No Turning Back

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Editorial - The Point of No Return

Sebastien Braxton

What do you do when the light turns yellow? If you’re impatient on the road like I am, you probably apply the gas appropriately and hurry through the intersection to avoid waiting at a red light. The Lord will teach us patience. However, according to the law, every driver has to stop at a yellow light, unless he or she is too close to stop safely. Debate wages over what exactly is “too close” to stop, yet there is agreement that “too close” is when your vehicle passes the point of no return. While the point of no return varies due to diverse factors, an endeavor to stop after this point presents potentially fatal dangers to cross traffic and even your own life.

Erich Bridges, a global correspondent for the Baptist International Mission Board, wrote an article regarding Arab converts heading deep into the Sahara to tell the story of Christ to hostile nomad camps. As they left their camp, there was a point when they could still see their wives and children waving good-bye, faint silhouettes of their tents, and camel footprints in the sand. Yet, once these safe and comforting visions were out of view, the point had been reached: the point of no return. They were too far into Sahara territory to turn back. Upon entrance to the first camp, the leader, Shama, was falsely accused of speaking evil of the Prophet Mohammed and was thus beaten with rods and stabbed in the leg. Saved by his fellow missionaries, his life was spared, and his wound was sewn up with horsehair.

Were his wounds reason enough to retreat? How could he turn back after suffering such things? He had come too far to turn back. Had he journeyed deep into the Sahara just to suffer a stab wound and merciless beatings? No, he had journeyed to tell the story of Jesus. He had journeyed to win souls. Thus, he kept going. He had passed the point of no return. It would be foolish and unsafe to turn back. Every ounce of persecution urged him on as if to prevent the difficulties and suffering from being in vain.

Is it not so with us? All that we have suffered in life? All that we have spent, donated, participated in, preached, endured, accepted, risen above, lost, gained, reminds us that we have passed the point of no return. We have had too many sleepless nights. We have borne too many temptations. We have gained too many victories, been inspired by too many sermons, responded to too many appeals, experienced too many blessings, attended too many conferences, and sacrificed too much to turn back now.

As a generation, perhaps the last generation, we must see that we are well beyond the point of no return. All the fulfilled prophetic signs plead with us to bring about the last sign of the end: the gospel to every nation as a witness. Each sign of the end has borne its appointed witness in fulfillment of the prophetic words of Jesus. Previous generations had the knowledge that we have today, but failed to finish the work. Now is the time for my generation to act upon present truth and be faithful to the commission! It is going to be done by a generation that fully embraces the principles that moved the heart of Jesus from the throne of heaven to the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary today. Jesus would stop at nothing to save. No sacrifice was large enough. No suffering was painful enough. No path was dark enough.
The Last Day
A last day brings us to a place of remembrance and nostalgia. Imagine Abraham’s last day in Ur of Chaldees with his father and brother. Imagine Jesus’ last day in the carpenter shop before heading to the Jordan to be baptized by John. Imagine Jesus’ last day with His disciples before the Ascension. Celebrations tend to be the order of the day when it comes to the last day of a pastor at his church or a professor at his school.

But there was one last day where I don’t imagine a celebration was held: Jesus’ last day in heaven before the incarnation. How many angels and unfallen beings did Jesus need to embrace? What did the Father and Son say to each other before Jesus took flesh upon Himself? Was Jesus looking back as He walked through the pearly gates? No! Furthermore, Jesus’ decision to become a man was not a temporary, for the moment change. According to The Desire of Ages, when God gave Jesus to us on the cross and in human flesh, He gave Him forever.³

This leads us to realize that Jesus made choices and sacrifices out of love for God and man that changed Him forever. He wasn’t afraid to commit to a life-altering sacrifice. Are we? What have we given to God forever?

When we look at the life of Jesus, we see a life that was lived not out of fear of pain, but fear of disobedience. This was a life that would never turn back; a life that every Christian is bidden by his own profession to follow. Are you ready?

No turning back. You’ve already passed the point of no return.
For this year’s issue, the Lord provided extremely powerful and cogent articles on this year’s GYC theme: No Turning Back. We begin with our very own GC president addressing the importance of our distinctiveness as a church and that our rich heritage makes it impossible to turn back. We then move to Jeffrey Rosario, who reminds us that we should get angry when we see ourselves and our church turning back. Thando Malambo clearly articulates that point of no return as a point of absolute surrender and abandon as exemplified by Jesus and the apostles. Dr. Pipim provides us with an exegetical guide on how to rightly view unjust suffering, which tends to be our primary reason for turning back from radical commitment to Jesus. Dr. Damsteegt masterfully paints the picture of the shaking, clears up misconceptions, and challenges us to take a bold stand coupled with unyielding sacrifice. Dr. Olatunji’s overview of the biblical and spirit of prophecy basis for our standards on modesty and adornment is concise and Christ-centered. We end with a play on our theme by David Asscherick, teaching us when to turn back from our turning back, and reminding us of the beautiful promise that it is possible to never backslide by the power of the Spirit.

May the Lord help us to never turn back.

1 http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=24150
2 Matthew 24:14
3 The Desires of Ages, 25
Thank you for that beautiful reminder of the love of God. He loves you and me with an everlasting love that will not let us go (Jeremiah 31:3). 1 John 4:16 declares that “God is love.” God’s love is the whole reason why we are the great Advent movement … why we can celebrate 150 years of the name “Seventh-day Adventist.” God’s love propels us to tell others about Him. It shapes our lives and our response to His wonderful law. His love for us exceeds anything we can imagine. Christ died on the cross to save us and provide us with eternal life … because He loves us. The “Conflict of the Ages” series, written by Ellen White, begins—in Patriarchs and Prophets with the very first words of “God is love” and ends on the last page of The Great Controversy with the [same] last words, “God is love.” We are assembled here in this General Conference headquarters auditorium as God’s world leadership only because of God’s great love for us and His grace. For this great love to us, we praise God’s wonderful name.

The Importance God Places on Names
Names are so important. Scripture reveals that from the very foundation of the world, names have been of special interest to the Lord. For instance, have you ever noticed that several times during the days of Creation, as God would bring forth a new handiwork He would also give it a name?

- Day 1: After creating light, the Bible records that, “God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night” (Gen. 1:5).
- Day 2: After creating the firmament by dividing the waters above from the waters below, the Bible says, “And God called the firmament Heaven” (Gen. 1:8).
- Day 3: After gathering the waters together and letting dry land appear, we read, “God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas” (Gen. 1:10).

Significantly, as an extension of the Creation naming process and as an indication of his divinely given authority we see in Genesis 2 that the Lord entrusted Adam with the responsibility of naming all the other living creatures of the earth. Of course, the culmination of God’s creative authority was saved for the seventh day of special rest, which the Lord blessed, sanctified and named “the Sabbath.”

Names of Individuals
God has made it clear that His own name is not to be taken lightly as one of the Ten Commandments is a decree to reverence the name of the Lord. Sacred history also reveals God’s interest in the names of certain other individuals. For example …

- Abraham, the father of the faithful, and his wife, Sarah, were once merely Abram and Sarai before God renamed them.
- After his night of physical and spiritual wrestling, the Lord changed “Jacob” to “Israel,” a name clearly associated with the name of God.
• At his conversion on the road to Damascus, “Saul,” the enemy of Christ, becomes “Paul,” the emissary for Christ.
• Daniel, though given the name Belteshazzar by his Babylonian captors, refused to refer to himself by that name because his Hebrew name, meaning “God is my judge,” was a standing rebuke to the heathenism in which he was immersed.
• Then, of course, there was the naming of John the Baptist ... this powerful forerunner of Christ.

John the Baptist and the Seventh-day Adventist Church
John’s Name and Mission
While burning incense in the temple, Zacharias the priest was frightened by the sudden appearance of an angel as recorded in Luke 1:13-17. “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ’to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Verses 59-66 record the people’s amazement that although there was no family precedent, Zacharias and Elizabeth remained faithful to the Lord’s instruction and named their little boy John. Now the name John means “Jehovah is gracious.” That special name was chosen by God because of the special work with which John would be entrusted. As the appointed forerunner of Christ, John’s name was a continual testimony of the indescribable grace of God surrendering His one and only Son to become the means of our salvation. What a wonderful God of love!

Our Name and Mission: Practical Ministry
Back to the description of John the Baptist and his work ... it sounds so much like the description of Seventh-day Adventists and their work. Like John, we have been called to prepare people for the Lord’s coming. We have been given a special work of proclaiming the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14—lifting up Christ, His righteousness and the true worship of God. We are to tell the world of the great love of God in providing the hope of salvation through Christ’s death on the cross and His ministry of intercession and judgment in the heavenly sanctuary. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been set apart as reformers preparing the way of the Lord. We’re to be modern-day Elijahs, bringing reconciliation to families and communities as Malachi 4:5 points out—turning the hearts of the fathers to the children. We’re to live lives of Christ-like selfless service to others. In so doing, we are to follow “Christ’s method[s] alone,” which Mrs. White has outlined so beautifully in The Ministry of Healing, page 143. “The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” Like Christ and His forerunner, our actions should speak louder than our words. As Seventh-day Adventists, let us witness through practical medical missionary work, doing good for others in relation to their physical, social, mental, and spiritual health. A glass of cold water for a thirsty person in Christ’s name is a wonderful witness. The Seventhday Adventist name—and by extension ADRA and Community Services and many other activities—should be synonymous with helping the needy in practical ways with food, shelter, encouragement and visitation in homes or schools or prisons or wherever someone is in need. Our humble lifestyle and service to others in various acts of kindness will speak volumes of the love of God as John did when he proclaimed the goodness of God and lived his name, “Jehovah is gracious.”

Our Name and Mission: Sanctified Living
As did John, we are to live our name by exemplifying a lifestyle that shuns alcohol and other such harmful substances like tobacco and caffeine. We are to live the upright, simple, godly lives of serious people anticipating Christ’s return. Through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to pursue wholesome and balanced lives, characterized by a healthy vegetarian diet, modest and becoming dress, a strong work ethic, good time management, and a winsome cheerfulness that will draw people to the Lord. We should be careful about what we watch, read and listen to; we should listen and watch and read only those things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy.

We, like John before us, are to be filled with the Holy Spirit as we announce the soon coming of Christ. We are to plead with the Lord for that genuine revival and reformation that comes only from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in latter rain proportions.
If we humble ourselves before the Lord, I believe we will see the fulfillment of Joel 2:28 where God promises to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Under the power of His Holy Spirit, we are to be messengers for the Lord, instructing people in the true worship of God and pointing all to Christ and His righteousness—how He justifies us and sanctifies us demonstrated in our lives of dedication to Him. There is power in the name of the Lord!

Power in the Name of the Lord
As Peter proclaimed to the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:12, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Similarly, John declared in John 1:12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” Speaking of Christ, Paul proclaimed in Philippians 2:9, “God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.” David lifted up the name of God above all powers when he defiantly proclaimed in Psalm 20:7, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: But we will remember the name of the Lord our God.” As Peter and Paul and David remembered the name of the Lord, and as John remembered his own name and its meaning, we must never forget the significance of our God-given name.

“Remember Your Name!”
Remember your name, Seventh-day Adventist! We’re currently commemorating the 150th anniversary of the name “Seventh-day Adventist.” On October 1, 1860, in Battle Creek, Michigan, a special meeting took place, as we heard last night, to discuss the need to choose a name. God knew that His remnant people needed a distinctive name that would identify them as those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus” as indicated in Revelation 12:17. The selection of the name “Seventh-day Adventist” came after the pillars of our faith—our beliefs—had been established through intensive study and consecrated prayer. Little did the pioneers know that this movement would grow to encompass the world in multiple languages and approximately 210 countries.

Young People
In those early days, when Bible study was the central feature of the movement, the Seventh-day Adventist movement was primarily led by young people. In light of that fact, I implore our Seventh-day Adventist young people today to stand up for Bible truth and reclaim the great spiritual legacy. Get involved in your local church, in missionary work, and in the strong proclamation of truth through personal witness and public expression. Tell your pastors, youth leaders, [and] teachers that you want solid biblical and Spirit of Prophecy teaching and preaching. Avoid the tremendous temptation to merely entertain yourselves, but instead be active in service to others. Don’t fill your minds with music that does not glorify the Lord, but rather keep a song of praise to God in your heart. Young people, take control of your lives, help return the Seventh-day Adventist movement to primitive godliness. Resist the urge to fasten your faith to the shifting sands of mystical experience. Instead, build a foundation upon the solid rock of God’s Word and establish yourselves on a clear “thus saith the Lord.”

Remember your name, Seventh-day Adventist! Our name was developed out of intensive Bible study. We believe in Sola Scriptura; that the Bible is our foundation and only rule of faith. Seventh-day Adventists have long held an appreciation for deeper truth and inquisitive approaches to theological and prophetic understanding. However, as the early believers who formed into the Seventh-day Adventist Church studied the Bible, prayed earnestly for truth, and were led by the Holy Spirit, they discovered the biblical beliefs and pillars of our faith that we hold dear today. These dedicated pioneers, in simple faith, took the Bible as it reads, even when it led them away from some of the most widely accepted errors popular in the churches of that day. We must remain steadfast to such a determined belief in the clear teaching of God’s Word. Sister White encourages us in Christ’s Object Lessons, page 79, that, “As in earlier ages, the special truths for this time are found, not with the ecclesiastical authorities, but with men and women who are not too learned [and not] too wise to believe the word of God.” We describe these precious truths as fundamental beliefs and they are just that—fundamental! As church workers—pastors, teachers, health workers, literature evangelists, Bible workers, office employees, departmental directors, administrators and others—let us uphold those twenty-eight fundamental beliefs that are rooted exclusively in Scripture.

It is amazing to me how some people want to claim that Seventhday Adventists use the Spirit of Prophecy in place of the Bible. Nothing could be further from the truth! Paul’s declaration in 2 Timothy
3:15 that the Scriptures "are able to make you wise unto salvation" remains true today. But just as it was since Bible times, the Spirit of Prophecy is one of the greatest heavenly gifts God gives God's people. That gift has been poured out upon this end-time movement not to replace Scripture but to amplify its meaning and enlighten our minds to more clearly understand and more correctly apply God's Word. When Bible study is neglected and the guidance of the Spirit of Prophecy is refused, you lose respect for the clear biblical truths of this Advent movement.

Remember your name, Seventh-day Adventist! Every time you say it, you preach a sermon! When you share with the public in writing or in speech, don't just refer to yourself as an "Adventist" or hide behind the abbreviation "SDA." Every time you say, "I am a Seventh-day Adventist" you preach a sermon. Never, never be ashamed of our name! When our church began, many names were suggested and considered, but when the name "Seventh-day Adventist" was discussed, God impressed church leaders that that name was best. Addressing the tendency to shy away from our distinctive name, Ellen White contends in *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, page 384, "We are Seventh-day Adventists. Are we ashamed of our name? We answer, 'No, no! We are not. It is the name the Lord has given us. It points out the truth that is to be the test of the churches.'"

As 21st century Seventh-day Adventists living at the close of earth's history, let us not hide our name. Churches, institutions, organizations and church members, use and share your name. Don't invent some generic, non-distinctive name for your local church that hides the fact that you are a Seventh-day Adventist. Say who you are and with that name preach a two-word sermon to everyone who passes your church.

**Creation**

*Remember your name, Seventh-day Adventist!* It is so distinctive. The "seventh-day" refers to God's power in creating this earth in six literal, consecutive, contiguous, 24-hour days and capping it with a memorial of that creation, the seventh-day Sabbath. This reminds us that we are a direct creation of God and not some chance anomaly of some impersonal evolutionary process. Saying you are a Seventh-day Adventist identifies you as a believer of this truth that is made so plain in Scripture! God has commanded us in Exodus 20:8-11 to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh-day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it." Listen to what Ellen White says in *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, page 385 about attempts to deemphasize our distinctive belief and understanding."I was told that men will employ every policy to make less prominent the difference between the faith of Seventh-day Adventists and those who observe the first day of the week. In this controversy the whole world will be engaged, and the time is short. This is no time to haul down our colors."

**Sabbath**

As Seventh-day Adventists living on the very brink of eternity we are not to minimize our "seventh-day" distinctiveness, we are to accentuate it, giving the trumpet a certain sound. We are told in the same book [*Selected Messages*, vol. 2] page 370, that, "The Lord has permitted the enemy of truth to make a determined effort against the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. He designs by this means to awaken a decided interest in that question which is a test for the last days. This will open the way for the third angel's message to be proclaimed with power."

The third angel shows us that the Sabbath will be God's special seal or sign of His people in the last days and anyone worshipping on another day than the seventh-day Sabbath will receive the mark of the beast. That is how important the Sabbath is to God and how important it should be for us. Therefore, we should not align ourselves with any other religious organizations or ecumenical bodies. Of course, we should show ourselves friendly and treat all with respect, but we are cautioned in the same book, *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, page 371, that, "There is to be no compromise with those who make void the law of God. It is not safe to rely upon them as counselors. Our testimony is not to be less decided now than formerly; our real position is not to be cloaked in order to please the world's great men. They may desire us to unite with them and accept their plans, and may make propositions in regard to our course of action which may give the enemy an advantage over us. 'Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; (Isaiah 8:12). While we should not seek for controversy, and
should not needlessly offend, we must present the truth clearly and decidedly, and stand firm to what 
God has taught us in His Word. You are not to look to the world in order to learn what you shall write and 
publish or what you shall speak.” The Bible tells us 2 Chronicles 20:20 to “Believe in the Lord your God, 
and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper.”

Second Coming
In the same way that “Seventh-day” reminds us of where we came from, as Artur [Ste] explained to 
us this morning, “Adventist” tells us where we are going. We are waiting for the imminent return of our 
Lord Jesus Christ, and look forward to it as the culmination of all of earth’s history. The literal return of 
Christ, the Blessed Hope, is the great objective and goal of every Seventh-day Adventist. Let the pulpits 
of all Seventh-day Adventist churches ring with the loud and exciting proclamation that Jesus is coming 
soon! Seventh-day Adventist preachers and elders ... preach on the second coming of Jesus Christ, not 
just once in a while, but often! Remind our members and tell the public that we are awaiting expectantly 
the soon return of our Creator and Redeemer ... the King of kings. Tell them that every eye will see this 
incredible return of Jesus and that He will not set foot on this earth but that we arise to meet Him in the 
air. Unashamedly proclaim those precious words of Paul found in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, “For the Lord 
Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of 
God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together 
with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore 
comfort one another with these words.” That powerful, heaven-sent name, ”Seventh-day Adventist,” is a 
two-word sermon of hope. It points to God as the Author and Finisher of our faith. It uplifts Christ in all 
is beauty. It proclaims the great controversy theme from the beginning to the end.

Personal Experience
A few weeks ago I boarded a flight from San Juan, Puerto Rico. We had just concluded a good session of 
the Puerto Rican Union, and just prior to that a fine visit to Venezuela to celebrate the 100th anniversary 
of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in that dynamic country. Although I had been traveling with some 
of our church leaders, I was now on my own. As I settled into my seat, I thought I would work the entire 
trip catching up on all my email, but God had another plan. A family of four came down the aisle and sat 
in the seats behind me and beside me. After introducing himself, the father, who was seated next to me, 
explained that he was a volunteer and believer in a branch of a large non-Christian religion and 
foundation. He asked me if I knew about their spiritual leader and humanitarian philanthropist. I told 
him I knew something and he went on to explain the humanitarian work of the foundation of which he 
was a volunteer. He asked me what I did. I told him I was a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist 
Church. He didn’t know much about Christianity and nothing about the Seventh-day Adventists. So I 
used our name to explain the seventh-day Sabbath and the second advent of Christ. I explained about 
Jesus as our Savior. He was very receptive. That brief introduction opened up a conversation in which I 
was able to share many of our wonderful beliefs for a considerable amount of time during that flight, all 
because of our distinctive name. When parting, I left him with several pieces of literature which I carry 
in by briefcase, as many of you do, I’m sure.

How Many More Anniversaries?
We are celebrating the 150th anniversary of our wonderful name that preaches a sermon every time we 
say it. And as joyous as it is to recognize that God has sustained us these many years, such an event 
should generate a certain degree of uneasiness and more than a little cognitive dissonance in our minds. 
Think about it. How can a movement, whose sole mission is to prepare the world for the soon 
coming of Jesus, rejoice in the 150th anniversary of its distinctive name? How many more anniversaries must we 
concede? How long will this movement continue before the Lord returns? I believe it is high time that we 
allow this precious name, Seventh-day Adventist, to represent our true identity as God’s remnant 
person. Now is the time for us to be the human voice of God, calling people out of spiritual Babylon as 
indicated in Revelation 14 and Revelation 18. In a culture steeped in pluralism, relativism, humanism 
and hedonism, God has called Seventh-day Adventists to be a counterculture, endtime movement in 
which every member—in humble Christ-like confidence—is willing to stand for the right though the 
heavens fall. My brothers and sisters, such a mighty movement is possible only through the power of the 
Holy Spirit. We, as Seventh-day Adventists, must surrender our pride and die to self as we lift up Jesus 
as the only hope of humankind. Are we ready to plead in prayer for a revival and reformation that can 
only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit? Are we truly ready to allow God to do what He has wanted to 
do for decades for His remnant people ... to pour out the Holy Spirit and finish the work in this 
generation?
I urge each of us in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to unite through the power of the Holy Spirit in finishing the work entrusted to us. Let us press together, everyone working in a united effort, both the organized church, its institutions, and other entities and the supporting ministries, many of which belong to that wonderful organization called ASI, that work side by side with the official church structure. Let me thank supporting ministries and appeal to you to continue to use your fine ministries and projects to work even more closely with the evangelistic plans of the church in a renewed, cooperative, Holy Spirit led outreach to “Tell the World” as we plead with the Lord for revival and reformation, as we unify our efforts to reach every corner of the world with the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 and the call of the angel of Revelation 18. Let us step out in faith where God is opening doors. Let us reach into the great cities of the world in a renewed emphasis on urban evangelism as outlined by the Spirit of Prophecy, using medical missionary work, public and personal evangelism and every type of media opportunity. Remember this wonderful quotation from Testimonies to the Church, vol. 9, page 116, sent to me by a leader of a faithful supporting ministry, “The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.”

**Remember Your Name!**

Let us search our hearts today and remember our name ... I make a special appeal to those who are discouraged, frustrated, despondent, or perhaps distant from the church or the Lord. Remember Your Name!

To those, including us as leaders, who at times have not followed God’s guidance in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy or the prompting of the Holy Spirit, but have willfully followed our own way and made the politically correct decision instead of standing courageously for what we knew to be right: we must all resolve to submit ourselves humbly before the Lord and remember your name.

To those of us who have neglected consistent Bible study and prayer and allowed even good things to crowd out Jesus; to those who have allowed television, popular music, hobbies, the Internet, video games, interschool sports, and a myriad of other things to crowd out time for the Lord: Remember your name! Refocus on Jesus, His word, prayer, and the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy.

To those who have forgotten that practical Christian service is the inevitable expression of your relationship with God: Remember your name!

To those who find themselves drifting far from the theological center of the Word and the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Remember your name!

To young people who are caught up in living life in the fast lane with little regard for the church: Remember your name and come home.

To those who are older and have become fossilized and static and stale in their Christian experience, which probably includes a lot of us: Remember your name!

To independent groups or ministries who have found themselves somewhat distant from official church connection and have accepted tithe for support. Contact your local church and local conference and return to a warm and appropriate relationship, refusing to accept tithe and encouraging members to return their tithe through the storehouse of the local church. Remember your name!

To church members who are bitter or angry because another church member offended you, and to churches where there are open fights, jealousies and tensions: Remember your name and implement God’s ministry of reconciliation and unity outlined in Matthew 18, John 17, and 2 Corinthians 5. Thank you, Elder [Jan] Paulsen, for your words last night urging us to be unified in Christ.

And how will we remember our name? How will we unite to finish God’s work? How will we fulfill Christ’s prayer for unity? How will we avoid more bittersweet anniversaries? When will we see God’s church filled with incredible Holy Spirit power? When will we go home to heaven?

I believe the Word of the Lord to Solomon is His word to us today found in 2 Chronicles 7:14, a familiar
text, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Since we have a name given by God, we must humble ourselves, pray, seek God, and be revived and reformed through His power. The book of Joel, chapter 2 and verses 12-13 tells us to "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, not your garments; Return to the Lord your God." We also see in verses 15-17 the command to "Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast. Call a sacred assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders ... let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, 'Spare Your people, O Lord.'" Further on in verse 23 we read the promised results of such consecrated contrition. "Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you—the former rain, and the latter rain." In verses 28-32 the Lord graciously continues, saying, "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. On My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord and whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant who the Lord calls."

Brothers and sisters, we are living in these days as described by the prophet Joel. We are living in the time when the Lord wants to pour out the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. It is now time for God's church to receive the latter rain experience. We need to plead with the Lord for this experience and the finishing of God's work through His power. Seventh-day Adventists, remember your name. Hosea 6:1-3 tells us, "Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has tom, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth." Brothers and sisters, we need the latter rain of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the three angels' messages with power so Jesus can come. We need revival and reformation through the power of the Holy Spirit. We need changed lives.

In Selected Messages, vol. 1, page 121, in the chapter entitled "Calls for a Revival," we are counseled that, "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work." Continuing on it says, "Let the church arise, and repent of her backslidings before God. Let the watchmen awake, and give the trumpet a certain sound. ... The church must arouse to action. The Spirit of God can never come in until she prepares the way. There should be earnest searching of heart. There should be united, persevering prayer, and through faith a claiming of the promises of God. We have not the first reason for self-congratulations and selfexaltation. We should humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God."

I recently had the privilege of spending time in Battle Creek, the site of our 1901 General Conference Session. There were two things on God's agenda for 1901: reorganization of the church and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to enable that structure to finish the work. As a result of Ellen White's pleading, the agenda for that General Conference was set aside and the church structure was reorganized to produce the conference and union structure that we have today. It is a good organizational structure and will serve us well for the future. But God's second agenda item never happened, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is still on His agenda.

Ellen White had a vision in 1903 entitled "What Might Have Been." You can read about that vision in Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, pages 104-106. On page 104 she says, "And the Holy Spirit was not imparted." Why did this not take place? Ellen White gave three reasons: 1) The leaders who had great light did not walk in the light ... there was unbelief at the General Conference and in the Review and Herald. 2) A break was not made with the past mistakes and only lip service was given to what God wanted. 3) The leaders did not humble themselves. There was pride and the desire for power into their work. We read that, "Men did not humble themselves before the Lord as they should have done." In that vision, Ellen White saw that something God wanted had not occurred. She saw how the leaders of the church at the 1901 General Conference Session could have acted. She saw delegates moved by the Spirit. There was a deep work of repentance with some weeping aloud. She saw a leader rise, she did not say who, and this person confessed before all the bitter feelings that he had for some. He saw his true
condition and went to them one by one asking for forgiveness, and they asked for forgiveness in return. It spread to the whole congregation. Ellen White reported that, "It was a Pentecostal season. God's praises were sung, and far into the night, until [the early] morning, the work was carried on." But then she writes these dreadful words, "Then I aroused from my unconsciousness, and for a while could not think where I was. My pen was still in my hand. The words were spoken to me: 'This might have been. All this the Lord was waiting to do for His people. All heaven was waiting to be gracious.' I thought of where we might have been had thorough work been done at the last General Conference, and an agony of disappointment came over me as I realized that what I had witnessed was not a reality."

My brothers and sisters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, God wants to make this a reality. When will it happen? It is our solemn, sacred duty to lead this precious church into a revival experience. We cannot produce revival and reformation. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. But we, who are called by God's name, can humble ourselves, pray and seek His face. We can lead God's people to the foot of the cross and implore God to prepare our hearts and send the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. Leaders like Nehemiah championed the great revivals of the Old Testament. Commenting on his work of revival, Ellen White writes, "The spirit manifested by the leader will be, to a great extent, reflected by the people. If the leader's profession to believe the solemn, important truths that are to test the world at this time manifest no ardent zeal to prepare a people to stand in the day of God, we must expect the church to be careless, indolent, and pleasure-loving."

The question before us today is will God be able to give the Holy Spirit to us now as He has wanted to since 1901 and even before? We are told in Evangelism, page 701, that "The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the church is looked forward to as in the future; but it is the privilege of the church to have it now. We must have it, and heaven is waiting to bestow it." This blessing is not without condition, however. In Selected Messages, vol. 1, page 121 we read: "But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing."

We have been praying here at the General Conference in special Bible study and prayer sessions. We have a special Revival and Reformation Committee, which has been praying and studying how to best prepare ourselves for this great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. You will not want to miss their report tomorrow morning and Monday morning. We want to see the fulfillment of God pouring out the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. We want to see God’s work finished. We want to go home to heaven.

Will you stand faithful? Will you humble your heart before the Lord? Will you lead out in leading our people to a deeper experience in the Lord to prepare for the Holy Spirit’s power and a revival of true godliness? Will you ask the Lord to take us out of our lukewarm Laodicean state as described in Revelation 3 and ask the Lord for “gold tried in the fire,” for His white robe of righteousness, and for the heavenly eye salve to see clearly? Will I?

Two weeks ago, I attended a youth conference at Bass Memorial Academy in Mississippi, where a revival of primitive godliness is taking place among the faculty and students. A lady from Pensacola, Florida, who attended the meetings, gave me a lovely note after I spoke. Part of what she said was this, "Please know that you have a sister praying for you every day. I am praying that you will be a godly leader (strong and true to the Bible), that you’ll be wise and always harmless, that you’ll be pure and above reproach, and that you’ll be faithful to spend time with Jesus. Please don’t ever allow the work of God’s church to get in the way of His work in your own heart. We are counting on you to be a conduit of God’s power. We are seeking, praying, longing for revival and reformation. Be faithful."

My brothers and sisters, I can only lead as I fall at the foot of the cross and as I personally spend time with Jesus in His Word. I do not have the wisdom and ability to lead except that I receive it from Christ. Today, I want to confess before you, and my God, my pride and arrogance, my selfishness, my neglect of spending enough time needed with God in prayer and Bible study and study of the Spirit of Prophecy. I confess to you my envy and my self-centeredness. I ask you as my fellow leaders for forgiveness. I want to do God’s will. I want to humble myself before God, I want to pray and I want to seek His face. I want the power of the latter rain in my life. Will you join me? Will you allow God to do today what He wanted to do in 1901? Will you remember God’s name and remember your name as a Seventh-day Adventist? Do you truly want to be a spiritual leader of revival for God’s people as we head into the last days of earth’s history looking for Christ’s soon coming? Do you want to be a leader helping our people to experience a revival of true godliness? If so, would you join me in quietly standing to your feet?
Please sing with me that little chorus: "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me, Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Break me, melt me, mold me and fill me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me."
"You’re graduating from Harvard only to work full-time in campus ministry?"

"Yes."

"For the rest of your life?"

"Maybe. All I know is that this is where God wants me now."

"So, what about your chemistry degree? Your research? Your dreams? Your career?"

Those are the kinds of questions I got every time people asked me what I wanted to do with my life. The closer I got to graduation, the more pressing the questions became. I always answered with a deep sense of conviction; there was never any doubt in my mind that God had called me to this. Nor had I ever looked back with regret at what I was "giving up" for ministry.

That is, until commencement week in May 2010, when the reality of the "sacrifice" I was making hit me with full force. As I mingled with Harvard alumnae from different parts of the world, I was bombarded with the apparently prestigious opportunities that a Harvard degree could offer. I suddenly found myself wondering why God had led me otherwise.

When the pomp and circumstance of commencement was over, I walked to my room in a daze, fighting back tears. I couldn’t believe the thoughts that were running through my head. What was wrong with me? Why was I so filled with regret? Had I really been called into ministry? What was I so afraid to give up?

That experience is an all-too-common one in the Christian life. When the will of God leads us to those altars of sacrifice, we question His wisdom and self struggles to surrender. Yet Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Those words imply that if we’ve surrendered ourselves to God, we must always ask, "What will You have me do, Lord?" Once His will is revealed, unquestioning obedience is imperative. Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it thus:

When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die ... death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man [or nature] at his call. Jesus’ summons to the rich young man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. In fact, every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts.¹

Indeed, only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. The kind of death described here is nothing less than a yielding of our own will and total surrender to Christ’s will. It means allowing Christ’s will to dictate what we do in every sphere of our lives. Christianity is thus about total abandon to Jesus Christ; there are no two ways about it.

Immanuel
When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. Jesus makes this summons on the premise of His own example; He is the model of complete surrender. This cannot be understood apart from a clear conception of who Jesus is. John begins his gospel by introducing three vital facts about the Word. First, this Word was in the beginning, meaning that He is eternal and pre-existent. Second, He was with God, meaning that He is a distinct person of the Godhead. Third, He was God, meaning that He is divine. Thus John here introduces the preexistent, eternal and divine Word. Furthermore, this Word is Creator and life-giver, for "without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:4).

Having painted a picture of this Word, John identifies Him: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14). The eternal, pre-existent and divine Word is none other than Jesus Christ. He is God, He is Creator and He is life. His divinity is definitively affirmed in other parts of Scripture. He is the "brightness" of the Father's glory and the "express image of His person" (Hebrews 1:3).

In Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 1:9). He is the "Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God" (Isaiah 9:6). Yet He came down from heaven to be our Immanuel, God with us. The Gospels tell the story of the man, Christ Jesus, who was the son of God. He walked the earth and was as fully God as He was fully human. It is this that the apostle Paul calls the mystery of godliness: that God was "manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Thus the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. While on earth, His life was an outworking of His Father's will, not His own. He came "in the volume of the book" not to do His own will but the will of the Father (Hebrews 10:7). Jesus' meat was to "do the will of Him that sent" Him and to "finish His work" (John 4:34). He came down from heaven not to do His own will (John 5:30; 6:38). He spoke the things which the Father taught Him (John 8:28). He always did those things that pleased His Father (John 8:29). He worked the works of the Father (John 9:4). He kept His Father's commandments (John 15:10).

Indeed, His was a life of complete and radical surrender. He always did "as the Father gave Him commandment" (John 15:31). Nor did He submit to His Father's will only in the good things. The Bible records that being "found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). He sweated great drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane on His way to the cross; He was troubled and exceedingly sorrowful. The weight of suffering was enough to make anyone turn back, but Christ's surrender weathered the excruciating pain. Nothing could deter Him from the path of obedience to His Father's will. The anguished cry was wrung from His lips: "If this cup cannot pass from me except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42).

Doulos

Even more amazing is the reality that He didn't have to endure any of this at all. When He was being beaten, bruised and spat upon on His way to the cross, He had the power to put an end to His own suffering. He could have done that because He was as fully God as He was fully human. Yet He chose to choose His Father's will; He chose to surrender His rights; He chose to die to self. Thus He drank the cup of death on the cross that His Father had given Him (John 18:11). "Not My will but Thine, Father" was the constant prayer of His heart. In this way Jesus set the ultimate example of unreserved surrender to God.

In a beautiful exposition of this completely surrendered life, Paul writes that "He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). The word translated "servant" in this verse is the Greek word doulos, which literally means "slave" or bondman. This is the word Paul uses in Romans 1:1 when he calls himself a "servant" of Jesus Christ. The word doulos describes one who voluntarily gives himself up to another's will. So when Paul calls himself a slave of Jesus, he means that He has completely given himself up to the will of Christ. Following in the footsteps of his Redeemer, he has prayed the prayer, "Not my will but Thine."
In that totality of surrender, Paul does not stand alone. Many others referred to themselves as slaves of Jesus Christ. Among them are Timothy (Philippians 1:1), Epaphras (Colossians 2:12), James (James 1:1), Peter (2 Peter 1:1), Jude (Jude 1:1) and John (Revelation 1:1). Even at the end of time, those who are redeemed are referred to as slaves of God: “And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him” (Revelation 22:3). The word translated servant here is the word *doulos* in the Greek. Thus the concept of a mind completely surrendered to the will of God, a *doulos* mind, emerges as central to Christianity. As a matter of fact, in the context of Christ’s example, this *doulos* mindset is the only one that makes sense.

Not only is total surrender the call of Christianity, it also holds the key to victorious Christian living. The word *doulos* appears in Romans 6:16, 17, 19 and 20. The use of the word *doulos* in these verses implies that in our natural state we are enslaved to sin. The solution to that terrible condition is to switch masters, to become slaves of righteousness and slaves of God rather than slaves of sin. Indeed, one who is made free from sin becomes a servant (*doulos*) of God (Romans 6:22). Notice that in the context of Romans 6 we are enslaved regardless; either we are slaves to God or we are slaves to sin. Either we yield our members as instruments to God or we yield them to sin (Romans 6:13). The choice is ours, and there is neither gray zone nor middle ground. Given that Romans 6:23 declares that the “wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life,” the most sensible choice would be to yield oneself in unqualified surrender to God.

Complete submission after the pattern of Christ is thus not an option, it is imperative. If we are to be true Christians, if we are to be true disciples of Christ, if we are to gain any kind of victory over the sins that enslave us, we must begin by making an unmitigated surrender of the heart, mind and life to the will of God. Succinctly stated, “The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness.”

Sin must be completely abandoned and a new master, Jesus, chosen. The entire being must be yielded to His control so that He can work in it to “will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). That is the simple heart of Christianity.

**Total Abandon**

This kind of utter resignation to the will of God is only hard because most of us have things that we think we cannot give up for God. For me, that idol was Harvard. It was the one thing about which I had said, “Lord, I’ll give you anything but this.” When I was struggling to surrender during that depressing commencement week in May, I was impressed to study the cross again. As my understanding of Christ’s sacrifice and submission deepened, the question was pressed home to my heart: “Thando, if God wills that you give up Harvard for the sake of the gospel, what is that to you? You’ve either surrendered or you haven’t.”

Reflecting on it now, I know that my struggle to surrender was nonsensical. God is no respecter of Harvard degrees. When I get to heaven, it will not matter that I went to Harvard. The only reason why Harvard will matter is if, when I get to heaven, I can say to God, “Father, because I went to Harvard, here are the souls that came into the kingdom!” That is the only way in which my Harvard education will make a difference for eternity. If God was calling me to give it up, He certainly knew how He was going to use it for His glory. Why, then, was surrender so hard?

Perhaps I was afraid to trust the heart of God. I think sometimes we have a hard time surrendering all to the will of God because we think He doesn’t have our best interest at heart. Yet contrary to our selfish misconceptions, the will of God is our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). God is neither trying to hurt us nor ruin our happiness. Total surrender to His will is the best possible choice we could ever make.

God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. In all that He does, He has the wellbeing of His children in view … Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by Him who knows what is best and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of transgression is the path of misery and destruction.
“Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God.” That alone ought to be enough to compel us to submit. Yet the beauty of the word *doulos* is that it implies a voluntary surrender: Jesus chose to submit to the Father’s will, as did Paul and many other giants of faith.

Consequently, if we’re going to come to God, we must come prepared to give Him our all. It’s that simple because He will accept “nothing less than absolute surrender of the mind, the heart, the will, the strength, the entire being, to His control.” He couldn’t accept anything less than unqualified surrender, because to do that would be to leave us in slavery to sin. This is because in the context of Romans 6 there is no middle ground: he that is not a slave to God is a slave to sin.

It would thus be logical to conclude that a Christian who is not completely surrendered to the will of Christ is no Christian at all; for to be Christian is to be Christ-like and to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6). Christ’s footsteps go down the path of radical abandon to the will of God. Those who expect to endure to the end must and will follow His example, no matter the consequences. They will "come and die," for God expects and deserves nothing less. A *No Turning Back* experience requires this *doulos* mindset. Reckless abandon is just that; an inch from the altar is an inch too far.

2 Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 43
3 Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, p. 46
4 Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, Volume 7, p. 164
Yes, Turning Back!

David C. Asscherick

There is nothing wrong with turning back. Personally, I’m quite fond of it. And you should be too. Yes, yes, by all means, turn back!

"Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:7).

Think for a moment about the word return. It is composed of two parts. The first is the prefix re- which is a direct inheritance from the Latin re meaning, you guessed it, “again.” The second part, -turn, derives from the Greek tornos, which means “circular movement.” Think of the word tornado. So a turn takes place when an object moves in a different direction relative to its surroundings or its former position. The meaning, then, of our word—return—is quite clear indeed, is it not? It means to change your position again.

So turning back can be quite a good thing indeed. Provided that you are turning from sin and to God. This is something that I need to do. Not only needed to do (past tense), but need to do (present tense).

Perhaps you can relate. Perhaps you are human. Perhaps you are, like me and the old hymn writer, “prone to wander … prone to leave the God [you] love.”

An authentic conversion experience is not a turning, but a continual turning. Course corrections need to be made, not once in a lifetime, but continually. And at times something more than a mere turn is needed.

A return is needed.

"Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11, ESV).

Turn and live! Turn back! Turn back! The urgency is palpable.

Israel was very good at backsliding. Again, perhaps you can relate. Backsliding is easy precisely because it requires no special effort. Things which require no special effort tend to happen a lot. Things like breathing. Or dying. Or blinking. Significant effort is expended not when you do these things, but when you try to not do them. They’re easy to do and hard not to do.

Like the presence of dust on your furniture, backsliding occurs when you simply do nothing. Its prevention, however, requires vigilant intentionality. Of course you can purposefully backslide. We sometimes call this apostasy. But apostasy and backsliding are actually different things. We get them confused because unchecked they lead to the same place; that place being condemnation and death. But though they lead to the same place, it does not follow that they are the same thing. For example, once you get to my neighborhood there are two ways to get to my house. You can take either Valparaiso Drive or Gold Springs Road. Either will get you to my door, but they’re not the same roads.
Apostasy carries with it the notion of volitional abandonment and defection. Apostasy takes some effort. Backsliding doesn’t. This being the case, laissez-faire Christianity is doomed to failure. If you are indifferent, neglectful, or apathetic about your personal walk with Jesus, you will backslide. More precisely, you are backsliding. See how easy it is? Like blinking, you can do it even when you’re not trying. An unattended garden will not lack for weeds. But a weedless garden takes energy, effort and, again, preventative intentionality.

Recall the hymn writer’s lines again. “Prone to wander ... prone to leave the God I love.”

Prone, he says.

Hmmm. What does that mean?

From the Latin pronus meaning “leaning forward,” it is something you are “likely or liable to do.” It indicates a direction, a bent, an inclination.

The hymn writer could feel something fundamental to his nature. Something inside of him that was at odds with His commitment to God. I feel it too. And I’m guessing you do as well. Paul certainly felt it. "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (Romans 7:22, 23). This contrarian core is so fundamental to human experience that Paul called it a law—like the law of gravity, constantly pulling.

Gravity being what it is, it takes effort to stand upright.

Your nature being what it is, it takes effort to live upright.

Need proof?

Is it easier to pray for an hour or not to? Is it easier to witness to the person sitting next to you or not to? Is it easier to love your neighbor as yourself or not to? Examples could be multiplied.

Quite often, the easy path and wrong path are the same path. The very quotable GK Chesterton observed pithily that, “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.” We will resist the temptation here to seek a reconciliation between Chesterton’s observation and Jesus’ invitation to receive His “easy” yoke and His “light” burden (Matthew 11:28, 29). That’s another article. For our purposes here, Chesterton’s insight stands, for most, if not all of us, as consistently experientially confirmed.

So Christianity is hard. Because of our "proneness."

Backsliding is easy. Also, because of our “proneness.”

This is a recipe for failure, right?

Wrong.

Because God’s solution is bigger and better than your problem. His solution is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the gospel is the cure for backsliding. Yes, the cure. As in, even though it’s easy, it’s not necessary. Many Christians often get these confused. They think that because something (sinning, backsliding, etc.) is easy that it’s necessary. Such is not the case. While backsliding may happen readily, easily and naturally, it does not follow that it has to happen. Ellen White is unequivocal on this point. She writes, “Christians who are constantly growing in earnestness, in zeal, in fervor, in love,—such Christians never backslide” (Review and Herald, June 7, 1887).


Never.
Ellen White, apparently, and probably surprisingly to some, did not appear to count herself in this category. For example, she wrote, "We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged" (Steps to Christ, p. 64, emphasis mine).

Even more to the point, she also wrote, Men whom God favored, and to whom He entrusted great responsibilities, were sometimes overcome by temptation and committed sin, even as we at the present day strive, waver, and frequently fall into error. Their lives, with all their faults and follies, are open before us, both for our encouragement and warning. If they had been represented as without fault, we, with our sinful nature, might despair at our own mistakes and failures. But seeing where others struggled through discouragements like our own, where they fell under temptations as we have done, and yet took heart again and conquered through the grace of God, we are encouraged in our striving after righteousness. As they, though sometimes beaten back, recovered their ground, and were blessed of God, so we too may be overcomers in the strength of Jesus. (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 238, emphasis mine)

The inclusive plural pronouns are absolutely telling here. Too, notice the phrases "even as we," "as we have done," and "so we too." They are unmistakable. Ellen White included herself among those who "frequently fall into error" and who "often [wept] at the feet of Jesus because of their shortcomings and mistakes." What are "shortcomings" if not backslidings? A shortcoming would, like backsliding, put you away from where you could and should be. The language is different, but the imagery and meaning are very nearly the same.

Consider one more phrase here. There can be no misunderstanding it. She writes, "though sometimes beaten back, [they] recovered their ground." The only ground one could "recover" would be ground that was formerly occupied. Well, then, why don’t they now occupy it? Simple: they backslid. That is, they lost ground, which is, of course, exactly what backsliding means.

So, like the rest of humanity, Ellen White found backsliding easy and readily accessible. And, like most of humanity, she did it. Ellen White, though, is not our example (I know this may come as a surprise to some). Jesus is!


And Ellen White, who was a special messenger of the Lord, said that others can have the same experience. Read it again: "Christians who are constantly growing in earnestness, in zeal, in fervor, in love,—such Christians never backslide."

But how is this possible? The answer is found right there in the phrase "constantly growing." The only way to not backslide—to never backslide—is to keep growing. Let’s say this very simply: the only way to not go backward is to keep going forward.

Backward is backward.

Neutral is backward.

Forward is not backward.

Are you moving forward? Unlike backsliding, which requires only neglect, moving forward requires Spirit-filled intentionality. A final quotation is in order here.

Many students have made their studies the first great object, and have neglected prayer, and absented themselves from the Sabbathschool and the prayer-meeting; and from neglect of religious duties they have returned to their homes backslidden from God. (Christian Education, p. 28)

Several things require comment here. First, notice the word "many." This is not an uncommon experience. Terrible, yes, but also terribly common. Now notice the word "students." The audience here is young people. What have they done? They’ve "backslidden from God." But how? And right here is our
key word: neglected.

_Neglect._

Neglect is what happens when you do nothing. Neglect is not a thing as much as it is the absence of a thing. And what is that thing that neglect is the absence of?

_Intentionality._

More precisely, _Spirit-filled intentionality._

It’s the Holy Spirit that wages war against the natural inclinations—the proneness—of the human condition. "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other" (Galatians 5:17, ESV). We often quote John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” but what about the next two verses? They read, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (vs. 16, 17). Verse 15 is the _what_; verses 16 and 17 are the _how_ and the _Who_!

And don’t forget Ezekiel 36:26, 27: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

Without the in-filling of the Holy Spirit, we will backslide. With Him, however, it is possible to “never backslide” (Review and Herald, June 7, 1887).

Never.

Ever.

Are you moving forward? Are you growing? Are you advancing? If not, you’re sliding back, sliding away. But sliding away from what? Actually, this is the wrong question. The right question is, from _Who_?

The Who is God.

And nothing, absolutely nothing, could be worse than moving away from Him who loved you more than life itself! Backsliding is less about ceasing to believe a set of propositional truths than it is about ceasing to live daily with your Creator, Redeemer, King and Friend.

What to do then? By all means, turn back! Yes, yes, _turn back!_ Turn back to God, and turn your back on backsliding for good. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).
