AT Update
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Reports on contemporary headlines, commentary & analysis, blogs, special features, reviews, cartoons, and other news items ...

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Update on New Adventist Today Website!

The new Atoday.com website is being developed by an experienced web hosting and development company, located near Berrien Springs, Michigan. The company, SimpleUpdates, is providing expertise by employees who have worked on hundreds of other electronic development projects.

Transferring pertinent data to the new website is underway by a team of dedicated people. After May 1, when you log in for your first visit to the new website, identification will be by your last name. However, this does bring the challenge of multiple users with the same last name and steps are in place...
to make this a two-or-three-step recognition system, to avoid confusion.

Following the first time you access your Atoday account on the new site, your current email address will become your new username - there is no choice on this one. At the same time you will choose a new password. To remember these changes a good suggestion is to write this information down as you go through the initial registration.

A separate sign-in will be required to access the forum. Non-subscribers, who want to make comments on the new site, will also be required to sign in. This is where one must choose a user-handle, which can be a non-de-plume or real name and will show on comments posted. Plan now to visit www.Atoday.com in early May.

Evangelism for the Post Modern World

By Monte Sahlin, AToday Blogger

Three books by conservative Protestant writers (published in recent years) have begun to describe the essential methodology for evangelism in the post modern world. Assuming you care about the cause of Christ, I highly recommend that you read these books and reflect on your own practice as well as those of your local church and the ministries you choose to support.

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Melissa Howell - Still Wondering Whether We're Saved

Quite a few years ago now, we learned from our Valuegenesis studies that the assurance of grace was one of the largest problem areas in our teenagers and young people. They admitted to believing we are saved by grace, but also admitted to feeling like they had to work their way into heaven.

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**Connecting like Jesus: Practices for Healing, Teaching and Preaching** by Tony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling (2010, Jossey-Bass) maps the terrain of personal and group evangelism. The authors use the term “soul healing” to describe the process by which nonbelievers and nominal Christians are brought to a significant relationship with Christ, one that meets their own personal needs and empowers/compels them to express their faith in the secular world. It is intended as a description of the methods for making disciples in our contemporary, highly secularized context.

Part one gives an overview of a personal evangelism that is focused on spirituality instead of religion. It is amazing the degree to which is follows the contours of Ellen White’s famous paradigm for Adventist evangelism in *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143. Notice that the metaphor “healing” is central to both volumes, despite the 107 years between their publication dates.

Part two is the most substantial and is primarily the work of coauthor Mary Darling. (A professor of communication at Spring Arbor University.) There are chapters on listening, asking questions, bridging conflict, narrative conservation, etc. Part three is Tony’s contribution. He focuses on preaching in group contexts, including a priceless section on the preacher as prophet and why this role is central to actual conveyance of the gospel. There is also a valuable appendix with concise notes on how to use this volume as a textbook for 12 weeks of small group discussions or a seminar.

**God Next Door: Spirituality & Mission in the Neighbourhood** by Simon Holt (2008, Acorn Press) was published in Australia and only recently became available in the U.S., as one might guess from the spelling. It takes a new approach to doing the work of Jesus in the condo building or block where you live. The first three chapters focus on the way neighborhoods have changed, including a very helpful chapter on suburbs. The next two chapters unpack a Biblical theology of “neighbor,” one of the central themes of Jesus. It clearly documents that a person who ignores their neighbors—who do not know the names of the people who live next door to them, as is true for the vast majority of Evangelical Christians in America’s suburbs—cannot be considered authentic followers of Jesus.

The second half of the book includes four chapters on core “disciplines of engagement.” These begin with “spiritual dawdling” or what Ellen White calls “mingling.” Parties (literally block parties, inviting neighbors into your back yard or your home, etc.) are a primary tool and the focus of the second chapter. A chapter entitled “Helping Communities Flourish” describes how to support and engage in small-scale community development and efforts to improve the wellness or quality of life among your neighbors. A final chapter describes appropriate methods to open the topic of spiritual life among your neighbors.

**The Missional Entrepreneur: Principles and Practices for Business as Mission** by Mark Russell (2010, New Hope Publishers) recognizes the facts that many middle class people today are opting out of jobs in large corporations to make a living with a small business that they own and that the process of starting a small business is very demanding and consumes almost all the waking hours during the early years. How can your small business be an activity that conveys the good news of Jesus Christ?

The example of Paul in the New Testament is used to provide a Bible foundation. He was a “tent-maker missionary,” that is he sometimes practiced his trade as a tent maker to make a living and provide a context for personal evangelism while keeping focused on his primary purpose of planting churches in unreached cities. Acts 18 gives a good example of this process, although it is in the background of the entire Book of Acts and all of the Pauline epistles.

There is a large section on motivations and approaches which recognize that there can be conflicts between making profits and representing the message of Christ. Small enterprises have to find a viable business model and if they are truly missional, they also have to find a viable way of being an authentic witness. The author could have dealt more boldly with this minefield, but he does not pass it by on the other side of the street. There is also an excellent section on “best practices.”

This book should be required reading for every member of ASI (Adventist-laymen’s Services & Industries, the principal coalition of small business owners in the Adventist movement). It focuses less on the area of personal evangelism that is often the case for ASI members and more on the strategic issues of how to make an enterprise truly mission-driven, impacting the world for Jesus.

Perhaps you don’t operate in a secular context or the post modern world, but it would still be a good idea for you to take a look at these books. It will give you a detailed picture of the cutting edge of Christian missionary work.
"Make a place for me, Mommy!" my son worriedly begs as he approaches me, his face full of concern and stress. It doesn’t matter where I am sitting -- whether in our plush chaise lounge, the small wingback by the fire, or in a single wooden chair at the table -- whenever he wants to sit on my lap, he immediately starts to worry that there may not be enough room for him. He is afraid there is not a place for him here, with me. He feels doubtful about whether or not I will be able to make one, worried that there will not in fact be space for his little body. His tiny blonde eyebrows furrow together in a frown as he repeats his earnest request multiple times, "Mommy, is there a place for me? Make a place for me!"

What he doesn’t know is that, no matter the seat and no matter the day, there will always be a place on my lap for him, for as long as he wants one. I would sit in any uncomfortable position imaginable or contort my body into all sorts of possible twists, for the sole joy of holding my little boy on my lap -- and gladly remain that way for hours. He is concerned there might not be a place for him, but what he doesn’t understand is that I would do ANYTHING at all to ensure a place for him with me.

I think my son is already learning a very Adventist way to approach God. Though we claim to be a people who believe in grace, the fears of legalism can still be found running rampant in us. Ask a group of any ten people in this church if they are saved -- especially any ten teenagers -- and often almost half of them will admit that they do not feel saved, clarifying that they feel this way because they have not yet cleaned up their lives. We know in our heads that we are saved by grace, but for some reason, Adventists are still afraid of measuring works. Maybe we haven’t done enough, changed enough, given up enough. Maybe there won’t be a place for us. Salvation is by grace through faith, but faith without works is dead, so maybe -- maybe our works aren’t enough...

Quite a few years ago now, we learned from our Valuegenesis studies that the assurance of grace was one of the largest problem areas in our teenagers and young people. They admitted to believing we are saved by grace, but also admitted to feeling like they had to work their way into heaven. There was a blatant discrepancy. Ten years later, when Valuegenesis conducted and published another study, the numbers had gotten better - more kids were understanding grace -- but there were still so many who didn’t believe there was a place for them.

I’ve been told by older folks that this legalism is in our church because of "what happened in the fifties," or something like that. Apparently, our church went through a time of being outrageously focused on works and behavior and rules, and this overshadowed grace in a big way. Today, many fear we are swinging the opposite direction -- we are so intent on forgetting works and uplifting grace instead that we are in danger of making it seem cheap, easy, and free (it is free, by the way). What I am wondering is, if these strands of legalism, this fear of being lost and this misunderstanding of salvation -- will these things always be a part of our church? What is still perpetuating them...Why are they still here?

One clarification that might be helpful to teach -- as often as we can -- is the difference between justification and sanctification. When we accept Jesus Christ’s sacrifice in our place, we are justified before God as if we are as righteous as He is. After this, after salvation, we continue to grow in our walk with Jesus for the rest of our lives -- that’s sanctification. This is the place where we choose to stop eating little shrimps, stop lusting after our married co-workers, start having a more consistent devotional life, and so on. We try to live out the Ten Commandments -- keep Sabbath, clear out idols, stop stealing music off the internet, stop hating people. My professor Sylvester Case at Union College defined the Ten Commandments to us as "the standard of living for saved people." Notice the order there: We change because we want to, in grateful response to already being saved. Maybe we forget this order?

Even with all of this in mind, sometimes I wonder if it all doesn’t just come down to the possibility that we have an inaccurate picture of God. When this church strives to apply the scriptures into practical-life do’s and don’ts, do we somehow come to see Jesus as only a God of do’s and don’ts? When we call sinners to leave their evil habits so they can enjoy the lives of freedom that Christ has made possible for us, do we instead hear that we aren’t saved because of our habits? Somehow, do we still feel like we have to beg and plead and prodd God, "Please! Make a place for me!!"

If so, we have forgotten perhaps the greatest core truth of Who God is: That He would stop at nothing to see us saved. He would die a horrific death and suffer unimaginable agony and loss, sparing no expense to Himself, just for the possibility and the promise of our company. For as long as we want it, there is a place in heaven for us, thanks to Jesus. I’m thinking of the thief on the cross.... "Remember me when you come....make a place for me..." And Jesus’ answer, in short: "Okay. Done."

I know -- that sounds too easy -- yeah, I’m a cradle Adventist too. I’m afraid to believe it can be that simple. But people...what if it is?