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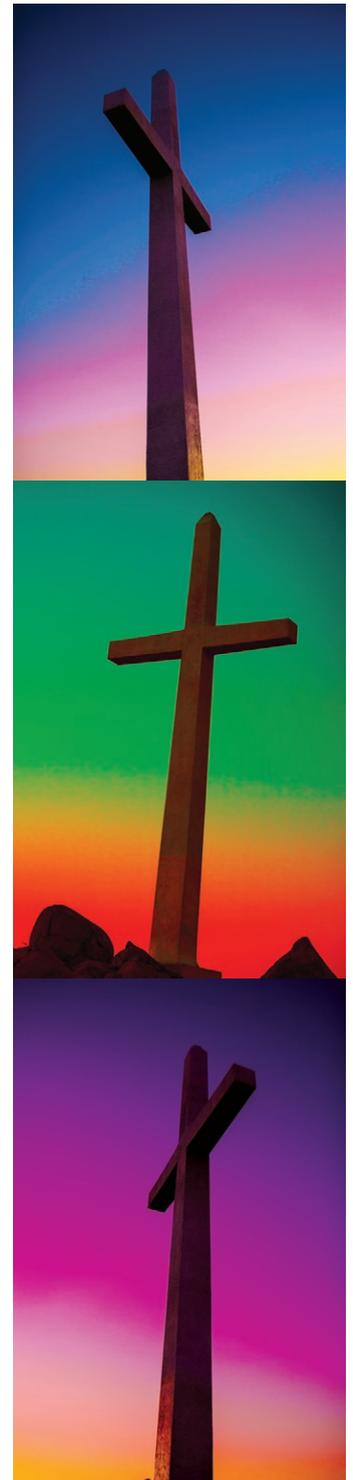
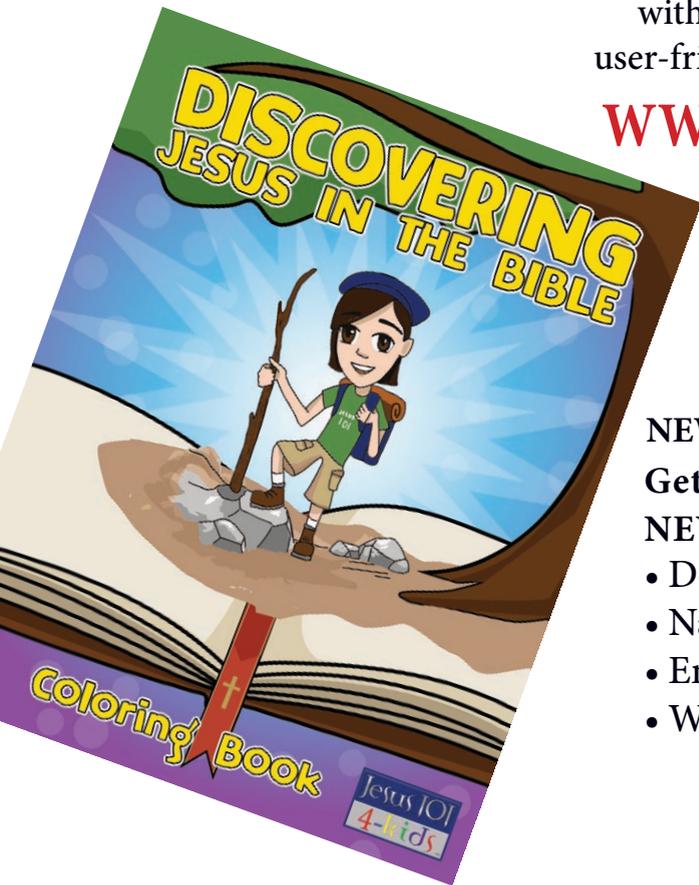
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“We often discuss in church very deep theological matters and pursuing new members, but, as was said in the article, we do not nurture our new members.”

Forgive, as He forgave

I would like to commend Roy Adams for his article “Seventy Times Seven” (July 2017). Too many of our people feel real guilt over being unable to forgive people who have offended them in such tragic circumstances as Adams describes. It was good to read such a balanced approach to this issue. Having worked with young people all my ministry, I have come against a number of situations that some of those youth will never recover from—like having a child as a result of a rape because they did not believe in abortion.

Being a Jew, Peter’s mind would have gone to Daniel 9:24, with 70 weeks of 7 given to the Jews to make an end of sin and bring in reconciliation, and understood that we need to forgive in the same way that God forgave those Jews who responded to His plea, while those who did not respond were rejected.

—R. Possingham, Australia

Nurturing new members

I have just read the article “Shutting the Back Door” (July 2017) in *Ministry* magazine. The five key points mentioned were very meaningful and useful; I have to absolutely agree with all of them. I am not saying I am using them, but I need to use them! I have experienced something like a “U” curve described in the article, but, fortunately, did not leave the church (thanks to God, of course). We often discuss in church very deep theological matters and pursuing new members, but, as was said in the article, we do not nurture our new members. Some specific things from the article (like not sitting with new members, associating with established church friends, forgetting new members, and so on) I can see operating in the church I attend, and often these are mistakes I make myself. So, thank you very much again for this article. It was very enriching, and I hope it will help me to care for new people in the church in a much better way.

—Matúš, Czech Republic

Come before winter

As a long-time reader of *Ministry*, and now retired, I have a problem you can help me with. How should a retired pastor be used? Dual ministry? At the least, perhaps, a regular pastoral interactive sharing of his or her experience and wisdom, either one-on-one or with a group.

I was hoping you would have an article regarding this already on file that you could send me. If not, please consider it a topic worth your attention.

—Wil Nuckolls (Baptist), Fair Oaks, California, United States.

PS Hurry, I’m 85.

Secondary sources

I am writing to say that I appreciated all the articles in your September 2017 issue, especially the one by Dr. Stefanovich. I also learned from Seth Pierce’s article, “Vanishing Acts.” But I do see some irony in this sentence by Pastor Pierce: “A speaker creates an existential absence through an overuse of ‘clichés, quotations, and secondary sources’ that leaves listeners feeling ‘deceived and deprived.’” It seems to me that the same “existential absence” can be created by your writer’s adherence to the apparent requirement (written or unwritten, I don’t know) that every Adventist contributor quote Ellen White at least once.

It is distracting when I know that Mrs. White will be quoted once or multiple times in each article, whether the quotation is the very best that could have been chosen to underline the point, or not. For this reader, it tends to create that “existential absence” that Brother Seth mentioned, and distracts from a writer’s credibility. I start

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Pavel Goia, DMin (ABD), is the editor of *Ministry*.



Practical spirituality

A few years ago, I went to Cuba for mission work. In the evenings we held meetings. We provided transportation and a full children's program. One lady brought an average of 150 children to the kids' program every night. And they knew many songs and Bible stories. I asked her how she got so many children to come to the meetings. "There is no greater call and privilege," she said, "than to love Jesus and His children."

"And how do you know that you love Jesus and people?" I asked.

She continued, "You make your relationship with Jesus a priority and serve Him by serving people. I ask Him to wake me up every morning to spend time with Him before the day starts, and He does it. The more time I spend with Him, the more I desire to know Him."

Speaking with her made me think of the Bible verse, "He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple" (Isa. 50:4, AMP). It is crucial to have information and understanding, yet no doctrine has power in itself unless it is lived and applied. We should be not only listeners but doers. When Jesus comes, He will not say that you had great knowledge and understanding; rather, He will refer to our living the knowledge we have. And to those that did not live accordingly He will say, "I don't know you." Ultimately, it is a matter of having a healthy, real, relationship with God and others.

So, back to the lady. She continued, "You cannot really love people while focusing continually on your own life. Jesus was never self-centered. He loved people, so He focused on them and served them. How long do you pray and how much time do you invest in others? It is easy to say 'I love God and people,' but the test is to prove your words. Pray

that God gives you a passion for people, and then invest in them. God will give you opportunities to serve them."

The lady invited me to visit her. The next day the local pastor and I went to her home. She lived in a one-room house with a small dirt yard. A little before two o'clock in the afternoon, a large crowd of children started to come from the neighborhood. She had them sit in the yard and then asked for their signed papers. She explained, "I teach them Bible stories and songs. The children have to prove they pay attention by telling their parents the story they learned that day, then the parents sign the paper. This way I also make sure their parents learn about Jesus."

After the kids indicated they had told the story to their parents, they sat down and the lady gave them rice. She clarified, "I have no money to buy more than rice for so many. Most parents have no job or are very poor and cannot supply plain food. I have a job; I make fourteen dollars a month." With a face full of joy, she exclaimed, "I have a job! I am so blessed. I have food, they don't. There is no greater blessing than to see them happy."

Yes, I said to myself, *it is better to bless than to be blessed*. We are called to be blessings to the world around, not to seek blessings for self. That's the greatest blessing we can ever experience.

So, I said to her, "How can I help you in your ministry?"

She replied, "I need nothing, I am happy and blessed." I offered her what I had, and with eyes wide open she said, "I cannot take it. God always provides; I know that. I know Him and have seen Him working."

How do you show your love to God? Seek Him and His presence before anything else, spend time with Him in prayer and in the study of His Word. The more

For 90 years, Ministry has maintained its commitment to deepen spiritual life, develop intellectual strength, and increase pastoral and evangelistic effectiveness.

you know Him, the more you trust Him and want to know Him even more. Make Him a priority.

How do you show your love to people? Pray that God would give you a passion for people, and then invest in people, pray for them, spend time listening and caring, serve their needs. The more you do that, the more you become a blessing. How can we tell people about Jesus unless we show them Jesus?

The year 2018 is special. God willing, it will see the 100th birthday celebration of one of history's greatest evangelists, Dr. Billy Graham (see "Dateline," p. 28). The year 2018 also marks the 90th anniversary of the unbroken, monthly publication of our journal for pastors. To God be the glory.

For 90 years, *Ministry* has maintained its commitment to deepen spiritual life, develop intellectual strength, and increase pastoral and evangelistic effectiveness, and throughout 2018, we will share vignettes from the earliest days of *Ministry*.

As you "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," may this New Year's issue be a blessing to you and a tool to support your leadership and service for God. 🙏

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Ron E. M. Clouzet, DMin, is director of the Ministerial Association for the Northern Asia-Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists.



The purpose and power of ministry: A pastor's journey

To be a pastor means to love others more than one's self. But that was my problem: I did not love others more than myself. Two of my uncles were pastors. One was erudite and self-sacrificing; the other was a key leader in the church, loved by many for his Christlike spirit. I was not like either of them. I rather liked my opinions and self-centered ways. I loathed the idea of acquiescing to people, just to be nice. I wanted to serve—a blessed concept inculcated by the life example of my own parents—but I preferred serving on my terms.

Still, I could not shake the idea that I had to seriously consider becoming a pastor. It seemed to me so out of place. Some of my friends went into the ministry, but they were gracious, patient, and willing to smile, even when they did not feel like it. I was a straight shooter. I esteemed efficiency and fairness over political correctness. And yet, I could see how God was at work when I visited with people, answered Bible questions, or gave a sermon.

What is a sinner to do?

My major at a denominational university in California was music, with a minor in theology. After two years there and a third in France, I decided on theology, but I still was not sure whether I qualified as a pastor. I spent a summer as an assistant pastor in a local church. I could not quite understand why people

benefited by my ministry, but I had to admit I was blessed doing ministry.

Maybe that was it. Maybe ministry was more about being blessed in the engagement rather than being particularly good at it. Weeks before my graduation with a BA in ministerial studies, a conference president offered me a call; actually, two presidents did.

After I had pastored for two years, some of my doubts persisted. I was growing in my role as a pastor, but I felt I should have been ahead of where I was. After seminary, I spent four months in evangelistic training in Chicago. It was then that the curtains of my mind opened wide and the light of God's wisdom poured in.

The real purpose of ministry

Pastoral ministry, I realized, was primarily, not about caring for the saints but seeking the lost. Then, the principal task of the ministry was a teaching one, not one of public or religious performance. Empowering members to see what God sees when He looks at a world lost in sin was not going to be easy but would certainly be worthwhile. My ministry focus changed from member maintenance to soul saving. Even members needed soul saving. Religion is not only not enough, it may actually be a distraction from the real thing, which is a vibrant, growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

What a difference that new perspective made.

I was, for sure, not "holier" than I had been before. I had donned the proper glasses, and now I could see what pastoral ministry was about. My spiritual life began to thirst for more of Jesus because I saw Him at work more clearly. My churches began to grow. I began to understand why the focus of the Gospels at the end of Jesus' ministry was on the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46–49; Acts 1:1–8) more than it was on staying close to Him (as strange as this may sound). He wanted His followers to see the need the world had for a Savior, which, in turn, would prompt them to personally long for more of the Savior to give to the world.

The power of prayer

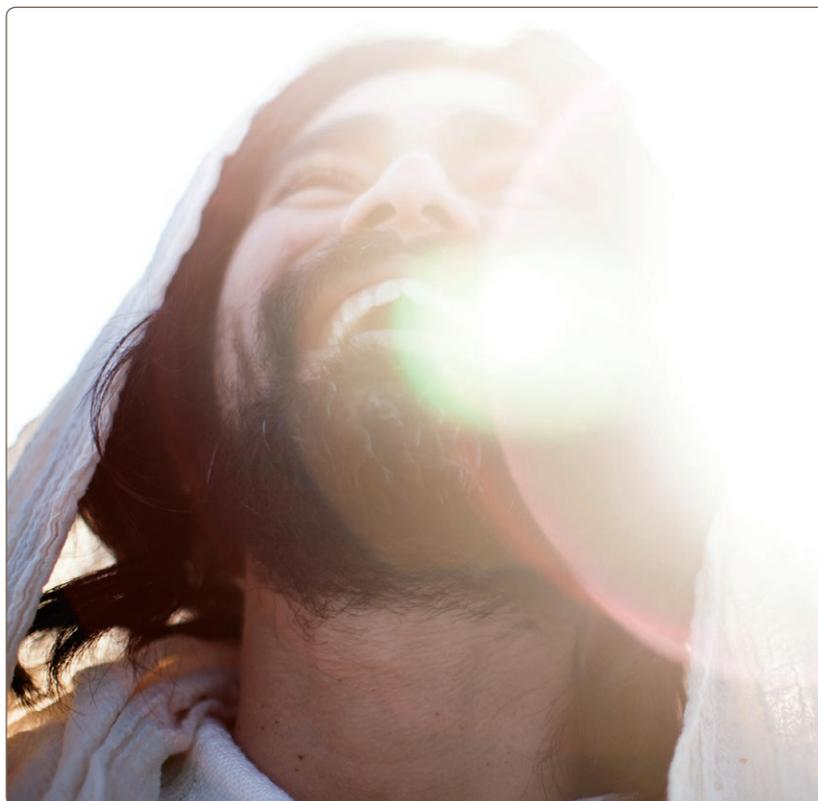
My days were spent meeting with people to study God's Word. Often, I would forget to eat, being so full of the joy of the Lord at seeing people take a hold of faith. I rejoiced every time I saw a sparkle in their eye as they realized some wonderful truth from God that applied to their life. At the church, we organized ourselves into ministry teams to more efficiently reach out to people. We even went door-to-door in our neighborhood to pray for people, simply because we loved them. Young adults began to get excited about a God who was becoming real to them.

My prayer life also changed, as did that of our members. When prayer became more about others than about *my* personal needs, perspective ensued. And then, one morning, I realized that I did not know how to pray. My prayers were still immature, even self-centered: much on the surface and little of actual

the remaining three days, and, yes, this once Laodicean church became a praying church. It did not do so for its own sake; it did it for the sake of the lost, the sad, the overcome. And that was the key to the enduring aspect of this five-o'clock-in-the-morning folly. Lives mattered, and we were invited to enter

The real power for ministry

Whatever happened to the young pastor full of doubts about ministry? He disappeared. After years of field ministry, he was asked to teach pastors, which he did for 23 wonderful years. The



Life transformation became a church expectation. Multiple ministries developed for the sake of the community.

conversation with the Almighty. So, I announced I would do a series of sermons on prayer.

In my study, I learned our—my—two greatest failures in prayer were lack of it (as simple as that) and praying faithless prayers. At the end of the seven-week series, the church woke up, and so did I. We got serious about corporate prayer. I invited my church elders to join me for prayer at the church any time on Mondays from five o'clock to seven o'clock in the morning, and seven of the ten did. Deacons asked to join the group. Deaconesses followed. We added Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings to this prayer adventure. Any member was now welcomed. We added

into God's throne of grace to petition on their behalf (Heb. 4:16). By God's grace, we would then do it.

The church grew in the way Paul talks about it to the Ephesians: spiritually and numerically (Eph. 4:11–16). Fasting and prayer weekends were held twice a year, and we had up to 800 participating when the membership of the church was only 400. Life transformation became a church expectation. Multiple ministries developed for the sake of the community. Most of the members were part of one or more of those ministries. Without a church school from which to draw youth for baptism, the Lord led 194 people to be baptized as new believers.

person God can use is not the pastor who has it all together or the one who is so politically savvy that he or she keeps everyone around him or her content (or even the one who makes no visible mistakes). *The pastor who keeps growing is the one whom God can use.* David made mistakes. He made serious mistakes. But God never tires of “bragging” about His servant David, whose heart was after His own (Acts 13:22).

I discovered, as George Müller had over a century before, that the secret of effectual prayer was effectual communion with God's Word. He wrote, “The primary business I must attend to every day is to have fellowship with the Lord. The first concern is not how much I might

serve the Lord, but how my inner man might be nourished. . . .

“The most important thing I had to do was to read the Word and to meditate on it. Thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprovéd, and instructed.

“Formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible. But I often spent a quarter of an hour to an hour on my knees struggling to pray while my mind wandered. Now I rarely have this problem. As my heart is nourished by the truth of the Word, I am brought into true fellowship with God. . . .

“... As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time unless he eats, so it is with the inner man. What is the food of the inner man? Not prayer, but *the Word of God*—not the simple reading of the Word of God. . . . No, we must consider what we read, ponder over it. . . .

“... Through His Word, our Father speaks to us. . . . The weaker we are, the more meditation we need.”¹

Claiming Isaiah 50:4, 5, I have been waking up each morning when God summons me to meet with Him. This has happened for most days of the past 30 years. I remember one morning, sitting by a lake in Nevada, the light of the full moon being so clear I could read the Word at three in the morning. I remember the joy of being with Him—the thrill of Creator and creature walking together, as if nothing else in the universe really mattered.

I also remember one day in Tennessee, reading the greatest book ever written on the life of Christ outside of the Gospels, *The Desire of Ages*, and being literally struck with the force of the immense and undeserved love of a God who would go to the cross just for me.² Years later, I related to Charles Finney’s conversion experience when reading about the “waves and waves of liquid love” that were poured upon his soul by a God who would not let him go.³

I remember, recently, walking through narrow streets in Tokyo, asking God as my loving, generous Father to grant my request on behalf of people I was sharing the Gospel with. The next

day, the answer came, to the amazing glory of God—and they were saved to the uttermost.

God is good. God is real. He is more than real. When we catch a glimpse of His greatness and superb love tailor-made for each of us, we stand in awe, quietly tearing, our hearts full of profound thanks for a God who would care so much for each of His children. We wonder how much more there is to Him than we have been able to perceive. Paraphrasing the psalmist: When I consider Your character, and your generous nature, the wonders you make available to us, “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (Ps. 8:4, NKJV).

God is everything that we need, and without Him, we simply cannot do anything worth doing (John 15:5). Recently, I visited a lady in great pain. We explored her issues, via a translator, for most of two hours. The picture was grim, the cloud dark. That was until we looked at God’s Word and we saw a different picture. God kept insisting that there was a beautiful blue sky above the dark cloud, with the sun shining on it. What mattered was not looking at the cloud but believing that the sun and sky were above. “Talk faith, and you will have faith.”⁴ Fifteen minutes of His Word changed two hours of gloom. The translator, the next day, was in awe of the transformation.

My greatest flaw is not my inherent selfishness or my favorite, recurring sins. Those are great weaknesses, indeed. But my *greatest* flaw is my lack of faith. And, if we paid a little attention to the stories of the Gospels, we would discover this to be so for most of us. All Jesus needs from me is me. All He wants from me is me, warts and all. All He really cares for is me. When I am His, I am a fisher of people. When I am mine, my net and my boat are full of holes.

Keep looking up

It has been more than 37 years now since I began professional ministry. I have been a congregational pastor, a university and seminary professor, an academic administrator, a missionary,

and our denomination’s pastors’ pastor in the most populated and secular area in the world. I still have doubts, but they are only about myself. I no longer entertain doubts about God or what He is able to do. But some days, strangely, I hide my face from Him, causing Him, no doubt, untold pain and disappointment. But I also know that He loves me, not because I am lovable but because He is love (1 John 4:8). And as Paul says, “Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8 NKJV). God will finish what He has started in me (Phil. 1:6), not because I feel it but because He said He would. And my Savior has yet to break a promise.

The book of Hebrews was written by a well-educated pastor, theologian, and missionary. In chapter 11, we find the commonly known Hall of Faith. By faith we know the worlds were made by God, by faith Abel obeyed God, by faith Enoch walked with God, by faith Noah prepared the ark, and so on. Then it says, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish” (Heb. 11:30, 31, NKJV). The author ends his Hall of Faith with these glorious words: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:1, 2, NKJV). Those “walkers by faith” were constant doubters, and the woman was a harlot. But they all chose to look up. They chose to center their attention not on their sins, misgivings, or failings—but on what God maintained He could do. I made the same choice. And, God helping me, I have been blessed to experience the purpose and power of ministry. 🙏

1 George Müller, *The Autobiography of George Müller* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1984), 139, 140.

2 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1898), 755, 756.

3 Charles G. Finney, *The Autobiography of Charles G. Finney*, ed. Helen Wessel (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1977), 10.

4 Ellen G. White, “The Light of the World,” *The Signs of the Times*, October 20, 1887.

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Distractions

Pastors often preach that Enoch walked with God, as that is what the text says. *Walking with God* describes the Genesis term for the ideal relationship between God and His people: Enoch (Gen. 5:22–24), Noah (Gen. 6:9), and Abraham (Gen. 17:1) all “walked with God.” The image of this gentle, continuous, present-tense activity is complemented by several New Testament metaphors for the relationship between God and His people, such as abiding in the vine (John 15:5) and eating with Jesus (Rev. 3:20).

It is also true that Genesis offers “theological propositions and convictions [that] are foundational for the rest of the Bible”¹ and that “Genesis is second to none in its importance in proclaiming ‘the whole will of God’ ” (Acts 20:17).² However, Genesis not only lays this foundational emphasis on walking with God; it also provides valuable insights into classic distractions that can thwart that walk, even for pastors.

And that is what this article will look at: the distractions.

The Genesis chiasm

Genesis has traditionally been seen in two parts, the primordial and the patriarchal, cleverly described as moving from generation to degeneration to regeneration.³ Some have challenged this traditional structure, with its “sin” versus “saved” outlook.⁴ Umberto Cassuto stated that the Golden Rule of Torah means that the conclusion of a narrative should reflect the opening;⁵

this is a literary technique known as “inclusion” and is commonly utilized as “chiasm.” Genesis has numerous examples of this form: chapters 2 and 3, which begin with humanity in the garden, then end with the expulsion of humans from the garden. Later texts then focus on their disobedience,⁶ the Tower of Babel,⁷ the *Aqedah* (the binding of Isaac),⁸ and the last words of Jacob and Joseph.⁹ Recently, the whole Genesis narrative was shown to have a chiasm structure.¹⁰

Use of the Genesis chiasm structure reveals three major “tests” that humans encounter. The first test challenged trust in God. At the heart of Genesis, God tests the love of His servant Abraham (Gen. 22:1). As the narrative closes, another test emerges, commonly thought of as Joseph testing his brothers, but it is, rather, a test of Joseph’s loyalty to God. Laurence Turner expressed concern regarding the character of Joseph: “With the Joseph story, or more correctly the story of Jacob’s family, we reach the most sustained, almost seamlessly constructed narrative block in Genesis. It is human activity, rather than the divine, that is at the centre of attention. God is present, though more often than not he is invoked by the characters rather than being explicitly active. Yet, as if to underline the nature of the book, Joseph might be the most finely portrayed character in Genesis, but he also is the most enigmatic of all, even more so than Jacob.”¹¹ When we recognize that Joseph is not the lead character (God is) but that his allegiance

to God is tested, we see the mirror image of the issues that confronted Adam and Eve and Abraham. In these three situations, Genesis chapters 3, 22, and 39–45, we discover the spectrum of satanic temptations.

The first distraction

The issue at the tree was more than simple obedience and trust in God, although disobedience was the outcome. Not only did the serpent attack the sovereignty and trustworthiness of God, but, significantly, he attacked the worth of the couple. His first words, “Did God actually say?” (Gen. 3:1), not only challenged the beneficence of God but implied a serious inadequacy regarding the intellectual ability of the woman. They imply that if she were smart enough and intelligent enough, she would understand God’s words correctly. Eve responded to this challenge by reiterating the words of God, and adding a reinforcement of her own, “or touch it” (v. 3, NASB). This reinforcement suggests that Eve was well aware of the challenge and that she and her husband correctly understood the dire results of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The serpent’s next thrust ridicules the present human state: “your eyes *will be* opened, and you *will be* like God,” (v. 5, NASB), emphasizing that the woman is *not yet* a god but, instead, is *only* a human. The fact that she was made in the image of God is, conveniently, overlooked. With the woman now doubting her own intellect and status, she was groomed

to accept the fatal, unproven, quick-fix solution of the serpent: just eat the fruit.

Making humans feel inferior opens the door to countless temptations and inappropriate choices, illustrated within the Genesis text itself. Abram felt inferior to the Canaanites when he told lies about his wife's identity (Gen. 12:10–20). Sarah, feeling inferior because of her infertility, agreed to an extramarital affair in order that her husband produce an heir (Gen. 16:1, 2). Esau felt inferior when he sold his

obedience, but that fails to appreciate the rich layers of meaning in this intensely emotional story. Jacques Doukhan, who delineated the chiasmic structure of Genesis 22, noted that the passage centers on the dialogue between God and Abraham and noted the significant episodes of silence in this dialogue.¹² Most importantly, Jo Ann Davidson notes that for the *first time* in the Genesis narrative (and therefore the whole Bible) the word *love* is used.¹³ The text identifies what Abraham loved:

The third distraction

Modern society relishes a success story so much that it is easy to miss the third distraction of the Genesis narrative. Thomas Brodie noted the Joseph story “picks up the elements of the first story (Genesis 2–4) and uses them in a radically new way.”¹⁵ After being the victim of brotherly hatred—reminiscent of the Cain-Abel tragedy of Genesis chapter 4—Joseph, in Egypt, becomes the focus of the narrative. Seven times in chapter 39 it is emphasized that

It is all too easy for us to be distracted by loving the work of the Lord more than the Lord of the work.

birthright (Gen. 25:29–34). Isaac felt inferior (old and blind) when he raced ahead of God and planned to bless his favored son (Gen. 27:1–4).

How many people today are induced to use deleterious substances like tobacco, alcohol, and narcotic drugs in vain attempts to make themselves feel less inferior? If this basis for their behavior is recognized, the pastor is more likely to be compassionate and nonjudgmental. A sense of inferiority will induce people to make inappropriate marriages, wear inappropriate clothing, and eat unhealthy food simply to fit in the crowd. Inferiority provokes defensive and aggressive behavior. The pastor is not immune to this powerful distortion of truth. The problems arising from the first temptation (God cannot be trusted, and you are not good enough) are still present today.

The second distraction

The text declares Abraham was tested when asked to sacrifice Isaac, but what was he being tested on? The simplistic answer is once again

“Your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love” (v. 2).

But Isaac represented more than a beloved son, a beloved relationship, important as that was. Isaac was Abraham's greatest achievement, his dearest possession, his hope for the future. In short, Isaac represented all the blessings of God to Abraham, concentrated in one human package.

The devil turns the gifts of God into the most powerful distractions. Instead of loving the giver, we, like children, focus on the gifts. So, Abraham's “test” was not simply one of obedience but of whether or not he loved God supremely—more, in fact, than he did his beloved son, his achievements, or his dreams. In his personal observations and testimony, Julian Archer poignantly demonstrates how modern society offers a huge range of distractions that start as the blessings of God.¹⁴ Pastors are not immune to this type of temptation. It is all too easy for us to be distracted by loving the work of the Lord more than the Lord of the work.

Joseph is successful because God was with him (vv. 2, 3 [2], 5 [2], 21, 23). When he interprets Pharaoh's dreams and gives wise advice about how to cope with the predicted famine, even Pharaoh declares, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” (Gen. 41:38). Joseph remains, clearly, a superior human being.

But how does Joseph behave when unexpectedly confronted with his murderous brothers? The text says he immediately recognized his brothers, *but* he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them (Gen. 42:7). The reason for this: he remembered his dreams (v. 9), those dreams that portrayed his superiority over his brothers.

Yet the man who gave wise counsel to Pharaoh and offered workable plans to avert the national disaster had no sensible plan to deal with his brothers. Irrationally, he accused them of spying; next, he demanded that they must send for their missing brother (how would that help break a spy ring?); and then he put them all in prison, which made sending for the

brother impossible. Finally, he kept one brother in prison, sent the rest home with money in their sacks, and when they returned, offered them a banquet. This is not a coherent strategy, and Joseph's frequent bouts of weeping further suggest a general loss of control. Worse, Joseph twice swears by Pharaoh (vv. 15, 16), which no other Hebrew ever does.¹⁶ This indicates that Joseph was a very troubled man.¹⁷ It is dangerous to be a superior person.

The chiasmic structure of Genesis reveals that Joseph's test is similar to the temptation in the Garden of Eden. The mention of Joseph's dreams elucidates the issue. While Eve, confronted with her *inferior* position, separates from God, Joseph was tempted by his *superior* situation to separate himself from God. Will he admit what the reader has repeatedly been told throughout the narrative: that Joseph prospers because "Yahweh God" was with him (Gen. 39:23), or will he force his brothers to worship him, as his dreams suggested?

The turning point was the selfless speech of Judah, although Joseph had probably been thinking deeply throughout this ordeal. Fourteen times Judah mentioned the sorrow of his aging father, and then, and *only* then, Joseph confronts reality, cannot control himself (Gen. 45:1), and passes the test. Now, four times in rapid succession, Joseph declares that he was nothing without God. "God sent me. . . . God sent me. . . . It was not you who sent

me here, but God; . . . He . . . made me a father to Pharaoh" (vv. 5–8, NASB).

Personal application

The distractions beside the tree and the altar are ones all humans face. Who has not felt inferior and been tempted to accept the devil's unproven, quick-fix, easy answers? Who does not cling to the gifts of God, forgetting the Giver? Yet, "[n]othing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour."¹⁸

But, for Christians in general, and pastors in particular, the test of Joseph becomes very significant.

Doubtless Joseph was God's instrument for saving not only his own family but also Egypt and other countries affected by the drought. Yes, he had an important, God-given, superior role. But it was God, not his own efforts, who made him a superior person. How easy it is for pastors to inadvertently see themselves as more essential to God's plan than they are. If, like Joseph, our focus is on our own high calling and what we must do, we are in danger of "treating roughly" the brothers and sisters God wants us to lead to Him. This can trigger a vicious cycle of attack and counterattack, when the pastor now feels inferior and is in danger of the negative spectrum of emotions that leads to depression and burnout. Once Joseph recognized that it was God who had been leading all the way, that it was God who had called him

to his superior position, that God had enabled him to accomplish what he had done and had given him success, he was able to bring reconciliation into his family. What follows in the narrative is a succession of blessing incidents (Jacob blessed Pharaoh [Gen. 47:10], Joseph's sons [Gen. 48:1–22], and all his sons [Gen. 49:1–27]). But most important was Joseph's final, repeated assurance that God will be with His people: "God will visit you and bring you up out of this land," and "God will surely visit you" (Gen. 50:24, 25, ESV).

The temptations Christians and God's leaders face today are the same as they have always been. Whether a pastor or a layperson struggling with a sense of inferiority, distracted by the gifts of God, or burdened by the enormity of the task, the answer is the same: walk with God. If you feel inferior, remember you are made in the image of God and redeemed by His blood. If things, position, or relationships distract, remember the Great Giver of them all. When tempted to savor the superiority of pastoral calling, remember we do nothing without God (John 15:5). Although two New Testament passages describe the Christian walk as a race (1 Cor. 9:24; Heb. 12:1), the first biblical description of successful partnership with God is encouragingly described as a walk. There is nothing inferior or superior about a walk. Taking one step at a time, we will reach the destination as long as we are not distracted from the Guide or the goal. 📖

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13 Jo Ann Davidson, "Eschatology and Genesis 22," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, no. 1–2 (2000): 243.

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16 Turner, *Genesis*, 185.

17 R. R. Reno, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 275; W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary: Genesis* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974), 407.

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Learning to be authentic in the midst of hardship

Sometimes life just is not fair. We do everything right we know to do, and bad things still happen. This can be frustrating and overwhelming, especially for those trying to minister to others. Investing so much energy and effort into other people while having your life sucked dry by difficult situations can lead to burnout.

Have you felt that way? I have, and it is very hard. That being said, there is hope.

Several months before my daughter's eighth birthday she began exhibiting some unusual behavior, including seizures, which my wife, Julie, and I had never before noticed. After thorough testing by the family doctor, Rachel was referred to a neurologist. After the initial neurological exam the doctor scheduled her for additional testing, including an MRI of her brain. The morning following the MRI, Julie and I received a call that no parent is ever prepared to take. The neurologist suggested we sit down, as she began to explain what they found on the MRI. Her words will forever be etched in my memory. She said softly yet definitively, "Your daughter has a brain tumor." In an effort to understand what was happening to our little girl, Julie and I asked every question we could think of while we had the doctor on the phone. After hearing the click of the phone hanging up, Julie and I stared at each other, neither of us wanting to say anything.

The silence was broken by weeping that would last for hours.

We were devastated. How could this have happened? These types of hardships happen to other people—but not us. At the time, I was serving in full-time ministry as the Family Life and Youth pastor at our home church, and things were going extremely well. Prior to this, we had served for years as volunteers in our local church. I wondered how something like this could happen to a family working so hard for the Lord. This was not fair! And most of all, it was not fair to our precious Rachel. What had she done to deserve this situation? I was angry. I was frustrated. I was sad.

Our precious little girl would soon begin a difficult journey that challenged the fabric of our faith and family. Over the next four months we saw Rachel go through various medications to control the seizures; they had limited positive impact. One of the medications almost cost Rachel her life due to an allergic reaction. Seeing the medications were not working as the medical team had hoped, the doctors decided the best treatment would be brain surgery. This would be a surgery that would see Rachel lose the entire left temporal lobe of her brain in order to remove the benign tumor.

Keeping my distance

Doctors appointments, long trips to the hospital, medical exams, tests,

and procedures began to take a toll on the family. Rachel went from being diagnosed with seizures to having brain surgery in a period of just over six months. Our world was turned upside down at home. Meanwhile, at church, my goal was to be the best leader I could be while dealing with Rachel's issue separate from my ministry. I appreciated the congregants' prayers and offers of support—but only from a distance.

Leading up to the surgery, a dear friend approached me during our Sunday night worship service. When he asked how I was doing, the response was generic as always: "Doing fine," I said. Placing his hand on my shoulder, he replied, "You don't have to be strong all of the time. It's OK to be real about what's going on. That's why we are all here." He embraced me and said a simple prayer asking God to provide strength, peace, and comfort for our family. After the simple, yet heartfelt prayer, he turned and walked away.

Little did he know his words of encouragement would change my entire approach to ministry. Even though the surgery was still weeks away, the healing process began for our family that night. No longer did I feel the need to put on a fake smile. No longer did I need to pretend to have it all together when it was very clear that was not the case.

Julie and I soon began to open up about Rachel's situation with the

people in our church, who then realized that we were not the stereotypical ministry family that had everything together. It was now OK to be real with the congregation about our struggle. Our daughter was having brain surgery to remove a tumor, and that was OK. It was just part of life—real life. Learning to be vulnerable changed my life and my ministry.

Delight in weakness

By coming out from behind the facade of “I have it all together,” the opportunities for authentic ministry

difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10, NIV). I believe I have learned the true meaning of this principle through our journey with Rachel. We should not hide our difficulties from the people we serve. Rather, we should minister out of the difficulties and weaknesses we face, because that is when we are made strong through Jesus Christ. If we’re strong on our own, there would be absolutely no need to rely on Jesus. By pretending everything is great through hardships, we may be robbing God of an opportunity to be glorified in our lives.

aggressive behavior toward her father, Rachel became afraid for my safety and started having nightmares that same night. The disturbing nightmares continued for weeks and led to severe sleep deprivation. According to the doctors, the lack of sleep triggered the seizures.

I remember the intense anger I had in my heart toward the situation that led to my daughter’s nightmares, to the point of not wanting to go to youth activities or other church functions. However, looking back on the situation I am eternally grateful for the events

By coming out from behind the facade of “I have it all together,” the opportunities for authentic ministry began showing up in more ways than I could have ever imagined.

began showing up in more ways than I could have ever imagined. Relationships with others grew to deeper levels and provided support that I had never before experienced in ministry. Not only was ministry more authentic but it became more effective as well. How so? People began to see the struggles, but they also saw that when we relied on the strength of the Lord, He provided the peace, comfort, and strength we so desperately needed. When we became focused on being real in ministry, God was glorified because He was our strength in our time of weakness. Instead of being discouraged by the situation, we became renewed with passion for loving others. God was going to use this situation to impact people.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in

God works all things for good

I was reminded of a passage in Romans that God has allowed me to use in effective discipleship since this journey began. Paul wrote to the Roman church “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28, NIV). You see, there was a traumatic event that triggered Rachel’s seizures. This was an unfortunate experience at a youth ministry outing. Due to some extenuating circumstances, one of the teens became verbally and physically aggressive with their leadership. Rachel was there with us during the event and watched as the teen attempted to attack me before being redirected by another adult. Those few moments of verbal assault and attempted physical assault proved to have an incredible impact on Rachel. Having seen this

that ultimately led to the diagnosis of the seizures, which in turn led to the removal of Rachel’s brain tumor. What seemed extremely challenging at the time paved the way for the treatment of a brain tumor that we were not even aware Rachel had prior to these events. This gives me hope that no matter how difficult a situation may seem, God always works things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Ministering through the difficulty

While God is working difficulties together for good, I have learned to minister through them, not in spite of them. While hardships are challenging, I now relish those moments because God has the opportunity to shine through my struggles and be glorified. Now, when I am facing a difficulty, my prayer on a daily basis is to discover ways to

build relationships with others through the situation. The best, most effective ministry and discipleship is achieved through established relationships. Jesus modeled this with His disciples throughout His earthly ministry. Not only did the disciples see Jesus when He was healing the sick and walking on water, but Jesus also allowed them to “live life” with Him in His greatest struggles.

When facing His betrayal and impending death, Jesus took the disciples with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Perhaps He wanted the disciples there because it was important for them to see Him struggle. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus went a little further in the Garden to spend time with the Lord privately—but not to the extent of separating His

struggle from His ministry or from His relationship with the disciples. Jesus taught the disciples that God’s will is paramount to ours, regardless of how difficult the situation may seem. What they learned from Jesus, coupled with the leading of the Holy Spirit, would help them minister through their own hardships in their future ministries.

Embrace the hardships

As our family continues to walk through the recovery process with Rachel, we now look for opportunities to encourage others as never before in our ministry. Rachel’s surgery was three and a half years ago and was a complete success. Rachel, no longer on any seizure medication, has been released from the care of all of the neurological doctors. If you

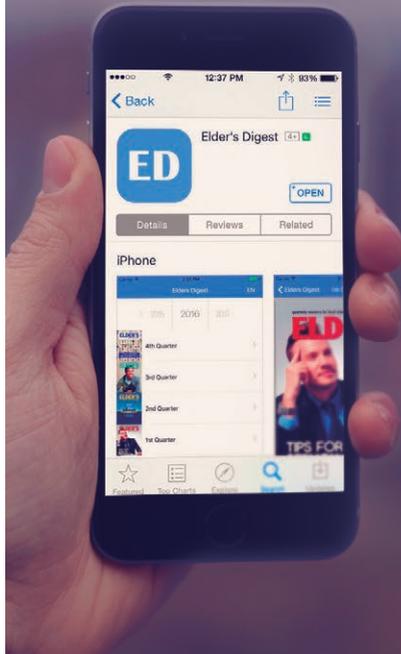
did not know Rachel had surgery, you would never know what she had been through, except for the scar above her left ear. But that scar will forever be a reminder to her of God’s grace and healing. God has, indeed, worked all of this for His good. Julie and I are so much more passionate about helping others in need than we could have ever been prior to this situation. We are learning the importance of delighting in our hardships and being authentic in serving others.

Embrace the hardships you are currently facing and the ones to come. If you love God, then thank Him that He works out all things for good. Be real with others through the hardships, and minister through your difficulties so that God is glorified through your situation. 🙏

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Elder’s Digest Editor

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Unexpected power

Feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and even jealousy overwhelmed me as I gazed around the room. The hubbub of pastors engaging in friendly banter, theological musings, and intentional networking were nothing unusual for the end of an evening at our yearly ministerial retreat. It was not that any pastor was giving me the cold shoulder. As a young pastor only six months into my first assignment, I just felt that I was lacking in all the gifts and talents necessary to succeed. In those first six months, I had come face-to-face with the reality that all of my dreams and visions for changing the world were being exchanged for an overwhelming sense of anxiety and failure.

I sat down with the impression that I needed to just pick up my Bible and start reading where I had left off that morning. As I began reading Exodus 33, I honestly was not expecting anything spectacular or life-altering. However, when I reached verse 11, my whole life began to change. “So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle” (Exod. 33:11).¹

It was not as if I had not read this verse before. It was just that only the first half had registered with me. I remembered the part about Moses speaking with God face-to-face, but what was this about Joshua? Why was that included?

Moses had just set up this temporary tabernacle “far from the camp” for

anyone who wanted to seek the Lord (v. 7). At first, everyone’s attention was drawn to this sacred space as Moses communed with God. Then everyone, including Moses, went about their business. Everyone, that was, except for Joshua. Joshua, the Word says, did not depart from the tabernacle.

Of course, this same Joshua would one day lead Israel into the Promised Land, witnessing everything from the Jordan River standing still at flood stage to the walls of Jericho falling down to the sun standing still for an entire day in answer to his prayer. However in Exodus 33, he was just a young man. He was only a servant. He had seen some victories in battle, but now Israel had chosen a golden calf over God, and things looked bleak. But Joshua was focused on one thing—the presence of God. He would not leave. He refused to depart from the tent, albeit far from camp and all the responsibilities he likely had there, because that was the place where people went to seek God. And Joshua was passionate about seeking God.

A new revelation

As I sat there, I suddenly felt God rearranging my priorities. I realized that, as with Joshua, the transformation and equipping that I needed most for ministry would come from extended time in His presence. It was incredibly reassuring to know it was not about who I was but about spending time in the presence of the One who could transform me into just the man He needed me to

be. It was not as if everything changed at once. The next six months were still stressful, and the successes still seemed few and far between. But now I had a new sense of peace. Now I knew that my inadequacies were OK. In fact, they could even be an advantage, as long as I allowed them to inspire me to seek the One who could supply all my needs.

A year and a half later, my wife and I moved across the country so that I could attend the master of divinity program at the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. I had dreams of being radically transformed during our time there as I continued to spend time in God’s presence, but honestly, I did not expect it to come through the classes. However, as Dr. Allan Walshe began to introduce, during my first class, the subject of biblical spirituality, I realized that this was going to be different from what I expected and exactly what I needed. Now I was receiving practical tools to accomplish the purpose God had set before me of seeking His presence.

The course focused on experiencing spiritual transformation through daily Bible reading, prayer, and journaling. Each day, our homework required us to intentionally focus on drawing closer to God through Bible study and prayer and to reflect on this through journaling. We were also expected to choose one classmate to meet with on a weekly basis in order to ask specific questions about our personal spiritual growth over the past week. This was an incredibly transformational experience

for me as I began to meet with my good friend, Godfrey Miranda.²

One day during my first semester of seminary, I was deeply challenged as I read how Martin Luther, “besides his constant reading of the Word of God, did not pass a day without devoting three hours at least to prayer, and they were hours selected from those the most favorable to study.”³ Three hours in prayer? This was while his writings were under the most intense scrutiny and he was most in need of ably defending his work. I read on, “From the secret place of prayer came the power that shook the world in the Great Reformation.”⁴ That was exactly what I felt my ministry had been missing: power!

Practical lessons

I did not want to just continue on for the next 30 to 40 years, pastoring with humdrum results, only to finally retire without ever seeing God’s power unleashed for the mighty revival and reformation He has promised. So, I determined that I, too, needed to spend at least three hours each day alone with God.

This sounded great, but there was a huge practical problem. Where was I to find three hours to spare in the midst of a full-time MDiv course load? I was not in the habit of waking up early enough for this each morning. I realized that I did not have the strength for this, so I asked God to do as He has promised to do in Isaiah 50:4, to wake me up

morning by morning. Do not pray this prayer unless you seriously want God to do it!

As God began waking me up earlier and earlier, I still had a problem. I could not stay awake. One day, I mentioned this to Godfrey as we were discussing our spiritual growth. He suggested that I try drinking several glasses of water when I first woke up. This definitely helped.

Soon I began to learn some other simple things that also helped keep me alert, like jumping out of bed immediately when God first fully woke me up. If I hesitated, I found that I would drift off to sleep, and when I woke up the second time, I was usually far more tired than I had been earlier. I also discovered that taking a shower helped me feel far more awake. Eventually, I began to read while standing up and to alternate short periods of calisthenics in order to stay awake. The biggest help came from making a habit of going to bed by nine o’clock at night. I have found the early morning hours are far more inviting when I have slept about three hours before midnight.

I admit that this all could sound crazy, painful, and maybe even legalistic. But let us think of this in terms of a marriage. If I decide to go to great lengths to spend time with my wife, my motivation is what really determines whether or not such efforts are beneficial. If my goal is some sort of reward, such as earning her love, then it will not turn out well. However, if I am compelled by love and am simply delighting in the love that we share, then it is wonderfully enriching for our marriage!

Do not get me wrong. While pure love is the only healthy motivation, there have been plenty of times that I have lost sight of this. Yet that time continues to be the most joyful, peaceful, and life-changing experience of my life! Truly, in His “presence is fullness of joy” (Ps. 16:11). The more that I have come to recognize this, the more delightful every sacrifice has become that furthers the purpose of drawing closer to His infinite heart of love!

At one point, I began to think about how I had been willing to change my diet to a strictly plant-based diet



Helpful tips for delighting in God

1. Ask God to wake you up as early as He wants, to spend time with Him (Isa. 50:4).
2. Ask God to cause you to hear His lovingkindness (Ps. 143:8) and see His beauty (Ps. 27:4).
3. Ask God to search your heart, convicting you of any sin (Ps. 139:23, 24).
4. Ask God to create in you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you (Ps. 51:10).
5. Ask God to open your eyes to see “wondrous things” from His law (Ps. 119:18).
6. Ask God what is on His heart for you today (Ps. 143:10).
7. Take time to allow Him to answer (Ps. 46:10).

in order to have more energy for a particular sport as a teenager. Why was I not willing to do the same in order to have energy to seek a deeper relationship with Jesus? This bothered me. So, I took it to God and asked Him to change my appetite as I surrendered it to Him. Now I had a new inspiration for eating healthfully. It was no longer about me not getting cancer or dying young but about having energy to enjoy God's presence. I have found this motivation to be far longer-lasting than the selfish focus of the diet changes I have undergone in the past.

I listened as Dr. Dwight Nelson, pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church, spoke about the importance of spending time with God. I felt pretty smug and confident as he came toward his appeal. I figured I was safe. He would not appeal that we spend more than three hours alone with God, would he? God has a way of humbling us and of opening our eyes to His desire for greater things than we can fathom. Dr. Nelson went on to appeal that we double our time alone

with God. Surely that was impossible! That semester I was overloading on credits, and I just could not see that this was feasible. But I felt compelled to make the commitment.

Why am I so apt to limit God? Joshua called out to God, and He held the solar system in place for 24 hours so that the battle could be completed. God is able to create the time that we need when we put Him first. On the day of Pentecost, God gave the disciples the ability to speak as many languages as it would have taken them a lifetime to learn on their own. "Why, the Lord can do more in one hour than we can do in a whole lifetime."⁵ That semester, it was delightful to witness how God was capable of handling all of my projects and assignments. And He did it with far better results than I could have on my own with those extra three hours.

Reality check

As I entered back into the flow of normal pastoral ministry after my seminary experience, I knew I could

not go back. Five years later, I no longer set the clock for six hours. But I have found that, just like George Müller, I cannot leave His presence until I am truly "happy in God Himself."⁶ For me, this usually takes at least three hours, sometimes more. I think it is probably because my heart is harder than most.

You see, I expected power to come from a closer connection with God. But I am not sure what I expected this to look like. I think I expected to see phenomenal results in my pastoring. I hoped to see thousands flocking to my church. I wanted the miracles found in the book of Acts to be repeated in my ministry. And I believe God longs to do these things among us. However, what has taken place has been more valuable, and I believe actually more powerful, than any of these things. As I have spent time in God's presence day after day, fixing my eyes on His beauty, I have come to recognize more and more of the ugliness of my own heart.

I can remember, time after time, where I have been deeply convicted

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about how my actions have hurt others. I began to see how my anger and frustration toward others, even when they were making mistakes, was so incredibly un-Christlike. Rather than bringing the healing that always attends Christ's actions, my leadership in ministry had created wounds in hearts.

I began to see how my attitudes toward my wife had been selfish; I began to long to be a better husband. For example, because of my extreme competitiveness, she was afraid to have me play games with her family. She would have to step carefully, or help others step carefully, around saying things that might provoke me because of my sensitive pride.

I was reminded of how my antics in high school and college had misrepresented God in so many ways. But all of this, although it may sound painful, was so incredibly healing. Like a doctor digging the gravel out of an infected wound, God was applying His scalpel to my heart in ways that brought deeper repentance, humility, and ultimately joy. The phone calls and messages to

those I had mistreated were not easy, but the peace that always came in knowing I had done my best to make wrongs right was delightful.

Day by day, as I continue to fix my eyes on Jesus, it becomes clearer and clearer to me that what makes God powerful is that He "is love" (1 John 4:8). And the greatest possible power in my ministry comes from allowing Him to exchange my hard heart for a soft one (Ezek. 36:26), creating in me a clean heart that beats in unison with His (Ps. 51:10). Without this, my preaching is just "a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1), and despite all of my knowledge, faith, miracle-working, and giving, "I am nothing" (v. 2). I find that the longer I stay in God's presence, surrendering everything and asking Him to change specific areas where He reveals that I am totally unlike Christ, the more it unleashes His power to chisel away at those abrasive spots in my character.

I still struggle with feelings of inadequacy. I still question why I do not see greater results. But God is teaching me to use these feelings as fuel for seeking a

more intimate relationship with Him. This is the only thing that truly satisfies anyway. And after all, it is only as I abide in Him that I will bear "much fruit" (John 15:5). There is incredible peace here. "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:6, 7). 

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New King James Version.
- 2 Our prayer partnership soon expanded to include a small group of seminary colleagues, which continues to be an inspiration for my walk with God five years later. Geography now separates us, but we have continued to earnestly seek God in prayer together using conference calls or Google Hangouts.
- 3 Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné and Henry White, *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Pub., LLC, 2003), 286.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 210.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 306.
- 6 George Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller, Written by Himself, Jehovah Magnified. Addresses by George Müller Complete and Unabridged*, 2 vols. (Muskegon, MI: Dust and Ashes, 2003), 2:730–731.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Ass.), 1901, 48.

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Share your story

Recently, while reading the story of the woman at the well, I marked John 4:39, which reads, "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (NIV). I wrote in big bold letters on the side of the page, "Share your story."

This past summer, I found myself in a situation where I was asked, "What's your story?" I was a leader at a camp trip, and at one of the leader meetings we were asked to write a few lines explaining our testimony. They would then select a couple of testimonies and place them on pieces of cardboard to be shared with high school students later that week.

Mine was chosen, and after I shared my cardboard testimony, a student approached me. She appeared rather nervous but asked whether we could talk. I was stunned, but overjoyed, and agreed to do so. We went and sat in a corner far from everyone else, and she asked for every detail of my testimony, from the beginning to now. I told her everything as she listened intently. It turned out the girl was going through some experiences that I had gone through. The fact that she got to look at Jesus through me still brings tears of joy to my eyes. I now not only see but also believe the power in testimonies.

I encourage every person who has been changed by Jesus to share their

story with as many people as you possibly can. Someone out there is going to connect. Someone is going to relate. And someone out there needs to hear it. It is a witness, like the woman at the well. You only have this chance for a short time here on earth to help others in this way. So, go and share your story. It might be what helps others believe there is a God powerful enough to change them too. 

—Written by Megan Sauers, a freelance writer residing in New York, New York, United States.

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Baptizing the devil: Evolution and the seduction of Christianity¹

Born in 1955, I grew up in a secular Jewish home in Miami Beach. Our religious observance could have been boiled down to this mantra: *They tried to kill us, they failed—let’s eat!*

My secular Jewish upbringing paralleled my secular public education. In the fifth grade, for example, a science book presented a drawing that began with a shallow pool. Above it was a single cell; above that, a jellyfish; above that, a fish; then a reptile; then an apelike creature; followed by a proto-human; and, finally, a *Homo sapiens*. A line was drawn, starting from the shallow pool and stopping at the *Homo sapiens*. This diagram, we were taught, represented the human evolutionary story.

Jump ahead to ninth-grade biology class, when I thought I was hot stuff because I knew the meaning of *ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny*. This phrase, the teacher explained, was the idea that embryo development echoed our evolutionary history. That is, “gills” on the fetus were a primal echo from our fish ancestry. Though made popular through drawings etched by an early Darwinian paladin and debunked in the late 1800s, *ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny* was still being taught in public schools in the 1960s and is circulating even today.

Jump to the mid-1970s, the University of Florida. I took an anthropology course, and though today nothing in particular stands out, I do remember that Darwinism formed the background for all that we were taught.

Now, in all these years of having the pedagogues of public education mold my tender young mind, not once do I remember ever questioning evolution. Why should I have? It was taught, not as a theoretical construct but as an unassailable assumption, the premise upon which theoretical constructs are built. Evolution was not something whose truth you questioned; rather, evolution was the standard in that context by which you determined what was or was not truth.

Born-again conundrum

Then, in 1979, before my twenty-fourth birthday, I had a born-again experience. Overnight, the geometry of reality changed for me. The world that I walked in now seemed different from what it had been before. Reality had fleshed itself out as so much deeper, broader, and more multifaceted than the parochial, materialistic worldview that I had been fed all but intravenously since kindergarten.

In one area, however, I immediately sensed an irreconcilable disconnect

between the old and the new, and that was my old belief in evolution and my new faith in Jesus. These worldviews, I sensed, could not both be right. I harangued the Christians whom I had first met about my struggle, and they gave me literature that opened my eyes to something I had never thought about before.

Yes, from that fifth-grade textbook up through college and beyond, I had been shown the world through a Darwinian framework only. I had worn only one pair of glasses because that was the only pair I had been given, the only pair that I was led to believe even existed. But once I took off the glasses and put on another pair, everything changed.

No one, of course, is going to deny the existence of fossils from creatures now extinct (the idea that Satan created the bones in the ground to test our faith is—*please!*—a nonstarter). Yet, for the first time, I was presented with another way to look at the evidence, another way to interpret it. Until then, not only had I never been shown any other way, I had never been presented with the idea that any other way, or other ways, could exist.

The fossils do not say *Created 60 million years ago in the early Cenozoic era*, do they? Nor do they come

inscribed with the words *Evolved from a Haikouichthys 550 million years ago*. These are interpretations, man-made constructions based on a web of assumption and speculation, none of which were universal, necessary, and certain. In other words, not only was the evolutionary science with which I had been indoctrinated all my life nowhere near as certain as it has been presented, I now believed it to be wrong.

Competing theories?

Little did I know that what I had experienced then was a manifestation of a fundamental weakness in the whole scientific enterprise itself. It comes with a fancy name, too: the underde-

claim to have attained truth, or even a substitute for it, such as probability.”²

Science never can claim to have attained truth? Or even a probability of truth? Have we not been told all our lives that science is the only way to obtain truth, or at least the most certain way, effective above every other method or means? And yet the last century’s most influential thinker on science throws out this whammy?

“But it’s science!”

Contrary to popular belief, science comes heavy-laden with a host of unresolved questions that challenge the epistemological integrity of the entire endeavor itself. We are not talking

teaches Creation as a supernatural phenomenon that leaves nothing to chance; evolution, in the broadest reading, teaches creation as a natural phenomenon that leaves most everything to chance. It is hard to imagine two positions more at odds.

Nevertheless, many Christians have capitulated, rejecting the historical accuracy or even veracity of Genesis 1–11, all in order to make room for an evolutionary model of origins. Why? Because evolution, they assume, must be true. After all, “It’s science!” And who can dare go against science?

Unfortunately, one of the greatest myths of our era (What? You think that we are the only age in history that does not have its own myths?) is that science is the final arbiter of truth and that to defy the claims of science, even “well-established” science, would be to prove your own ignorance and intellectual imbecility.

However, if science is so good at finding truth, why does the truth change so often? Why are scientific certitudes of one generation often mocked as myths by the next one? Why do the findings of science, the result of the “scientific method,” often contradict each other? When scientific explanations about present reality, about what can be handled, heard, seen, even tested and retested now before our eyes daily, are filled with debate and controversy—why do many Christians unquestionably accept every scientific proclamation about supposed events millions or billions of years ago, especially when those claims contradict any reasonable reading of Scripture?

Baptizing the devil

After years of reading and study on these questions, I wrote *Baptizing the Devil: Evolution and the Seduction of Christianity*, in which I seek to help free readers, especially Christians who take Scripture seriously, from the knee-jerk reaction that once something is deemed “science,” they must surrender any and all contrary beliefs. And I do so by examining these unresolved challenges in the practice of science itself (such as

Have we not been told all our lives that science is the only way to obtain truth, or at least the most certain way, effective above every other method or means?

termination of theory by evidence. It is the problem—still unresolved—which argues that, for any given scientific phenomenon, more than one theory can be compatible with the evidence. Competing, even contradictory, theories can explain the same data. There are, potentially, an infinite number of theories to explain any natural phenomenon.

Because of this problem (and others), one of the most influential philosophers of science, Karl Popper (1902–1994), claimed that we can never give positive reasons that justify the belief that a theory is true. “Science is not,” he argued, “a system of certain, or well-established, statements; nor is it a system which steadily advances towards a state of finality. Our science is not knowledge (*epistēmē*): it can never

here about *specific* scientific theories, such as the impact of fossil fuels on climate, the pros and cons of saturated fat, or whether humans are, as Richard Dawkins claims, the “distant cousins of bananas and turnips.”³

We are talking, instead, about the practice of science qua science: what it means, how it works, what it does, what it assumes, how it makes the claims it makes, and what justifies its claims.

These grand issues, to this day, remain unresolved, which is important, especially in the Creation-evolution debate, because many Christians—despite the unambiguous testimony of Scripture—have thrown out the biblical account of Creation for a scientific theory, evolution, that contradicts Scripture in every way possible. After all, in the broadest reading, Scripture

underdetermination), challenges that most people (other than scientists and the philosophers of science) do not usually know about, which helps explain why so many mechanically genuflect before all its proclamations.

For example, in one of the most influential texts in the twentieth century, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn claimed that science is nowhere near as rational, objective, and progressive (as in progressing closer to truth) as many believe. He argued that science works subjectively, contingently, even at times irrationally. One stream of Kuhn's thought is captured in a statement that he quotes by quantum physics pioneer Max Planck: "[A] new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it."⁴ If true, even partially, what does Planck's claim say about the objectivity, much less the correctness, of scientific claims? A "scientific truth" should be accepted or rejected based on proof, evidence, data, not on which generation of scientists happens to be around at the time, right?

Larry Laudan, an influential philosopher of science, wrote: "For the last two decades, I have been arguing that, in the appraisal of theories and hypotheses, what does (and what should) principally matter to scientists is not so much whether those hypotheses are true or probable. What matters, rather, is the ability of theories to solve empirical problems—a feature that others might call a theory's explanatory or predictive power."⁵

Or as Freeman Dyson wrote: "To be useful, a scientific theory does not need to be true, but it needs to be testable."⁶

What? Is not the whole point of science to find truth?

Not really. Many scientists and philosophers of science argue that science is not about finding truth at all, as in capital *T*, or even truth as in a lower case *t*, but merely a matter of solving

empirical problems. If the theory works, in that it can make accurate predictions and/or bring tangible fruit, what else matters? Whether it happens to be true or not is another issue, one that (some argue) would be a metaphysical question, not a scientific one. History is filled with examples of technology based on theories that were later trashed or are still not understood. The technological efficacy of a theory is a separate issue from its truth. A theory could work but still not be true.

And then there is the much ballyhooed "scientific method," the idea drummed into our heads since grade school that science has created a special formula, a process in which you plug in a few variables and out pops the truth. The only problem? There is no such thing as the scientific method, and, even if there were, nothing guarantees truth, or anything related to truth, will result from its application.

Meanwhile, debate exists over what a scientific explanation is, or even whether science explains anything, as opposed to just describing. Take the famous formula $e = mc^2$. It is a shorthand way of saying that energy has mass and that mass represents energy. Wonderful, and fruitful for sure—but the formula only describes the relationship between mass and energy. It explains nothing about why that relationship exists.

And, too, why do so many scientific theories, once deemed true, even irrevocably true, later get trashed? "A reality," wrote Daniel Robinson, "that once seemed readily expressed in the language of the science of Newton and Galileo would now be closer to mythology than to reality. My own father was alive and well when the best minds in physics regarded nothing as more certain than the *aether*. The same term today seems as if it were taken from astrology."⁷

Myth busters

With *Baptizing the Devil*, my intention was not to dismiss the

technological benefits of science or the astonishing insights (however specialized, narrow, and provisional) that science has brought us about the natural world. I simply wanted to help free Christians from the myth that science is this almost transcendent meta-view of objective reality, a search for truth unencumbered by the contingencies, foibles, and subjectivity that deflower "lesser" forms of knowledge. This myth is so powerful that a doctrine as crucial as Creation, a doctrine upon which all other Christian doctrine rests, has been usurped by a counterfeit that contradicts the biblical Creation account at every step. Worse, this counterfeit cannot be made to fit with the Word of God other than by torturous exegesis that, frankly, makes Christians look silly. The last section of *Baptizing the Devil* looks at some of these well-meaning attempts to ram an evolutionary paradigm into Genesis and then humbly asks: *Are we not better than that?* Christians are, or we certainly ought to be, anyway. Yet it is hard, even for Christians, to step outside the Zeitgeist, to transcend the time, place, and culture in which they are immersed. And our time, place, and culture have been saturated with the myth of evolution. *But it's not a myth*, we are told; *it's science*. But that is the meta-myth: that because it is science, it must then be true.

- 1 This article is based on Clifford Goldstein, *Baptizing the Devil: Evolution and the Seduction of Christianity* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2017).
- 2 Karl Popper, *Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 278; italics in the original.
- 3 Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 8.
- 4 Max Planck, quoted in Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 151.
- 5 Larry Laudan, "How About Bust? Factoring Explanatory Power Back Into Theory Evaluation," *Philosophy of Science* 64 (June 1997), 306–316.
- 6 Freeman Dyson, *The Scientist as Rebel* (New York: New York Review Books, 2008), 215.
- 7 Richard N. Williams and Daniel N. Robinson, eds., *Scientism: The New Orthodoxy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 30.

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“But It’s Science!”

Why do so many Christians feel an irresistible lure to “baptize the devil” by seeking to harmonize evolution with Scripture? Though we can’t know individual motives, the overarching answer is tied to the contemporary belief that evolution must be true because, after all, “it’s science!”

But if science is so good at finding truth, why does the truth change so often? Why are scientific certitudes of one generation often mocked as myths by the next one? Why do the findings of science often contradict each other?

Baptizing the Devil shows that this capitulation is not only unnecessary but misguided—another unfortunate example of well-meaning Christians compromising their faith to the prevailing culture. Goldstein shows that Christians shouldn’t compromise so crucial a doctrine as origins to the prevailing culture, even when that culture is wrapped in the authoritative garb of science.

BAPTIZING THE DEVIL

EVOLUTION AND THE SEDUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY



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The secret life of the pastor

The alarm clock sounds and the beeps of text messages and emails flood your phone. Your attention is captured by news alerts and social media pings. The morning silence surrenders, without apology, to the demands of another day as prayer and devotions are hurried or skipped. What used to be a “thoughtful hour” can easily become a “mindless minute” as time with God is stealthily swapped for the false god of busyness.

The demands of life and family, and the challenges of leadership and ministry, are all worthy of passionate pursuit. However, activities and commitments can so overflow every space of the soul and every crevice of the calendar that there is little room for God. These important activities and pressing needs can easily crowd out time needed for the soul’s basic nourishment through prayer, study, and solitude. “Church and ministry have become big business. We are more familiar with management and marketing principles, than with the principles of humility, purity, faith, and prayer. Many pastors and Christian leaders have become CEO’s rather than spiritual shepherds.”¹ As Eugene Peterson highlights, pastors, like shopkeepers, can become preoccupied by simply looking for more customers.²

The slogan “Fake it ’til you make it” has no place in the ministry, and yet how often pastors fall into the soul-numbing, comatose state of being busy all the time. “In this insanely busy time that is driven by activities,

meetings, and programs, it is far too easy to bypass the priority of our quiet time with God because it is primarily in secret.”³ If this trend is allowed to continue unchecked, pastors can find themselves simply going through the motions of ministry with little joy or fulfillment, and, perhaps, no one will even notice. John Piper cautions, “Few things frighten me more than the beginnings of barrenness that come from frenzied activity with little spiritual food and meditation.”⁴ Like a chef crafting a delicious meal for others to enjoy, pastors often engage in Bible study and sermon preparation, yet there is no replacement for their own personal encounter with God.

Hindrances to the secret life of the pastor

Many obstacles keep us from praying, thus stealing the vitality from our devotional experience.

1. Busyness of life and ministry. Even the fulfillment of the duties of ministry can often keep us so busy that we do not take time to pray. But how can one work with the Lord unless one walks with the Lord? “The reason why our preachers [we] accomplish so little is that they do not walk with God. He is a day’s journey from most of them.”⁵ When overwhelmed by work or rushed by the demands of life, we can easily let go of the discipline and routine of daily time with Jesus. Busyness is never a valid excuse for neglecting prayer; as Bill Hybels and many others have said, “When we are too busy to pray,

we are busier than God ever intended us to be.”⁶

The secret life of the pastor finds its foundation in unhurried time with Jesus, just as Enoch walked with God or as Mary sat quietly at His feet. But this does not come with what looks like a hurried, fast-food drive-through experience with God. “Our Lord is the pattern for all preachers, and with Him prayer was the law of life. By it He lived. It was the inspiration of His toil, the source of His strength, the spring of His joy. With our Lord, prayer was no sentimental episode, or an afterthought, or a pleasing, diverting prelude, nor an interlude, nor a parade or form. For Jesus, prayer was exacting, all absorbing; paramount. It was the call of a sweet duty to Him, the satisfying of a restless yearning, the preparation for heavy responsibilities, and the meeting of a vigorous need.”⁷

2. Complacency and lack of interest. John Piper states, “Both our flesh and our culture scream against spending an hour on our knees beside a desk piled with papers.”⁸ A recent study among 572 American pastors (crossing regional, age, and denominational lines) confirms this assumption, showing that 57 percent prayed less than 20 minutes per day; 34 percent prayed between 20 minutes and 1 hour; and only 9 percent prayed more than 1 hour per day.⁹ A recent study among 92 Adventist pastors revealed that 23 pastors of growing congregations were spending 1 hour in daily devotions. Conversely, the remaining pastors were of churches in plateau or in decline, and

they were spending 30 minutes or less per day in personal devotions.¹⁰ It is no wonder that the vast majority of both Adventist and evangelical churches are in a state of plateau or decline.

Pastors cannot expect to lead a vibrant, thriving church without first taking the time for personal spirituality. It just doesn't seem practical to devote oneself to prayer and meditation for an entire hour. "But prayer will be no task to the soul that loves God; it will be a pleasure, a source of strength.

The secret life of the pastor finds its foundation in unhurried time with Jesus.

Our hearts will be stayed on God and we shall say by our daily life, 'Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.'"¹¹ From our own experience, when we invest time with God each morning, His presence in our lives provides greater focus and effectiveness in ministry, and we accomplish more of significance that day than if we had used that time to work on our own checklists.

3. *Discouragement and disillusionment.* Discouragement from unanswered prayer can even lead one to think that prayer really does not make a huge difference, anyway; that God will do what He wills, regardless of my prayers. Francis Chan was sharing at a pastors' conference about how God is faithful in hearing and answering prayer. After one of the sessions, a pastor expressed frustration with prayer, comparing Chan's amazing

story of answered prayer to his own unanswered one. "I took a difficult church," the pastor asserted, "prayed that God would help me and the church split three months later."¹² From our own experiences, we have witnessed many other pastors who feel the same discouragement and frustration. It can be difficult to sense God's leading over the short time when our prayers appear to go unanswered, and yet a broader perspective can often reveal God's constant activity.

If we are not spending quality time with Jesus, yet busily going about performing religious tasks, it should not surprise us when emptiness and discouragement are the natural result. "Workers for Christ are never to think, much less speak, of failure in their work. The Lord Jesus is our efficiency in all things; His Spirit is to be our inspiration; and as we place ourselves in His hands, . . . our means of doing good will never be exhausted. We may draw upon His fulness, and receive of that grace which has no limit."¹³ In silent, earnest prayer and adoring faith, we find the assurance of God's presence and the confidence that He works in our lives.

Benefits of a consistent prayer life

1. *A pastor's prayer life is indicative of the state of his walk with the Lord.* Regular, earnest prayer is the breath of the soul that busyness can so easily choke out. No one was as busy as Jesus. From the busy life and ministry of Jesus we see His unwavering commitment to prayer and quiet time with the Father.

One day, as recorded in Matthew 14, Jesus was spending a quiet morning alone with the Father. But a sea of people quickly gathered around Him, and His time was interrupted by a multitude of ministry needs as He spent the day healing, teaching, and simply being with the people. But we must not miss the personal discipline demonstrated by Jesus in caring for His own soul. As daylight faded Jesus sent the multitude away, including His disciples, in order to reclaim the solace of quietness on the mountain and live

in the joyful awareness of His Father's presence (see Matthew 14:13–23).

Often, we find ourselves in the same predicament. Our love for people and our desire to serve them and the never-ending needs of life and ministry can often sap our energies and time. Our greatest danger is not that we stop praying but that we settle for a mediocre prayer life as the result of our harried busy life. The example of Jesus and our personal devotion to God will keep prayer at the top of our to-do list. By doing this, we will comprehend and enjoy God more richly, for we know that in Christ is the life of the soul.

2. *True effectiveness in ministry comes through prayer, not through methods.* It is counterintuitive, in our public ministry, that others see us molded by our private encounters with God that others do not see. As Oswald Chambers reminds us, "The lasting value of our public service for God is measured by the depth of the intimacy of our private times of fellowship and oneness with Him."

Like desperately trying to lose weight, this requires a full surrender and commitment to reestablish a healthy routine. Discouraged by the lack of results from trying all the latest methods he had read in leadership and church-growth books, one minister, Pastor Doug, turned to prayer. He shared how he recommitted himself to daily prayer for his church by increasing it from ten minutes to one hour a day, taking prayer walks, praying more often with his wife, and praying specifically for his church and community. Members of his congregation started to notice a difference in him, reciprocated by a transformation in them, evidenced by a greater unity, growth, and engagement in ministry. Regarding his renewed commitment to prayer, he gratefully expressed that he had never felt more effective and fulfilled in more than 20 years of ministry.

A hundred years ago, E. M. Bounds said, "What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men [and women] whom

the Holy Ghost can use—men [and women] of prayer, men [and women] mighty in prayer.”¹⁴ Pastor Doug’s story demonstrates how strategies and methods alone can fall short and how a local church is a reflection of the spiritual experience of the key leaders, especially that of the pastor. It was through prayer that the Holy Spirit transformed both a discouraged pastor and lethargic church into a powerful witness of what God can do when individuals fully surrender their hearts and agendas. What became a collective experience as a church began in the prayer closet of a pastor.

3. *Prayer knits the heart of the pastor to his or her people.* Interceding for others reminds us that the Lord Jesus is also interceding for them and for us. God calls pastors to pray boldly and work diligently. One of the greatest, most consistent examples is found in the ministry of Paul as he constantly uplifted the church in prayer. He had compassion on them, he thanked God for them, and he cheered them on in their journey of faith through encouragement and instruction.

While Paul was not a “settled pastor” but a traveling church planter, we see him constantly praying for local church leaders and members by name and for God to work mightily through them. It appears that Paul prayed for the church as much as he preached and planted churches. Amid the busyness of life and ministry today, praying for your church is one of the best uses of a pastor’s time. Though it may feel counterproductive at times, pastors who neglect this function will pay,

together with their churches, the high price of an unhealthy and spiritually lethargic congregation.¹⁵ Let’s take a look at just a few examples of 40 instances of the apostle Paul praying for the church. (The complete list is given under “Paul’s prayers for the church.”)

Paul often uplifted the churches by saying, “I thank the Lord in every remembrance of you,” as he prayed for their salvation, victory over sin, for them to be filled with grace and the presence of Jesus, and that they would experience continual growth in knowledge and grace. He prayed night and day that God’s purposes would be fulfilled in them by their faithfulness in advancing His kingdom. The heart of the apostle Paul is revealed in his prayers for the church. So often, we pray about the things that are near and dear to our hearts. Paul was bonded to the people and his work as he prayed often for the salvation of others and for God’s kingdom to grow and expand.

Conclusion

We have reviewed the various reasons why pastors opt out of a consistent, earnest prayer life. Pastors are always busy and, thus, may be distracted. However, studies show that the busier the pastor is, the more they hinder the progress and health of the church.¹⁶ More than anything else, members need a pastor who models a life of prayer as the senior spiritual leader of the church. We desperately need men and women of high spiritual integrity, who pursue intimacy with God, who, like Paul, urge others to follow his or

her example as he or she follows the example of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

In following the examples of Christ and of Paul, we quickly see how the benefits far outweigh the investment of time spent in prayer. A pastor’s prayer life is a strong indication of the closeness of his or her walk with the Lord. Peter urges us to keep prayer a number one priority; “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” (1 Pet. 4:7, NKJV). In these modern times, where the latest and greatest methods fall short, true effectiveness in ministry comes through prayer.

Prayer also knits the heart of the pastor to his or her people. Paul prayed for the churches. He kept in constant contact with these budding congregations, and his writings appear like a prayer journal on their behalf. The pastor who is busy but does not model a life of prayer and devotion will hinder, rather than help, the church.¹⁷ We must daily resist the temptation to fill our calendar with events before we fill our hearts with God’s Spirit.

A successful, seasoned pastor was often asked for advice from younger pastors about various issues, to which he consistently responded, “Whatever you do, reserve the morning for God.”¹⁸ The precious morning moments spent in prayer and study allow for God’s presence to linger with you and serve as a holy influence for the rest of the day. Give God ample time to reveal Himself each day, and through His Spirit comes the power to fulfill His purposes in you and in the hearts of those you serve. 📖

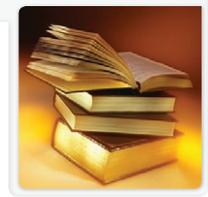
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 2 Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 2.
 3 Eugene Bradford, *Intercessory Prayer: A Ministerial Task* (Avinger, TX: Simpson Pub. Co., 1992), 8.
 4 John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (B & H Pub. Group: Nashville, TN, 2013), 66.
 5 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 434.
 6 This familiar statement has been expressed by authors such as Martha Brunstetter, Hal Elrod, Bill Hybels, and Joyce Meyer.
 7 E. M. Bounds, *The Classic Collection on Prayer*, Harold J. Chadwick, ed. (Newberry, FL: Bridge-Logos

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 10 S. Joseph Kidder, *Moving Your Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2016), 13, 14.
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 12 Lillian Kwon, “Pastors Confess to Weak Prayer Lives, Doubts,” *The Christian Post*, February 3, 2011, christianpost.com/news/pastors-confess-to-weak-prayer-lives-doubts-48812/#tG8yZVhRBHcbWWYx.99.

13 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 19.
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 15 Bradford, *Intercessory Prayer*, 18.
 16 Christian Schwarz, NCD Study, question 74 on passionate spirituality, “Our leaders are spiritual examples to me.”
 17 Eugene Peterson, “The Unbusy Pastor,” *Christianity Today*, Summer 1981, christianitytoday.com/pastors/1981/summer/eugene-peterson-unbusy-pastor.html.
 18 W. A. Criswell, *Acts: In One Volume* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan Pub. House, 1983), 206.

Paul's prayers for the church

- He prayed for those in Rome often, longing to see them and share some spiritual gifts (Rom. 1:8–12).
- He prayed for the salvation of others (Rom. 10:1).
- He prayed that God would give them endurance and unity (Rom. 15:5, 6).
- He prayed that God would fill them with joy, peace, and hope (Rom. 15:13).
- He prayed that the church would receive spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 4:9).
- He prayed that their hearts might be filled with grace (1 Cor. 16:23).
- He prayed that they might receive the God of all comforts (2 Cor. 1:3–7).
- He prayed for those in Corinth that they might appear blameless, not lacking any gift, to continue being sanctified until the return of Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:4–9).
- He prayed for them to be in unity (1 Cor. 1:10).
- He prayed for the Corinthians to be comforted from tribulations and sufferings, offering hope and instilling trust in God and not in themselves (2 Cor. 1:3–7).
- He prayed for victory over sin and for the church to be triumphal witnesses for Jesus (2 Cor. 2:14–16).
- He prayed that they might be generous in supplying the needs of others (2 Cor. 9:12–15).
- He often invited them to pray for him (Rom. 15:30–33).
- He prayed for them to be strong, mature, and make wise choices (2 Cor. 13:7–9).
- He prayed for the grace of Jesus to be with them (Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28).
- He prayed for the spirit of wisdom and revelation to open the eyes of their hearts that they might know the riches of God's glory and have power and experience the fullness of Jesus (Eph. 1:15–23).
- He prayed that God might strengthen them, that Christ would dwell in them, and that they would be rooted and established in love and have power and know Jesus (Eph. 3:14–21).
- He asked the church to pray for him that he would be empowered to preach the gospel fearlessly (Eph. 6:19, 20).
- He prayed that God, who had begun His work in them, would be faithful to complete it (Phil. 1:3–6).
- He prayed that their love would abound in knowledge, and depth of insight, and that they would be pure and blameless and filled with the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:9–11).
- He prayed that they might not be anxious but to turn to God with confidence, knitting their hearts with Jesus (Phil. 4:6, 7).
- He thanked God in prayer for their faith, love, and hope. He prayed unceasingly for them to be filled with the knowledge of His will. He prayed for them to live a life worthy of the Lord and that would bear fruit in good works. He prayed that their knowledge of God would be strengthened with endurance and patience and that they would live joyfully (Col. 1:9–14).
- He asked the church to pray for him to proclaim the gospel clearly (Col. 4:4).
- He remembered the work of the church and asked that their faith, hope, and love would grow (1 Thess. 1:2, 3).
- He thanked God that they readily received the Word of God and became imitators of God (1 Thess. 2:13, 14).
- He prayed night and day that he might see them again and supply what they lacked (1 Thess. 3:9–13).
- He prayed that God would sanctify them to be blameless and faithful (1 Thess. 5:23).
- He thanked God for their faithfulness, lifting them up as an example (2 Thess. 1:3, 4).
- He prayed that God would fulfill every good purpose for them (2 Thess. 1:11, 12).
- He prayed that God would strengthen and encourage them (2 Thess. 2:16, 17).
- He asked them to pray for his, Silvanus', and Timothy's deliverance from wicked and evil men, and prayed that the Lord would redirect their hearts to God's love (2 Thess. 3:1–5).
- He prayed that God would be with them and give them peace (2 Thess. 3:16).
- He requested that Timothy pray for national leaders and peaceful lives for all (1 Tim. 2:1).
- He thanked God for Timothy's faithfulness and affirmed the faith of his extended family to use the Spirit's gifts and to have love and self-discipline (2 Tim. 1:3–7).
- He prayed that God might give mercy to Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16–18).
- He prayed that God's grace would be with Timothy (2 Tim. 4:22).
- He prayed for God's grace to be with them (Titus 3:15).
- He prayed that Philemon might effectively share his faith in Christ with others (Philemon 2–7).
- He prayed for himself, that he would be humble (2 Cor. 12:7–9).
- He prayed for himself to have strength and that God would consider him worthy of His service (1 Tim. 1:12).



Reset: Jesus Changes Everything

By Nick Hall, New York, NY: Multnomah Books, 2017.

Reset is a book about our relationship with Jesus. It is divided into two parts and connects personal experiences with popular illustrations in order to make theological statements. Nick Hall's basic thesis is: Jesus can reset everything.

The first part is called "The Setup" and serves as a comprehensive foundation for the second. The first chapter intends to underline a state of awe, making us understand that we are made for something higher. "We were hard-wired to live in a state of awe" (17), the implication being that we are not made merely of biological cells and to live only hedonistic lives that cannot save us.

The second chapter introduces Hall's life experience and how he became involved in organizing the PULSE meetings.* He uses this illustration of doing something meaningful and contrasts it to the meaningless lives we have when avoiding Jesus. "The needles, the pill bottles, the booze, the porn—it was a generation's way of screaming, 'Save me from myself. I can't take this anymore.'"

"The truth is we all want to be saved" (34).

The third chapter focuses on three main areas of life: the individual, the church, and Jesus. Individually, we are not interested in pretending to be someone that we are not. The church does not fully explore its potential, which results in "a modern-day Exodus—literally millions of Millennials walking away from the church" (41). And Jesus, who is misrepresented by the church, is not lame, not weak. On the contrary, "He is a man of great conviction, willing to go to the cross for what he believed" (43). It is this attractive Jesus that offers everyone a reset.

The second part of the book is titled "Hitting Reset" and describes eight areas in our lives where Jesus wants to reset us. Jesus wants to reset our faith, plans, self-image, relationships,

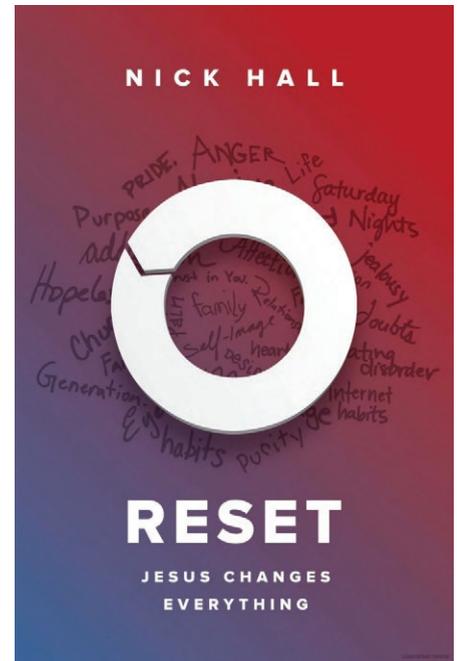
purity, habits, affections, and, finally, our generation. Hall challenges his audience and connects his ideas with movies, song lyrics, Bible passages, and personal experiences. He concludes that growth is going to come only if our life is in accordance with God. Jesus invites us to trust Him and let Him grow us personally. The final chapter draws parallels to former great revivals and expresses the author's desire for our generation to surrender fully (185). "The answer isn't a four-step process, event, or program. The answer is a person. No matter what the question is, the answer is found in him" (186).

Hall's book is not primarily a book on church growth, but there are some principles that can be applied in dealing with Millennials. The strong emphasis on music, emotions, and the abundant appearance of structurally placed illustrations can make this book a difficult read for other generations. His summary of the second chapter, "The basic idea is, we do not know what we are living for" (32), is clearly directed to the needs of the Millennial generation. Young people want to be invested in something lasting and should be given a chance to express their energy, passion, and compassion (25).

The most prominent aspect of this book is the author's openness and transparency in sharing his personal experiences (57). This is something that resonates with his intended audience and gives him credibility. What really stands out is his claim that though many things in life can be boring, "but Jesus? He's never boring. Life with Jesus is always on fire" (67). This contrasts with the "lame version of Jesus" that Millennials seemingly were taught (43). He likewise gives a sample prayer to personal dedication for Jesus, which is really helpful.

Often in his book he states that we need to find the real Jesus. He talks about how we can "get as close to

Jesus" (146) as we can. Another aspect that can be learned from is the need for role models. A highlight for the author in his ministry was when he met his



role model, Billy Graham (125). Role models can give young people advice and guidance.

Resetting can take place only if the heart is in the right place. If we are not committed to Jesus and He has not reset our lives, then there will be no growth. The growth is not quantitative but qualitative.

This book is a recommended read, it will help answer Millennials' questions about their relationship with Jesus, which can help them question their skepticism and experience a reset. ☞

—Reviewed by Artur Boldt, a student working on his MA in religion in Cernica, Romania, Institutul Teologica.

* PULSE is a large ecumenical event held at the National Mall in Washington, DC, United States.

► Evangelist Billy Graham celebrates his 99th birthday

Nashville, Tennessee, United States—Famed evangelist **Billy Graham** celebrated his 99th birthday November 7, 2017, with lemon cake while sermons from his prolific international ministry were played on the airwaves around the clock.

Social media swarmed with birthday greetings to Graham, who lives with nursing care at the same home in Montreat, North Carolina, where he and his late wife **Ruth Bell Graham** reared their five children.

“I am not a great preacher, and I don’t claim to be a great preacher,” he once said. “I’m an ordinary preacher, just communicating the gospel in the best way I know how.”

Zondervan Publishing announced the upcoming Graham biography, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story*, set for a March 2018 release. Graham personally chose as the book’s author, **William Martin**, a Rice University religion and public policy professor.

The book will expound on Graham’s autobiography *Just as I Am*, Zondervan said, by going “further behind the scenes to explain the conditions that made

it possible for Graham to achieve his spectacular success and to reveal how sometimes he succeeded in spite of himself.”

“His mind is good, but he’s quieter these days,” Graham’s son **Franklin Graham** said of his father. “He can’t see or hear well, but his health is stable. As a family, we are just so very grateful that he is still with us.” Billy Graham’s daughter and noted speaker **Anne Graham Lotz** joined Franklin Graham in offering reflections. Remarks from former US presidents were also featured.

The patriarch launched *The Hour of Decision* broadcast 67 years ago, which was designed to continue only if sufficient financial contributions came, **Jim Kirkland**, director of audio media services for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, said. The unexpected influx of monetary support birthed the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Kirkland said, because Graham needed a mechanism to handle the funds.

When Billy Graham was 15, his father and other businessmen in their hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina,



Photo: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

gathered on the Grahams’ dairy farm to pray for revival in their city—specifically that God would raise up someone from Charlotte to spread the gospel worldwide. Later that year, 1934, Billy Graham dedicated his life to Jesus Christ after hearing traveling evangelist **Mordecai Ham**. By the time he graduated high school, the young Billy Graham wrote in his yearbook, “My hopes and plans for the future are to serve God and do His will as a minister of the Gospel.”

In evangelistic outreaches and crusades, Graham preached to nearly 215 million people in live audiences across 185 countries and territories. [*Kentucky Today*]

► TED-Style Life-Enrichment Talks Attract Hundreds in Australia

20-minute presentations focus on “health, hope, and happiness.”

Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia—More than 800 people attended a TED-style weekend of presentations, and more than double that number watched those presentations online.

PROPHETICA 2017 featured a diverse list of presenters, including award-winning cookbook author **Sue Radd**, leading lifestyle disease

researcher **Ross Grant**, radio host and history buff **Lyle Southwell**, and former punk rocker turned pastor **David Asscherick**.

The 20-minute presentations included numerous ways for audience members to participate in question-and-answer sessions, including a mobile text line, meet-and-greet sessions, and meet-the-host dinners.

Event organizer **Julian Archer** was thrilled by the community response. “It was so encouraging for our amazing team to see hundreds of people from

all walks of life purchasing tickets to an event that offered them the latest scientifically proven techniques for increasing their health, hope, and happiness.”

While many attendees were from the local area, quite a number traveled up to 60 miles (100 kilometers) to attend the event.

Students from Avondale College of Higher Education found the opportunity to hear such polished presenters to be beneficial and took back skills and techniques learned



from the short but information-heavy presentations.

“The caliber of the speakers and their knowledge of the subject matter was fantastic,” said Aniele, a third-year student.

The group was sponsored by the Avondale Ministerial Training Scholarship Fund, set up in 2001 to help support ministry and theology students with potential for full-time ministry to pursue extra learning experiences.

The PROPHETICA 2017 team has been asked to consider holding similar events in other cities.

You can watch the presentations on Prophetica.com. [Jarrod Stackelroth and Michaela Truscott, *Adventist Record*]

LETTERS

Continued from page 4



thinking thoughts like, “Was any quote necessary here?” Or, “Would a biblical reference have been more appropriate?” Or, “Does this writer believe that Mrs. White was just as authoritative as Isaiah or Jeremiah?” And I have to struggle hard to wrench my focus back to the writer’s main point.

In conclusion, let me say that when I was a young man, having left off church attendance, not walking with Jesus but instead leaning toward atheism, one of your colporteurs handed me a copy of *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*. That book, plus my reading the whole Bible for the first time, plus the persistent prayers and witnessing of many friends, relatives, and even strangers, finally led me to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. I have great respect for Seventh-day Adventists. Yours in the Lord.

—Rev. Dr. Robert Hellam, Seaside, California, United States

RESPONSE FROM SETH PIERCE

Dear Rev. Hellam,

Thank you for your gracious comments about our church. I am so glad you have had some positive experiences with Seventh-day Adventists.

More importantly, I rejoice with you in the truth you have found and the saving relationship with Jesus that has also called you into ministry.

You bring up an excellent point about the use of Ellen White’s writings. First, I would agree with you that her writings are often abused, in print and even in the pulpit. Frequently, Adventists will lean back on familiar White quotes (without any attempt at fresh application). I share that concern, and we need to diversify our sources. Where I would slightly deviate from your point, though not completely, concerns the context.

In a professional journal, there is a bit of argumentation that needs to rest on authoritative sources versus testimony. In the case of our faith tradition, Ellen White holds some authority, though SDAs very clearly spell out that we *do not* hold her on the same level as Scripture (see for example, “Sola Scriptura: The Reformers and Ellen G. White” by Alberto Timm, in *Ministry*, October 2016). Secondly, while the journal is interdenominational, it is distributed to every Adventist pastor. Occasionally, one runs into someone who tends to be suspicious of non-Adventist sources (which is tragic in my opinion), so a quote from her can

act as a buffer against unnecessary pushback.

The context the article speaks of is the pulpit—and most sermons should not “preach” like an academic article. A journal article has a particular style and “rhetorical situation” that doesn’t work in the pulpit. Journal pieces are bound to use a lot more, and, ideally, a wide variety of, sources/quotes, including Scripture. A quick glance at my article reveals eight citations from Scripture, seven non-Adventist academic sources, and one Ellen White/Adventist quote, so, given the audience, it seems like a diverse mix. I also think it appropriate for pastors of various traditions to cite those who were influential within their tradition (Methodist/John Wesley, Reformed/John Calvin, Lutheran/Martin Luther, etc.).

However, on a macro-level, you may be onto an interesting Adventist literary dynamic—what percentage of Adventist pastors feel compelled to use Ellen G. White as an authority in their writing? Feels like an article waiting to be written . . .

Blessings on your ministry!
Pr. Seth

—Seth J. Pierce, Lead Pastor, Puyallup SDA Church, Washington, United States

Fred Hardinge, DrPH, RD, is an associate director of the General Conference Health Ministries department, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Lose weight – but not breakfast

Have you made your New Year's resolutions? If they include losing weight, hold off until you read this article!

Many people think skipping breakfast is a good way to lose weight. However, the desired weight loss rarely occurs with this method. Today, a growing body of research focuses on meal frequency and timing, with breakfast playing a prominent role.

Researchers, using information from 50,000 participants in Adventist Health Study-2 (AHS-2), found four factors that were associated with a decrease in body mass index (BMI):¹ eating only one or two meals per day; maintaining an overnight fast of up to 18 hours; eating breakfast instead of skipping it; and making breakfast (or lunch) the largest meal of the day.²

The two factors that related most strongly with higher weights were eating more than three meals a day (snacks are counted as extra meals) and eating the largest meal of the day for supper. The latter is very common among many cultures—and even church gatherings! Recent research strongly suggests that eating meals later in the evening can sabotage an otherwise good weight management program.³

These findings also challenge the widely held opinion that eating more frequently is better for weight management than eating larger meals less often. A few observational studies have suggested the opposite, but large prospective studies have clearly shown snacking leads to weight gain—probably because snack foods tend to be high in sugar, fat, and calories.

The principle investigator of AHS-2, Hana Kahleovo, MD,⁴ says these findings could be combined into a very practical weight-management strategy for relatively healthy individuals. She recommends skipping supper, avoiding snacks, eating a substantial breakfast, and fasting at least 18 hours per day.

We may not like the idea of going to bed on an empty stomach—many people are used to retiring with very full stomachs! Evidence in animal studies points to a longer life-span and positive influences on glucose tolerance, insulin sensitivity, and the incidence of type 2 diabetes when evening meals are skipped.⁵

Most of us are acquainted with the old adage, “Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, and dinner like a pauper.” For years, nutritionists have urged us to make breakfast the largest meal of the day—containing at least 25 to 40 percent of the daily calories. Yet, evidence from large-scale surveys in the United States reveals that 18 to 25 percent of adults and as many as 36 percent of adolescents skip this most important meal.⁶

Breakfast foods vary by culture. One culture often can't even contemplate eating what another relishes first thing in the morning! Yet within cultures, there is a surprising amount of consistency in terms of the kinds of foods consumed at the start of the day.

A wide and growing body of evidence supports the concept that breakfast is a very important meal of the day for both children and adults. It provides fuel for the body, supports mental alertness, and may prolong life as well!⁷ Breakfast should contain a substantial part of the day's energy, be well-balanced, and deliver its energy slowly over the course of the morning. This is not always followed. Researchers in the United Kingdom found that children younger than 10 years old consume more than 50 percent of the daily allowance for sugar in breakfast cereals, drinks, and spreads alone.⁸

These are not new concepts. Many years ago, the early health reformer Ellen G. White wrote: “It is the custom and order of society to take a slight breakfast. But this is not the best way to treat the stomach. At breakfast time the stomach is in a better condition to take care of more food than at the second or third

meal of the day. The habit of eating a sparing breakfast and a large dinner is wrong. Make your breakfast correspond more nearly to the heartiest meal of the day.”⁹ The same author recognized that not all would do better on two meals and then suggested a very light supper: “Most people enjoy better health while eating two meals a day than three; others, under their existing circumstances, may require something to eat at suppertime; but this meal should be very light. Let no one think himself a criterion for all,—that every one must do exactly as he does.”¹⁰

It will not hurt you to try this eating pattern for a few weeks—you may find you feel better and have a clearer mind—and an easier time losing weight! 🍏

- 1 BMI, while not a perfect metric, is widely used to rate a person's weight. For a calculator and more detailed explanation, see “BMI Calculator” at bmiccalculator.net.
- 2 Hana Kahleova, et al., “Meal Frequency and Timing Are Associated With Changes in Body Mass Index in Adventist Health Study 2,” *The Journal of Nutrition* 147, no. 9 (Sept. 2017): 1722, doi.org/10.3945/jn.116.244749.
- 3 M. Garaulet, et al., “Timing of Food Intake Predicts Weight Loss Effectiveness,” *International Journal of Obesity* 37, no. 4 (Apr. 2013): 604, doi.org/10.1038/ijo.2012.229.
- 4 Dr. Kahleovo is from the Czech Republic and was a research fellow with AHS-2 when this research was conducted. She is a Seventh-day Adventist.
- 5 C. L. Goodrick, et al., “Effects of Intermittent Feeding Upon Growth and Life Span in Rats,” *Gerontology* 28, no. 4 (1982): 233, doi.org/10.1159/000212538.
- 6 Ashima K. Kant and Barry I. Graubard, “Secular Trends in Patterns of Self-Reported Food Consumption of Adult Americans: NHANES 1971-1975 to NHANES 1999-2002,” *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 84, no. 5 (Nov. 2006): 1215.
- 7 Leah E. Cahill, et al., “Prospective Study of Breakfast Eating and Incident Coronary Heart Disease in a Cohort of Male US Health Professionals,” *Circulation* 128, no. 4 (Jul. 2013): 337, doi.org/10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.113.001474.
- 8 Matthew Taylor, “Children Consume Half of Daily Sugar Quota at Breakfast—Study,” *Guardian*, January 2, 2017, theguardian.com/society/2017/jan/03/children-consume-half-of-daily-sugar-quota-at-breakfast-alone-study.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1938), 173.
- 10 White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, 176.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.



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