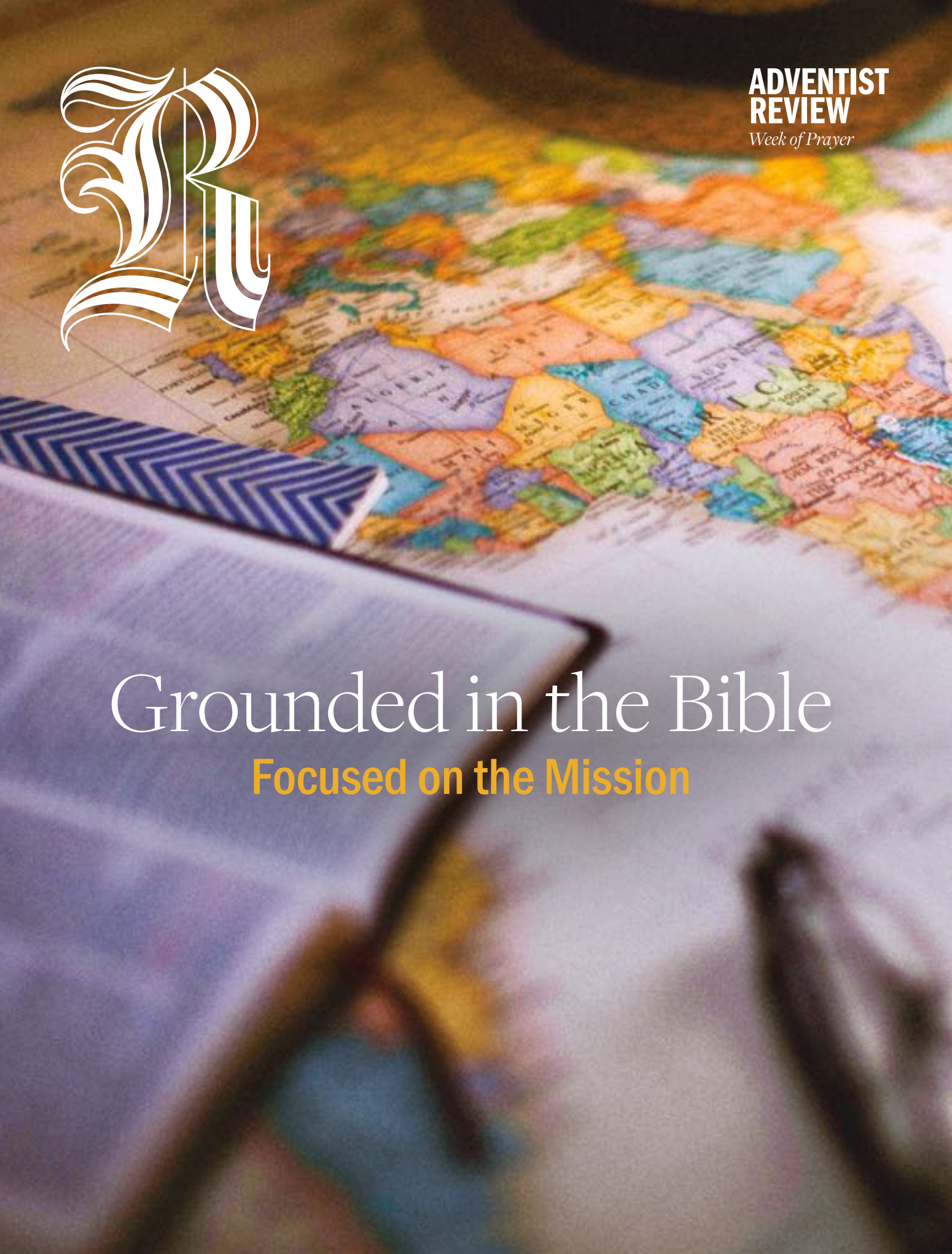
ADVENTIST REVIEW
Week of Prayer



Grounded in the Bible

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Erton C. Köhler

As the world church enters this year's Week of Prayer, we do not slow down; we realign. We prioritize what sustains us and what sends us. Across continents and cultures we return to the foundation that defines us and the mission that drives us. The theme "Grounded in the Bible, Focused on the Mission" is not a phrase for a season; it is the identity of a people living in a prophetic time.

To be grounded in the Bible is to stand where Christ stands. "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). Scripture anchors conviction when voices compete for attention. It steadies faith when uncertainty surrounds us. It shapes character and purifies purpose. A church rooted in the Word does not drift with trends or surrender to confusion. It listens first to heaven. It kneels before it speaks.

Yet grounding leads to movement. To be focused on the mission is to embrace the reason we exist. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19). The church was never called to preserve comfort; it was commissioned to proclaim hope. Where there are barriers, there are bent knees. Prayer opens paths no strategy alone can secure. Where there are people, there is a calling. Every city, every language, every neighborhood, represents an invitation to serve and to witness.

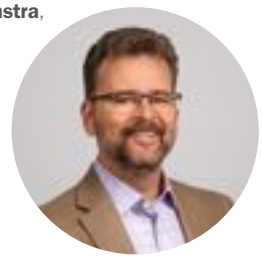
Prayer fuels this urgency. The advance of the gospel begins not with resources but with surrender. Before programs are organized, hearts must be consecrated. Before plans are announced, intercession must rise. History shows that when God's people pray, mission accelerates. The Spirit empowers, doors open, and courage grows.

This Week of Prayer is therefore not a pause; it is preparation. It is a return to the Source of power and clarity. The world does not need a distracted church; it needs a faithful one—rooted deeply and reaching widely.

May our prayers this week strengthen our foundation and enlarge our vision, until every person has heard the gospel and Christ returns in glory.

Maranatha!

The principal contributor to the Week of Prayer readings is **Shawn Boonstra**, an associate editor of the *Adventist Review*. Raised in British Columbia, Canada, he became an Adventist as a young adult, and soon began teaching the Bible. That grew into decades of pastoral ministry, public evangelism, and media outreach. Alongside his wife, Jean, Boonstra's work has contributed to the baptism of tens of thousands. He previously served as speaker/director for both It Is Written in Canada and It Is Written International and, from 2013 to 2025, as speaker/director of the Voice of Prophecy, reaching audiences around the world.



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Grounded in the Bible

Our unshakable foundation

Erton C. Köhler

Grounded in the Bible, focused on the mission" is more than a slogan. It is the compass that guides the Adventist movement in this decisive time. While the world drifts on a sea of shifting convictions, the global remnant church can stand firm only when it is anchored to the eternal foundation of God's Word.

We live in a world of instability. Borders shift, truths are renamed, and values lose their anchors. The rain of doubt pours relentlessly, rivers of post-truth flood billions of screens, and the winds of relativism blow into hurricanes of indifference. In the midst of this avalanche of uncertainty, one question inevitably arises: Is there anything that does not change? Is there a foundation that remains secure?

Jesus answers with absolute clarity. In Matthew 7:24-27 He tells the story of two builders—one wise, the other foolish. Both build. Both face storms. But only one remains standing. What makes the difference? The foundation. One builds on rock, while the other builds on sand. In the original Greek the word for "rock" is *petra*, meaning a solid, deep, immovable mass. That is the foundation of God's people—the living and eternal Word of God. According to 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, that

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Word is "God-breathed," able to teach, correct, restore, and equip every person for every good work. In other words, Scripture is not just one book among many; it is the ground of eternity.

The house may be beautiful, the design bold, the decor modern—yes, it may look impressive. But if it stands on sand, it will fall. Only those who build on what cannot be moved will stand firm. And in these times there is only one unshakable foundation: the Word of God.

The Word Is Inspired

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul tells us, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The original Greek word, *theópneustos*, literally, "God-breathed," paints a powerful picture. This brings us back to Creation: the same God who breathed life into Adam now breathes truth into the pages of Scripture. The Bible is not just a book written by humans; it is heaven's breath captured in human language. It is not a dictation of divine power, but the divine breath expressed through human words.

This inspiration is not merely poetic, nor it is partial—it is complete. The Word was formed by the Spirit, revealed by God, written by consecrated individuals, and preserved across the centuries through sacrifice and faith. "God cares for us as intellectual beings, and He has given us His Word as a lamp to our feet and a light to our pathway," writes Ellen White.[1] Even in these days of cultural darkness and ideological tempests, the Word of God still shines brightly, providing clarity and direction.

Today voices multiply across every channel—experts, algorithms, trends—yet none carry the authority of the Eternal. That is why the Bible does not need to be updated; it needs to be applied. It should not be reinterpreted to please culture; it must urgently be proclaimed to transform hearts.

A 2023 report from the organization Open Doors revealed that more than 360 million Christians face severe persecution worldwide, many simply for possessing or sharing a Bible.[2] In some countries owning Scripture is treated as a crime against the state. In others, surveillance systems alert authorities when biblical texts are accessed online. In some places state cameras are installed inside Christian churches. Notice this: If the Word were irrelevant, it would not cause such fear. The enemy knows its power—and God's people must know it too.

When everything around us trembles, it stands. When ideologies change, it stands. When structures fall, it endures.

The Word Is Sufficient

The next verse, 2 Timothy 3:17, affirms that the Word makes the person of God "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Greek word *artios* means complete, fully capable, fully prepared. In other words, the Bible is self-sufficient. It requires no complements, no embellishments. It shapes character, leads to salvation, and sustains mission.

Throughout history, religious movements have shipwrecked by abandoning Scripture. Others turned to human traditions, mystical visions, and theological fashions. Yet biblical faithfulness has always been the axis of true Christianity—and in the end-times it will be no different.

"If men had been willing to receive the truth so plainly stated in the Scriptures concerning the nature of man and the state of the dead, they would see in the claims and manifestations of spiritualism the working of Satan with power and signs and lying wonders," writes Ellen White.[3] Scripture has never been insufficient. The problem is that many have set it aside or twisted it for their own advantage.

Therefore, it must be clearly stated: the global mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is built not on human strategies but on the Word. We are a people of the Book. And wherever the Bible is central, heaven works miracles beyond imagination.

In Psalm 119:105 the psalmist declares, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." The Hebrew word for "lamp" is *ner*—a small oil lamp used to light one step at a time on dark trails. The Word does not promise to reveal the entire future, but it guarantees light for the next step—and that is enough.

The Word Is Practical

Jesus' metaphor in Matthew 7 is unmistakable: the difference between ruin and endurance lies in obedience to the Word. It is not enough to know; we must live it. It is not enough to hear; we must put it into practice.

The church will be strengthened not by creative ideas but by obedient faith. Stability comes not from the amount of biblical knowledge, but from submission to it—faithful obedience to God and communion with Him under the shadow of His grace. In this way, when end-time Adventism faces persecution, trials, and testing, only those firmly grounded in the Word will remain steadfast.

In 2017 a 7.1-magnitude earthquake struck central Mexico. Many modern buildings collapsed, yet some older structures remained intact. Engineers would explain that the secret is in having a deep, discrete, but solid foundation. The same is true for the church. What sustains a church is not what shines on the surface, but what lies beneath. And there is only one foundation that never fails: the Word of God.

The Bible is not merely a book for theological debates; it is a guide for daily life. It shapes how we treat others, manage resources, respond to crises, and make decisions. Every area of life not grounded in the Bible is vulnerable to collapse.

Is the Bible Still Sufficient for Us?

The essential question is not how many Bibles we own, but whether we are truly grounded in the Word. There is a difference between memorizing verses and depending on the Word. The remnant church will be recognized not merely by professing correct doctrines but by living in covenant with revealed truth.

The people who keep the commandments and hold the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17) are those who will not compromise the authority of the Word. It is our moral code, our prophetic foundation, our missionary manual, and our divine love letter.

When everything around us trembles, it stands. When ideologies change, it stands. When structures fall, it endures. After all, the Bible is the only book that reads the human heart even as it is being read.

Let Us Return to the Word

Today God calls leaders, families, youth, elders, children, teachers, and preachers to return to the foundation. There is only one future for the church—upon the Rock. There is only one power for the mission—the Word.

Will you rebuild your life on Scripture? Will you place every ministry plan, every family step, every financial decision under "Thus says the Lord"? Do you desire the Bible to be your foundation and not merely an ornament?

Then stand up. Reconsecrate yourself. Return to the Word. Pray with the Bible open. Decide with the Bible in mind. Preach with the Bible in your heart. For only those who are grounded in the Bible and focused on the mission will remain standing.

Maranatha! 𝔄

[1] Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Aug. 21, 1888, par. 6.
[2] Open Doors Hong Kong, "World Watch List 2023: Overview," https://www.opendoors.org.hk/en-US/news/latest/wwl23-overview/.
[3] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 559.

Erton C. Köhler is the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Only those who build on what cannot be moved will stand firm. And in these times there is only one unshakable foundation: the Word of God.

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Reading the Bible Isn't Enough

You must also live by God's Word.

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes" (*Ps. 119:11, 12*).

There is an old story about two travelers who needed a place to stay for the night. As they made their way through the forest, one of them noticed an old trapper's cabin with smoke emerging from the chimney. They knocked on the door and inquired about spending the night. The old man warmly invited them in, giving them the use of his only bedroom.

The men didn't sleep well, however, because they were carrying a large sum of money. To keep it secure, they took turns sleeping while the other watched the money. In the wee hours of the morning the man keeping watch noticed a light under the door. Quietly he pulled it open a crack, to discover the trapper sitting at his table, carefully studying a Bible. When the trapper closed the Bible and bowed his head to pray, the man shut the door and woke his companion. "I think we can both sleep now," he said, "because this man is trustworthy."

You've got to wonder: if he'd opened the door to find the trapper perusing Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species,* would it have created the same level of trust?

Another story: A man is walking home late at night when he hears the sound of many footsteps behind him. He nervously looks over his shoulder to find a group of young men following him. His heartrate quickens, and he picks up his pace, fearing that he is about to be robbed . . . or worse. The gang easily catches up with him—and that's when he notices that most of them are carrying Bibles. They are not thieves; it's a youth group coming home from a Saturday night Bible study. He lets out a quiet sigh of relief.

Trust Shaped by the Word

What is it about serious Bible students that makes us more likely to trust them? Put aside any culture's tendency to mock believers, and think about it. Somehow, even if they ridicule people of faith, most people still instinctively recognize that if someone chooses to *live* by the Scriptures, they are more likely to be morally trustworthy. Daniel, after all, had all sorts of trouble when he was immersed in Babylonian culture, but you'll notice that in chapter 2 the king instinctively trusted him when he made a request for more time.

Ironically, however, many people seem to hate the Bible for the same reason they're prone to trust those who live by it: they realize that it makes high moral demands on humanity. It demonstrates, powerfully, that human beings are accountable to a supreme Creator. When someone chooses—voluntarily—to be accountable to a moral God, we don't mind having them as neighbors. But when it occurs to us that God expects the same moral standard from *us*? Well, that's far too often another story.

From Reading to Living

Merely *reading* the Bible isn't enough. Many universities offer courses that study the Bible as literature. The professors are not believers; they have read the text but remain unchanged by it. To them, it is just another example of good writing, not unlike the works of Dostoevsky, Sun Tzu, or Shakespeare. They do not take the Word of God to heart because they consider it a purely human creation and regard its claims of divine inspiration as a holdover from an ignorant and superstitious age. Many of the students will also read it without absorbing it, coming away completely unchanged.

So how is it different for believers? Christians recognize that it is not enough just to read the Bible; we must also *live* it. Many things in this life cannot be understood until you *do* them. Without ever leaving your home, you can certainly study how skydiving works—learning the science of wind resistance, measuring the canopy, factoring in your weight. Mathematically, you can come to the reliable conclusion that your parachute would save you from fatal impact. But do you really *understand* skydiving? No; that would require *experiencing* it.

That's how it is with the Christian faith: you cannot simply read your way into the kingdom. For the Bible to have its proper effect, you need to exercise enough faith to live by the principles it reveals. Only then, when you choose to believe that God knows what He's talking about, will you discover the sheer life-altering power of His Word.

We are "born again . . . through the word of God," Peter wrote (1 Peter 1:23), but he didn't mean that you are saved by keeping a copy of the Bible in your home. There will almost certainly be people in the second resurrection who *owned* a Bible; the difference between them and the crowd inside the Holy City is that the saved are "the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14:4).

The prophet Jeremiah famously compared Scripture to food: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16). Jesus used a similar metaphor: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

Food enters—and feeds—every cell in your body. The nutrients are applied where they are needed most. Without that nourishment, you will die. Likewise, the Bible must be *ingested*, so that the very thoughts of God can penetrate your own mind, gradually changing who you are. How do you ingest it? By both *reading* it and *living* it.

The Narrow Way

Nothing reveals the power of God's truth like applying it to a life lived in a world that is opposed to Him. God's idea of an authentic human life runs sharply across the groove of our sinful human tendencies, and our lazy fallen nature loves the ease of living in a groove. That, Jesus taught us, is the broad road. Our sinful nature prefers it because it feels easy. It will not seem easy at the end, however, once people discover that it is a toll highway, and the price is higher than any sinner can afford.

Nothing reveals the power of God's truth like applying it to a life lived in a world that is opposed to Him.

By contrast, those who choose (by faith!) to live the principles in God's Word will find that while *that* path is narrow, the toll has already been paid by a God who came to live among us in human flesh. "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world," Jesus once prayed, "but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:15-17).

The devil himself knows what Scripture says, and he even knows it to be truth. If he didn't, Jesus wouldn't be able to accuse him of lying; the devil would simply be misguided. No, he is willfully misrepresenting it, and he doesn't even mind if you read it—as long as you don't *live* it.

That, he knows, would mean that the very character of God—His name—would be etched in your forehead by the Spirit, and you will be found on Mount Zion with the Lamb (Rev. 14:1). ℜ

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Monday

"Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.' And another angel followed, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.' Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (*Rev.* 14:6-12).

The Message the World Still Needs

Our mission has not changed.

Now, *that's* what you should be preaching!" An organization had sent this man to evaluate Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic meetings. The evening he attended, I'd talked about the influences that popular culture can have on your moral outlook and how allowing consistent negative influences can make it harder to resist temptation.

I looked at him quietly. Sometimes, if you hesitate to reply, people fill the silence by telling you more of what they're thinking. "Forget all that other stuff," he continued. "I mean, I get it: The Sabbath is important to Adventists, but if you were to shift to more of *this* stuff, I think your ministry would really explode."

A MESSAGE THAT CANNOT BE REPLACED

Dudley M. Canright suddenly came to mind. He once said that if it wasn't for our unique—and difficult—message, he'd be a great preacher. He was, of course, completely missing the point. It is not a talent for speaking that makes Adventist preachers great; it is our biblical message—a message that has the power to capture the hearts of sinners like nothing else. It's effective because it's securely anchored in the person of Christ.

The fact that this man was not a Seventh-day Adventist made it easy to understand why he didn't yet value the three angels' messages. He hadn't actually heard the rest of it and was responding from an understanding of Adventists that he'd heard from friends and online sources. He favored content that aligned more closely with his personal beliefs.

The stunning truths in Revelation 14 are not losing their significance, no matter how far the world appears to be straying from God's ideal.

Tragically it is not only non-Adventists who feel this way. Sometimes you will hear well-meaning lifetime Adventists suggest that our message is a relic from the nineteenth century, that it's time to move on and become more like other Christian churches. Often you will discover that their distaste for our doctrines stems from the way they learned them as children: If their mentors were severe and judgmental, it's likely they were cheated of a Christ-centered and redemptive understanding. It's also tragically possible that they were simply never taught.

Recent converts to this movement will often tell you that the three angels' messages were the clearest, most powerful picture of Christ they'd ever seen—and those engaged in soul winning will testify to the power of the message to draw lost sinners home.

Watch a public evangelistic audience carefully. Pay attention to the faces. Every night, the evangelist casts a different doctrinal fishing lure over the ears of the crowd—and every night, you will see different "fish" rise to the surface to bite.

Different aspects of our message appeal to different people. Sometimes it's the Sabbath that convinces someone to surrender his or her life to Christ. Other times it's the state of the dead, or even the health message. It's as if God has given us 28 lures to use as fishers of men. By the time all 28 fundamental beliefs have been faithfully taught, the net begins to fill.

Some are convinced that the effectiveness of our message is waning—that it is less relevant to postmodern crowds. Experienced evangelists will tell you that this is far from the truth: In recent years they've been watching its appeal grow. Audiences are not only as big as they've ever been—they're also more responsive. There are even cases in which people rose from their seats halfway through a presentation, spontaneously starting an altar call response more than 20 minutes before the presentation finished.

It's not human eloquence that causes that. Mediocre preachers, if they're faithful, will see results comparable to the eloquent ones, because it is the Spirit of God speaking to the audience through His Word.

FAITHFUL TO THE ASSIGNMENT

God did not make a mistake with the assignment He's given us. It's hard to imagine heaven gathering for an emergency meeting because it has occurred to them that they gave the Seventh-day Adventist Church the wrong message. "Someone get a pen," Gabriel says, "because we've got to do a complete rewrite. We just didn't anticipate the postmodern world, and we need to adjust!"

It's a ridiculous thought; we instinctively know that it's not true. If the prophecies have been right for so many centuries—even millennia—we know that Revelation 14 is not wrong. Neither is Revelation 18, which promises that the world will soon be illuminated with the glory of Christ.

This movement is not destined to die in the dark; it is headed toward a grand climax, and we will be utterly surprised by the people flowing into the church. Sister White assures us, "Thousands in the eleventh hour will see and acknowledge the truth. . . . These conversions to truth will be made with a rapidity that will surprise the church, and God's name alone will be glorified."*

The stunning truths in Revelation 14 are not losing their significance, no matter how far the world appears to be straying from God's ideal. They are gaining in potential as people witness the collapse of human systems and experience the disappointment that trusting in the kingdoms of this world brings. Disillusionment is at an all-time high, and while it's true that many people have despaired of the idea that there is objective truth to be found, it is a mistake to believe people are happy in that condition. The human heart has been wired for eternity (Eccl. 3:11), and the pull toward Christ will only grow stronger as this fallen planet continues to disintegrate.

But even if that weren't true, we'd still be required to preach. After all, Noah spoke for 120 years without the promise of large results, and we all know he would have been sinning had he refused to do it. There's a key difference, though: Even though the moral condition of our world *will* resemble that of Noah's day, Noah was told up front that there would be only eight people on the ark. But we've been shown a crowd of redeemed sinners that cannot be numbered—a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

* Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 2, p. 16.

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Doctrine With a Face

Our beliefs are about a Person.

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

Polycarp, well known to Christians as a stunningly brave second-century martyr, used to tell a (perhaps legendary) story about the apostle John, recorded in the writings of an early church father named Irenaeus.

"There are also those who heard from him," Irenaeus wrote of Polycarp, "that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, 'Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.' "*

Why John Ran

If it actually happened (it may be mere legend), what would make John flee, declaring Cerinthus an "enemy of the truth"? Cerinthus was a well-known early heretic who taught that Jesus was merely human; there was no miraculous virgin birth, and he claimed that creation was the work of a lesser god. He is probably best known for teaching that Jesus became Messiah at His baptism, but then as He went to the cross, the divine power that enabled His ministry departed, leaving behind a mere man to die.

Such errors became increasingly common through the early centuries of Christianity. They are, of course, completely contrary to everything the apostles had taught as they carried the gospel to the Roman Empire. Although John did not write his Gospel as a polemic against heretics, his opening words *do* serve as a corrective for those who might be tempted to demote Christ. They are among some of

the most beautiful found in the Bible, asserting that Creation was the work of none other than Christ Himself. "All things were made through Him," John reminds us, "and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3).

John identifies Jesus as the *Logos,* a word that Greek philosophers would have found immensely interesting. The Greeks used the word differently than John did; to the Greek mind, *Logos* was the overarching, immovable principle that held the universe together, an unchanging constant behind an ever-moving cosmos. John was describing something different; he was drawing on the Scriptures to reveal Christ. But a Greek reader new to Christianity might have paused at John's declaration: The God who created the universe and holds it together, the One who gave us life, has made a personal appearance on this planet—as a genuine flesh-and-blood human being. The Word became flesh. To a Greek mind, that would have been a revolutionary thought.

Reading the Bible Correctly

Jesus is the ultimate truth that lies behind everything we experience with our senses. The Greeks were unwittingly searching for Christ, as many people still do—but so were God's covenant people. Inspired by the Spirit, John was careful to include these words from Jesus: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

Academics from various traditions have long debated the best way to interpret the Scriptures, but in this statement Jesus gives us an all-important key: If you're not seeing Christ in the words of the Bible, you're reading it incorrectly. If Jesus is not the source and center of everything, you've got it wrong. If you attempt to understand our fundamental doctrines apart from the person and character of Christ, you're going to get it wrong. If you—like ancient heretics—try to demote Christ . . . Again, you'll never grasp the essential message of the Bible.

The Sabbath, after all, is not merely a rule; it's an invitation to rest in the presence of Christ. The doctrine of baptism is an invitation to crucify the old self and begin a new life surrendered to the One who both made the universe and continues to hold it together. Principles for a healthy life were not given merely to extend our lifespans; the Bible is the operating manual for the human body, produced by the divine Manufacturer, and it reveals a way to move closer to God's original design.

Writing to the church in Colossae, which was not terribly far from John's home in Ephesus, Paul explained the essence of good doctrine. Speaking of the mystery being revealed to the church in the gospel, he wrote, "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:27, 28).

The Point of Our Beliefs

All of this teaches us something important about our mission in a world living on the verge of the kingdom. Our prophetic movement was not born of committee deliberations, although committees certainly did meet to wrestle with the teachings of the Bible. It was rather born of Christ Himself, the very one on whom our existence depends. Pay close attention to the way Scripture describes our work and the setting in which it is said to take place:

The Bible is the operating manual for the human body, produced by the divine Manufacturer, and it reveals a way to move closer to God's original design.

"Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1). Without the Lamb, there is no Seventh-day Adventist Church. Without the Lamb, there is no message, because He is the center of it. To preach our doctrines apart from the person of Jesus is to get them completely wrong.

Perhaps the most important question we can ask ourselves when studying our fundamental beliefs is: "What does this teach me about who Jesus is and what He is like?" And then, when we set out to share those beliefs with someone else, that Christ-centered understanding needs to be the very heart of what we say to that person. If the Sabbath is nothing but an arbitrary rule, it becomes vacant of meaning. But if the Sabbath is a sign of a covenant with the Creator—a way to come closer to the one who made us, and become reshaped in His image—if it is about the Lord of the Sabbath and His love for us, then the day is understood to be filled with the power of the Spirit.

The Sabbath is not so much about a 24-hour period as it is about a Person. If the way we teach it to others doesn't reflect that, again, we've got it wrong. It is entirely possible to mechanically, ritualistically observe the Sabbath every week for a lifetime and never really know the God behind it. Without Christ, it's just a day off. But *with* Christ, it is a day that fills the soul, reminding us of where we come from, who we are, and where we're headed. It is a potent reminder that Jesus is the point of all existence.

Did John really flee from the bathhouse because Cerinthus the heretic was there? Maybe. It might be just a story. But this much we *do* know: The Spirit made sure that John's Gospel established Christ as the center of *everything* in an unmistakable way. It leaves those who might be tempted to think otherwise without an argument. ℜ

* Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* (Rome: Aeterna Press, 2016), book 3, chap. 3, p. 182.

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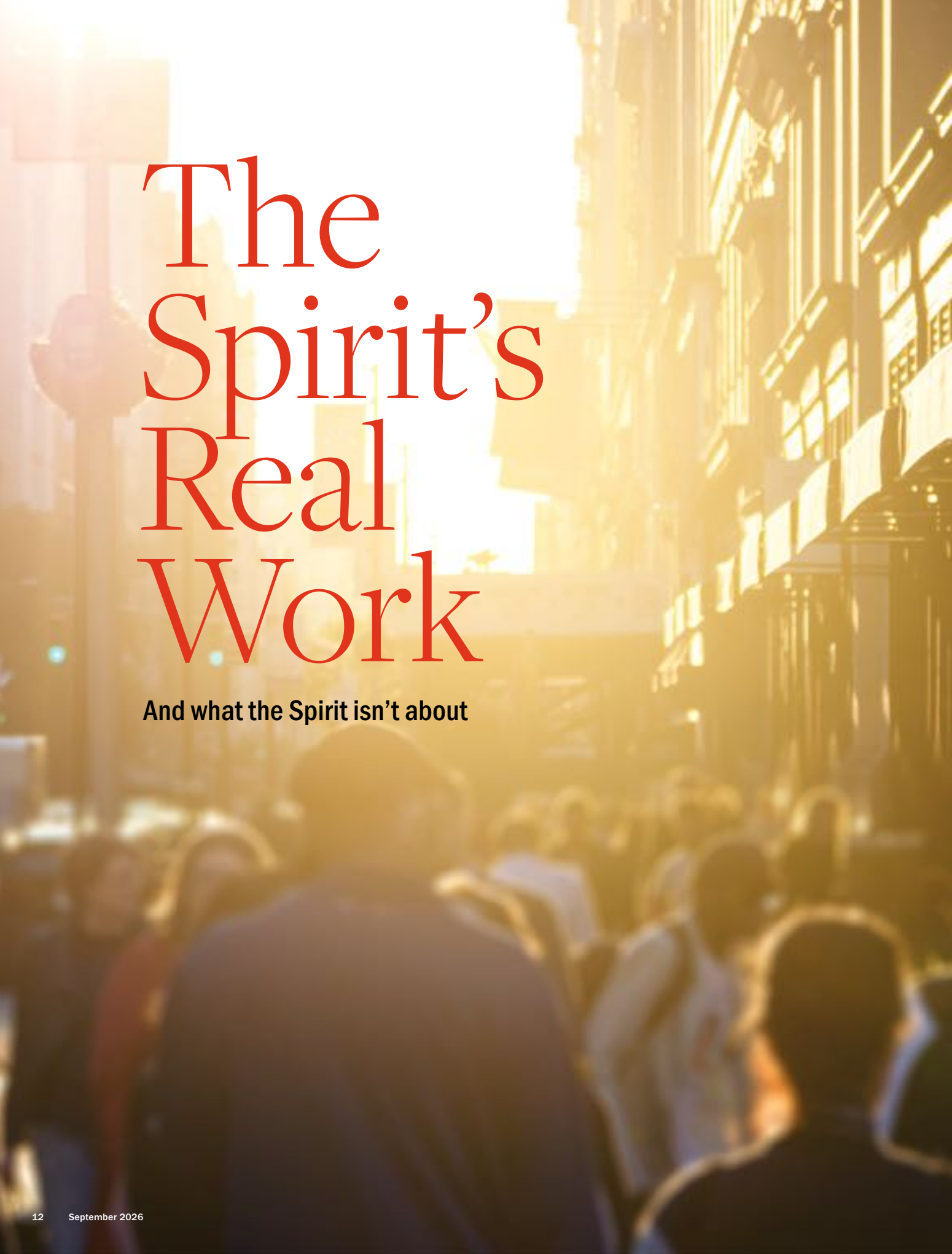

The Spirit's Real Work

And what the Spirit isn't about

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13, 14).

When I was a brand-new Adventist, a friend of mine encouraged me to visit some charismatic revival meetings that were taking place in a rented hall on the other side of the city. It occurred to me that if I wanted to share my faith with *her*, I might have to demonstrate a willingness to consider her point of view.

In hindsight, it became obvious that attending the meeting was not at all a good idea. The preacher delivered a message that surprised me. "This is where you'll find the Holy Spirit," he said, referring to the rented hall in which we were gathered. That was the first indication that something was terribly wrong: The Scriptures do not require you to attend a specific preacher's meetings to find the Spirit of God—He is available wherever you happen to be. The speaker continued: "After about two or three days the blessing of the Spirit will wear off, and you'll have to come back to get more."

That was *another* major problem, biblically speaking: God has not appointed any individual as the sole dispenser of His blessings. The Spirit of God definitely shows up in meetings of believers; the dramatic outpouring on the gathering of believers in Acts 2 is proof of that. God *does* bless the preaching of individuals with the presence of His Spirit, but *this* particular preacher was not Peter, and *this* meeting was definitely not the day of Pentecost.

Then came the final blow, the words that caused me to pick up and quickly leave the auditorium. "To receive the Spirit," the pastor continued, "you have to empty your mind and let it happen." With that, people all around me started dropping to the ground, laughing uncontrollably. I had wandered into what some people called the "Toronto Blessing," a global movement that had added the phenomenon of *holy laughter* to the more traditional charismatic belief in speaking in tongues. In time their movement would become even more dramatic, including "barking in the Spirit" while crawling around on all fours like an animal. There were even rumors of people attending the meetings in adult diapers so they could behave like babies in order to demonstrate a commitment to being "born again." None of this, of course, can be found in the pages of the Bible.

What the Spirit Actually Does

Desperate to discover evidence that God knows them and wants them, some people fall into the trap of thinking that the so-called miracles taking place in their meetings are evidence of salvation. You are not a complete Christian, some are told, unless you start speaking in a mysterious heavenly language.

Not only is there no biblical evidence for this—all of the incidents of tongue-speaking found in the New Testament involved real human languages—it is also a gross misunderstanding of the role of the Spirit. He does not announce His presence by meaningless tokens; His work is centered on bringing people to the foot of the cross. Jesus told His disciples:

"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. . . . He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:8-14).

The Holy Spirit is the presence of Christ in this world after His physical return to the heavenly sanctuary. His mission is Christ's mission: "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

At His ascension Jesus told the disciples that they would conquer the world with the gospel. "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem," He explained, "and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It would begin, He said, when the Holy Spirit granted them power. In other words, the Spirit was given to the church to empower *mission*.

On the day of Pentecost, as the crowd marveled over the miracle of hearing Peter in multiple languages, he explained what they were witnessing with these stunning words: "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

> Jesus is the heart of all mission, and the Spirit serves *His* purposes in this world—not ours.

We sometimes make the mistake of saying that the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples at Pentecost; this is not *quite* what happened. According to Peter, Jesus was the one who received the Spirit; it flowed over Him onto the church below. Jesus is the heart of all mission, and the Spirit serves *His* purposes in this world—not ours.

Power for the Assignment

Centuries in advance of Pentecost, the psalmist anticipated what would happen the day that Peter led thousands to Christ. See if any of this passage seems familiar:

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the

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The real proof that the Spirit is visiting a congregation? Mission. Souls. Transformed lives.

dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forevermore" (Ps. 133:1-3).

When else did brethren dwell together in unity? On the day of Pentecost, when they were all in "one accord" (Acts 2:1). Who was Aaron? The high priest. What does oil symbolize? The Holy Spirit. It is not insignificant that Peter told the crowd that Jesus had just been "exalted to the right hand of God" (verse 33). Many scholars suspect that the earthly day of Pentecost was the same day that Jesus was installed as our high priest in heaven, when He received the Spirit and shared it with His church to inaugurate its Spirit-led mission.

This means that *everything* about our work is to be led by Jesus from heaven's sanctuary; we are in charge of almost nothing. The Spirit prompts us to follow Christ's lead in reaching the lost, granting us gifts for the accomplishment of that mission. Nothing—absolutely nothing—is as important to Christ as saving the lost. You'll remember that in His parable, Jesus described a shepherd who left behind 99 sheep to find just *one* that was lost. When that lost sheep was found, heaven dropped everything to celebrate.

All of heaven's resources are devoted to reclaiming lost sinners, not to entertaining *us*. The Spirit of God was not given so believers can try to impress each other during a church service with apparently miraculous abilities. The Spirit was not sent to enable TV preachers to promise healing in exchange for a financial contribution. He was not sent to cause people to giggle uncontrollably or utter nonsensical sounds. He was sent to help us accomplish the one and only thing God has given us to do.

"In a special sense," Ellen White reminds us, "Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention."[1]

Nothing else. If we are focused on something else, that's a distraction. If we're attempting to summon the Spirit for anything else, we are asking for the wrong thing. The job we've been given is a monumental task—in fact, it is humanly impossible. We often find it overwhelming when God shows us His final message for the world, the three angels' messages, and then asks us to go to the nations and preach it. It seems like a completely impossible mission—until we remember that the assignment comes with the certain promise of power. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Historically, every step forward in the cause of Christ has been powered by the Holy Spirit. He uses His church—enabling and empowering us—so that we can meaningfully align with the highest priorities of Christ.

The real proof that the Spirit is visiting a congregation? Mission. Souls. Transformed lives. Church members growing in faith because they see the way that God takes their humble efforts and multiplies them. "The only way to grow in grace," inspired counsel tells us, "is to be disinterestedly doing the very work which Christ has enjoined upon us—to engage, to the extent of our ability, in helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them."[2]

It's not *one* of the ways to grow; it's the *only* way. By all means, pray for the final and glorious outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to send the latter rain; after all, it's a promise from God that He invites us to claim. But then be ready to share Jesus, because that's what He's going to urge you to do, the same way He empowered the early rain in Peter's day.

[1] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 19.
[2] Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 80.

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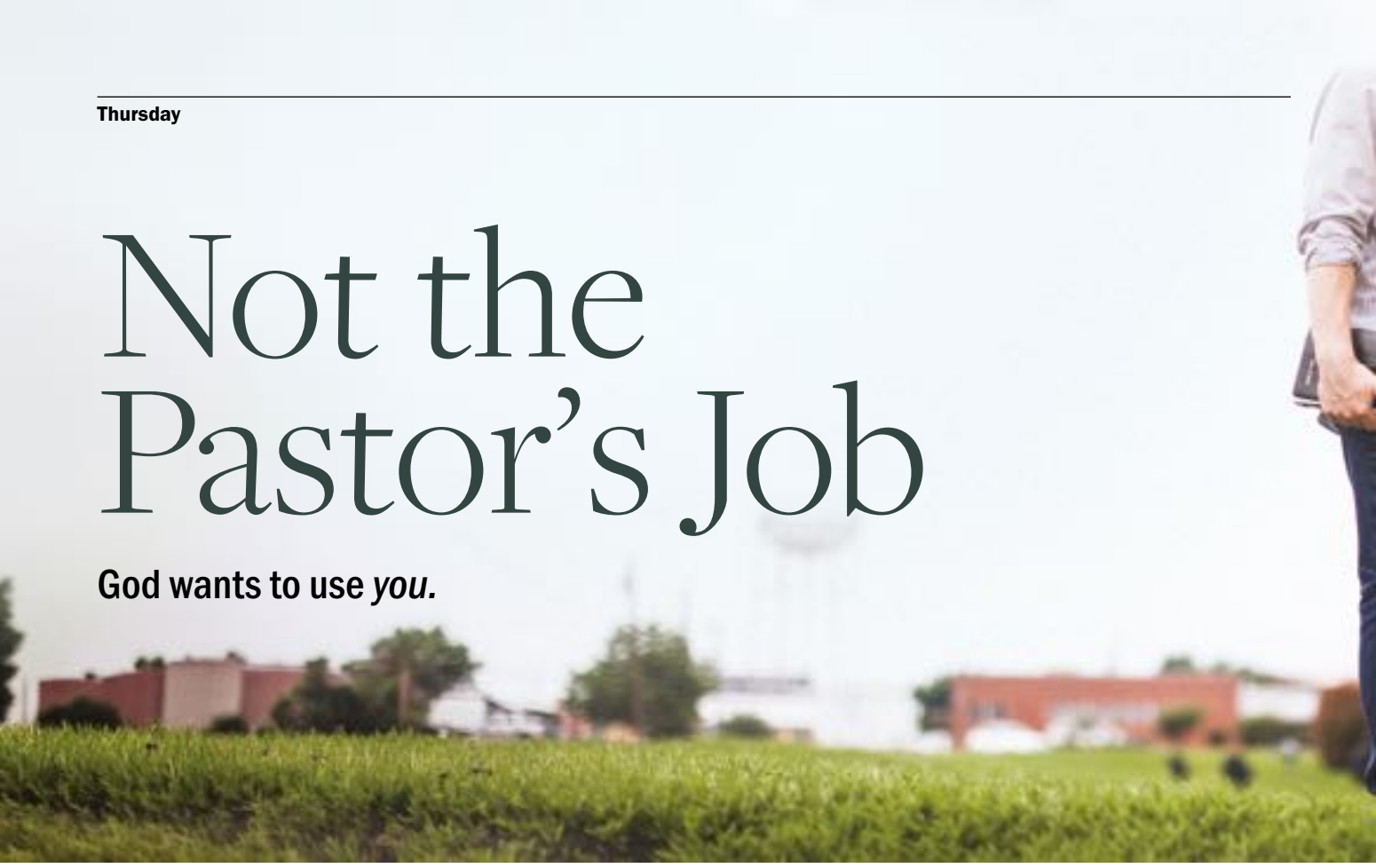

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (*Matt. 5:14-16*).

Pastor, I think my friend might be interested in the gospel, but I'm pretty sure she's at the bar today instead of here at church."

We were walking up from the church basement where the fellowship meal had just concluded. I paused for a moment halfway up the steps so she could continue.

"You need to get over there right away and get her out of that place!" she demanded.

"I really do appreciate your concern for your friend," I replied, "and it's nice to have someone in the congregation who cares so much. But let me ask you a question: What do you think would happen if I walked into that bar to confront her?"

"I think that if a *pastor* went in and talked to her, she'd change her mind about drinking and leave!" Tammy brightened up for a moment, confident in her answer and hopeful that it would compel me to go.

Her sentiment was understandable; many people appear to be convinced that members of the clergy have special arguments and phrases they learn in seminary that can be uttered to instantly win arguments or create conviction. While it's true that soul-winning pastors often have more experience than many when it comes to engaging in conversation with people struggling with conviction, they are utterly powerless to actually *manufacture* it. Generating conviction, it turns out, is something that only the Holy Spirit can do. If someone is ignoring or rejecting the prompting of the Spirit, it is not possible to develop a rational argument that will change things.

"But the natural man," Paul reminds us, "does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

"Tammy," I replied, "I don't think that would work the way you hope. Most of the time, if someone realizes that a friend or family member has sent the preacher—and that visit isn't particularly welcome—it's going to make things worse. I *could* go over to that bar right now, but she's going to know that you made that happen, and there's a real chance it's going to damage your friendship."

"But she's in spiritual danger!" Tammy replied, a little surprised that I didn't think her idea would work.

Why was I hesitant? I'd tried it many times as a young pastor, and I'd seen it backfire too many times to think it would work. Most often, hopeful wives hoped I could find just the right words to convince their husbands to become interested in God. It's often true that if I can casually become friends with that person, I can build enough trust to encourage honest inquiry and create an open environment in which someone would feel comfortable discussing Jesus, but people are generally not *debated* into the kingdom of God.

Photo by Pearl / Lightstock

Consider all those heated arguments you've witnessed on social media. How often have you seen them conclude with the words "You know what? I think you're right!" Pride usually prevents that from happening.

A Different Picture

Quite apart from the risk of angering her friend, Tammy also harbored another widespread misunderstanding: the medieval idea that it's the role of the pastor—a trained professional—to win souls. It's an unbiblical notion that has contributed to the slow growth—or even negative growth—of many churches. In the New Testament model you'll find that the church member is the minister, and the pastor plays the role of a coach—training, equipping, and emboldening the congregation to win souls.

In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul explains the gifts God has given to each of us: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11, 12).

Notice that pastors have not been gifted in order to *do* the work of ministry on their own; they have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to *equip the saints* for the work of ministry. In some translations of the Bible, the punctuation divides that thought in two, as if the role of pastors is to both equip the saints and to do the work of ministry themselves. The punctuation, however, was not in the original manuscripts; it was added at a time when the understanding of the role of clergy was still deeply influenced by the way people thought of the Roman Catholic priesthood.

The pastor's proper role is to get *you* busy doing the task that Christ assigned to all of us.

"All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come," Ellen White reminds us, "are put in trust with the gospel. 'We are laborers together with God,' called to represent Him as ambassadors of love [1 Cor. 3:9]."*

You'll notice that Jesus did not teach His audience that *some of you* are the light of the world. He was addressing a large crowd, including everyone present. Many of us fear that call, however, wondering if we really have what it takes to lead someone else to Christ. The truth of the matter is that we *don't.* Neither does the pastor. We are not called to do the job of the Holy Spirit—but we *are* called to be present for those on whom the Spirit is working.

The pastor's proper role is to get *you* busy doing the task that Christ assigned to all of us.

A Role for All of Us

When you come in contact with someone who might be interested in the faith, it's natural to immediately think of sending in the pastor—and it's true that a good pastor can be a helpful resource. But it's important to choose to believe that God put *this* individual in *your* path for a reason. It's entirely possible that *you* are the best possible choice to help that individual find a connection to God's church.

When we understand that God calls *us,* as we are, with the gifts we have (and do not have), it can liberate us from fear. We do not have to adopt the styles, the words, or the mannerisms of ministers we look up to, thinking that in order to win souls, we need to emulate those who are already doing it. By all means, listen to those who are successful in order to learn the principles involved. But at the same time, it's critically important to believe that God has called *you* for this moment because of who you are. When He needed a Paul, He raised one up. When He needed a Luther or a Wesley, He found them. But now, at this moment, God needs *you* to be a light in this world.

Yes, *you,* with all your faults and personality quirks. He didn't bring that individual interested in spiritual things to someone else, He sent them to *you* . . . because for the story that's about to unfold with this new believer, God seems to think you're perfect for the job. ℟

* Ellen G. White manuscript 21, 1900, par. 30.

On the Edge of Canaan

With a global mission

"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' " (*Rev. 7:9, 10*).

The data was in, the study complete. Ten out of 12 experts agreed: Taking possession of the Promised Land was impossible. Their arguments made sense; the inhabitants of Canaan were stronger and better equipped, and Israel didn't stand a chance. There was just one problem with their data: It was tempting them to doubt God's promise.

"Arise," God told Abraham, "walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you" (Gen. 13:17).

Have you noticed that God seldom asks His people to do what seems possible? Leave Egypt? The pharaoh would never allow it. Leave by the route that ends at the Red Sea? How were they supposed to cross it? Take possession of Canaan? How?

But notice that when they *did* enter the Promised Land 40 years later, they followed the ark of the covenant. The Jordan parted as the priests carried the ark into the water. When the walls of Jericho fell, they were still following the ark, the symbol of God's authority in heaven's sanctuary.

But now they were doubting God's promise because it just didn't seem reasonable. Only two of the 12 chose to believe that if God was asking for it, it was certain to happen. And when the audience chose to trust the naysayers, failing to trust God's plan, they ended up stuck in the wilderness for 40 years.

As they were turned away from Canaan, God revealed what He had intended: It was far more than a simple scouting mission across the border, or even the conquest of a few villages. "Truly, as I live," God told Moses, "all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. 14:21).

It's the same end goal we find in the book of Revelation, where God promises to illuminate the world with Christ's glory (Rev. 18:1). A lack of faith on our part will not ultimately frustrate His plans to take back the planet and establish the kingdom of Christ. We might delay it through a lack of faith, but we will not stop it; The world—the *entire* world—will be lit up. You'll notice that God didn't say, "This land will be filled with the glory of the Lord." Instead, He laid claim to the whole earth.

Always Been Global

Whether we're talking about the Old or New Testament church, God's goal has always been the same: the entire planet. Listen carefully to His words through the prophet Isaiah:

"I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6).

"For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isa. 60:2, 3).

Under the rules of the great controversy, which are based on God's character, He has allowed the human race a remarkable degree of liberty. We are free to walk away from Him and live as we please (see Acts 14:16). The very existence of the world's nations is proof that this liberty is real, and the beasts that rise from the sea in Daniel's vision illustrate how this freedom causes so much trouble for our planet: The winds whip up the surface of the water, generation after generation, causing untold pain and heartache as power continually shifts between the world's leading powers. It is trouble that will not stop until the judgment sits and the Son of man is awarded His kingdom:

"Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14).

The task of God's last-day remnant church is the same as it was for Israel, because God's love for sinners hasn't changed: We are to bring the light of Christ to *all* nations. "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven," John tells us, "having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water' " (Rev. 14:6, 7).

Standing at the Border

Like Israel, we now find ourselves sitting on the very border of the Promised Land. Everything God told us would happen? It's either already happened, as with most of the prophecies of Daniel, or it appears to be happening *right now*. And like Israel, we have an encouraging report from someone who slipped into the Promised Land—in vision—and brought back a challenge for us to be faithful:

"There are great difficulties and trials before us. It will require strong courage and persevering effort to go forward. But all now depends on our faith in the Captain who has led us safely thus far. Shall we let unbelief come in now? Shall we weakly yield to distrust and fear? Shall we compromise with the world, and turn away from the heavenly Canaan?"* At this moment the real question is whether we will repeat Israel's mistake and stay here for yet another generation.

The task of God's last-day remnant church is the same as it was for Israel, because God's love for sinners hasn't changed: We are to bring the light of Christ to all nations.

There is no question that the world is full of intimidating giants. To our minds, the powers of darkness seem to have more power, more influence, and more resources. We see the task we've been given—the message we are asked to share—and while it excites us personally, we also feel a sense of panic when we consider the world with whom we are supposed to share it: "*This* message? To *those* people? How?"

We are tempted to fall back on studies—empirical data that seem to prove that the Christian faith is losing ground. Churches are shrinking. Young people are turning away from religion. People have given up on the very idea of objective truth. How are we supposed to light up *that* world with the glory of Christ? It appears to be a mission doomed to failure.

But then God reminds us of the same thing He did on the day Israel chose to reject the challenge: "After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory" (Rev. 18:1).

God is daring us to lay claim to a world that *will* belong to Him. Lift your foot. Push past the fear and step over the line into Canaan. Understand that it takes courage to believe God in spite of what critics say. Be faithful. Tell someone what you know of Jesus. Be a part of the light that is about to illuminate the world. ℜ

* Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 29, 1881.

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Until He Comes

Faithful to the end

Ellen G. White

The Bible is the armory where we may equip for the struggle.

Through his long term of service, Paul had never faltered in his allegiance to his Saviour. Wherever he was—whether before scowling Pharisees, or Roman authorities; before the furious mob at Lystra, or the convicted sinners in the Macedonian dungeon; whether reasoning with the panic-stricken sailors on the shipwrecked vessel, or standing alone before Nero to plead for his life—he had never been ashamed of the cause he was advocating. The one great purpose of his Christian life had been to serve Him whose name had once filled him with contempt; and from this purpose no opposition or persecution had been able to turn him aside. His faith, made strong by effort and pure by sacrifice, upheld and strengthened him. . . .

The true minister of God will not shun hardship or responsibility. From the Source that never fails those who sincerely seek for divine power, he draws strength that enables him to meet and overcome temptation, and to perform the duties that God places upon him. The nature of the grace that he receives enlarges his capacity to know God and His Son. His soul goes out in longing desire to do acceptable service for the Master. And as he advances in the Christian pathway he becomes "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" [2 Tim. 2:1].* This grace enables him to be a faithful witness of the things that he has heard. He does not despise or neglect the knowledge that he has received from God, but commits this knowledge to faithful men, who in their turn teach others.

In this his last letter to Timothy, Paul held up before the younger worker a high ideal, pointing out the duties devolving on him as a minister of Christ. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God," the apostle wrote, "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" [verse 15]. "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" [verses 22-25].

The apostle warned Timothy against the false teachers who would seek to gain entrance into the church. "This know also," he declared, "that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy . . . ; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" [2 Tim. 3:1-5].

"Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse," he continued, "deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation. . . . All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" [verses 13-17]. God has provided abundant means for successful warfare against the evil that is in the world. The Bible is the armory where we may equip for the struggle. Our loins must be girt about with truth. Our breastplate must be righteousness. The shield of faith must be in our hand, the helmet of salvation on our brow; and with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, we are to cut our way through the obstructions and entanglements of sin.

Paul knew that there was before the church a time of great peril. He knew that faithful, earnest work would have to be done by those left in charge of the churches; and he wrote to Timothy, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" [2 Tim. 4:1, 2]. . . .

Fearing that Timothy's mild, yielding disposition might lead him to shun an essential part of his work, Paul exhorted him to be faithful in reproving sin and even to rebuke with sharpness those who were guilty of gross evils. Yet he was to do this "with all longsuffering and doctrine." He was to reveal the patience and love of Christ, explaining and enforcing his reproofs by the truths of the Word. . . .

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What the church needs in these days of peril is an army of workers who, like Paul, have educated themselves for usefulness, who have a deep experience in the things of God, and who are filled with earnestness and zeal.

By the pride of human wisdom, by contempt for the influence of the Holy Spirit, and by disrelish for the truths of God's Word, many who profess to be Christians, and who feel competent to teach others, will be led to turn away from the requirements of God. Paul declared to Timothy, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" [verses 3, 4].

The apostle does not here refer to the openly irreligious, but to the professing Christians who make inclination their guide, and thus become enslaved by self. Such are willing to listen to those doctrines only that do not rebuke their sins or condemn their pleasure-loving course. They are offended by the plain words of the faithful servants of Christ and choose teachers who praise and flatter them. . . .

God has made known His will, and it is folly for man to question that which has gone out of His lips. After Infinite Wisdom has spoken, there can be no doubtful questions for man to settle, no wavering possibilities for him to adjust. All that is required of him is a frank, earnest concurrence in the expressed will of God. Obedience is the highest dictate of reason as well as of conscience.

Paul continued his charge: "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" [verse 5]. Paul was about to finish his course, and he desired Timothy to take his place, guarding the church from the fables and heresies by which the enemy, in various ways, would endeavor to lead them from the simplicity of the gospel. He admonished him to shun all temporal pursuits and entanglements that would prevent him from giving himself wholly to his work for God; to endure with cheerfulness the opposition, reproach, and persecution to which his faithfulness would expose him; to make full proof of his ministry by employing every means within his reach of doing good to those for whom Christ died.

Paul's life was an exemplification of the truths he taught, and herein lay his power. His heart was filled with a deep, abiding sense of his responsibility, and he labored in close communion with Him who is the fountain of justice, mercy, and truth. He clung to the cross of Christ as his only guarantee of success. The love of the Saviour was the undying motive that upheld him in his conflicts with self and in his struggles against evil as in the service of Christ he pressed forward against the unfriendliness of the world and the opposition of his enemies.

What the church needs in these days of peril is an army of workers who, like Paul, have educated themselves for usefulness, who have a deep experience in the things of God, and who are filled with earnestness and zeal. Sanctified, self-sacrificing men are needed; men who will not shun trial and responsibility; men who are brave and true; men in whose hearts Christ is formed "the hope of glory" [cf. Col. 1:27], and who with lips touched with holy fire will "preach the word." For want of such workers the cause of God languishes, and fatal errors, like a deadly poison, taint the morals and blight the hopes of a large part of the human race.

As the faithful, toilworn standard-bearers are offering up their lives for the truth's sake, who will come forward to take their place? Will our young men accept the holy trust at the hands of their fathers? Are they preparing to fill the vacancies made by the death of the faithful? Will the apostle's charge be heeded, the call to duty be heard, amidst the incitements to selfishness and ambition that allure the youth?

Paul concluded his letter with personal messages to different ones and again repeated the urgent request that Timothy come to him soon, if possible before the winter. He spoke of his loneliness, caused by the desertion of some of his friends and the necessary absence of others; and lest Timothy should hesitate, fearing that the church at Ephesus might need his labors, Paul stated that he had already dispatched Tychicus to fill the vacancy.

After speaking of the scene of his trial before Nero, the desertion of his brethren, and the sustaining grace of a covenant-keeping God, Paul closed his letter by commending his beloved Timothy to the guardianship of the Chief Shepherd, who, though the undershepherds might be stricken down, would still care for His flock. ℟

*Bible texts are from the King James Version.

This article is excerpted from chapter 49, "Paul's Last Letter," of *The Acts of the Apostles*, by **Ellen G. White**. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.

ROOTED IN SCRIPTURE

Living God's mission

Abigail Duman

Have you ever dreamed of doing something for God, something great in His service, as in being a hero or changing the world? I have good news for you: If you are alive, you are called. You also have two choices—either join the ranks of Jesus, or by default be used as a tool of darkness.

Satan wants to destroy you. God wants to save you. The choice should be easy, shouldn't it? Yet why do so many people hesitate to adopt God's mission for their lives? Maybe they're afraid that it will be too difficult, or they don't want to say no to their naturally sinful human nature. Or maybe they don't realize just how real the battle between good and evil is (we hope that this week's stories will change that!).

But with God, "nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37). Do you believe that God can do great things with your life? You'd better believe it! So take up your "sword" (the Bible) and focus on your mission. If you are breathing, if you are reading or hearing these words right now—God is calling *you*.

Illustrations by Karen Jimenez Findley

WALK WITH GOD

Alone on the trail

Onward, Christian soldiers!" a big voice announced over the ring of bicycle bells and eager chatter of voices. Abby adjusted her bicycle helmet. She had been looking forward to this church bike ride for weeks now!

Before long, the group started out. Thick woods lined the paved trail on one side, and a tall chain-link fence on the other. The group crested a little hill that led to a big dip, and Abby reached the bottom first, where she disembarked to explore. That was where she spotted a bone beside the path! *I wonder if a large animal left it here,* she thought with a little shiver.

The rest of the group didn't pause, so she jumped on her bike and raced after her friends. After going for several miles, someone suggested they turn around. When she spotted her mom also making a U-turn, Abby felt a twinge of disappointment. "Do we really have to go back, Mom?"

"Honey, my legs are going to give out if we go much farther," Mom said with a laugh. "Besides, your dad and little brother are in the car in the parking lot, waiting for us."

Abby's eyes suddenly brightened. "Mom, is it all right if I ride ahead of the group?" With a fresh burst of energy she cycled around the first corner. She felt very independent and strong as she rounded the next bend; then she noticed how empty the trail was. Cars whizzed past beyond the chain-link fence, and shadows in the dark woods lengthened on her right.

Maybe I should turn around and go back, she wondered. *But no, the parking lot must be around the next bend. I'm almost there!*

Minutes passed, and no parking lot came into view. She cycled faster as she realized that she was alone on the trail, and her heart thumped when two bicyclists appeared and passed her with a nod. Then she noticed a hill ahead—and remembered the bone. How could she have forgotten? *But I've gone too far to go back,* she panicked. *I've just gone too far.*

She prayed that no wild animal prowled nearby. For a fleeting second she imagined that a mountain lion crouched beside the path. And then in a blur she was past the scary place. It felt like an eternity before she spotted the parking lot. Wonderful sight! She raced to her dad's car and explained what had happened.

Sometime later she saw a lone figure in the distance, running toward the mouth of the trail. It was Mom—breathless and crying. Abby ran to meet her. "Oh, Abby, I'm so glad that you're safe," she said as she hugged her. "Why did you go ahead of me?"

"I'm so sorry, Mama," she confessed with tear-filled eyes. "I asked you if I could bicycle ahead, didn't I?"

"You did," she said. "But you didn't wait for my reply."

Have you ever run ahead of God? Learn from Abby's error; you'll save yourself a lot of heartache and pain if you never leave to begin with! You need never walk the trail alone! The devil will whisper a lot of lies into your ears during your lifetime, so remember this: You have never gone too far to come home. It doesn't matter what you've done, what you've seen, what others have said, or what you might think—Jesus values you. "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love," He says (Jer. 31:3). He wants to be your companion. Will you walk with Him? If so, give Him your hand and your heart—and look forward to the future, because your life's mission has only begun!

Illustrations by Karen Jimenez Findley

SURRENDER MYSELF

Little is much

I imagine Matthew 14:13-21 went something like this:

"Something is in the air—I can smell it," Nathan murmured as a breeze filtered through the window.

"Hmm," Mother remarked. "Maybe it's a storm brewing over the lake."

"It's not that, Mother," he insisted. "Do you see all the people walking by? Something is happening."

Upon further investigation, Nathan was right—an intriguing, miracle-working Stranger was in the area, and people of every description were tramping in one direction. "*Pleeease,* can I go to see Him?" Nathan begged. "I want to hear Him speak."

Nathan's mother paused. "Hold on long enough for me to pack you a lunch." Before long she had a basket in her hand with a few loaves and two small fish. "Here you go, Nathan—do be careful. Don't be gone too long!"

Finding Jesus wasn't difficult. Thousands of people crowded around Him, surrounded by a field of wildflowers and tall grasses overlooking the beautiful lake. Nathan got as close to the Teacher as he dared and then sat down to listen. He listened so well that when a disciple of Jesus approached him, he barely noticed. "Pardon me, young man," a kind voice said. "Would you be willing to share your lunch with the Master?"

Nathan swallowed as he nodded and suddenly realized how empty his stomach felt. "But it's not much—just five loaves and two small fish."

The disciple smiled. "It's enough."

Nathan blinked. When he thought of the priests with their costly robes, pompous words, and countless rules, he never felt good enough for God. But the disciple's words spelled out a new sort of hope—one that said God wouldn't refuse the smallest gift when it came from the heart.

His eyes followed his lunch as it passed into Jesus' hands. When the kind Teacher smiled and locked eyes with his young face, Nathan sensed that Jesus knew everything about him and loved him still. *There's no other way to describe it!* Nathan marveled.

Jesus prayed a blessing over the lunch and then began to break the loaves into pieces. Nathan's eyes grew wide with astonishment—by now his mother's five loaves should have been used up. Yet Jesus' hands continued to draw out more loaves and fish. Thousands of people sat on the hillside and ate their fill!

Nathan gripped a barley loaf in his hands and inspected it. *I'm holding a miracle,* he thought to himself. *And to think that Jesus used what little I had to make it happen!*

Maybe sometimes you've been tempted to think that your life doesn't mean much in the grand scheme of things. But if Jesus fed more than 5,000 with a little boy's lunch, what do you think He can do with your *life* if you give it to Him?

Nathan didn't have to "grow up" to do some big thing for God. The gift of his lunch—and the gift of his heart—may have seemed small, but were priceless in Jesus' eyes. So what about you? Will you give Him your moments? Nothing is too large—or too small—to give to Jesus.

When you surrender yourself to Him, you are allowing His mighty power to work through you. This is how we can have "treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7). You are a vessel; He is the treasure. Together you make a wonderful team!

LIVE IT

The field's on fire

How you live says more about God's love than the words you speak.

Tim knew all about fires. He knew how not to start them, he knew how to put them out, and what to do if he were on fire (stop, drop, and roll). His mom taught him wildfire statistics and talked about the fires that ravaged the countryside. She even bought fire safety stickers for him to share with his friends. And most of all, she stressed that he should *never* play with matches. Out of all the boys and girls at Tim's school, he had the most knowledge about fire safety.

But deep down, Tim wanted to play with fire. On the outside he looked obedient and cooperative, but on the inside he was waiting for an opportunity—any moment when his mom might be distracted—to grab a wad of matches and slip them into his pocket. And sure enough, that day came.

Tim patted the bulge in his pocket on his way to school and thought about what he would do with the forbidden treasure. "I'll find a safe spot to strike one," he planned.

On his walk home from school, Tim passed a large field with a small barn beside the road. No one lived across the street, and when Tim sank down in the grass, he was invisible to any passersby. Eagerly he pushed the grasses aside and lit a match. The flame flickered in the breeze. Tim's eyes were aglow with fascination as the flame traveled down to the end of the matchstick. "Ow!" he exclaimed. Without thinking, he dropped the burning match into a grassy hole, where, try as he might, he could not snuff out the flame. The fire licked up the dry grasses, then escaped into the field.

Tim soon realized that there was nothing that he could do to stop the fire. With an empty pit in his stomach he walked the rest of the way home and silently entered the house.

"Hi, honey," Mom said from the kitchen. Suddenly she gasped. "I see smoke coming from the field down the road. I need to call the fire department!"

Tim ran back to the field with his mom, where perspiring men fought to stop an out-of-control blaze. The beautiful field became charred, and the barn burned to the ground. When the fire was out, Tim wasn't relieved: He realized his disobedience had cost the town a lot of money and risked people's lives. For Tim, fire safety knowledge was good, but not enough. He needed to act on what he knew.

What about you? Maybe you have a lot of knowledge about the Bible, but you're not obeying what it teaches. If, like Tim, you know what's right, but you're not living it, ask God for help! He is calling you to do more than just talk about His goodness or look obedient to His commands on the outside—He's calling you to *be* His witness. Being a witness doesn't mean that you are perfect; it means that you ask God to help you give your best. You have one life: Live it for Jesus!

Illustrations by Karen Jimenez Findley

LISTEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Danger on the woodpile

Luke scanned the yard for anything of interest. His dad and grandmother were deep in conversation beside the porch steps, and he was incredibly bored. When he spotted a large pile of firewood at the edge of the yard, his eyes brightened, and he took off in its direction.

"Don't go near the woodpile." The voice in Luke's head made him pause. *Could God be speaking to me?* He wasn't sure. Why, he was just a kid! But he did know that he wanted to climb that woodpile. I don't see any danger, he thought. He shrugged his shoulders and continued downhill until he reached a large log and began to climb.

Suddenly a loud rattling sound filled the surrounding air with a sense of alarm. Only a few feet ahead of him a long snake was curled up, preparing to strike. In an instant Luke was petrified. He had never seen a rattlesnake before in his life! Yet he instinctively knew that it was dangerous. What could he do? He began to yell as he backed away—and then, to his horror, he realized that his little brother Daniel had toddled to the woodpile after him and didn't seem to recognize the danger!

Dad came running. "A rattler!" he exclaimed. Grandmother grabbed Daniel's hand and pulled him away from the snake. Luke's heart thumped as he ran up the hill and into the house, where Mom hugged them both. "Praise God that you were saved from being bitten," she exclaimed over and over. Her hands trembled, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Mama, I heard a voice in my mind that told me not to go to the woodpile," Luke later confessed.

"That was the voice of the Holy Spirit," Mom replied. "Listen to that voice, and as you grow older, it will save you from many troubles."

"A lot of thoughts come into my brain. How do I know which ones are from the Holy Spirit?" Luke wondered.

"That's a good question," Mom replied, pausing to think. "It's important to spend time in the Bible. As you read God's words, you will learn to recognize His voice. The Holy Spirit will always tell you to do what's right, and you can test the thoughts against what you've learned in the Bible."

Luke shivered when he thought of how close he had come to the rattlesnake, and Mom placed her hand on his shoulder. "God warns us in Matthew 26:41 that we should 'watch and pray,' because we have an enemy who wants to destroy us."

"The devil."

"Yes, that's right," she nodded.

"But he's not going to win," Luke said. "Jesus wins. And I'm going to do my best to listen to His voice."

"That's a big part of watching and praying," Mom smiled. "Our only true safety is found in Jesus. When you listen to the Holy Spirit, not only are you blessed and closer to heaven because of it, but you also become a powerful witnessing tool in God's hands. That's how you can accomplish His mission for your life."

Luke thought for a moment. "I don't know exactly what God wants me to do, but I have a pretty good idea for now—listen for His directions."

Mom smiled, because Luke suddenly looked exceedingly wise for his years. "That's exactly right," she said. "Let God's Word and Spirit guide you."

PRAY AND MOVE

When Mother prayed

God is looking for humble people who are willing to go on missions for heaven—even if that means just a simple phone call, a few words, or a sincere prayer. Are you willing to stop and listen to His voice?

The weather forecast warned of an approaching storm with wind gusts of more than 60 miles (96 kilometers) per hour. As the sky darkened and the wind began to whistle, Bryce carefully guided his car home. Springtime storms were not uncommon in his area of the eastern United States, but they were rarely severe.

Back at the house, Bryce's parents sensed that this storm was an angry one. Thunder and lightning increased as strong winds tossed trees and tore off branches. "This is becoming much worse than we expected," Mom remarked. "I would feel better if I knew that Bryce wasn't driving through it."

"God's angels are with him." Dad touched her gently on the shoulder. "He's in good hands."

When the sound of the wind changed from a howl to the rumble of a driving train overhead, the couple sought shelter in the back bathroom—away from windows and outer walls—for safety. As they huddled together, they prayed for their son's safety. Then suddenly Mom raised her head. Something prompted her to do something specific. "Call Bryce. Call him now!"

"OK," Dad said as he reached for his cell phone.

Meanwhile, Bryce struggled to view the road as wind and rain buffeted the car. Windshield wipers barely kept the water off the windshield, and small, tumbling branches scratched the sides of his car. With some relief he reached the familiar road that led to his driveway. Suddenly he heard a crack, and a large tree fell with a crash—directly in front of his car. Leaves flew in every direction. "Whoa!" Bryce exclaimed. *What to do next?* He shifted his car into reverse and began to back away from the blockage. And that was when his phone rang.

It's Dad. Bryce pressed his foot on the brake and then clamped the phone to his ear. "Hello?"

Crack—crash. His car reeled with the impact of a massive tree trunk. Metal bent and glass shattered as another tree crashed through the back of his car and flattened the rear passenger section.

"Son, are you OK?" Dad asked.

Bryce blinked. "Yeah, I think so. But my car isn't—there's a tree in my back seat!"

He leaped outside and surveyed the downed tree in front of the car, and the tree on the back of it. "A few seconds more, and I would have been sitting where that second tree fell."

"Praise God for His protection," Dad breathed. "I'll come and get you."

Once Bryce safely arrived home, they reviewed every detail of the experience together with awe. In response to prayer, God convicted a mother to call her son when seconds made all the difference.

In a way, life is a storm—a clash between light and darkness, a testing time that determines whom we put our trust in. Are you turning to the One who can guide you through the storm? Listen for God's voice—a quiet, steady voice in your mind that reminds you to do right—and respond. Be ready to act when He speaks! Every second counts when it comes to working in His service! And the good news? The joy of working for the King of kings lasts *forever.*

SHARE THE MESSAGE

Angels in the graveyard

Editor's Note for Parents/Guardians: This true story includes references to spiritual conflict and supernatural themes that some children may find intense. While the events described are more dramatic than what most children experience, the Bible reminds us that the enemy often works in quiet, subtle ways to influence hearts and choices. Parents are encouraged to read the story first and talk it through with their children afterward.

"Shhh," Marguerite* whispered as wind tossed the branches of a palm tree far above her. "We're almost there."

Kisangani, a city in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is home to more than 1.6 million people—and many of them are children. In this big city beside the Congo River, spiritual battles between light and darkness are very real. Even adults are afraid of witchcraft and the dangers it can bring people involved in it. This is why one group of young people kept a dark secret—that they were being trained to be witches.

Marguerite slipped to the outskirts of town and into a graveyard where some of her friends were already waiting. The evil angels were late this evening. Night after night they personally trained Marguerite and her friends in sorcery. Marguerite liked the idea of having special "powers" and being called a witch, even though she was still a child.

"Our teachers are late tonight. I wonder what has held them up," Marguerite spoke aloud.

"Maybe they are keeping our parents fast asleep so that they do not miss us," one of her friends said.

Suddenly a flash of light enveloped the group. Instantly they knew that this presence was different. Marguerite fell to the ground and squinted as she held up a hand to shield her face. Out of the light she could see the form of a heavenly being.

"What are you doing here?" a voice spoke firmly. "You do not have time for this."

The night rituals and the hours she spent under the demons' instruction paled in comparison to the words of this new visitor.

When the children did not reply, the angel spoke again: "Jesus is coming soon."

This world is full of material that will draw you away from God. Is there anything in your life that isn't preparing you for God's kingdom—and maybe better preparing you to live in darkness? If so, put it away. God is speaking to you today: You don't have time for this. Jesus is coming soon!

That night in the graveyard changed everything for Marguerite and her friends. They told their parents everything and refused to meet the demons again. They opened their hearts to the Holy Spirit and felt a burning desire to share the angel's message with the people in Kisangani. Many churches opened their doors to hear the story from the lips of the children who wanted to tell the world that Jesus was coming soon and that no one had time to be baited by the devil's tricks. Marguerite's testimony was powerful, and many people were touched by her experience in a graveyard where heavenly angels intercepted demons. Less than a year later Marguerite attended an evangelistic series in her city and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church along with her family.

Did you know that you have a testimony to share? Do you believe that Jesus is coming soon? Look for opportunities to share what He has done for you! Maybe He's given you victory over sin or obviously protected you from danger. Just like Marguerite, be ready to listen to His voice and share what He has done for you! He will give you courage to fulfill His mission!

* Names have been changed for privacy.

Illustrations by Karen Jimenez Findley

LOVE LIKE JESUS

The canceled funeral

What does witnessing look like? It is being like Jesus. Being kind no matter how unkindly you are treated. Loving the people who are difficult to love. It doesn't mean that you are always perfect, but that you are allowing Jesus to perfectly work through you!

Ever since Tembo's heart was captured by the beauty of God's Word, he knew that he wanted to walk with God, to listen to His voice, and to stay connected with heaven through prayer. Everyone loved Tembo for being kind, thoughtful, and spirit-filled—everyone, that is, except for Juma.* Juma had disliked Tembo ever since they first met. He taunted him and whispered untrue stories behind his back. Sometimes this affected Tembo's reputation, but Tembo was always kind.

"Did you hear that Juma is very sick?" someone told Tembo one sunny Tanzanian day. "No one—not even his family—wants to be around him, for there is a very bad smell, and no one can stand being in the house except for his wife."

Tembo felt a quiet voice speak to his mind: *Go and help Juma.* Without hesitation Tembo did. To Tembo's surprise, Juma's family was waiting outside when he reached the house. "What are you doing here?" one man scoffed.

"I'm here to help Juma," Tembo said.

Illustrations by Karen Jimenez Findley

"He's not going to live much longer," another relative said. "And if you step through his door to help and he dies, we will hold you responsible for paying the funeral costs."

Tembo thought for a moment. Funerals in Tanzania could cost several thousand dollars, and he didn't have that kind of money. But he couldn't let his enemy die without knowing Jesus' love.

As soon as Tembo entered the house, the stench inside overpowered him. His stomach churned, and his lungs begged for fresh air. But when Tembo saw the terrible sore on Juma's skin, he knew that God had sent him just in time. Praying for stamina and a strong stomach, Tembo turned to Juma's wife. "I need clean clothes and water to wash his wound. Once I am finished, I will pay for transportation and get him to the hospital right away."

Juma's eyes widened, but his lips didn't move. Tembo gently cleaned the wound and did what he had promised; he paid for the hospital treatments and visited Juma often.

Days passed, and a change happened in Juma's heart. He tried to understand why Tembo would do such a thing for someone who had treated him so terribly. "When my relatives were waiting for me to die, you took the risk to try to save me," he marveled.

When Juma recovered enough to return home, Tembo accompanied him. And when they arrived, relatives were swarming around Juma's house, expecting his funeral. They also expected Tembo to pay according to their agreement. As they walked into the circle of relatives, Juma pointed to his new friend, Tembo: "Do you see this man? He showed me a love that even my relatives did not have. *He* has become my family." The funeral didn't happen, and the relatives went home. Because of Tembo's selfless act of love, Juma came to know God too.

Do you want to be a missionary, maybe allow God to use you to change the world? If so, love Him first and best—and loving others will happen naturally. Start in your corner of the world, wherever that is, and love the people that He places in your path, whoever they are. Walk with purpose and "hold fast" to your faith (Rev. 3:11). Not a gift, a prayer, or a moment is wasted in the service for the King of kings!

* Names have been changed for privacy.

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