Unpacking one of Jesus’ strangest miracles

Led by the Hand

Have you ever begged God for something, only to find that He had to take you someplace else first? An unusual miracle story gives encouragement for times when our journey to wholeness is longer than expected—times when we can’t quite see where Jesus is leading us.

Adventist Hospital Fights Ebola in Liberia
Drs. Gillian Seton and James Appel share their experiences from the front lines.

California Sued for Demanding That
Justice, Ethics, and Adventism, Part 2

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Led by the Hand: When Healing Isn’t Instant

Have you ever begged for something? Have you ever begged God for something—for yourself or a loved one? When I read the above Bible story recently, the word “begged” stood out to me. Trying to think of what it means to beg, I scrambled through my life memories for instances of “begging.” I recalled pleading with my mom to let me go to the playground alone (she only let me go when she or my dad could accompany me, which felt too rare). I remember a couple instances when I begged my parents for extra pocket money. And I remember begging my sister to share her part of the sweets my dad brought us every time he returned from working in a wealthier country.

Then I grew up, and I learned what it means to really hurt. I remember being alone in a foreign country, huddled on my bed in a room rented from a stranger, begging God to soothe my heart. I remember feeling really sick one night and hating it and imploring God to take my pain away. My begging—my grown-up begging—was a mix of tears and erratically repetitive, highly emotionally charged phrases. Nothing articulate. Nothing worthy of a bestseller. Just spitting out my plea in the plainest of words.

When we beg, we are desperate. We are desperately aware of our weakness, our incapacity, our insufficiency. And we desperately need someone who can do for us or a loved one that which we wish would happen but is not in our power to accomplish.

Begging for the Healer’s Touch

Mark 8:22-26 is a story about an explicit supplication and the resulting miracle.

Jesus comes to Bethsaida, and some people bring to Him a man who had lost his sight (verse 24 shows that he knew what trees and people looked like, so he must have once been able to see). These were probably friends or family who longed to see him restored. Their approach to Jesus is desperate. They beg Jesus to touch him. In response, Jesus foregoes words and does what He is besought to do: He touches the man. He takes him by the hand and walks with him like that, hand in hand, until they have left the village behind.

Interestingly, the man is not cured when Jesus touches him. Before being healed, he has one last walk to take led by Someone’s hand.

I imagine that his heart beat fast. I imagine that with every step waves of hope rose higher and higher, erasing piece by piece the shoreline of his debilitating boundaries. I imagine that he pictured what it would be like to see again, to
be healthy again, to be able again—able to care for himself, able to see love in the eyes of another, able to cultivate his talents more fully.

Jesus gives him immediate attention, but He rushes not. He is too loving and too wise to disregard the need to protect both the sick man and His mission. Before curing the blind man, He takes him outside the village. Not only is he led away before Jesus intervenes miraculously, once healed he is commanded to strictly avoid Bethsaida and go to his home (evidently located in another village). The explicit command to “not even enter the village” suggests that he either used to frequent this town or actually lived there. But Jesus forbids him any contact with the village.

Thus, it is outside the confines of Bethsaida that Jesus lifts the blind man’s limitations. He touches his eyes with saliva and asks him: “Do you see anything?” The man looks up and replies: “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.”

Jesus’ question is intriguing. Many instances throughout the Gospels indicate that He could read people’s minds. This means His question was not intended to aid His healing work. Rather, it was meant for the blind man. Jesus touches his eyes again, and his vision is restored fully.

**Step-by-Step Journey to Wholeness**

This brief account in Mark 8:22-26 includes three instances when Jesus touches the sick man: He takes him by the hand, touches his eyes once, and then touches his eyes again. The healing of this blind man is a healing in three steps. First, Jesus moves him to a safe place; then He heals him partially; and eventually He restores his sight fully.

Sometimes this is how God works with us. Before healing us, He leads us to a safe place where the miracle would not threaten our personal well-being (physical, emotional, spiritual) or the work of God. Then He heals us partially, involving us in the process in some form or another. Eventually, as promised, God will cure all our aches and restore us fully.

The encounter between Jesus and the blind man changes both of their courses. Jesus leads the steps of the blind man, yet the need of the blind man directs Jesus’ steps. He changes direction and walks away from the village, where He cures the man and commands him in precise terms the direction to take. The God who descended among us in human form makes Himself available to those who need Him, being willing to change His course in accordance with our needs. Yet as He crosses paths with us, He establishes the path we are to take as He moves us toward healing and restoration.

> Jesus is a God who touches us.

For me, the most beautiful part of this story is the fact that that once the blind man meets Jesus, he is led by His hand until wholly restored. I find this beautiful because Jesus goes the extra mile. He didn’t need to take him by the hand personally. He could have simply asked those who brought the man to follow Him outside of the village. But Jesus is a God who touches us. He touches us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The same hands that formed us at creation touch us throughout the days of our lives. His touch, I learn here, is not always an instantly healing touch. But it is a touch leading us toward healing.

Sometimes we have to journey hand in hand with Him for a while until we are restored. At times this is a short walk. Other times it is longer. For some of us it may be a lifetime walk. God may choose to cure our ache in a moment, or He may choose to help us carry it until the final restoration of mankind. But once we meet Jesus—the kind of God who walks hand in hand with the sick—we know that our life will never be the same again. As we live with a growing anticipation of restored wholeness, each step in our walk hand in hand with Jesus is one step closer to our healing.
Sitting with the Sages: Justice, Ethics, and Adventism (Part 2)

Jerome Skinner

Read Part 1 of this article

Most people have an idea of what justice is, what it should look like, and how it should operate on a day-to-day basis. Unfortunately, a just society has eluded us from that fateful moment when through our progenitor’s logic and the bite of an apple, a world was unveiled that was full of iniquity, and hence, inequity.

Fortunately for all of us, a plan, a divine failsafe, was enacted at that very same moment when hope seemed to slip away. The biblical message of the battle to restore God’s just order in society and human hearts is what Seventh-day Adventists call the Great Controversy. It is a battle between Christ and Satan, Christ’s way and Satan’s way, Christ’s authority and Satan’s authority. Adventists understand this drama, as outlined in the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation, to be particularly relevant for today’s world, and it is within this drama that we will pause to reflect for a moment. For it is here that true justice originates within our inevitably social world.

A brief additional word may be informative. An unfortunate trend has recently engulfed our cultural landscape. It seems that conversations about justice in a social context are always reduced to questions about abortion, same-sex marriage, environmentalism, and the redistribution of wealth (often without any discussions about how wealth is generated or sustained). The approach taken here is a very different one—one that seeks to embrace the totality of the Biblical view on the subject.

It was while I was sitting in an undergraduate theology class on the biblical book of Daniel that our teacher made an astute observation, one we budding theologians hadn’t yet taken the time to consider. In the Hebrew Bible, Daniel is in the Writings section, not the Prophets section. Our teacher proceeded to make a case for Daniel as wisdom literature and helped us to see the ethical dimensions of world history outlined in the book. More importantly for me, he pointed out the ethical dimensions as they applied at the personal level.

From that point on I have been interested in the practical and existential ethical purpose of the prophetic picture we hold dear as Seventh-day Adventists. Much has been written on issues like who the beast is, what the beast does, and what the beast will do in the future. More recently, the Messiah and His work have come more into focus in Adventist thinking, along with rich implications for faith in God, the trustworthiness of His Word, and our relation to Him in the coming crisis outlined in Bible prophecy.

So what does all this have to do with justice, sages, and the role of Adventism in social issues? As I alluded to in the first part of this article, it is a question of definition and how those definitions articulate thoughts and result in actions.

Perils and Pitfalls in the Politics of Identity

First, to prepare us for answering the above question, I must note what I see as three universal perils or pitfalls to Christian identity in biblical thought and action:

1. political affinities (party-line politics),
2. nationalistic impulses,
3. a culture-centered worldview vs. a Christ/Biblical-centered worldview.

1. Political Affinities
Besides the short-sighted, time-serving nature of party politics, the Bible clearly does not support any political machinery today. For example, from an American perspective, contrary to what some professing conservative Republican Christians or progressive Democrat Christians might try to have us believe, neither God nor His Word is subject to the thinking, planning, and organizing of man. I fear that many Christians are attracted to the Biblical language used in political and social rhetoric. Yet without a clear understanding of the underlying presuppositions and premises this rhetoric is built upon, we will reach faulty conclusions (i.e., non-Biblical notions of what makes a just society and what justice is).

I cut my teeth on The Great Courses series like Daniel N. Robinson, *The Great Ideas of Philosophy, 2nd Edition*; Andrew Fix, *The Renaissance, Reformation, and Rise of Nations*; Dennis Dalton et al., *Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 3rd edition*; Robert Bucholz, *Foundations of Western Civilization II: A History of the Modern Western World*; Thomas Childers, *Europe and Western Civilization in the Modern Age*; Lawrence Cahoone, *Modern Intellectual Tradition: From Descartes to Derrida*; and Allen Guelzo et al., *The History of the United States, 2nd edition*. After working through many of the issues dealt with in these courses, I have concluded that it is not responsible as a Bible-believing Christian to affiliate oneself with any party politics, for history and the history of thought have shown us that nations rise and fall and that ideologies are subject to the changing tides of history. But my primary reason is that the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation outline the Great Controversy and how nations (and this nation in particular) factor into the picture of end-time events. It is unclear in this country how the fault lines of ideology will bring about those events.

A major flaw in commitment to any particular social or political theory or party is the problem of knowledge. In Part 1 I touched on this element briefly as it relates to poverty. The problem of knowledge deals with the epistemic resources, or, more specifically for our purposes, the weight of authority those sources carry. How does one define poverty? What are its causes, its history, and its impact on people's personhood?

Looking at poverty from the Christian standpoint means we rest on Scripture as the primary and most authoritative source. For Adventists, we also look to the lesser light, the writings of Ellen White, to give us additional insight on our eschatological context through the practical counsel found in books like *The Ministry of Healing* and *Welfare Ministry*. Lastly, of course, we are obliged to look at the sources the world provides us. Such sources include data from the political, social, economic, and demographic realms to shape our understandings of how societies presently operate. We should hope that these statistics will enhance in some way our ability to discern how the issue of poverty is identified and quantified in modern society.

Suffice it to say, the most astute scholars in each of these fields of study have reached no universal consensus, and the issues surrounding their conclusions are complex to say the least. Without a clear understanding of the biblical mandates and perspective on Christianity in culture in regards to poverty, a broad and in-depth reading of Ellen White’s counsel on affiliations and Christian actions, and a cogent grasp of political theory and praxis and its history in relation to caring for and improving the situation of the poor, on what basis would an Adventist affiliate himself or herself with a specific political party and its approach to the issue?

Here is the salient point: political parties operate on theories that define issues like poverty and give solutions that are geared toward promoting and maintaining their vision of how society should operate. I'm not advocating civic disengagement. I'm making a case for Christian responsibility in how we orient ourselves to the body politic while serving humanity within broken systems in a fallen world.

### 2. Nationalistic Impulses

The second pitfall is the tendency to identify oneself nationalistically so that systemic problems and solutions to problems are described more geographically and ideologically than biblically. Nationalism in a fallen world is not simply defined in terms of nation-states but by how the powerful and privileged classes within those spaces and places determine what the national identity looks like, thereby contributing to mindsets about those who do not come into line within those boundaries and reinforcing the always highly complex justifications for those people’s predicaments.
We don’t need to detail here the violence against different ethnicities, tribal warfare, and enslavement throughout modern history involving professed Christians whose nationalism in its varied forms has contributed to the dehumanization and in many cases the death of “the other.” The ideology of national identity has the tendency to confine us to the “us versus them” mentality: democracy vs. communism, Republican vs. Democrat, monarchy vs. constitutional republic, etc. Within such discussions, it is easy to dismiss the importance of poverty as an issue that the human family faces. In both our thoughts and our actions, those in poverty can become “the others” or the governing bodies’ problem that Christians shouldn’t bother thinking about.

3. Worldview

Thirdly, one of the most addressed areas in Adventist thinking is that of worldview and how it addresses the problem of conduct, which would cover ethics. The biblical understanding of the Great Controversy that frames Seventh-day Adventism’s worldview is easier to state in theory than in practice. What does poverty have to do with the Great Controversy? I would argue it is intimately related to every aspect of it. Consider Ellen White’s statement about the effects of sin:

> At the first advent of Christ, Satan had brought man down from his original, exalted purity, and had dimmed that golden character with sin. The man whom God had created a sovereign in Eden, he had transformed into a slave in the earth groaning under the curse of sin. The halo of glory, which God had given holy Adam to cover him as a garment, departed from him after his transgression. The light of God’s glory could not cover disobedience and sin. In the place of health and plenitude of blessings, poverty, sickness, and suffering of every type, were to be the portion of the children of Adam.7

Poverty therefore is not primarily a result of bad politics, financial mismanagement, or scant earthly resources; it is a result of sin. It is sin that plagues the political, fiscal, agricultural, and various other dimensions of life.8 Because of this fact, we will never resolve the problem of poverty on this side of glory.

A culture-centered worldview points to and operates on the results of the curse and tries to patch up problems without addressing their causes. In this country that usually means using a humanistic model of power politics and, on a broader scale, U.S. hegemony,9 something Adventists understand as prophetically significant.10 A Christ/Biblical-centered worldview understands the true nature of the problem and strives by God’s grace to live out Christ’s words found in Matthew 25 by addressing the whole person, spiritual and physical, not just his or her socioeconomic condition.

The revolution in Russia after World War I is a prime example of the changing fortunes of power groups and the ill effects that resulted from humanistic attempts to right the wrongs as they were perceived and defined. In culture-centered thinking there is no moral absolute or restraining influence to keep the oppressed from turning into the oppressor.

Ellen White powerfully brings home the point that the social and political conditions of a society affect the poverty of people in that society, which in turn directly impacts those people’s potential receptiveness to spiritual realities. Upon her visit to England in 1886 (many years after that country officially abolished slavery in 1833), White commented upon the fact that one of the many difficulties the English faced that inhibited the spread of present truth in their professedly Christian land was “the difference in the condition of the three principal classes, and the feeling of caste. . . . In the city the capitalists, the shop-keepers, and the day-laborers, and in the country the landlords, the tenant-farmers, and the farm-laborers, form three general classes, between whom there are wide differences in education, in sentiment, and in circumstances.”11

White noted in relation to these classes that “Wealth means greatness and power; poverty, little less than slavery.
This is an order of things that God never designed should exist. Nothing of this kind was seen anciently among his people when he was their acknowledged leader. **Valuable lessons might be learned by the rulers of today**, if they would study the plan of government given to the children of Israel."\(^{12}\)

Following a lengthy description of how God’s method of earthly governance even after the Fall provided for those afflicted with poverty, White concluded:

> If the laws given by God had continued to be carried out, how different would be the present condition of the world, **morally, spiritually, and temporally**. Selfishness and self-importance would not be manifested as now; but each would cherish a kind regard for the happiness and welfare of others, and such wide-spread destitution and human wretchedness as is now . . . would not exist. Instead of the poorer classes being kept under the iron heel of oppression by the wealthy, instead of having other men’s brains to think and plan for them in temporal as well as in spiritual things, they would have some chance for independence of thought and action.\(^{13}\)

That White would connect temporal blessings (both material and educational) to religious liberty is striking.

**The Sage, the Christian, and Society: Meaning and Methods**

Now we return to the question of definition. How do Christians define themselves, others, and the problems of our world? How should Christians relate to social ills and injustices? The Bible is a clear and unambiguous guide to help us approach people wholistically. It defines what justice is. It enables us to understand the methods used by Christ and Satan to create a just society, as well as the end result of those methods.

The wisdom theme in apocalyptic literature is relational, ethical, and pragmatic. Contrary to the autonomous nature of party politics, nationalistic impulses, and a culture-centered worldview, the wisdom of God is interpersonal and beneficial for everyone and is defined by the fear of the Lord, the leading of the Spirit, and submission to the rule of God. The most potent and pervasive aspect of biblical wisdom as an orientation toward social issues is the love of God in the heart and the restoration of the image of God in man, which none of the aforementioned man-made constructions can command or bring about.

For the Christian, social ills are not quantifiable simply in terms of ideological points or material statistics, but mainly in terms of the spiritual impact: character, virtues, values, etc. The heart of the matter is really a matter of the heart. Social ills are the result of the indifference with which we as humans look at our fellow human beings—a sordid selfishness that contributes to gross inequity.

Moses gives us clarity about God’s perspective on our predicament. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (Gen 6:5-6). God must transform the heart in order for us to relate to one another with selfless care as children of one Father. This entails being clear about God’s character, His solutions to human problems, His aims and goals for interpersonal interaction with people of faith and unbelievers, and what it means to live in accountability before Him as our brother’s keeper.

Proceeding from transformed hearts are transformed actions in harmony with God’s will. From a biblical perspective, justice in a social world is unabashedly ethical, not bound to the relative nature of much modern thought. There is a burgeoning trend today to identify anyone’s personal grievance as a social injustice. It should be clear that while God’s acts benefit both the just and the unjust (Ps 65, Matt 5), in His work to restore His image, and hence human equity, He is not in league with those lifestyles and activities He has revealed as wicked and out of harmony with His character. Again, here the sages’ counsel is paramount in deciphering between those things that contribute to true justice in our social contexts according to God’s revealed will and those things that promote human autonomy and
self-centered aims. I admit that separating the two is not as easy as we might like.

Ellen White and early Adventist pioneers in some instances worked alongside secular efforts to curb the tide of evil in their generation, but they were by no means beholden to every method used by those entities. For example, White’s strong words connecting poverty to America’s condoning of alcohol licenses and alcohol’s deleterious effects are clear. As she observed:

Our Creator has bestowed his bounties upon man with a liberal hand. Were all these gifts of Providence wisely and temperately employed, poverty, sickness, and distress would be well-nigh banished from the earth. But alas, we see on every hand the blessings of God changed to a curse by the wickedness of men. There is no class guilty of greater perversion and abuse of his precious gifts than are those who employ the products of the soil in the manufacture of intoxicating liquors.¹⁴

Though today this issue may seem lost to Satan’s grip in America, her words remain instructive for those who wonder what can (or should) be done as they examine not just their local situation but the world at large. Regarding those things that tend toward the defacement of the image of God and are dehumanizing according to Scripture, we should prayerfully and wisely seek counsel (remember those three knowledge resources we have) to know how to affect and thus help our fellow sisters and brothers, wherever they may be.

It’s unfortunate that Jesus’ words recorded in the Gospels three times: “The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me” (Matt 26:11, Mark 14:7, John 12:8) have been used by some to dismiss any serious concern for the issue of poverty and instead focus solely on Jesus or correct theology. It is noteworthy that Mark adds a clause in the middle of these words: “The poor you always have with you, and whenever you wish [or have reasonable opportunity], you can do them good, but you do not always have me” (Mark 14:7, emphasis supplied). Jesus here reminds us that social concern, alongside the health message, should always accompany our trumpet cry of the three angels’ messages.

Lastly and briefly, true justice in our sinful social context is pragmatic. In Part 1 I asked whether Christians should give money to every panhandler that appears. Unless we have access to unlimited resources, for most of us the answer would be no. So what can we do in regard to poverty and other social injustices? I’ll leave that up to you. I have found two approaches helpful:

1. If God gives us power and influence to use our pens and voices to encourage those who can make structural changes to improve the quality of life for others of every hue, culture, and gender, we should do so.

2. We should work on the local level and support efforts that seek to inspire hope and give people dignity and respect through work programs, educational opportunities, etc., while addressing their immediate needs.

The main point is to do something while we can, remembering always that every person is a whole person with a unique context—not merely a brain to be indoctrinated into some list of theological beliefs or a stomach to fill, but always both.

Endnotes

¹ The Hebrew Bible is broken up into three sections: Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy), Prophets (Joshua-Malachi), and Writings (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Chronicles, Ruth, Lamentations, and Daniel).

² It would be useful to take a concordance and look at the vocabulary of Daniel. Words like “understand,” “wisdom,”
“discernment,” “knowledge,” etc., are frequent and usually frame the narratives and prophecies. This impression was reinforced in a doctoral class on Daniel with Jacques B. Doukhan. His works *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987) and *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000) present helpful thoughts on themes that emerge from the book.

3 Romans 13:1 must be seen in its broader context, starting back in chapter 12 where the Christian is told not to be conformed to this world. Paul was not advocating aligning ourselves with the bureaucratic mechanisms of governance. First Peter 2:13f advocates living as a Christian in society. His argument was not about affiliations, for he had already made it clear in vss. 9–10 where the Christian’s citizenship and allegiance lie. From its inception there have been voices that advocated establishing a “Christian society” in America. See Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The 17th Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).


8 A prime example of how one’s worldview affects one’s view of a situation can be found in Thomas Hobbes’ and John Locke’s understanding of the “state of nature.” Hobbes’ “psychological egoism,” according to which all human actions are motivated by self-interest, influenced his understanding of natural rights and presupposed a condition of scarcity. Locke’s understanding was more religiously focused, and his “law of nature” theory presupposed a condition of abundance. See Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*.

9 Noam Chomsky is one who has written *en masse* on the ill effects of this ideology.

10 See works like Angel Manuel Rodríguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002).

11 Ellen White, *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists* (1886), 164.

12 Ibid., emphasis supplied.

13 Ibid., 165, emphasis supplied.

Adventist Hospital Fights Ebola in Liberia

When all the other hospitals closed due to the outbreak of Ebola, the Seventh-day Adventist Cooper Hospital in Liberia remained open. Now from the front lines of fighting Ebola, Drs. Gillian Seton and James Appel share their experiences and recommendations to the World Health Organization (WHO) on how to fight this disease.


Valmy Karemera

In yet another swipe at the people’s fundamental freedom, the state of California has ordered churches to cover abortion. As reported by Casey Mattox, a senior counsel in The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF),

California’s Department of Managed Health Care has ordered all insurance plans in the state to immediately begin covering elective abortion. Not Plan B. Not contraceptives. Elective surgical dismemberment abortion.

Mr. Mattox adds,

At the insistence of the American Civil Liberties Union, the DMHC concluded that a 40-year-old state law requiring health plans to cover “basic health services” had been misinterpreted all these decades. Every plan in the state was immediately ordered, effective August 22, to cover elective abortion. California had not even applied this test to its own state employee health plans (which covered only “medically necessary” abortions). But this novel reading was nevertheless quietly imposed on every plan in the state by fiat.

The state of California, like the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), exempts churches from contraceptive requirements due to religious liberty. However, as a result of this mandate, seven churches have filed a complaint with the HHS. Now all eyes await the decision of the HHS Office of Civil Rights.

More than a century ago, Ellen G. White gave this insightful warning:

The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God’s witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands. The responsibility for this great gift rests with those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of His word. We are to receive this word as supreme authority. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God’s word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A “Thus saith the Lord” is not to be set aside for a “Thus saith the church” or a “Thus saith the state.” The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.

We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would necessarily close up our way. We are to go forward in Christ’s name, advocating the truths committed to us. If we are forbidden by men to do this work, then we may say, as did the apostles, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” [Acts 4:19, 20.] (Gospel Workers, p. 389-390).
Meditation God’s Way: How to Find “Sweet Satisfaction” in God’s Word

Much confusion exists regarding “meditation” in Christianity today, even in Adventist circles. There is no uniform understanding of its definition and its practice.

Scripture is not silent on this subject and speaks with clarity beginning with Joshua 1:8: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (KJV).

Scriptural guidance begins with a description of our need to meditate upon the law of God, which reflects the character of God. So when we meditate upon the law we find ourselves learning about God.

Psalm 1:2 says: “But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (KJV). This statement regarding the life of a faithful man defines the process as lengthy and determinate. The pilgrim does not dabble with meditation or engage lightly in its beauty, but holds the value of the activity in such high regard that he repeatedly returns to it throughout the day and night.

We Christians in the twenty-first century are deceived into thinking that meditation is either totally unnecessary or of minimal importance. We leave no place for it in our daily schedule; we allow other media to saturate our minds and our attention. We give it a low priority while claiming to place upon it a high value. We are hypocritical regarding its importance.

A Unique Method of Listening

More recent counsel informs us that “the mind should be elevated to dwell upon eternal scenes, heaven, its treasures, its glories, and should take sweet and holy satisfaction in the truths of the Bible” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 164).

We are also told: “By study, contemplation, and prayer, God’s people will be elevated above common, earthly thoughts and feelings, and will be brought into harmony with Christ and His great work of cleansing the sanctuary above from the sins of the people” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 575).

Contemplation and meditation can thus be understood to be synonymous, a process of dwelling in thought upon God and spiritual matters, a process of bringing us closer to God in a unique way. Meditation not only involves thinking but it incorporates study. It underscores the importance of truth. So it’s not a simple process of repeating a mantra or some other short recitational prayer. “The words of Christ must be meditated upon and cherished and enshrined in the heart. They should not be repeated, parrot-like, finding no place in the memory and having no influence over the heart and life” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 355).

Meditation is a deliberate effort to connect to God without talking to Him. It’s not prayer but a unique method of listening. It is something that we should include in our daily routine, something we should not overlook.

“But what should I do when I’m not feeling well?” you ask. Once again we have words of comfort: “Often your mind may be clouded because of pain. Then do not try to think. You know that Jesus loves you. He understands your weakness. You may do his will by just resting in his arms” (Review and Herald, June 2, 1910).

There is no need for meditation to become stressful. No, it should be a pleasant and edifying experience—one that is
thoroughly enjoyable. That's why we are also told: “Disciplining the mind by religious exercises to love devotion and heavenly things, will bring the greatest amount of happiness” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 507).

The apostle Paul joins this conversation in his letter to the Philippians: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8, KJV, emphasis supplied). He confirms the process as one involving thought, evaluation, and continual study.

Paul’s letter to the church is not limited to any age group, but is meant for believers of all ages. Ellen White informs the church of today that the “future abode of the righteous and their everlasting reward are high and ennobling themes for the young to contemplate” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 504).

What then should we contemplate? Upon what shall we meditate? Is our meditation limited to the law of God and the writings of the Old Testament, as stated above in Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2?

Again we have counsel: “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ from the manger to Calvary. We should take it point by point and let the imagination vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones of His earthly life. By thus contemplating His teachings and sufferings, and the infinite sacrifice made by Him for the redemption of the race, we may strengthen our faith, quicken our love, and become more deeply imbued with the spirit which sustained our Savior. If we would be saved at last we must all learn the lesson of penitence and faith at the foot of the cross. . . . Everything noble and generous in man will respond to the contemplation of Christ upon the cross” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 374).

**Missing Out on the Power**

Each of us is probably familiar with the above-mentioned quote. We know its content, and we know its intent, yet we fail to parse the statement and fully grasp its meaning.

We fail to live its power. “The contemplation of the matchless depths of a Savior’s love should fill the mind, touch and melt the soul, refine and elevate the affections, and completely transform the whole character” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 213).

Perhaps we have never learned of this power to assist us in partaking of the divine nature and elevating our affections. Meditation is an unused tool in our spiritual toolbox. It lies idle and unworn.

We wonder why the church is stagnant. We wonder why the Holy Spirit is manifested so little. And yet we fail to qualify for receiving Him. With so little preparation He cannot come to us; we are not ready.

The power of meditation will also affect our minds: “The mind will strengthen by dwelling upon elevating subjects” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 408). As we spend time in meditation, our minds and our faith will strengthen. Our desires will become His desires, our thoughts will become His thoughts, and finally our actions will become His actions, and we will be living the life that God means for us to live.

“Contemplating things of eternal interest will give true perception of the things of God. The respect and reverence due to God will be exhibited in the daily life and character. The soul will be brought into harmony with heaven. The entire character will be elevated and transformed. The believer will be made Christ-like, and finally obtain an entrance into the city of God” (*Review and Herald*, January 1, 1880).

Lest we think a minor investment of our personal time is adequate, let me reiterate with this comment: “The work of becoming perfect through the merits of Christ requires much meditation and earnest prayer” (*Review and Herald*, August 8, 1878, emphasis supplied).

Yes, the church is largely uneducated regarding meditation. The subject needs to be presented before the people with clarity and enthusiasm that we may “comprehend and enjoy God” (*Review and Herald*, May 30, 1882).