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“DYING YOU SHALL DIE”

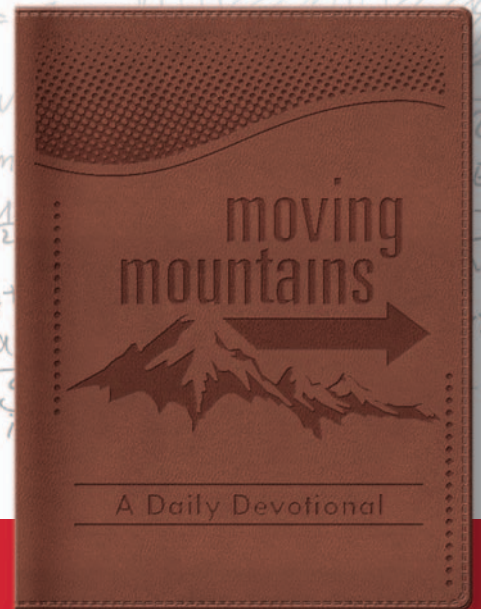
THE MEANING OF GENESIS 2:17

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“I BELIEVE THE ONLY WAY GOD’S REMNANT CHURCH WILL ASSIST THE SPIRIT TO FINISH HIS WORK IS TO PRACTICE VALIDATING GOD’S ‘ASCRIBED HONOR’ BY APPOINTING LEADERS REGARDLESS OF THEIR SOCIAL STATUS, WORLDLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS, GENDER, OR NATIONALITY.”

True honor in God’s sight

I praise God for and was truly blessed by Bernhard Oestreich’s article, “Preserving Church Unity: Lessons From the Jerusalem Church” (October 2011). I wish this article were printed in every one of our publications. I will be much encouraged to know that pastors and members alike are prayerfully considering Dr. Oestreich’s counsel.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America is shrinking. Are our church leaders falling into the same trap of valuing “acquired honor”? I believe the only way God’s remnant church will assist the Spirit to finish His work is to practice validating God’s “ascribed honor” by appointing leaders regardless of their social status, worldly accomplishments, gender, or nationality. In this way, we will (as did our first century predecessors) preserve the unity of

God’s body and honor the only One worthy of honor.

—Gabriel Constantinescu, Dallas, Oregon, United States

The rest of the story

I read with keen interest Galina I. Stele’s article, “Lessons of God’s Providence: 125 Years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Euro-Asia Division” (October 2011). She tells the story of my paternal grandfather, Axentie T. Babienco, who lived in San Diego, California, until his death in 1965. He was arrested because he had gone to the authorities to ask permission to build a church as the result of reading the Bible. This is why they sent him to Stavropol. This is also the place where my father was born.

A Baptist businessman was allowed to visit all Christians in Stavropol and gave my grandfather

a map, a disguise, and money so they could escape to a free state. Then they traveled across Europe and migrated to Canada to work on a wheat farm in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. My father and his brother migrated to America and attended the Clinton Theological Seminary. After graduation, my uncle, Tom Babienco, became a minister, and later was the union conference president of the Baltic States.

My father graduated from Emmanuel Missionary College (now known as Andrews University) and then attended Loma Linda Medical School, graduating in 1927. He married Laura Lucille Dobson and they had four children.

As the late Paul Harvey would say, now you’ve heard “the rest of the story.”

—Bruce Babienco, email 



The gift

On a recent visit to Russia, a group of pastors presented me with a gift—a simple hand-painted picture on a rough wooden plaque. This Russian landscape may have little monetary value, but I carried it home like a precious treasure. Now on display in my office, this gift serves as a constant reminder of the love and devotion of those dedicated colleagues in ministry. One was a former KGB agent; another used to sing in nightclubs until he had a life-changing encounter with Jesus and found a new song to sing; some suffered in labor camps; many were persecuted because of their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Every time I look at that painting, I thank God for each one of those pastors.

Their simple gift reminds me of a much greater Gift. Heaven offered its most precious Treasure when the Son of God came to dwell with us. He came in simple packaging, wrapped in swaddling bands, lying in a manger. While angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14), many on planet Earth did not recognize this precious Revelation—Emmanuel, God with us. He came to His own, and they did not receive Him—and it is still so today (see John 1:11). The Gift is passed by, unnoticed, unappreciated.

We are entering a season of the year when Christians focus in a special way on the First Advent of Jesus to our world. We sing Christmas carols and watch Christmas plays, but many of us do so in the midst of a culture where “Season’s Greetings” has replaced references to the One who came as Heaven’s Gift. People often think more about gifts that they either need to purchase or wish to receive rather than focusing on the greatest Gift of all.

So how should we, as Christian leaders, respond? I encourage you to take this opportunity to retell the story of God’s precious Gift. Gather your family together and read the inspired and inspiring accounts in the Gospels. Invite neighbors and friends to hear about Heaven’s precious Gift. Don’t miss this unique occasion to share the truth about Jesus.


Some Christian churches are developing creative approaches for telling the old, old story of Jesus and His love. One pastor shared with me about a live Christmas play that attracts thousands of visitors from his community. Others provide Christmas dinners and food baskets as tangible demonstrations of God’s love. Countless numbers of volunteers around the world sacrifice time, energy, and resources to tell the story of Jesus. Many have learned that in giving they also receive.

In this issue, Stephen Bauer’s study of Genesis 2:17 reminds us of the need for Heaven’s greatest Gift. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23). Without divine intervention, we have nothing to look forward to except certain death. We can all give heartfelt thanks that Emmanuel did indeed come to dwell with us, full of grace and truth. Jesus reminded us that God did not send “his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17). As a Christian leader, you know that story. But what about those who live across the street or down the road? What about those who have grown up in biblically illiterate families where Advent stories are never told? The treasure that we can bring to those within our circles of

influence is the good news about Heaven’s greatest Gift.

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“Dying you shall die”: The meaning of Genesis 2:17

When I was a district pastor, one of the more interesting elements in my work was fielding questions about a word or phrase from the original biblical languages. Like first year Hebrew students, members have unparalleled access to Internet and software resources that enable them to know enough to ask interesting questions about translation and interpretation.

Consider a classic example in the final phrase in Genesis 2:17: “‘But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it *you shall surely die*’ ” (emphasis added).¹ The Hebrew text uses an idiomatic construction literally translated “dying you shall die.” Members and students figure out such literal translations, and come running to the pastor with questions. Some have asked me if this phrase indicates that Adam and Eve began dying that very day, even though they did not finish dying the same day. Others wonder if this might be a descriptive warning akin to a parent telling a child, “If you touch the fire, you will get burned.” Still others suspect it should be understood as a divine announcement disclosing an enforceable penalty.

Hebrew grammars inform us that this construction intensifies

a sense of certainty.² While the concept of certainty appears to weaken reading the text as “they began dying,” it does not, in itself, help us determine which of the other two options comprises the best one. How then, should we understand this phrase and why does it matter? Due to the limited scope of this article, I can only explore this question by surveying the biblical uses of this Hebrew idiom.

The biblical data

Variants of the phrase “dying you shall die” occur 49 times in the Old Testament.³ Of these, two are involved in the story of the fall of man—one in Genesis 2:17 and the other in Genesis 3:4.⁴

Texts in Genesis. This same idiom appears twice more in Genesis. In chapter 20, Abimelech takes Sarah as a wife thinking that she was not married. Before he consummates the relationship, God intervenes to prevent Abimelech from committing a moral blunder. The Lord appears to Abimelech in a dream, announcing a sentence on him, “‘You are a dead man’ ” (v. 3)—for unlawfully taking a married woman. Abimelech’s plea of innocence shows he understood himself as standing before a judge on trial. After acknowledging Abimelech’s moral innocence, God warns Abimelech that if he

consummates with Sarah anyway, he will *certainly die* (v. 7). The setting shows clearly a localized instance of an investigative judgment, conducted by God, which closes with the announcement of a death penalty if Abimelech consummates the marriage anyway. The use of the idiomatic phrase in this instance comes through as thoroughly juridical in nature.

A similarity in Genesis 26 indicates how Isaac told a second Abimelech that his wife Rebecca was actually his sister. Then Abimelech discovered they were actually married. Abimelech rebuked Isaac for risking guilt on the king and his people as one of them might have had intercourse with Rebecca. The concept of guilt is not one usually associated with natural consequences. Rather, it indicates a matter of jurisprudence and morals. Additionally, these juridical overtones are reinforced because Abimelech commands that, “‘whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death’ ” (v. 11). The announcement of certain death clearly depicts a legal punishment. It seems significant that both of the remaining uses of this idiom in Genesis are in the context of regal warnings, in both cases announcing a juridical penalty with the purpose of deterring illegal behavior. This

suggests that the use of the phrase in Genesis 2 and 3 is juridical as well.

Texts in the remainder of the Pentateuch. In the remainder of the Pentateuch, variations of “dying you shall die” occur 26 times. In 23 cases, the writers use this phrase to state the penalty for various crimes including murder, Sabbath breaking, bestiality, and blasphemy.⁵ In each text, God is announcing criminal or civil laws with their penalties.

Before leaving the Pentateuch, there are two uses of this idiom that are less obviously juridical in nature. The first, in Exodus 19:12, God commands putting barriers on the flank of Mount Sinai and then states that anyone touching the mountain will certainly be put to death. The next verse indicates that the guilty party will be stoned or shot (presumably with an arrow). Stoning and shooting constitute volitional actions by

The second text in question, in Leviticus 27:29, reads, “No one devoted [*hērem*], who is to be devoted for destruction [*haram*] from mankind, shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death.” Forms of *haram* are sometimes used to describe God’s orders concerning the conquest of Canaan, and they are devoted to destruction.⁶ A possible basis for such a decree may be found in Leviticus 18:27, 28 and



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Additionally, these capital penalties are interspersed among other laws with lesser punishments. It seems unquestionable that in these 23 occurrences, “dying you shall die” announces a legal penalty for breaking specific laws. Thus, these 23 texts align well with the two other uses in Genesis just examined. All announce a punishment to be given for breaking a law or command.

a legal authority to execute punishment on a violator of the law. While this case appears to depict the establishment of a temporary statute and not a permanent civil law, it still carries a death penalty for violation expressed through the same idiom used in Genesis 2:17. As such, this text remains steeped with a strong juridical flavor that matches the 23 uses already cited.

20:22–26. Both texts assert that the people groups Israel was driving out of Canaan were being evicted from the land because of their abominable sexual practices. Leviticus 18 and 20 appear to supply a judicial basis for the devoting to destruction in the above texts. Hence, Leviticus 27:29 appears to state that when, in judgment, God devotes someone to destruction, there is no approved

way to redeem them from being put to death. Leviticus 27:29 thus seems to reflect a context of judgment and penalty like all the other texts we have examined. The Pentateuch texts demonstrate a single, consistent use of this idiom that the authors used for announcing criminal penalties. Assuming Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, this uniform consistency would imply that Genesis 2:7 should be understood as announcing a legal penalty for eating the forbidden fruit.

Other Old Testament texts. In the rest of the Old Testament, the vast majority of texts using a form of “dying you shall die” are from kings or communities announcing death penalties for specific actions or crimes,⁷ thus reinforcing the pattern found in the Pentateuch. Of these, 1 Kings 2:37, 42 is most interesting. Solomon summoned Shimei—who had cursed David during Absalom’s rebellion—and issued an individualized edict. Solomon ordered Shimei

to stay within the city limits of Jerusalem and then decreed a penalty for going outside them: “‘For *on the day* you go out and cross the brook Kidron, know for certain that *you shall die*’ ” (emphasis added). This text uses phrases identical to those found in Genesis 2:17. Clearly, Solomon issues a royal decree with an accompanying death penalty for violating it. Furthermore, once Shimei violates the decree, Solomon challenges Shimei, “‘Did I not make you swear by the LORD and solemnly warn you, saying, “Know for certain that *on the day* you go out and go to any place whatever, *you shall die*?”’ ” (v. 42; emphasis added). Solomon clearly understood “dying you shall die” as a prescribed penalty for violating an oath. Shimei is clearly standing trial. Solomon reminded Shimei of the announced penalty and then had Shimei executed (v. 46). It seems beyond dispute that “dying you shall die” was intended

to announce a death penalty for violating the law laid down by King Solomon.

The parallel of this story to Genesis 2 and 3 is striking for both God and Solomon issue kingly commands. Both promise a penalty, framed using the same phrases “in the day” you do X, “you will certainly die.” Both conduct investigations prior to executing sentence, and, in both cases, sentence is announced and executed. The only difference is that for Adam and Eve, the sentence of death appears to be executed in a sacrifice, the skin of which was made into their new clothes (Gen. 3:21). The striking parallel between these two passages makes it exceedingly difficult to defend the position that “dying you shall die” warns of natural consequence and not announcing juridical penalty. Additionally, as Richard Davidson observes, “When God comes to the Garden after Adam and Eve sinned, he initiates an encounter


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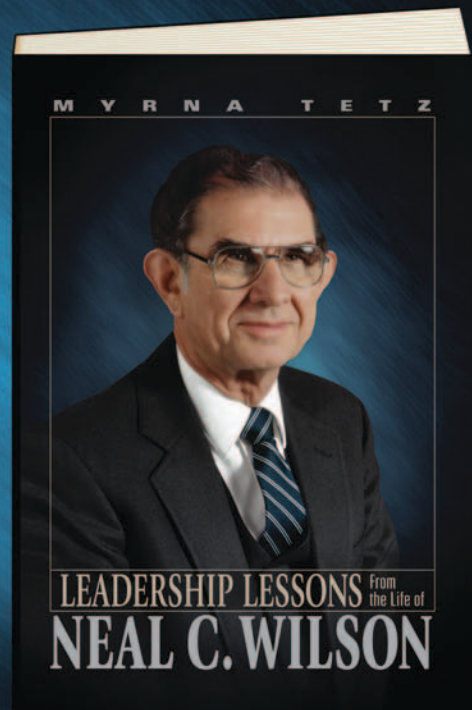
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MYRNA TETZ recently retired as managing editor of the *Adventist Review*. Her career included teaching at Walla Walla Valley Academy and Canadian University College, conference health and communications director at the British Columbia Conference, and college recruitment and public relations vice president at Canadian University College. She previously compiled *We Can Keep Them in the Church*. Myrna continues to write and loves spending time with her three grandchildren.

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that constitutes nothing less than ‘legal process,’ a ‘trial punishment by God.’”⁸ Davidson’s observation further reinforces the concept that “dying you shall die” is juridical in nature, a penalty for transgression announced to Adam and Eve as part of their stipulations for living in Eden.

The pattern is clear. Outside of Genesis 2 and 3, the variant uses of the “dying you shall die” are overwhelmingly used in the context of announcing penalties for some kind of violation of a command or law. Even the two or three texts that might be less clearly juridical in nature can be argued to fit into the dominant pattern on the basis of reasonably good evidence.⁹ Furthermore, I find no uses of this idiom describing a natural consequence scenario. Thus, it seems safest to conclude that the uses of this phrase in Genesis 2 and 3 are indeed juridical in nature, matching the pattern of usage established throughout the Old Testament. Why is this important?

Significance

Why should the meaning of Genesis 2:17 be important for the pastor? First, being able to give your members thoughtful, evidence-based, substantive answers to biblical questions helps build respect for your ministry. Members tend to be suspicious of methodological gimmicks, but respond more positively to depth of character, knowledge, and spirituality. Solid Bible answers evidence such depth.

Additionally, the pastor should be faithful to the whole biblical text. How one interprets Genesis 2:17 sets the tone of one’s view of divine judgment in the remainder of Scripture. If Genesis 2:17 is not announcing a punishment for violating a command, it implies that God does not actually threaten punishment and hold people accountable

to His commandments. This, in turn, calls into question the meaning of the judgment depictions in Daniel and Revelation, as well as the teachings of Jesus, Paul, and other New Testament authors. Are all these promises of future punishment on the wicked mere metaphors of natural consequences? If we answer Yes, are the teachings of a future paradise with a new heaven and new earth also metaphoric and not to be taken depicting a literal reality? Furthermore, if God threatens judicial punishment through a legal process in a heavenly court when there will be no such process, He would seem to be lying, threatening something He will not actually do.¹⁰ God is thus misrepresented as a being whose word cannot be trusted. As pastors, we have a duty to properly represent God. Part of the message we are called to proclaim includes the message of the first angel: “ ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come’ ” (Rev. 14:7). If we misinterpret Genesis 2:17 as merely announcing natural consequences, we set the foundations for misrepresenting the rest of the biblical teaching of judgment and accountability to God.

Finally, to interpret Genesis 2:17 as announcing natural consequences instead of a juridical penalty ignores the overwhelming biblical evidence of how authors used the phrase in question throughout the Old Testament. As such, the natural consequences interpretation seems to establish human arbiters as higher authorities than the text to determine its truthfulness and relevance. Scripture no longer interprets Scripture. How the pastor handles texts like Genesis 2:17 remains vital to maintaining a ministry faithful to the authority of Scripture and that properly disciplines the church members in their walk with God. ❏

- 1 All Scripture passages in English are from the English Standard Version.
- 2 Bruce Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 584–586; Gary D. Pratico and Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 253, 254.
- 3 Some occur with the second person form (you shall surely die), two occur with a first person form (I/we will surely die), and the majority occur with the third person (he/they shall surely die). The third masculine singular forms in the Pentateuch, Judges, and Ezekiel all are in the *hophal* stem (he shall certainly be made to die), literally expressing the involuntary nature of the death. There are a small handful of third masculine singular forms using the *qal* stem (he shall certainly die) used in other books. All first and second person forms use the *qal* stem. In surveying the use of this phrase in each text, I see no evidence that the use of the *hophal* stem indicates any significant difference in nuance from the *qal* stem usage.
- 4 Interestingly, when Eve repeats the command, she rephrases the language to “lest you die.” A cursory look at this verse seems to add no real evidence to help solve the problem of whether the base phrase is a juridical warning of penalty, or a descriptive enumeration of natural consequences.
- 5 Exod. 21:12, 15–17 (death penalty for various crimes); Exod. 22:18 (death penalty for bestiality); Exod. 31:14, 15 (death penalty for profaning or working on Sabbath)—see also Num. 15:35 (man gathers sticks on Sabbath to certainly die); Lev. 20:2, 9–13, 15, 16, 27 (death penalty for various crimes, generally sexual); Lev. 24:16, 17 (death penalties for blaspheming God and killing a man); Num. 26:65 (the wilderness generation will certainly die except Caleb and Joshua as punishment for lack of faith); and Num. 35:16–18, 21, 31 (the murderer shall certainly die).
- 6 For some examples, see Deut. 7:1, 2; Josh. 6:17, 18, 21; 7:1, 11–13, 15.
- 7 For communal announcements of a death penalty using this idiom, see Judg. 21:5; Jer. 26:8. For various kingly announcements of a death penalty for a given action, see 1 Sam. 14:39, 44; 1 Sam. 22:16; 2 Sam. 12:14; 2 Sam. 14:14; 1 Kings 2:37, 42. God announces death penalties through prophets in 2 Kings 1:4, 6, 16 (a judgment on Ahaziah for inquiring of Baalzebub concerning his sickness); 2 Kings 8:10 (Elisha assures Hazael that Benhadad will live and recover from his sickness. Then he says Benhadad will certainly die at the hand of the Hazael. Judgment seems implied but is not as clear as other references); and through Ezekiel (3:18; 18:13; 33:8, 14). All these (with the possible exception of 2 Kings 8:10) clearly use forms of the phrase “dying you/he shall die” to announce juridical penalties.
- 8 Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 58, 59. Footnote 16 on page 59 has an extensive list of scholars advocating the view that Genesis 3 contains a judicial trial conducted by God.
- 9 I have not discussed Judges 13:22, where “Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, for we have seen God.” This is unusual in that it is in the first person plural, a self-pronouncement, which would not seem to be fully analogous with the examples we have seen in which an authority figure is announcing a penalty to someone else. On the other hand, this seems to be a direct allusion to Exodus 33:20 where God told Moses that no one can see His face and live. The context of Exodus 33 is God’s judgment on the people for worshipping the golden calf, so even here Manoah’s pronouncement may have juridical overtones.
- 10 Disbelieving that God will actually follow through with punishment appears to have been a regular problem in ancient Israel. This is especially evident in Jeremiah 7; 27; 28; Ezekiel 12; 13; and Amos 7; 8.

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Leave not the house empty: How to ensure a lasting revival and reformation

When was the last time you attended a revival meeting that blessed you abundantly? How long did that impression stay with you? Have you ever wondered why the warmth of such revival fires goes out so soon? This article will attempt to answer these important questions and offer a biblical remedy to ensure a lasting revival and reformation.

Consider a parable of Jesus: “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first” (Luke 11:24–26).¹

This parable tells of a man possessed by the devil with Jesus likening his life to a messy and dirty house. But when the evil spirit was cast out, Jesus depicted the man’s life as a clean and orderly house. After some time, the evil spirit returns to the man and finds him to be like a house, clean, well-swept, and orderly. The spirit enters the man and repossesses him along with seven other spirits. The man is

now more greatly controlled by the demons than before, and the later condition of the man becomes worse than the former. The question—why? What led to the evil spirit’s success? Was it because the house was swept and put in order?

Matthew 12:43–45, a parallel passage, provides additional insight: When the spirit returned, it found the house not only clean and orderly but empty. “Then [the evil spirit] goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. . . . That man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

The cleanliness and orderliness of the house have nothing to do with the sad fact of the relapse. Rather, as Christ points out in Matthew, the house was empty, and the evil spirit accompanied by seven others repossessed the house. The man was worse off than before.

What is the message of this parable? What does it tell us of how to ensure a lasting revival and reformation?

The message of the parable

Look at the context of Luke 12:24–26. Jesus told this parable

when He was accused of driving out demons with the help of Beelzebul. The fact that an evil spirit was driven out of a person demonstrates that a stronger power has triumphed over and taken control of the situation. This stronger power or being is, indeed, Christ who came “to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8). The parable illustrates that the entrance of Jesus into someone’s life not only drives out the evil power, but also purifies the person. This is not nearly enough, though. We need to comprehend the importance of remembering that the house representing the life of an individual should be cleansed but not empty.

When we attend revival meetings, we tend to experience similar outcomes. Jesus drives out the evil powers in our lives, but the fire of such revival can easily go out, and we risk a worse condition. And this leads to utter discouragement, and we ask the familiar question “why?” Why does the impact of our revival meetings seem so short lived? The answer? The house stands empty. The house can be cleansed and put in order during the revival but, if the abode becomes empty afterwards, chances are it will be repossessed.

And the latter condition will be worse than the former.

How can this dangerous state be avoided? The simple answer is, Do not leave the house empty. Cleansed of the evil spirit, the heart is clean, but do not leave it empty—let Jesus dwell in it as a permanent occupant of the heart. The apostle Paul gives us a two-step action plan:

First, be filled with the Word.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). This is a command—not an option. The following steps will help us make this verse a living reality.

1. *Read and/or listen to the Word.*

The incarnate Word that dwelt among us must also dwell in us in the form of the inspired Word. Says the psalmist: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11). Without the Word of God and His commandments dwelling in our hearts and guiding the course of our lives, we are constantly exposed to the danger of coming under the influence of the evil one (see also Rom. 10:17; Rev. 1:3).

2. *Study the Word in-depth.* A deep and continual study of the Word is necessary so as to be filled with it; a superficial reading or listening will not get us very far (2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11; Ps. 119:11). As Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord and firmly declared that he would not leave Him until he received His blessing, we should also struggle with the Word of God until we clearly see Jesus Christ and His purpose in our lives.

3. *Obey the Word.* We should not focus on Bible study to satisfy our curiosity, but rather to maintain a fulfilling relationship with Jesus. “ ‘If anyone loves me,’ ” said Jesus, “ ‘he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him’ ” (John 14:23).

Second, “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). To avoid the

risk of leaving the house empty, the house should be filled with the Spirit. Ellen White counsels, “The religion of Christ means more than the forgiveness of sin; it means that sin is taken away, and that the vacuum is filled with the Spirit. It means that the mind is divinely illumined, that the heart is emptied of self, and filled with the presence of Christ. When this work is done for church members, the church will be a living, working church.”² Notice how Ellen White equates being “filled with the Spirit” with “filled with the presence of Christ.” This experience is one and the same. Thus, a Spirit-filled Christian will join Paul in saying, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Due to many strange practices ascribed to a *filling with the Spirit*, some are afraid of it. However, fear should not lead us to an unwise act of “throwing out the baby with the bathwater.” The existence of the counterfeit experiences cannot be an excuse to forfeit the genuine gift. Paul speaks of a drunkard, controlled by the influence of alcohol and acting under its influence. That experience is called part of the “works of the flesh.” But to be under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit should be the goal and aim of a Christian, and Paul calls this experience a part of the “fruit of the Spirit” (see Gal. 5:19–23).

Ellen White wrote an appropriate comment: “By what means shall we determine whose side we are on? Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Upon whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are on the Lord’s side, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. We have no friendship with the world; we have consecrated all that we have and are to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His Spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things.”³

Revival and REFORMATION

The power of intercession

Pastor Sergei Kovtun of the Briysk church in Russia shared a moving testimony of the Lord’s answers to daily prayer. Nearly three years ago he felt impressed to ask his church members for names of their friends, relatives, and work associates and the specific needs of each of these individuals and pledged to pray for each one on a daily basis. He invited his church members to join him in praying as well. A list of approximately 50 names was compiled and the prayer journey began.

As Pastor Kovtun and his church members continued earnestly in prayer, one by one these precious souls became interested in turning toward God. More than half of the individuals on his prayer list were baptized. This inspired church members to intercede for others and add more names to the prayer list. The list grew eventually to more than 200 names.

This intentional prayer ministry of Pastor Kovtun reminds me of Ellen White’s statement, “Select another and still another soul, daily seeking guidance from God, laying everything before him in earnest prayer, and working in divine wisdom. As you do this, you will see that God will give the Holy Spirit to convict and the power of truth to convert the soul.”*

Pastor Kovtun recently moved to another district and plans to begin the same type of prayer ministry with all of the church members.

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* Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1963), 245.

revivalandreformation.org

The Word and the Spirit

The Word of God is authored under the inspiration of the Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). The Word and the Spirit, with which our life should be filled, are complementary not contradictory. Indeed, true Christian experience becomes possible only where both are present. Some may profess to have the gift of the Spirit, but their lives are not subject to the Word, and, in such cases, they

out of his bewilderment, “ ‘O Sovereign LORD, you alone know’ ” (v. 3).

In the vision, the Lord explained to Ezekiel what these dry bones represent. These “ ‘bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off” ’ ” (v. 11). But the good news that came out of this dismal picture was the following statement from

be translated also as *breath* or *Spirit*. When the Spirit was coupled with the Word, the dry bones rose to become a mighty army.

Conclusion

If we are filled with the Word and the Spirit, we not only guard ourselves from being repossessed by the evil spirit, but we can also fight and defeat the evil powers as a mighty army under the leadership of

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really do not have the presence of the Holy Spirit; indeed, they may have some other spirit. Others may profess to know the Word, but do not manifest the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and, in such cases, they may know only the formality of the Word but not the power thereof. The Word without the transforming power of the Spirit creates dead formalism. Professing to have the Spirit without obedience to the Word is mere irrational emotionalism, but when the two come together they transform a heap of dry bones to a mighty army.

In Ezekiel 37, the prophet was taken to a valley, and he saw there a great many dry bones. While astonished with what was in front of him, a question came from heaven. “ ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ ” (v. 3). The prophet answered

the Lord Himself: “ ‘O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them’ ” (v. 12). The vision also tells what instruments God will use to make this real.

The first command given to the prophet was to prophesy, and thus, the Word of God was declared. When the Word fell on the bones, they came together “and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.” This clearly depicts the fact that the Word alone cannot finish the work of bringing a lasting revival and reformation. It may give us a form of godliness, but the power does not exist. At this point the second command to speak to the wind came onto the scene. The Hebrew word for wind in this command is *ruach*, that can

the indwelling Jesus. Thus, just to experience revival and reformation is not enough, and this experience is not sufficient to cleanse our inner temple. What we need is not to leave our cleansed hearts empty, but to fill them with the Word and the Spirit. The continuity of a revived and reformed lifestyle demands the continual presence of the Word and the Spirit in our lives. 

- 1 All Scripture passages, unless otherwise stated, are from the New International Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1995), 318.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1991), 185.

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“Fools”: A declaration to seminarians, professors, and preachers

Y*ou are fools.* And I am a fool to insult you by calling you *fools* because does not the Word say that if you call your brother a “fool” you are in danger of hellfire?

Some are thinking, “You’re wrong preacher—I’m no fool.” But you are debating the wrong question. The question is not, *Am I a fool?* but *What kind of fool am I?*

Petty follies

Some of you are fools because you allow slights and insults to fester within you until fury drives you to folly, as it did King Saul. He imagined that David was a malicious enemy plotting to seize his throne, so he took with him 3,000 of his best troops in order to hunt David down.

David slipped into Saul’s camp one night. Saul was sleeping inside a ring formed by slumbering warriors. David took the spear and the jug of water near Saul’s head and slipped away. He climbed a nearby hill and woke the camp with his shouts. Saul recognized David’s voice and called out, “Is that you, my son David?”

“Yes, my lord the king,” David replied. “Why are you chasing me? What is my crime? Why has the king

of Israel come out to search for a flea? Why does he hunt me down like a partridge on the mountains?”

Then Saul confessed, “I have sinned my son. I will no longer try to harm you, for you valued my life today. I have been a fool and very, very wrong” (see 1 Samuel 26, NLT).

David was eminently trustworthy, but Saul allowed foolish notions of imagined conspiracy to cloud his judgment. His intense jealousy over David’s exploits drove him to try to destroy the man whom God had chosen to succeed him as king.

Saul was a fool. He said so himself.

And you are a fool if, like Saul, you allow petty jealousies and trivial insults to embitter you. You are a fool, indeed, if you try to hunt down fleas and partridges in the wilderness instead of attending to the King’s business. And you are the king of fools if you distrust David’s Son; if you distrust the one Man who is true and faithful and absolutely trustworthy.

Too much trust?

After Saul died, his son, Ishbosheth, was made king over Israel by General Abner. However, King Ishbosheth offended the

general. So great was Abner’s outrage at this insult that he traveled to Hebron, in the rival kingdom of Judah, with an offer to deliver the kingdom into David’s hands. This gesture pleased David, and he entered into an alliance with Abner.

When Joab, the general in David’s army, heard what had happened, he was furious. He believed that Abner had dealt treacherously with David, and so he sent a crafty message to Abner that David wanted to see him. When Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside from his companions as if to deliver a secret message and stabbed him. Thus, Abner died because he trusted the wrong man.

At the general’s funeral David lamented, “Oh Abner, you died like a fool. You were not handcuffed, your feet were not in shackles. As a mighty warrior you understood the peril of trusting an enemy” (2 Samuel 3:33, 34).¹ In other words, *You lowered your guard. You died like a fool, Abner, because you trusted the wrong man.*

You may be a fool because you trust too much. You trust the used-car salesman who sells you a fine-looking car that turns out to be a bucket of troubles. You

believe your financial advisor who gives you “inside information” about investments and then the market tanks. And you are the king of fools when you trust your own self too much, when you arrogantly lean on your own understanding and rely on your own righteousness instead of acknowledging God and His Lordship in your life.

What kind?

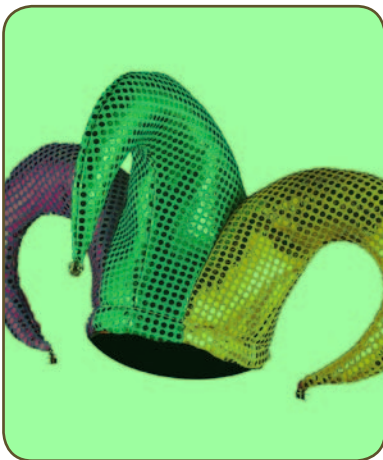
So, what kind of fool are you? Like one of the many kinds described in Scripture? Fools who make mischief? Fools who trouble their own

bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater.... But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee” (Luke 12:16–20).²

Strange, is it not, that this same Jesus, who warns us not to call each other fools, uses this invective Himself. He calls us fools when we choose eating and drinking and merry-making, and must-have toys instead of eternal life. Are you a pleasures-of-sin-for-a-season kind of fool? Are you a rich-and-increased-in-goods kind of fool in

ruler who, according to conventional wisdom, made the right choice to hold on to what he had. Why would anyone in his right mind want to exchange wealth and privilege for deprivation and tribulation? Yet, on the other hand, you have Paul’s unequivocal declaration that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. Paul insists that, “If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (1 Cor. 3:18, 19).

You are either a broad-way fool or a narrow-way fool. If you choose



households? Fools who meddle when they should mind their own business? Fools who make the same dumb mistakes over and over? Fools who think they can take fire into their bosoms and not be burned?

Or, are you a linger-longer fool, like David, who took a long and lingering look at a beautiful woman? Like him, do you linger longer when Bathsheba pops up on your computer screen?

Maximum foolishness

If it is gross stupidity to be lured into sin by seduction, it is ultimate folly to banish God from your thinking. Jesus describes maximum foolishness this way. “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to

need of nothing except to trash your old storage system and trade up to a multi-gigabyte supercomputer to house all your marvelous religious knowledge and spiritual insights? And yet, at the core of your being, are you a jaded, know-it-all fool whose manna has turned to corruption?

One can be a fool for different reasons. You can be a fool like Abner if you trust too much. You can be a fool like Saul if you don’t trust enough. You can be a bigger-barns fool whose sole purpose is to accumulate wealth and to enjoy a life of ease. Or you can be a religious fool who accumulates spiritual insights but lacks oil in your lamp.

Broad or narrow way?

This is a puzzling paradox. On the one hand, you have the rich young

broad-way wisdom, God calls you a fool. If you choose narrow-way wisdom, the world calls you a fool. So what kind of fool will you be? Will you build on the shifting sands of worldly wisdom and be called foolish by God? Or will you build on the solid-rock wisdom of heaven and be called a fool by the world?

If you choose to be God’s fool, you can expect Him to ask you to do things that are folly in the eyes of the world. What if God calls you to be a preacher fool, to preach *Heaven’s foolishness*? Will you agree, or will you flee like Jonah? If you agree, will you be a preacher of foolish wisdom? Will you preach smooth things to soothe the itchy ears of people who disdain the truth? Or will you be a preacher of wise foolishness? Will you determine to preach nothing but Jesus Christ and Him

crucified *foolishness*, a stumbling block to the Jews and the Greeks?

The fools on a hill

There was a fool on a hill one day. Friday's fool was a man on a cross, who, like Abner, listened to the crafty lies of the enemy, the one who was a liar from the beginning. Thus, he died like a fool.

There was another fool there; he had run with the wrong crowd, pushed his luck, and got nailed. Like the first fool on the cross, he cursed Christ and joined in the mocking chorus, "Come down from the cross

call Him *the greatest fool of all*—He, who, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6–8). Bearing Adam's nakedness, He hung there, owning nothing at all, except a crown of thorns. In a world where the wise die rich, He died destitute.

He had a choice to be born.

will you be like the sinner-woman fool who blew her life-savings on perfume, on an alabaster box of ointment, to anoint the incomparable Man?

Or, will you be a linger-longer fool who looks and lusts? Or lingers longer on his knees when he hears the Lion's roar? Will you be a fool like Solomon, who turned his great wisdom into folly, who plunged into eating and drinking, into gluttony and debauchery and, in the end, declared that worldly wisdom is vanity, a chasing after the wind. Or will you be a Prince-Daniel fool who

THOUGH WE HAD NO CHOICE TO BE BORN
AS FOOLS, WE DO HAVE A CHOICE AS TO
WHAT KIND OF FOOLS WE WILL BECOME.

and we will believe!" Like the fool of long ago who distrusted David, so this doubt-filled fool distrusted David's Son.

But a curious change came over the faithless fool. Like two other fools who were slow to believe, he found his heart strangely warmed by Jesus. As the Light of the world shined into his mind, he came to see the utter folly of distrusting his only Hope. Impervious to the contempt and scorn of the mob, the faithful fool declared his absolute confidence in the cross-crushed Christ.

Heavenly wisdom or divine folly?

What of that Man on the center cross? Some irreverent soul might

Knowing the gruesome end from the beginning, He chose to be born. We had no choice. We were born as fools, as enemies of God. So the question is not, *Am I a fool?* The real question is, *What kind of fool am I?* Though we had no choice to be born as fools, we do have a choice as to what kind of fools we will become.

Choose wisely

When Christ calls you to be God's fool, will you be a run-away fool for Him? A run-away fool like Joseph? Will you be a fool like Potiphar's wanton wife who perfumed her bed with myrrh and cinnamon and her person with priceless fragrance to entice and beguile, to charm and allure, to tempt and ensnare? Or

shunned the eating and drinking scene and, at the risk of his life, maintained his integrity no matter what?

Will you be a self-congratulating fool like those self-promoting, ambitious disciples who argued over who would be the greatest, who were too proud to wash Jesus' feet? Or will you be like that humble woman who knelt down and drenched His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair?

We are all fools. No exceptions. The only question that remains for us is, *What kind?* ❏

¹ Author's interpretation of the verses.

² Unless otherwise indicated, texts are from the King James Version.

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Training lay pastors in your district

The Pennsylvania Conference president just called," my wife said. "He wants to talk to us about a six-church district."

Thus began my immersion in multichurch districts—a context that would define my pastoral experience for the next decade. For those who face the challenge of a multichurch district, along with the spiritual responsibility of equipping others for ministry,¹ let me share some of what I have learned in this area with you.

After surveying the biblical roots of lay pastoral ministry, I have summarized my discoveries in the following areas: biblical roots, educational theory, methodology, curricular content, and a lay pastor training course.

Biblical roots

The term *lay pastor* means a person serving as church pastor with minimal to no pay² and no higher ministry education.³ This model corresponds to that of the New Testament elder.⁴

As the New Testament church developed, its organizational structure was not pre-defined. Instead, Jesus defined the *mission* but the structure took shape around missional need. The apostles comprised the first branch of church structure

(Luke 9:1–6; Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8, 9). The second branch emerged to meet social needs, explicitly so that these needs would not interfere with the apostolic mission. Thus the order of deacons was formed (Acts 6:1–7). Finally, the apostles appointed elders in every new city to provide spiritual guidance while the apostles moved on (Acts 14:23, 24; Titus 1:5). This was the third branch of church structure.

In the early church, the local elder became the primary spiritual leader while deacons attended to social needs and apostles shared the gospel abroad.⁵

Today's pastor often comes tasked with all three functions: apostolic mission expansion, deaconlike social care, and elder-style spiritual guidance. The lay status of a lay pastor can facilitate a re-narrowing of the pastor's role because members do not expect as much from a volunteer. It can also help recapture the apostolic function by freeing the salaried minister to lead mission expansion.

In essence, developing lay pastors in your multichurch district can be a restorative model to help redistribute ministry leadership according to the New Testament pattern.⁶ The results can lead to less fragmented ministers and more leaders helping to advance the mission.

Educational theory

The educational approach I used in the Pennsylvania Conference operated on three assumptions.

Assumption 1: Experience from two factors has already taught candidates much of what they need to know. The first factor is that, in most cases, lay ministry candidates have spent many years observing church ministry in action. The second factor is that adult educational theory endorses the value of building on previous knowledge.

Preaching, for example, can be defined as a task that many candidates have vast experience with. Through experience, most know a good sermon when they hear one but do not realize how much this could instruct their own preaching. Asking Socratic questions to help learners pinpoint what makes a sermon effective will not teach them new information, but it will give new meaning to what they know,⁷ and it will give them most of what they need to start writing biblical sermons.⁸

Educational theorists contend that adults retain what is practical for them. Much of the teaching task helps students reorganize what they already know in ways that help them apply it to ministry. Showing the links between new information and knowledge already retained becomes essential.⁹

Assumption 2: Every competency should be reduced to its underlying principles from two factors. The first factor is the limited time students have. The second is the law of diminishing returns.

Many of my lay pastoral students had full-time jobs and young families. They were sacrificing their time to develop their skills for God. I needed to be a good steward of that time, making their participation possible.

I also contend that most things pastors do are not complex. When we have understood a competency well enough to teach it, we can explain its core simply. By contrast, if we say too much, we might make the student think that the task is more difficult than in reality and scare them away.¹⁰

Assumption 3: Candidates are best prepared for unexpected ministry challenges when, from two factors, they learn to reason from principle to practice. The first factor is our rapidly changing world. The second is the importance of learning to adapt.

Through a principle-driven curriculum, we prepare students to adapt to whatever new challenges might arise. Every methodology becomes an adaptation of a principle. Teaching students principles instead of methodologies makes the difference between students who can grow and students who cannot.¹¹

Methodologies should be taught only as examples to help students learn the underlying principles. By teaching principles, you give students a mental filing system in which to retain what experience teaches them. Before drafting a single lecture, you must do the hard work of summarizing the principles that underlie each competency.

Methodology

Adding five methodological guidelines to this broad educational theory gives it sharper focus and a greater chance of being used.

*Guideline 1: Use mentors to guide the learning process.*¹² This allows the

curriculum to adapt to the needs of each student. It is essential, however, that students earn class points by meeting with their mentors. By trial and error we learned the necessity of such accountability.

*Guideline 2: Facilitate learning in a real ministry context.*¹³ Separation from the world of application limits formal ministerial education. Short-term field schools mitigate this problem, to some extent, but remain partly artificial. Learning competencies in the context where they will do ministry is the best way for students to become competent.

Guideline 3: Make the curriculum accessible. In other words, make it as easy as possible for candidates. Cost, location, workload, and schedule are the primary factors to consider.

*Guideline 4: Combine theory with practice.*¹⁴ This guideline is second only to spiritual development. For the principle-driven curriculum to work, you must constantly challenge students to reason from theory to practice. You can do this by teaching theory in class and giving assignments that require the student to apply it in practice.

*Guideline 5: Foster spiritual development.*¹⁵ The work of ministry is a central part of the salvation process, both for the one ministering and for those to whom they minister. This means the shaping of the minister's heart after God's heart. It also means revealing God's character to a perishing world. Both require spiritual transformation. Do not assume that spiritual formation is happening. Weave it through the learning process.

Curriculum content

Having considered *how* to teach, we must also consider *what* to teach. The local context should define this. However, drawing from a broader consensus can help overcome your blind spots.

While developing my methods in Pennsylvania, I synthesized a list of five major ministerial competencies that met the criterion of quantifiable

consensus:¹⁶ spiritual vitality, people skills, biblical preaching, spiritual leadership, and team building. I drew these competencies from data on common pastoral practices, commonly desired traits, biblical instruction, and similar sources.

Spiritual vitality consisted of one lecture, monthly study assignments, and student-created spiritual development plans. People skills included listening skills and conflict management. Biblical preaching integrated exegesis, writing, and delivery. Spiritual leadership incorporated biographical sketches and principles of leadership. Team building involved the ministry of all believers and mentoring.

The five competencies provide a framework for your localized curriculum development. Each warrants 1–3 class sessions, depending on its complexity. If you cover the basics well, I believe you will find that graduates possess all the major skills needed for effective lay pastoral ministry.

A lay pastor training course

If this discussion corresponds to a need in your district, prayerfully develop a plan. I offer four steps to help.

Step 1: Nurture a culture of lay ministry. Trying to meet a felt need results in greater success than trying to meet an unmet one. Enough of your members need to believe in the validity and value of lay leadership for it to thrive.

Consistently preaching positive sermons on the priesthood of all believers, spiritual gifts, church mission, the work of the Holy Spirit, and similar themes will turn the tide over time. Circulating books like Russell Burrill's *Revolution in the Church*¹⁷ or Lonnie Wibberding's *Fire Your Pastor*¹⁸ can also add impact.

You will have to decide when enough people are ready. You should not wait for everyone. Some hesitant members will buy in only when they see the obvious skills of your graduates in action.

Step 2: Establish a strong placement policy. Before asking people to invest their time in a lay pastor training course, find a place for them to minister. This nurtures two advantages. First, it gives them a natural context in which to apply what they are learning. Second, it helps to avoid setting them up for disappointment by graduating with nothing to do.

To know how students will develop during their training may be difficult. Do not let this stop you from placing them in ministry—these might be small ministry roles at first. You can give them greater responsibilities later. The main concern is to make sure they have ministries. Before you plan any further, make a list of potential ministry opportunities in your district and community.

Step 3: Identify and enlist a project pioneer. This person needs to be in tune with the scope of pastoral ministry, able to organize, and able to mentor. This might be you, but only

if the role matches your gift mix. Ask the project pioneer to develop the training system to meet local needs. He or she should incorporate the educational theory, methodological guidelines, and curriculum content outlined above but otherwise use creative license.

The project pioneer may or may not teach classes, but he or she will be the stable presence from session to session. He or she will also recruit experts to teach classes, grade assignments, and administer all aspects of the course.

Step 4: Recruit and teach students. Students should be hand-picked for their potential. The selection process, in the majority of situations, will be most effective when done in collaboration with established lay leaders. This helps ensure that no one is overlooked and that local leaders are ready to assimilate new ones. Established leaders are also prime candidates for training.

The class schedule should be conveniently arranged for students. We found that two-hour sessions, once per month on a Sunday morning, worked well. This also gave busy students enough time between classes to apply what they learned.

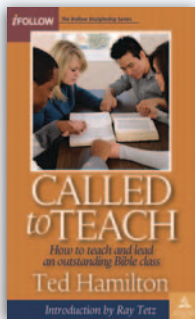
Conclusion

Experience has convinced me that when a pastor equips and empowers members of the church to do ministry, a lot of good results. The pastor might not get the credit, but God's kingdom advances. The educational theory, methodological guidelines, curriculum content, and the lay pastoral program, which I have shared above, will give you a good start toward success. **M**

- 1 Stanley E. Patterson, "The Pastor as Proactive Leader," *Ministry*, May 2009, 21–23.
- 2 We should ask whether it is ethical to request so much from an unpaid volunteer. Although Paul contends that the work of an elder earns him the right to compensation (1 Tim. 5:17, 18), the economy of the New Testament church was need-based. Members "had everything in common"

Continued on page 26 ►

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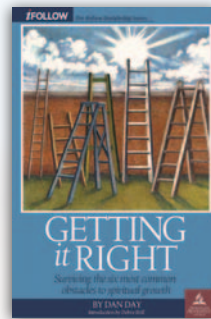
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A pastor, a king, and a necromancer: Lessons from the forbidden ground of spiritualism

Moses Hull was a man of many talents. Skilled in the tools of the English language, he was a persuasive speaker, an argumentative debater, and one who was too sure of himself. He accepted the Adventist message in 1857 and was ordained as an Adventist pastor the following year.

Hull was an eloquent and convincing evangelist and soon became a popular and much sought after speaker from the northeast to Midwest United States. His linguistic abilities and debating skills drew large crowds, particularly when he was challenged to debates, which he generally won. He loved to debate with spiritualists, and usually demolished their arguments by pointing to the doctrine of the state of the dead and turning to logical flaws in spiritualism. But there was a flaw in the path of self-certainty that marked Hull's life: the more he succeeded the more he depended on himself and the less on God. Ellen White warned him several times about getting too close to spiritualists and appealed to him to turn away from

self and remain close to God. She even spoke of the dangers of meeting with spiritualists alone.¹

In spite of such warnings, Hull continued to debate spiritualists. Noteworthy among these debates was one with W. F. Jamieson, a spiritualist medium, in Paw Paw, Michigan. During this fateful session, he seemed confused, made some compromises, and finally lost the debate. That was serious enough, but Hull made a lethal statement: "From this day on I am a spiritualist."

Although he confessed his error and remained in the Adventist ministry for a time, he was never the same man. He preached his last sermon as an Adventist on September 20, 1863, and then became a leader in the ranks of spiritualism. He left his wife, and married a spiritualist medium named Mattie E. Sawyer. In 1902, Hull became the first director of the Morris Pratt Institute, a school specialized in training spiritualist mediums. Tragically, Moses Hull committed suicide in 1907 in San Jose, California.²

On the deadly nature of spiritualism, Ellen White wrote, "There are

few who have any just conception of the deceptive power of spiritualism and the danger of coming under its influence. . . . But they venture upon the forbidden ground, and the mighty destroyer exercises his power upon them against their will. Let them once be induced to submit their minds to his direction, and he holds them captive."³

Moses Hull was one of those cases that fell to the deceiving power of spiritualism. Some 3,000 years before Hull, there was another sad story—that of Saul, Israel's first king. By his own actions Saul distanced himself from God, and after the death of Samuel, the prophet, Saul had no one to guide him. When the Philistines laid siege against his army, he sought God's will, but God did not answer him (1 Sam. 28:4–6). So he sought counsel from a spirit medium—something specifically prohibited by God (Lev. 19:31). Indeed, Saul had earlier "expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land" (1 Sam. 28:3).⁴ Still, he gave way to the evil one and sought out a woman who was a spiritist and asked her "to bring up

Samuel” so that he may obtain the dead prophet’s counsel on how to proceed in the impending war against the Philistines.

We, as Adventists, reject Saul’s quest for counsel through the spirit medium for we do not share the teachings of spiritualism. We believe in conditional immortality of human beings; that is to say, human beings

passage in 1 Samuel 28 that shows the prophet Samuel came back from the dead and communicated with King Saul?⁶ Spiritualism often uses this text as its main support.

This article will make a careful analysis of the biblical text and also look at the rituals of necromancy among the people of Mesopotamia and Canaan.

of Endor replied, “gods rising I see” (literal translation). Interestingly, the noun *‘elohim* in this passage is used to refer to a dead spirit. The reason for this usage can be better appreciated when we remember that in the ancient Near East, ancestors used to be worshipped as gods.

In Mesopotamian texts, for example, the noun *ilu*, the Akkadian

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are not inherently immortal as many religions, philosophies, and some Christians advocate. Our faith-stand is based on the biblical position that after death no independent entity such as the spirit exists. Death brings to an end the existence of the human being, and the dead persons await the call of the resurrection in the last day either to perish in the judgment of fire or be saved to live with God forever. Living with God forever is the doctrine of conditional immortality.⁵

However, those opposed to Adventist belief in conditional immortality often use 1 Samuel 28 to argue against the Adventist position. They point out that the spirit medium in Endor apparently brought back Samuel from the grave and facilitated an apparent conversation between the dead prophet and Saul. How are we to understand the problematic

Saul and the necromancer

The city of Endor was approximately five miles from Gilboa, where the Philistine camp was assembled (1 Sam. 28:4). Andrew Fausset suggests that due to its location, Saul probably passed by the enemy camp before going to the necromancer.⁷ Ellen White provides the same information,⁸ which makes sense when we read that Saul disguised himself before the meeting (v. 8). Saul took the risk just to find someone who could ease his fear through a spirit-medium session.

The biblical text does not provide details about the ritualistic processes that occurred during the psychic session. We only have the dialogue between the necromancer and Saul. When asked about what she saw in her trance, the medium

word for “gods” is used broadly to refer to the dead. Theodore Lewis demonstrated the same phenomenon in the Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Hittite, Phoenician, and Ugaritic texts.⁹ The same is also true in Canaan if we compare Numbers 25:2 that says that the Israelites ate the sacrifices of the gods of Moab and Psalm 106:28 that says that they ate the sacrifices of the dead (*‘elohim*). These texts suggest that among the people of Canaan the dead were called gods (*‘elohim*). An honest interpretation of 1 Samuel 28 cannot lead to the conclusion that the appearance of Samuel to Saul was of divine origin, since the text clearly says that God did not answer the king through any of the familiar methods of revelation (v. 6). What we have in 1 Samuel 28 is a pagan ritual completely contrary

to the commandments of God (cf. Deut. 18:9–13).

Saul seems to ignore the fact that the medium was seeing many gods/spirits of the dead, and changes from plural to singular with the question “‘What does he look like?’” (1 Sam. 28:14). Perhaps fearing for her life (cf. v. 9), she appealed to Saul, saying she was seeing “ ‘an old man wearing a robe’ ” (v. 14). What led Saul to identify this “elder” as Samuel as found in verse 14? The cover (*me’il*) was a feature of the prophet’s garment (cf. 1 Sam. 15:27; 2:19). Still, it is difficult to see any connection between the “old man” and Samuel.

This matter may be clarified by looking at a textual problem in verse 14. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., from the Near Eastern Studies at Johns Hopkins University, noticed that a difficulty exists in accepting the translation “elder” or “old man” (*’ish zaqen*) based on the Greek version of the Old Testament, the LXX.¹⁰ Instead of *zaqen*, “old” in Hebrew, the original form of the word was *zaqep*, meaning “erect” or “upright,” but in this text it should mean “surprising.”¹¹ The difference between the last part of these two words is minimal, since the final form of the letters *n* and *p* is very similar in Hebrew.

If this reconstruction of the text is correct, the spirit medium of Endor was not frightened when she saw an old man, but was scared when she saw an unexpected creature. Her identification between this being and Samuel may have been motivated by the fear that Saul would not keep his word to preserve her (v. 9).

Saul and Samuel

What causes some discomfort to Adventists comes from what we read in two verses (vv. 15 and 16): “Samuel said. . . .” Although the prophet was dead (1 Sam. 25:1) how can he be said to come up and

speak in the trance? Grenville J. R. Kent, an Adventist theologian and Old Testament specialist, responds by comparing the situation to the narrative of Dagon in 1 Samuel 5, in which the descriptions of this Philistine god sound the same as of a human being. Verses 3 and 4, for example, say that Dagon had “fallen on his face,” a description common only to humans, not to an idol of wood or metal. Kent argues that “Samuel said,” or that Dagon had “fallen upon his face,” is a literary technique in which the biblical author presents the character’s point of view, whether or not they were pagans.¹²

Finally, the Endor episode ends with a pessimistic speech about the fate of Israel. Although the medium was transmitting the words as though Samuel spoke them, the biblical position on the state of the dead and the Bible’s teaching that God’s people should have no link with any medium pretending to speak for the dead should forever keep us in a mode of caution. Indeed, 1 Samuel 28:16–19 must not be seen as Samuel speaking, but rather as Satan’s attempt to drive Saul into further hopelessness. Ellen White says, “It was not God’s holy prophet that came forth at the spell of a sorcerer’s incantation. Samuel was not present in that haunt of evil spirits. That supernatural appearance was produced solely by the power of Satan. He could as easily assume the form of Samuel as he could assume that of an angel of light, when he tempted Christ in the wilderness.”¹³

Final considerations

The tragic end of Saul’s life should serve as a warning to a generation of Christians surrounded by spiritualism’s influences that are contrary to the Word of God. To enter in the territory of the enemy may temporarily satisfy the curiosity of the supernatural, but it will

demand an extremely high cost. “Among the most successful agencies of the great deceiver are the delusive teachings and lying wonders of spiritualism. Disguised as an angel of light, he spreads his nets where least suspected. If men would but study the Book of God with earnest prayer that they might understand it, they would not be left in darkness to receive false doctrines. But as they reject the truth they fall a prey to deception.”¹⁴ Saul and Moses Hull. A king and a pastor. Two men separated by nearly 3,000 years fell into the same deception, deceived by the first lie uttered by the devil in Eden: “ ‘You will not surely die’ ” (Gen. 3:4). Paul was right when he said, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Cor. 10:12). ❏

1 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 1:428.

2 James R. Nix, “The Tragic Story of Moses Hull,” *Adventist Review*, August 1987, 16.

3 White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 558.

4 All biblical passages in this article are from New International Version.

5 See *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 387–401.

6 For further information about the history of interpretation of this passage in Jewish and Christian literature, see K. A. D. Semelik, “The Witch of Endor: 1 Samuel 28 in Rabbinic and Christian Exegesis Till 800 A.D.,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1997):160–179.

7 Andrews Fausset, *Bible Encyclopedia and Dictionary Critical and Expository* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 205.

8 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2002), 679.

9 Theodore J. Lewis, “The Ancestral Estate in 2 Samuel 14:16,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 4:600, 601.

10 P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel: The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 421.

11 Theodore Lewis mentions two Akkadian documents in which the word *zapaqu*, the same root of *zapep*, was used to refer to the act of snakes becoming upright, when about to attack, and, curiously, another text talking about the ghost of a dead person that made one’s hair stand on end. “In both of these instances the notion is a sudden or startling action associated with fear.” *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 116. Therefore, the translation of *zapep* in 1 Samuel 28:14 must assume this etymological background.

12 Grenville J. R. Kent, “Did the Medium at En-Dor Really Bring Forth Samuel?” Gerhard Pfandl, ed., *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, Biblical Research Institute Studies, v. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 199.

13 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890), 679.

14 White, *The Great Controversy*, 524.

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Why is God so misunderstood?

One of the great tragedies of human history centers on how few people understand God. Indeed individuals often misunderstand God and take His name in vain. Natural disasters are often dubbed “acts of God.” Misfortunes are placed at His feet. Taking His name in vain becomes routine in every day talk. People bad-mouth God at every turn.

So many even misunderstand God in Christian churches, Christian preaching, and the way Scripture is interpreted. Does God really choose only the elect to be saved and the rest to be thrown away? Does God allow some to be born lost and stay lost? Does God give irresistible grace to the elect alone, but abandons the rest?

This article intends to explore why God is so misunderstood, and its point of departure focuses on the biblical worldview that affirms the misunderstanding of God, beginning with Satan questioning God’s character and leading a rebellion in heaven against God and all He stands for (Rev. 12:7–10). This cosmic controversy remains at the foundation of Satan’s attack against God’s character and motives. Ever since Satan deceived Adam and Eve, he has carried on the battle against God on earth. We shall focus on the biblical data that documents what goes on behind the scenes

of human history so as to have a right understanding of God and the deceptive ways of Satan.

The cosmic controversy

The worldview based on the cosmic controversy between God and Satan remains central to Adventist theology.¹ Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 provide a brief overview of this controversy, and how Satan continues with his purpose of maligning God. Most scholars interpret Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 as local kings of Babylon and Tyre, respectively. They do not see, imbedded in these chapters, insights into the cosmic controversy. Such scholars include Martin Luther² and John Calvin³ in their comments on Isaiah 14. John Oswalt notes that “the great expositors of the Reformation were unanimous in arguing against” these chapters referring to Satan.⁴

However, several thought leaders in church history have grasped the deeper significance of these chapters. Such leaders include Origen (185–254), Peter Lombard (1100–1160), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and John Wyclif (c. 1328–1384). Some theologians, such as Jerome (340–420) and Augustine (354–430), saw in Isaiah 14 a wider worldview. Most of the church fathers, from Augustine to Gregory the Great (c. 590–604), believed Isaiah 14 as referring to Satan.⁵

Some contemporary scholars also understand the deeper significance of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. For example, Gregory Boyd and William Dembski believe Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 refer to Satan.⁶ Boyd rightly believes that the “cosmic warfare constitutes one of the central threads that weave together the whole tapestry of the scriptural narrative.”⁷

Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 include data that transcends local application. For example, the local king of Babylon had never been in heaven (Isa. 14:12) nor had the local king of Tyre resided in Eden or appeared as a guardian cherub at heaven’s throne (Ezek. 28:13, 14). In both passages the kings were cast out of heaven because of pride (Isa. 14:12, 15; Ezek. 28:16, 17). The king of Tyre is said to have been perfect until sin was found in him (Eze. 28:15), which cannot be said of any human since the Fall (Rom. 5:16–18).

The fact that Lucifer (Satan) was a covering cherub at God’s throne indicates the privileged position God gave to him. Knowing of his future fall, God evidently gave him every opportunity to be grateful and that exposed his rebellion as unreasonable. The fact that he was created perfect, yet became proud, indicates that God did not create evil. Lucifer made this choice. He fell because of a distorted view about God, a product of his own imagination. He became the source of

all distortions about God. Christ called him “the father of lies” (John 8:44).⁸

In Isaiah 14, Satan says, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High” (vv. 13, 14). Clearly Satan wanted to usurp the place of God. The word *devil* in Greek (*diabolos*) means to “accuse, bring charges with hos-

Eve in Eden. We know from Scripture that Satan was “in Eden, the garden of God” (Ezek. 28:13); that he was the “ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (Rev. 12:9). We know that Satan used a serpent as his medium to tempt Eve.

Let’s follow Satan’s approach in Eden. The serpent asked Eve, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from *any* tree in the garden?’” (Gen. 3:1; emphasis added). Here is a question of surprise. “You mean

the One who gave her everything, and trust the one who gave her nothing?

The serpent said, “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” (Gen. 3:5). Heady stuff! Eve was vulnerable to the bait: “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it” (v. 6). How did she know wisdom comes from eating the fruit? Well, she saw the serpent speak. If

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tile intent,” and the word *Satan* in Greek (*Satanas*) means “adversary” or “slanderer.” The “widespread trade” of Ezekiel 28:16 is *rekullah*, the Hebrew word which, in this context, probably means “slander” (gossip about God).⁹ This throws wide open the scheme of Satan to distort the truth about God. Pride led him to have too high an opinion of himself that lessened his opinion of God.

Satan’s strategy

Scripture speaks of Satan winning angels over to his side (Rev. 12:4; Jude 1:6). He did it through distorting the truth about God. How do we know, and how did he do it? How could Satan undermine the goodness of God when angels had known nothing but His goodness? Did Satan insinuate that God was holding them back from their full potential? Was this his approach?

To answer these questions, we need to see how Satan later tempted

you cannot eat *any* fruit at all?” Satan implied, “Why did He create it for you if you cannot eat it?” Satan knew this would invite a response. It worked. Eve’s response, “We can eat from all trees, but one is off limits. We must not eat or touch it, or we will die” (see v. 3).

Yes, God did say if you eat the forbidden fruit “you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Satan countered God’s words, saying, “You will not surely die” (v. 4). Satan must have said this in such a way that Eve did not realize he was doubting God. For we know that Eve did not question the serpent. Rather, she was faced with contrary claims, and was pondering this dilemma. Her Creator Christ (Col. 1:15, 16; Heb. 1:1, 2) had given her life, a husband, a garden with luxurious fruit trees, flowers, and much more, with the freedom to commune with Him. Satan had given her nothing, except a contrary claim to her Creator. Why did Eve distrust

the fruit gave wisdom to a serpent to speak human language, then as a human she could become as God.

“Seeing is believing” trapped Eve. She thought she had empirical evidence that the serpent was more trustworthy than God. Eve’s slippery slope began with doubting God’s words, and doubting God’s words led to disobedience. She should have believed God’s words, for faith in God enables one to overcome Satan’s deceptions. To get angels to rebel in a perfect heaven, and humans to rebel in a perfect world would require a work of distorting the truth about God. Satan was successful in heaven and on earth. His approach in both venues was to destroy trust in God, and since it worked so well in heaven, he used the same approach on earth.

What Christians face today

It seems logical to assume that Satan has used the same approach

on all humans ever since. Those who listen to us preach are just as vulnerable as Eve if they focus on “seeing is believing” rather than on “believing God’s Word is seeing” through Satan’s counterfeits. In other words, doubting God’s written Word today is no different from doubting God’s spoken word in Eden. For Satan’s first words on earth questioned God’s words. He has done this ever since. He even causes Christians to distrust God.

For example, Genesis 1 informs us that God created the world and all that is in it in six days. The author of Hebrews affirms the Creation record: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3, NKJV). With the Bible so clear, how come most Christians accept evolution, some suggesting that God used that as a method of creating new forms of life?

The answer is clear. Evolution, whether theistic or otherwise, remains a masterpiece of the enemy’s deceptions. Why? Because theistic evolution says that God chose billions of years in an evolutionary process of death, mutation, and evolving, to produce human beings when He could have done it instantly. What kind of God is this? Is He really a God of love?

If survival of the fittest was God’s chosen means to create humans as some theistic evolutionists would suggest, why does God oppose humans earning their own salvation? If humans arrived by chance, a result of evolutionary accident, is there any purpose in human life? If the creation of humans was not a personal act of God’s love, the result is tragic: naturalism replaces supernaturalism; a counterfeit replaces the Creator. Such consequences are compatible with Satan, for he wants to replace God, even though he cannot make a blade of grass.

Furthermore, evolution claims it has empirical evidence for its authenticity. This evidence questions the biblical Creation record

and God’s words, even as Satan did in Eden. Satan is in the business of distorting God’s Word, leading to a misunderstanding of God’s character, and deceiving countless Christians.

God’s self-revelation

The only way for us to see through Satan’s many distortions about God consists of allowing God’s self-revelation in Scripture to fill our minds and hearts with God’s love. This happens when we seriously study His Word with prayer and when that Word is preached with all the power of the Spirit. Some theologians believe that God’s love is one attribute along with His other attributes. This is not so. By nature God is love, and all other attributes are qualified by His love.¹⁰

This God of love needs to be placed continually before the congregation. But how can this be done when people attack Scripture constantly? Even in seminaries, professors question God’s Word, echoing what Satan did in Eden. Many no longer consider that Scripture is God’s self-revelation. Instead, revelation is seen as taking place between God and the biblical writers. Scripture is seen as full of human responses to revelation instead of God’s self-revelation. Such views make the Bible a *human*, not a *divine-human*, book. When such naturalism replaces supernaturalism as the source of Scriptures, we are indeed deprived of the most potent weapon to fight Satan’s cunningness and deception.

Consider also the biblical teaching of salvation. Most Christians today believe in grace, and diminish the importance of the law. They would argue that we are saved by grace and do not need the law. But that is a deceptive argument. The Bible says sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). If the law is done away with, there would be no definition of sin, and hence no need of salvation, and no need of grace. God’s love is manifest in His law as much as in His grace. Law, as God intended it,

protects rather than restricts people. Satan opposes God’s law because he opposes God’s rule, which is based upon His law.

Conclusion

Thus, in every possible way Satan attempts to misrepresent God and lead His people away from Him. That way he cunningly devised to fight the war in the cosmic conflict. As pastors and preachers, our responsibility includes witnessing with the power of the Holy Spirit, showing who God is and what He is like, within the context of the great controversy. Our preaching should uphold the Creator God, the Giver of the Word, and the God who so loved us that He gave His only Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. Our preaching continues as a sacred opportunity to counter Satan’s misrepresentations of God. Preach God’s Word. Your congregation’s deepest needs in church worship are met through Bible-based, Christ-centered, Calvary-centered preaching. Let God reveal Himself through your words. This describes our holy calling. Only a revelation of God can overcome the distortions about God. Every sermon needs to declare the awesome love of God (Exod. 34:6; Jer. 9:23, 24; 1 John 4:8–16). ❏

- 1 Fundamental Belief 8 in *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005). See Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 1:387–453.
- 2 *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia), 16:140, 141.
- 3 *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 7/1: 442–444.
- 4 John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the OT: The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 320.
- 5 See the following for sources on these persons: José M. Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Church in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil” (ThD dissertation, Andrews University, 1985), 4–8.
- 6 Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 157–162; William A. Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Co., 2009), 134, 135.
- 7 Boyd, 24, 25, quote on 25.
- 8 All scriptures quoted in this article, except as otherwise stated, are from the New International Version.
- 9 See Richard M. Davidson, “Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, (2000) no. 1:2:108.
- 10 See Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), no. 2, chapters 1 and 2.

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Paul's letter to you

Editor's note: The apostle Paul wrote several letters to young pastors in ministry. Even seasoned pastors today need encouragement. This article contains excerpts from Paul's letters that he might have written to you, a servant and friend of God.

Dear Pastor:

I've been thinking a lot about you lately and have been praying for you. I write to bring you encouragement and blessing in Christ that you may live a victorious and fruitful life for Him.

I affirm you. I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in Him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and knowledge.* We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints. I delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. By faith we stand firm.

I have great confidence in you. In fact, I have boasted about you, but you have not embarrassed me. I am glad I can have confidence in you.

Remember always what God can do. God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, you will abound in every good work.

God is able to do immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work

within you. He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.

Let the Holy Spirit play an important role in your life. You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father." Let that Spirit help you in your weakness.

Remember your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God. Since you live by the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit.

Think about your position in Christ. You are God's field, God's building. You are not your own; you were bought at a price. You are a letter from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. God has made you for this very purpose and has given you the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore, be always confident.

Remember you are a new creation in Christ. For you are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for you to do. You are therefore Christ's ambassador as though God were making His appeal through you.

Seek the gifts and fruit of the Spirit. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts. Pursue the gifts that build up the church. Do not neglect your gift that was

given to you when the body of elders laid their hands on you. And do not forget the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Be not ashamed of the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Your message and preaching must not be with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on God's power.

Experience the power of prayer. In all my prayers, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.

In addition, I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith. I ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.

Lead a blameless life. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you

will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing, and perfect will. Keep your whole spirit, soul, and body blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember that in a race all runners run, but only one gets the prize. Run in such a way as to get the prize. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and in your love for us—see that you also excel in the grace of giving.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your mind, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Be an imitator of God.

Conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Set your heart on things above. Look to Christ seated at the right hand of God. Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be watchful and thankful, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and correctly handles the Word of truth. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's

schemes, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.

Live a victorious life. Sin shall not be your master because you are not under law but under grace. Now that you have been set free from sin and have become a slave to God, you are more than conquerors through Him who loved you. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God! He gives us all the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Affectionately,
Your friend,

Paul

M

* The verses to which the author alludes throughout this article are either direct quotations of, or paraphrases from, the New International Version.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

JAMES WIBBERDING

Continued from page 18 ▼

- and "gave to anyone as he had need" (Acts 2:44, 45). In most cases, local elders and deacons would have had the opportunity for gainful employment because they were stationary. By contrast, the apostles were less likely to have such opportunity. Full salaries were probably, in most cases, reserved for apostles. Whatever the arrangement, I suggest that a need-based pay policy is a pragmatic solution with biblical precedent.
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structure is a mandate for the church in all times and places. The mission is the mandate (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8), not the structure. Instead, the structure must develop around the unique needs of the mission in its present context. However, disbursement of ministry activity and authority is a mandate (1 Cor. 12).

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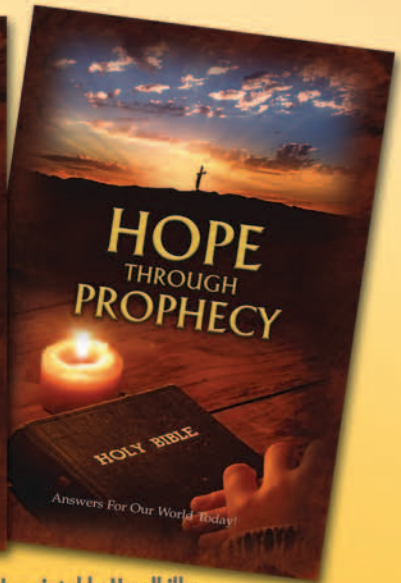
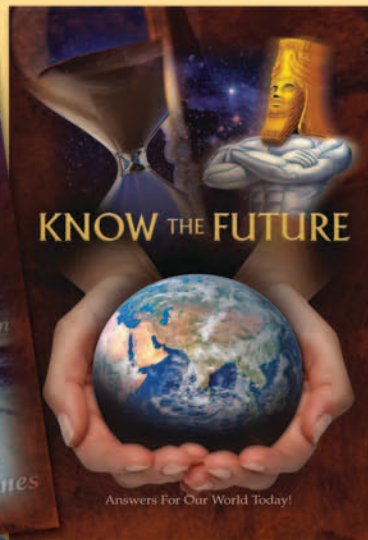
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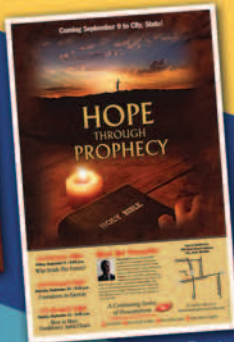
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Pastors' Council in Egypt

Ain-Al-Sokhna, Egypt—Approximately 80 pastors of the Seventh-day Adventist Church



in the Middle East gathered together for professional, theological, and pastoral training in Egypt from September 12–18, 2011.

“It is always a great experience when pastors and administrators are coming together to fellowship, train, and sharpen the pastoral tools given by God,” says **Janos Kovacs-Biro**, Ministerial Association Director at the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists (TED). This was the first time that the meeting was open for the pastors’ spouses as well. Pastor Kovacs-Biro explains, “During this pastors’ meeting we have experienced the readiness to learn and discuss relevant pastoral issues. My greatest joy is that the Middle East Union (MEU) pastors are willing to be engaged in God’s plan in order to make our Lord known in their surroundings, and invite people to become part of His story.”

Kjell Aune, MEU president, comments, “Within MEU we are quite focused on basic and continuing education for our pastoral staff. This quinquennial council provided

quality teaching besides having a collegial and social value.” Aune emphasized, “Our team was knit closer together and we made new friends. All-in-all we had a very rewarding week together by the Red Sea in Egypt and we are thankful to

all who contributed to this success.”
[*Jony Hajaj, tedNEWS*]

Chinese Protestant leaders’ visit to headquarters precedes official visit to China next year

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—Leaders from the official Protestant church in China paid a courtesy visit to the Seventh-day Adventist Church headquarters, October 3, 2011, the second time in two years.

The visit of representatives of the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee preceded the visit of the denomination’s president to China next year. Adventist Church President **Ted N. C. Wilson** and a small delegation from the church’s headquarters are scheduled to visit China during March and April 2012, to strengthen relations with Adventist believers in China.

Leaders from the council previously visited the Adventist Church headquarters in July 2010.

“We are grateful to have contact and visit Adventist believers in China through the official organization, the China Christian Council,” Wilson told Chinese officials during a protocol lunch yesterday. He thanked the leaders for helping to facilitate the visit.

The China Christian Council is a postdenominational organization of Protestants in China. “There are approximately 23 million Protestant Christians in China,” said Reverend **Shen Xuebin**, chairman of the Shanghai Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Church.

“Christians are a minority in China. Most people in China are atheists,” Shen said.



Shen Xuebin, center, chairman of the Shanghai Committee of Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Church, visits with Adventist Church Executive Secretary G. T. Ng.

Adventist believers in China fall under the China Christian Council and are recognized as a special group for their worship services on Saturday. It is estimated that there are some 400,000 Adventist believers in China.

In the past few years, Adventist believers in China have built several large churches in agreement with authorities.

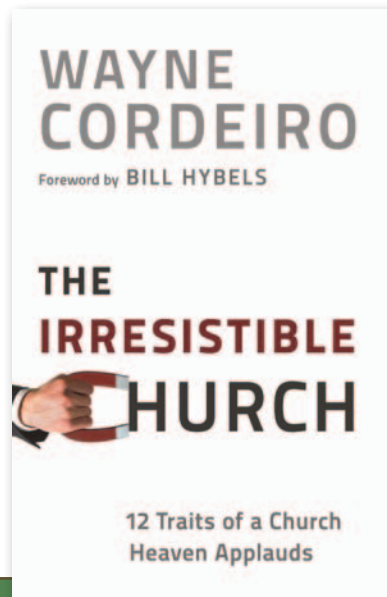
Next year’s trip will be Wilson’s first visit to China. His predecessor, **Jan Paulsen**, visited China in 2009.
[*Ansel Oliver/ANN*]



The Irresistible Church: 12 Traits of a Church Heaven Applauds

by Wayne Cordeiro,
Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2011.

An irresistible church to God? In the introduction to his book, Cordeiro writes, "This is actually a book about becoming a church that is irresistible to *heaven* . . . a church



1. Hungers for the Presence of God
2. Remembers Who She Is
3. Lives Heart First
4. Practices Gratefulness
5. Promotes Healthy Relationships
6. Is Always Learning
7. Promotes Spiritual Self-Feeding
8. Connects Everything to a Soul
9. Chooses to Love
10. Takes Risks
11. Humbles Itself
12. Has a Plan

Following the last chapter is a study guide for personal or group study from which Cordeiro reiterates,

IS IT REALLY A BOOK ABOUT BEING A CHURCH THAT IS IRRESISTIBLE TO GOD, NOT PEOPLE? *YES.*

that God can't help but bless and use for His eternal purposes. It's a church that makes the angels shout *Encore!*" (11).

What does this church look like? Cordeiro describes this church with members who grow spiritually, witness fruit from mission, desire to attend church functions, commit to the mission, tell others about it, grow but know they are not perfect, are challenged and equipped to take one more step toward growth in the Christian life next week. Is it really a book about being a church that is irresistible to God, not people? *Yes.* Cordeiro affirms, "When we find out who we are, and are fully settled on


doing what God has asked us to do and be, then we don't have to move far to find Christ and live for Him. Our days aren't wasted doing the wrong things. Our lives are well stewarded" (22).

Cordeiro develops 12 traits of how a church could please God and thereby receive His blessing. To this end he quotes Augustine, "A man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

Cordeiro's writing style is direct, hopeful, and easy to read. After his introduction, he invests a chapter on each of the 12 traits through which he has seen God bless his church in Oahu. They are

"When we find out who we are, and are fully settled on doing what God has asked us to do and be, then our days won't be wasted doing the wrong things. Our lives will be well stewarded" (151).

I left a great deal of ink and yellow highlighter throughout each chapter, encouraged in the discovery that there is only One I need to please, and He has everything I need to serve His church faithfully. My task now includes teaching my people what this means.

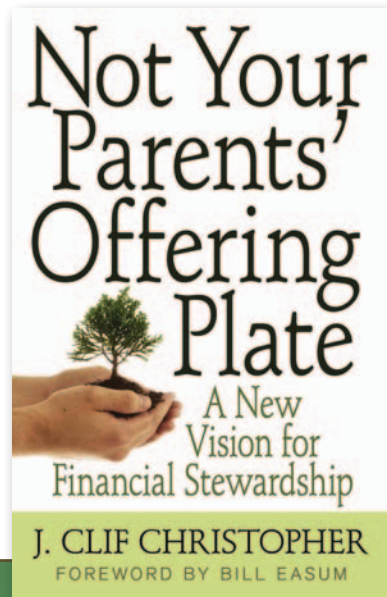
—Reviewed by Michael R. Cauley, DMin, pastor,
GracePoint Seventh-day Adventist Church,
Brentwood, Tennessee, United States. 



Not Your Parents' Offering Plate: A New Vision for Financial Stewardship

by J. Clif Christopher,
Nashville, TN: Abingdon
Press, 2008.

First of all, let us get the bad news out of the way. The author wants you to know that today religious organizations receive about 33 per-



reluctant to support the church. How many times have you been told in an offering appeal that *members need to give a generous offering in order to keep the heat on in the winter?* If, on the other hand, the message is—*we did great things last year with your money and we hope to do more this year*—the members will respond positively. Leadership sets the tone (29).

The second broad issue is reporting. All too many churches do not report to the congregation how the funds were used. Other churches

THIS RELATIVELY SMALL BOOK HAS
NUMEROUS PERSPECTIVES AND IDEAS THAT
READERS WILL FIND USEFUL.

cent of all charitable giving (ix). That is a significant amount since, in the United States, charitable giving is about \$300 billion per year. But, consider the fact that just 20 years ago religious organizations received 60 percent of all charitable giving—almost twice the percentage of today. The author reminds the reader that “The church is now just one of many organizations competing for a piece of the charitable-dollar pie” (ix). Your congregation, by itself, cannot change the national trend, but you can change the trends in your congregation. (While most of the statistics refer to United States congregations, the observations and ideas have broad application.)

The author, an experienced pastor, consults with more than 150 congregations in building,

finance, and church growth projects. Throughout the book Christopher identifies challenges that congregations face and offers practical and helpful insights for pastors and congregations.

This relatively small book has numerous perspectives and ideas that readers will find useful. Rather than refer to the author’s rather lengthy list, I have chosen to emphasize two issues that are addressed throughout the book.

First, the author discusses the attitude of the pastor and church leaders. Are the pastors and leaders reluctant to ask for money? Do they communicate effectively the mission and outcomes? If the members hear that the organization is “dying on the vine” and more funds are needed to stay afloat, the members will be

give detailed reports but do not address the issue of how the funds helped fulfill the mission of the church. Members want to know that their funds made a difference—in the congregation, the community, and ultimately in the proclamation of the gospel.

So, why read this book? It is short and easy to read, yet at the same time packed with helpful insights and perspectives that will give you a positive perspective on your church finances. Once you have experienced the blessing, share a copy with your key church leaders. They will thank you for recommending it.

—Reviewed by Nikolaus Satelmajer,
DMin, retired pastor and former editor of
Ministry, living in Silver Spring, Maryland,
United States. ❏

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