How would you live your life if you knew you had only one year left to live? What would you do that you hadn’t done before? What would you sacrifice? What would you let go of?

In Luke 13:6-9, Jesus used a fig tree to teach His disciples about the importance of fruit-bearing. The fig tree was the produce of the nation of Israel. The gardener was asked to cut it down. The gardener requested that it be allowed to live for one more year. If it was still barren, it would be cut down. The gardener was patient. The Fig tree was protected by the presence of other fruit-bearing Christians. God has been patient with us. If I knew I only had one year left to live, I would make a few things my priority.

The church can be like a family. There may be some crazy cousins, eccentric aunts, and a few black sheep. However, the church is as much a part of my life as the air I breathe. The church is God’s body, and Jesus Christ is its head. It has the backing of God the Father and the Holy Spirit. It has my support as well.

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NamYong Han, 69, is the Head Elder of the Chilbo SDA Church in Jealabuk-do, Jeongeup, in the Chilbo-myeon region of Korea. The Chilbo Church belongs to the Southwest Korean Conference. Elder Han holds a bachelor’s degree in Theology and for many years used it to serve as an agriculturist missionary in Bangladesh, the Philippines, and China. He also has served as the vice president of the Korea Organic Farming Association and professor at the Public Service Training Center. He enjoys writing agricultural topics which include “Secrets of Grape Therapy” and “Country Life and Organic Farming.” His other passions are spreading the gospel and heading the elders of his church.

1. WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO TRANSCRIBE THE BIBLE?
I worked as a volunteer in China for 8 years from 2000 to 2007. At that time, I struggled with many difficulties related to religious activities, so I had conflicting thoughts and felt disappointed. I realize that being closer to the Lord was the only solution to my problem and so I studied the Bible carefully everyday to fill myself with spiritual food. I tried to reflect the Gospel and the fragrance of Jesus through my life and behavior. Then, I was requested to support agricultural development projects from North Korea. As I cannot carry the Bible into North Korea, I started to transcribe the Bible by memory with the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

2. HOW DID YOU TRANSCRIBE THE BIBLE?
I have copied the Bible six times since January 7, 2003 to today. My third transcription was the Chinese Bible. I also transcribed the series of the Conflict of the Ages. It took me 375 days. My fourth transcription was the Bible in Korean. This transcription was initiated by the General Conference and has the word of God in Korean. I have made twelve-folding screens with the fifth transcription. It shows the content of Old and New Testaments at a glance. God sent me a good artist who asked me to make this screen. Many people who look at the screen are so touched and decided to copy the Bible too. The Conflict of the Ages series was also produced as a ten-fold screen.

3. WHAT BENEFIT OR LESSONS DID YOU LEARN THROUGH THE BIBLE TRANSCRIPTION?
The most important fact is that Satan tries to deprive humans of the Word of God, while God is trying to protect it. To be a son of God or Satan depends on whether we keep and practice God’s Word or not and it is also the way of restoring the image of God. When we study the Bible, we can meet God, walk with God, see God, and talk with God. The more I read the Bible, the more I realize that God is great and holy in contrast to me who is so small. Depending on God, we can accomplish sanctification. Reading, copying, and living according to the Bible is the same way that Enoch walked with God.

4. WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?
God has aroused a Bible-transcribing movement in many countries including Korea, China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan through me. The FoVoW the Bible project initiated by the General Conference emphasizes the importance of the Bible to all people. If possible, I will do my best to transcribe the Bible more and to spread this movement all over the world.

5. WHEN WAS THE FIRST TIME YOU READ THE BIBLE?
I have been reading the Bible since 1959. At that time, I did not have enough money to buy a complete Holy Bible, so I read Bible books in pieces every evening. I borrowed a complete one from a church elder to copy it.

6. IN CLOSING, ANY WORDS TO CHURCH MEMBERS?
Satan deprived people of God’s Word using idols during Old Testament times. He also captures people’s minds through fame, money, pleasure, sports, TV, and computers in the present age. God’s people must practice to keep His Word until death just like the Waldensians did. As Waldensians observed God’s Word through Bible transcription movement, this movement will bring a second Waldensian age. John 17:3 says “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”. I wish all of you could meet and walk with Jesus Christ through the Bible.

7. THE FASTEST HIGHWAY TO BE GOD’S HOLY PEOPLE

It is almost impossible to adequately fulfill the office of church elder without having a firm commitment to studying and obeying God’s Word. The nature of the office, the qualities of those who exert it and the responsibilities implied in it, compels the church elder to be a person with a good knowledge of the Bible.

Christian maturity, life example, the ability to teach others, and the knowledge of God’s plan for His church are prerequisites for being a good elder. On the other hand, it is expected that the elder be able to preach and counsel, always focusing on what the church believes and preaches. How could an elder do that if he or she is not connected to the Word of God, the source of all knowledge? Impossible!

The apostle Paul was right when, in counseling Timothy to learn how to conduct the church, he included advice such as the following; similar advice may also be found in Paul’s epistles to Titus.  
- “A bishop then must be blameless . . . able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).
- “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:13).
- “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).
- “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14, 15).
- “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

* Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers” (2 Tim. 4:2, 3).

These texts dearly reveal the value the apostle gives to the fact that each church leader, especially elders, should study the Bible so that he or she may talk about it, teach it, and preach its truths. Furthermore, Paul presents it as the power that can make church members improve themselves in following God’s will.

Therefore, it is the duty of each church elder to be committed daily to studying the Bible as a matter of great personal importance and as a need for their office. I believe studying the Sabbath School quarterly and reading the Bible helps us to become better leaders. We also need to read it to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of church doctrines. On the other hand, it is very healthy for elders to share biblical truths with other people and with small groups; this practice will improve the elder’s ability to teach the distinctive elements of the Adventist faith, and he or she will seek opportunities to teach the Word of God publicly. Regular church services, public evangelism, and special weeks of spiritual emphasis may be a great help for doing that.

Roberto Herrera is the head of the Religious Liberty department for the Inter-American Division. He is a distinguished preacher and author of the books 101 Ideas Para Usar la Vida Sabiamente y Primero la Primera.
Ezekiel spoke at length against the dangers of such messages, warning that not all apparent signs and wonders are genuine. Given that the gift of prophecy has been and still remains a valid manifestation of the Spirit of God, and knowing that Satan desires to deceive even the most discerning believers with his counterfeit messengers, it behooves us to take seriously the Bible’s admonition to test the prophets (1 Tim. 5:19-21). To this end, the Bible outlines the following four hallmarks of a true prophet:

1. Any future events prophesied must come true (Deut. 18:21-22).
2. All prophecies must harmonize with Scripture (Isa. 8:19-20).
3. Any future events prophesied must come true (Deut. 18:21-22).
4. The Christ-like results of their work must be evident (Isa. 11:2-3).

As outlined in the eighteenth fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we recognize that all of these criteria were met in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Looking ahead to what I believe are the times in which we are now living, Ellen G. White cautioned, “The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. ‘Where there is no vision, the people perish’ (Prov. 29:18). Satan, as the great deceiver and father of lies, will continue to undermine our confidence in the testimony of the Spirit of God in the same manner as the false prophet Marduk operated in ancient Babylon. The false prophet Marduk concealed his identity by pretending to be a servant of the Sun God, his master. The false prophet Marduk’s inspired perspective had an understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures, and his appearance was such as to be able to assert his messages as if they were from God. The same is true of the false prophet of the last days. They will assert their inspired messages as if they were from God. This is why Satan will continue to undermine our confidence in the testimony of the Spirit of God. As we see the final events of earth’s last days unfold, let us not concede one inch of territory to our enemies. May we be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we may stand firm upon the Bible truth regarding the gift of prophecy. As we witness the false prophet continue to operate in our midst, it is most important that we be able to distinguish between the Spirit of God’s Word and His chosen messenger, Ellen G. White.”

Ministry Magazine, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20902, USA. P.O. Box 686800, Dallas, TX 75268 USA. Telephone: 1-800-258-7586. Email: magazine@gc.adventist.org. Please share this request with others. The Spirit of Prophecy, 1936, 1:14-15.
CHURCH ELDERS AS ADVOCATES FOR ADVENTIST EDUCATION

Do you wonder these days? Do you wonder why some parents are not interested in Adventist schools? Have you noticed that the enrollment growth rate is not as great as expected for the past few years? The economic environment for all schools is not as favorable.

When does the Adventist Church need its church elders? When the church needs direction from the board. Church elders can be advocates for Adventist education. Adventist education is a God-given privilege.

Ellen G. White said, "The education of our church is an educational system that is under divine direction. The church is in charge of the education of children in its schools. Church elders can be advocates for Adventist education. Adventist education is a God-given privilege."

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The pastor is the shepherd of the flock, and the local elder is the undershepherd. Together they have the responsibility of caring for the sheep. On Sabbath they help to provide proper spiritual nourishment, inspiration, and encouragement through Bible study, worship, and fellowship. Sabbath should be a high experience for every Seventh-day Adventist Christian. Each Sabbath should be a step in spiritual growth and another milestone on the road to holiness. Each service should contribute toward the great objective, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

However, as important as the Sabbath service is, we can never forget that our responsibility to the flock begins and ends with the Sabbath. What happens during the week may actually determine the salvation or loss of many souls. Here is where the care that the shepherd and the undershepherds becomes exceedingly important.

THE MISING SHEEP

On Sabbath the anxious shepherd will look carefully to see which sheep are missing. His heart will go out to the absent ones, particularly to those whom he knows are experiencing spiritual struggles.

It is easy to report to the church board that Brother Blank has not been in church for six months, one year, or perhaps several years, but what has been done during that period to encourage the missing member to return?

Visitation with former members have revealed that many of them could have been rescued if they had been contacted, prayed with, and encouraged during the early periods of their declining experience. Eternity alone will reveal how important the visits of faithful pastors and elders have been in saving members for Christ and His church.

MY EXPERIENCE

There was a time when, as a teenager lad, I had become unsettled and careless. I began slipping away during the worship service, then finally skipped Sabbath School as well.

The words touched my heart. I loved the Lord. In fact, as a junior I had already felt the call to the ministry. But then the devil had lured me into the broad and popular way. Now I knew that I must change, and the decision for change was made while these humble lay leaders of the church talked and prayed.

A number of years later, I learned that this head elder, who for years had given spiritual leadership to my home church, was seriously ill in a rest home near where I was then pastoring. I seized the first opportunity to visit him. What great encouragement came into his life, then ebbing away, as I expressed to him my great appreciation for his visit that dark night! Tears of gratitude flowed from each of us. I have often wondered just what would have happened to me if he had not come, if he had not made that personal appeal!

Church Elder, how is it with you? Do you have the same concern? Are you willing, after a busy day at your office, in your shop, or perhaps on your farm, to leave the comforts of your home and go out to search out a missing member of the flock, perhaps a teenager? What efforts are you putting forth to encourage discouraged souls? What are you doing to bring them back to the sunshine of God’s love?

The care of the flock has been entrusted to the pastor and elders of the church. This is not an option; it is a decided responsibility. It can be neglected only at the loss of some dear souls.

In the larger churches, some type of undershepherd plan should be in operation by which the church membership is organized into groups, with undershepherds over each. Where this plan is followed, the prime responsibility for seeing that this plan is actually a functioning process rests with the elders. The deacons and deaconesses should be involved, but the leadership, by precept and example, must come from the elders.

DO NOT NEGLECT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

This phase of responsibility is too often neglected, and as a result we have the wrecks of human souls strewn along the highway to the kingdom. Just recently a dear woman came into my office to discuss a problem with me. She had been disfellowshipped for lack of attendance. There were extenuating circumstances. Admittedly, she could have made a greater effort to contact the church, but through the experience that continued for quite a period of time, little effort was made by the church to contact her. Finally the post office brought her the news that her name had been dropped from the church records. Thankfully, she is preparing to have her membership reinstated in a church in the city to which she has moved. She loved the Lord enough to take the initiative. It would have been much easier for her to have grown bitter and turned completely away from the church.

May the Lord bless both pastors and elders as together they have offered, plans laid, and efforts made not only to win souls for the church but to hold those who have already been gathered in. It is part of the self-sacrificing but rewarding labor that God has called you to do.

And in thus looking after the flock, you are following the example of the Great Shepherd.
I moved from upstate New York to South Texas about three years ago. Being head elder in the beautiful Adirondack Mountains was very different from being an elder in a bilingual church in the wonderful Gulf Coast region of Texas. As we were getting acquainted with our new church family, one man stood out from the rest. Brother Rito’s strength and compassion and his dedication to the church and the Word of God was amazing. You could tell that the Lord was using him and his wonderful family—wife Genny and daughters Kimberly and Carolyn—to further His work.

Shortly after we arrived, Brother Rito was diagnosed with a very aggressive type of cancer. You could see the cancer taking the strength from his body, but his love and determination to live for God and to set an example grew stronger every day.

At the young age of 30, I was elected to be head elder of my Texas church. If the Lord had faith in me, I should have faith in myself! Brother Rito was getting weaker every week. Every Sabbath the pastor would ask for special prayer for Brother Rito, and we elders would lay our hands on him and anoint his head with oil. Every Sabbath Brother Rito would shake hands with everyone as they left the church. This effort took all his physical strength, but his emotional strength was amazing. He was Job-like; Satan could hurt his body, but God had his mind. That enraged Satan even more. In a matter of months, Brother Rito had taken a turn for the worse and was given only a couple months to live.

At that point, the pastor decided to have a Week of Prayer for Brother Rito and to anoint him every night during that week. Each church leader was assigned a night to give a brief sermon, after which we prayed together. My assigned talk was at the end of the week, and each night I searched my soul to see if there was anything that would prevent the healing that our church so desired. I thought all week about what to say that had not already been said, but I couldn’t think of anything! Our petition was before the Lord; what more could I do?

On my way home from work Thursday night, I put the top down on my convertible so I could have it out with God. As I drove though the solitary ranchland, I looked up at the vast Texas night sky and felt closer to God as I looked up into His creation. In desperation, I asked the Lord, “What do you want me to do? You know what we want! How many more anointings do you want us to do? What must I say? Is my prayer wrong? Am I not saying the right words? Lord, if there was ever anyone who deserved healing, it would be Brother Rito. His family needs him, and Your church needs him. What do you want me to do? Please let me know!” Suddenly, it was as though someone had snapped their fingers. A calm came over me, and a voice said, “Don’t you know that I love Brother Rito more than you can comprehend?”

That was it! No matter what happened to Brother Rito, God loved him and would do whatever was best for him, even if I could not understand it.

The next night I shared my experience and we anointed Brother Rito again. But his condition got worse, and a month later he died. His death was a great loss to the church’s leadership and morale, but I am happy to say that Brother Rito’s wife has stepped in to fill his shoes. She is the church’s first woman elder, and the Holy Spirit has empowered her in her work with the church. The same strength and conviction that her husband had, she now brings forth.

Brother Rito’s passing was a trying time for my church and I, but we have grown from this experience and now have a better understanding of God and His love for us. In these uncertain times, we need to strengthen our faith and believe that God knows what is best for us. We also need to recognize that the love that He has for us is greater than we can imagine. We need to trust Him, even if we can’t understand. We also need to appreciate the people God places in our lives. I consider myself privileged to have known Brother Rito. I thank God that He used his life to teach our church a valuable lesson and to strengthen our faith.

Bryan Windover is the head elder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Victoria, Texas.
Is serving Jesus a commitment or a convenience? Many people today do not want to be totally committed to the Lord because it demands too much of them. Let’s be honest: commitment becomes someone else’s responsibility when it interferes with our schedules.

According to Webster, “commitment” means “to pledge to some particular course or use.” Commitment to Jesus is more than a definition; it requires my life, my soul, my very being! And it’s not just twice a week or even once a week, but all the time!

Just look at the cross: Jesus was committed to you all the way.

Many are not committed to the things of God, only to what is convenient before God. A clear example of this lifestyle is when someone says, “I go to church on Sabbath morning. Isn’t that enough?”

Webster defines “convenient” as “suited to one’s comfort or ease.” Are we living a life that is suited for our own comfort? Do we want to be committed as long as it is easy? What if Jesus had decided not to do for us? Where would our eternity be?

I want us to look at being totally committed to God. The commitment should be a part of our everyday lives, not just something we do when it’s convenient or comfortable.

THE CONVENIENCE OF THE SELF-SERVING

The self-serving focus on themselves rather than on God. In Matthew 19:16, we see someone asking Jesus what they need to do to obtain eternal life. Self-serving has to give up something to follow God.

In verse 21, Jesus says, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions...” Many today have an uncommitted focus on keeping their possessions rather than having a giving attitude.

In verses 21 and 22, Jesus continues, “Give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come follow me.”

This command doesn’t apply only to money. Commitment can be giving of your time, energy, and possessions for God. Many of us have idols in our lives that are not money. Maybe it is work, sports, etc. Jesus is telling the rich young ruler (and us) to get rid of such things and focus on commitments to the Lord and following Him unconditionally.

Mark 8:36, 37 says, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet lose his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

The rich young ruler wanted to follow Christ, but he wanted it to be convenient. How about you and me? This young man was looking for a better way to get what he wanted rather than wanting God to make him a better man. Are we looking to get what we want out of convenience rather than wanting God to make us better Christians?

God does not give up on the self-serving, no matter what the situation is or what you or I have done in the past. God follows U-turns, and today you can make that U-turn in your life.

YOUR ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN YOUR WORDS!

Have you ever sized yourself like this? “If my job is it to serve God? Have you ever answered yourself by saying, “Well, it is the pastor’s job. I’ll take care of it because we pay him to do it.” If that is your answer, you are lying to yourself. Let’s read what the Bible says about serving the Lord.

First, what is the Bible for? (Read 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.) We are all instructed to work for the Lord! Second, what is the job to be done? Matthew 28:19 says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

We should preach the Gospel to the world. COMMITTED TO SERVING GOD?

Are you totally committed to God in every area of your life? Is it convenient for you to attend church once a week, but commitment means serving no matter what, no matter when life happens and things get in the way, but the Lord never gives us more than we can handle.

CONCLUSION

Are you totally committed to God in every area of your life, or are you conveniently committed to Him for the sake of your comfort or ease? Jesus is totally committed to the way, and we are willingly to be totally committed to God?
**INTRODUCTION**

A. Mount Everest, in the Himalayas, has an altitude of approximately 29,000 feet; it is the highest peak on earth. Likewise, Isaiah 53 is the highest prophetic revelation about the suffering Messiah. 

B. No other Bible passage presents in a clearer way Christ’s vicarious nature and the character of His death. It is the anticipated story of Christ’s suffering. 

C. Though it was written in the seventh century B.C., it could almost have been written yesterday. Carlos Sophron, the acclaimed evangelist, said “What a chapter, a miniature Bible, the Gospel in its essence!” 

D. Its inspiration and its power to move hearts are unmeasured.

E. Ellen G. White says that Satan diligently studied Isaiah’s prophecies and other prophecies which referred to the Messiah. The prophecies instilled in him fear and apprehension, and he decided to blind the people so that they could not see the revelation. He was mostly successful, and his still trying to prevent us from understanding the sacrifice Jesus made for us and from giving Him our love. Ellen White also states that we should “let the impression of each scene of the life of Jesus, especially the final ones” (this chapter should be studied, it presents Christ as the Lamb of God [...]) “the entire chapter should be committed to memory” (Ellen G. White, SD4 Bible Commentary, 17).

**JESUS FORETOLD (ISAIAH 53:1-13)**

A. A plant has a root that sustains it. When a tree is cut to the root, a tender plant grows and flourishes from the apparently lifeless roots.

1. Revelation 22:16 says that Jesus is “the root and the offspring” (generation). The root tells us of His divinity, the offspring tells us of His humanity.

2. The root of the litchi tree's baby. The word became flesh. It took part in our nature. 

3. “I am the root and the offspring.” There was neither life nor joy; however, the root was there. Any farmer knows that it is not normal for a sprout to appear in dry land. The laws of nature demand moisture in the ground for germination. 

4. Jesus would come precisely from an origin as strange as “dry land.”

5. From a human viewpoint, this last comparison is very appropriate: “What distinguished person was born in a stable? Who among the great men of the Earth has worked hard to conquer and influence others only by his integrity, character, and virtue?”

**JESUS IS THE SUBSTITUTE (ISAIAH 53:4-6)**

In Isaiah 53, the vicarious nature of Christ’s suffering is emphasized 11 times:

1. He has borne our grief. 

2. Carried our sins. 

3. Smiten by God, and afflicted; 

4. He was wounded for our transgressions; 

5. He was bruised for our iniquities; 

6. He bore the chastisement of our peace; 

7. His stripes we are healed; 

8. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all; 

9. He was cut off from the land of the living; 

10. He was stricken for our transgressions; 

11. Sinners are justified through Him, and He will carry their iniquities upon Himself. 

**JESUS AND THE FRUIT OF HIS WORK (ISAIAH 53:10-12)**

A. The believer who fears Satan’s captives was terrible. While Satan tried to exalt himself to be like God, Jesus divested himself from everything. He humbled himself.

1. He prospered despite His terrible humiliation. 

2. Seeing the fruit of His work in the conversion of the nations, even He, through the Spirit, felt fully made by the agony He suffered. 

3. Christ Himself saw His differentiation as a fulfillment of this prophecy (see Luke 23:27). 

4. Wow! great is a person’s value to God? in what will the Messiah find satisfaction? He will be happy to see the pleasure of the glory that comes from the Father. He rejoices in seeing the countless millions of people who seek His righteousness and become new creatures.

5. On the fifth day, He created the sea, the creatures, and the birds (Gen. 1:20-23).

6. On the sixth day, He created animals (Gen. 1:24, 25) and man—this creature for man was created in God’s image in both exterior likeness and character (Gen. 1:27).

7. On the seventh day, God rested. The completion of the creative work was part of ending the work of that week. That day would be a special blessing for man, and that is why God sanctified it and set it apart, for holy purposes.

**CONCLUSION**

Seeing that it pleased the Lord to save us, let us be thankful by accepting His salvation today.

—Laenco Mazzaro is the communication secretary for the Central Brazilian Union.
INTRODUCTION

We read in the nativity story that “there was no room for them at the inn.” Those are familiar words, but this is not a Christmas message. Life in the first-century Roman Empire was very different from life today. Although we might think of Christmas as a time when we gather at home to celebrate the birth of Jesus, many people in the first century would have been away from home on their way to or from work. Life in the desert, hospitality was a mark of discipleship. Abraham was known for his hospitality. In Genesis 18, when Abraham saw three strangers approach his tents, he called for his wife and servants to prepare a meal for them and watched over them as they rested in the shade of a tree. Abraham regarded these strangers as divinely sent. This was quite true, as they turned out to be angels from God. His humble graciousness Abraham received a rich blessing. The author of Hebrews likely had Abraham in mind when he wrote that “he showed hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2).

MODERN EXAMPLES OF HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is deeply rooted in the Scriptures. In Genesis 18, when Abraham saw three strangers approach his tents, he called for his wife and servants to prepare a meal for them and watched over them as they rested in the shade of a tree.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus expresses His gratitude, saying, “I was a stranger and you took Me in” (Matt. 25:35). He also encourages us to help others, saying, “If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of My followers, you will surely be rewarded!” (Matt. 10:42).

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is deeply rooted in the Scriptures. In Genesis 18, when Abraham saw three strangers approach his tents, he called for his wife and servants to prepare a meal for them and watched over them as they rested in the shade of a tree.

The root of all three words is the Latin word translated as “guests.” Our homes are meant to be places of shelter and healing. Homes of rest. The Greek word for hospitality (philia) in the New Testament means “a love of strangers.” In Bible times, strangers were synonymous with enemies. One way to destroy enemies is to kill them. Another way is to befriend them. Hospitality does that.

BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION ON HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is a mark of discipleship. In James 2:15-17, we read, “Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say ‘Good, well done, and God bless you, stay warm and eat well!’, but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? Faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.” In his letter to the Romans, Paul directs us to “share with people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (12:13).

A modern translation to John’s commendeation to the church is “Dear friend, when you extend hospitality to Christian brothers and sisters, even when they are strangers, you make the faithful visible. They’re made a full report back to the church here, a message about your love. It’s good work you’re doing, helping these travelers on their way, hospitality worthy of God Himself! They set out under the banner of the name and get help from unbelievers. So they deserve any support we can give them. In providing meals and a bed, we help our companions in spreading the Truth” (3 John, The Message). The apostle Jesus sent to proclaim the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire depended on the hospitality of others. John is referring to the needs of these early church missionaries.

To understand what hospitality is and what it is not, we need only look to Luke 10 and observe two women who welcomed Jesus into their home—Mary and Martha. Here we learn about priorities—it’s more important to be with people, to spend time with our guests, than to fuss and be frustrated about housekeeping details. We choose our priorities by how we invest our time. Many of the Marthas of this world are frustrated perfectionists, and this includes men—hospitality is not exclusively a feminine task! We can be discouraged from entertaining because our standards are more important than that love we could be showing to others. Martha was in bondage to her standards.

The point of hospitality is not the lack of the food of the world, but the relationships we develop and the love we convey by involving ourselves with others. The food we serve is not the goal but a means to the goal. True hospitality is not pretentious—it is bringing people into our homes as honorary members of our family.

Do we really know what it’s like to linger over a meal? This may be lost in our fast-paced culture, where eating has been reduced to a necessary function. Go to any fast-food place, and the atmosphere, even the uncomfortable chairs, are intentionally designed to get people in and out in a hurry. We’ve gone from grazing to gulping! Some homes are like fast-food restaurants. Families rush through meals and often do not even eat together, missing opportunities for closeness and communion.

MODERN EXAMPLES OF HOSPITALITY

Now I’d like to consider to how we apply hospitality to our lives. We are our brother’s keeper. This means that when we have an opportunity to assist someone in need, we should consider it a divine appointment. Believing in God’s providence means that there are no accidents, only appointments!

One way of showing hospitality is by hosting a Bible study in a home or by organizing a lunchtime study, prayer, or fellowship to welcome our children’s friends and teach them about Christ.

Christian service projects provide ways of showing hospitality. These might include: volunteering to visit shut-ins or people in hospitals and nursing homes; working at the family pantry or a homeless shelter; preparing a meal for a neighbor who is bereaved or ill; welcoming newcomers to church and inviting them to our homes, helping out at a church dinner, or providing transportation for someone in need. God isn’t looking for any special abilities, only our availability.

Hospitality extends to children. We need to welcome our children’s friends and teach our kids to show hospitality.

CONCLUSION

Hospitality is an attitude of the heart, a way of life, a form of grace. Have angels been to your home? I ask you how we can befriend others, make a charred of your grace and instruments of your love. Whether we are single or married, adult or young person, show us how you can demonstrate God’s hospitality. Amen.
HEALTHY TIPS FOR ELDERS
7 SECRETS FOR TRUE LONGEVITY

AQUATE SLEEP

Certainly it is essential to participate in prayer vigils or to be available to help others in an emergency, but these situations are usually not routine. In most cases, sleeping too little or too much or having an irregular sleep pattern is often unnecessary and avoidable. If we place a priority on this issue, we can easily rearrange things and plan ahead, while still leaving room for special circumstances.

Think about your sleep habits over the past few months. Perhaps you see a pattern of irregularity in your sleep schedule and may even have experienced insomnia or felt unable to enjoy a regular 7-8 hours of restful sleep. Here are some tips for improving sleep and maintaining levels:

- Awaken with the sun, or be exposed to at least 30 minutes of bright light starting within 10 minutes of awakening.
- Establish regular hours for sleeping (ideally before 10 p.m.) for eating, and for exercise.
- When going to sleep, be still with your eyes closed and plan for 7-8 hours of sleep.
- Keep the room quiet, dark, and cool.
- Ask God for peace and restful sleep as you lay your anxieties on Him.

Isn’t it time to take a second look at the hours spent with God, family, work, and church ministry, while at the same time optimizing and planning for healthier sleep patterns? It will not only contribute to your longevity; it will positively impact those around you as well. “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (Ps 4:8).

1. Adventist worship should be awe-inspiring. In Revelation 14:3, the angel proclaims, “A voice roared in the hearing of the angels.” This heavenly harp-playing and singing reveal the joy and feeling that belongs in worship. When we who are preparing for heaven worship as we will in heaven, our worship will be joyful. It will include both our thoughts and our feelings, demanding clear heads and warm hearts.

2. Adventist worship should be joyful. Revelation 14:3 describes God’s redeemed in worship: “The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang as before the throne: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and magnificence, for You alone O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” (Ps 4:8).

3. Adventist worship should be experimental. Referring to the song God’s people sing, Revelation declares, “No one could learn the song.” Why? Because it is a song of personal experience. Nobody else can do it for us. Worship is experiential.

Worship is not a routine or a tradition. It is an event, a happening. It is not a passive, spectator sport but a personal interaction between the Creator and the created.

INGREDIENTS OF ADVENTIST WORSHIP

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CONTROVERSY ABOUT ADVENTIST WORSHIP

Adventist worship has become controversial. Many of our pastors have been communicating with the General Conference Ministerial Association, asking for guidance as they attempt to navigate the minefield surrounding change in worship practice. Some don’t know where to turn. What should change? What should never change?

The subject demands far more than the cursory treatment this brief article allows. Below are some questions that need to be addressed:

- What did early Adventists worship?
- What are our current worship customs or traditions?
- Where did we get them?
- What do our pastors and congregations think about worship?
- What do our young people think of our worship services?
- What are the Bible principles that will keep us balanced between divine adoration and human fellowship and between reason and emotion?
- What about “celebration” worship?
- How does your worship service measure up? Sometimes you ought to sit alone in the sanctuary, when the people are gone and the pews are empty, and ask the one question that counts: “Did they or did they not meet God today?”

Keep preaching the old message. But keep experimenting with more meaningful ways to worship until you feel certain each week that every sincere worshipper is encouraged to encounter God. Worship is encountered by Floyd Breeze is a former Ministerial Secretary of the General Conference.
The art of speech

SIMPLICITY IN OUR SPEECH

Secrets of Success for the Gospel—The success of the gospel message does not depend upon learned speeches, eloquent testimonies, or deep arguments. It depends upon the simplicity of the message and its adaptation to the souls that are hungering for the bread of life. “What shall I do to be saved?”—this is the want of the soul.—COL 231.

Purity and Simplicity—Our work should be to embrace every opportunity to present the truth in its purity and simplicity where there is any desire or interest to hear the reasons of our faith.—3T 214.

Work in the Cities—The Lord is speaking to His people at this time, imploring, Gain an entrance into the cities, and proclaim the truth in simplicity and in faith. The Holy Spirit will work through your efforts to impress hearts. Introduce no strange doctrine into your message, but speak the simple words of the gospel of Christ, which young and old can understand. The unlearned as well as the educated are to comprehend the truths of the third angel’s message, and they must be taught in simplicity. If you would approach the people acceptably, humble your hearts before God and learn His ways.—MM 299.

Unlocking Closed Hearts—The true, honest words of a son or daughter of God, spoken in natural simplicity, will open the door to hearts that have long been locked.—6T 115.

Simple Words May Open Locked Hearts—The most intellectual, those who are looked upon and praised as the world’s most gifted men and women, are often refreshed by the simple words that flow from the heart of one who loves God and who can speak of that love as naturally as the worldling speaks of the things which his mind contemplates and feeds upon. Often the words well prepared and studied have little influence. But if the true, honest words of a son or daughter of God, spoken in natural simplicity, will open the door to hearts that have long been locked.—6T 115.

Too Much Proof—In this age, when pleasing fables are drifting upon the surface and attracting the mind, truth presented in an easy style, backed up with a few strong proofs, is better than to search and bring forth an overwhelming array of evidence; for the point then does not stand so distinct in many minds as before the objections and evidences were brought before them. With many, assertions will go further than long arguments. They take many things for granted. Proof does not help the case in the minds of such.—3T 36.

Plain Mileposts—The world needs labor now. Calls are coming in from every direction like the Macedonian cry: “Come over and help us.” Plain, pointed arguments, standing out as mileposts, will do more toward convincing minds as any great deal of ground, but which none but investigating minds will have interest to follow.—3T 39.

A few Forcible Remarks—A few forcible remarks upon some point of doctrine will fasten it in the mind much more firmly than if such a mass of matter were presented that nothing else would be thought of. It unfits the mind for solid thought and solid labor. It makes men inefficient, superficial, and spiritually diseased.—Ev 644.

The Highest Eloquence—You are to be the agent through whom God will speak to the soul. Precious words of vital interest and import. Your simplicity and sincerity will be the highest eloquence, and your words will be registered in the books of heaven as fit words, which are like apples of gold in pictures of silver.—SD 274.

Light With Every Word—At the Queensland camp meeting in 1898, instruction was given me for our Bible workers. In the visions of the night, ministers and workers seemed to be in a meeting where Bible lessons were being given. We said, “We have the Great Teacher with us today,” and we listened with interest to His words. He said, “There is a great work before you in this place. You will need to present truth in its simplicity. Bring the people to the waters of life. Speak to them the things which most concern their present and eternal good. Let not your study of the Scriptures be of a cheap or casual order. In all that you say, know that you have something which is worthy of the time you take to say it, and of the time of the hearers to hear. Speak of those things which are essential, those things which will instruct, bringing light with every word.

“I learned to meet the people where they are. Do not present subjects that will arouse controversy. Let not your instruction be of a character to perplex the mind. Do not cause the people to worry over things which you may understand but which they do not see, unless these are of vital consequence to the saving of the soul. Do not present the Scriptures in a way to make self and experience influential in the one who opens the Word. The work for this time is to train students and workers to deal with subjects in a plain, serious, and solemn manner.”—6T 58 59.

Spiritual Disease—All the singing which is so common, the theoretical gestures, all lightness and trifling, all jesting and joking, must be seen by the one who wears Christ’s yoke to be “not convenient”—an offense to God and a denial of Christ. It unfits the mind for solid thought and solid labor. It makes men inefficient, superficial, and spiritually diseased.—Ev 644.

This article is excerpted from the practical resource, Counsel on Speech and Song, by Ellen G. White. The entire work is available for purchase at www.pacificpress.com.
**RE-ELECTION AND MARRYING SOMEONE FROM ANOTHER FAITH**

The answer is “No.” It is possible that all officers could be re-elected, but we need to follow the steps outlined in the Church Manual, chapter 11.

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, officers are elected every one or two years (see p. 48) through an appointed nominating committee. This committee brings its report to the church, which then acts on the names presented. This procedure enables the church to give careful study to each name prior to election, and avoids the public competitive element that may arise when nominations are made from the floor.

I invite you to carefully consider the following points:

1. The church does not recommend an unequal yoke (see Church Manual, 183). “The Spirit of Prophecy consistently counsels against marriage between ‘the believer and the unbeliever’ and further cautions against uniting with fellow Christians who have ‘not accepted the truth for this time’” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies to the Church, 5:364).

2. The church cannot use authority or constraints to prevent its members from marrying between a Seventh-day Adventist and a non-Seventh-day Adventist, and strongly urges Seventh-day Adventist ministers not to perform such weddings.

“The church recognizes that it is the prerogative of the individual to make the final decision relative to the choice of a marriage partner. However, it is the hope of the church that, if the member chooses a marriage partner who is not a member of the church, the couple will realize and appreciate that the Seventh-day Adventist pastor, who has covenanted to uphold the principles outlined above, should not be expected to perform such a marriage.”

Because this is a biblical orientation, a courtship of this nature may disqualify the person from holding church leadership offices, because it might give the impression that the church condones such relationships, and others might feel motivated to follow the same example. However, the church needs to be very careful not to show rejection or discrimination to the non-Adventist partner.

This limitation has the purpose of motivating the church member to reconsider the relationship that is incompatible to his or her faith. Thus says the Church Manual: “If an individual does enter into such a marriage, the church is to demonstrate love and concern with the purpose of encouraging the couple toward complete unity in Christ” (183).

**WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN RELATION TO A MEMBER WHO MARRIES SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT PROFESS THE SAME FAITH?**

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**THE UNSPOKEN HEROES**

A child learns the words, “Jesus loves me this I know...”, a Pathfinder discovers the intricate beauty of nature during a field trip, church members reach out to a family in need at the food bank and youth help to build a chapel during a spring break mission trip.

Who are these unspoken heroes? They are the thousands of volunteers who make ministry possible on a 24/7 basis. Stop and ask yourself this question – how would your church, school or conference accomplish its mission if it had to depend solely on paid denominational employees? The fact is it couldn’t be done! Volunteers are the heart and soul of ministry, but do we take them for granted? As an elder, you have been chosen to be a leader in your congregation of this mighty army of Christian soldiers.

Using a quotation from Dr. Ken Blanchard, let’s set a vision for 2010:

“I think people (volunteers) want to be magnificent. It is the job of the leader (church elder) to bring out the magnificence in people (volunteers) and to create an environment where they feel safe and supported and ready to do the best job possible in accomplishing key goals. This responsibility is a sacred trust that should not be delegated and should be an opportunity to guide others to their full potential is an honor and one that should not be taken lightly. As leaders, we hold the lives of others in our hands. These hands need to be gentle and caring and always available for support.” ~ (Situational Leadership II – The Article pg. 2) Are you up to this challenge?

How do we manage the risks associated with such a diverse army of volunteers? Often we neglect our duty by taking the stance that the Lord will automatically provide safety at all church-related activities. “Where there is no counsel the people fall; but in a multitude of counselors there is safety” admonishes King Solomon in Proverbs 11:14 (NKJV). Taking adequate time to address safety issues during church board, elders meetings and other ministry planning sessions should be a critical focus and part of your congregation’s strategic vision and plan for ministry. Allowing apathy to fog clearly focused plans to conduct all church activities in a safe manner is a sure prescription for a serious accident that can cause physical harm or bring financial hardship and loss to your congregation.

“Leadership begins with our thoughts even before our actions. When our minds and our attitudes are right, we position ourselves to lead well.” ~ (John C. Maxwell, The Maxwell Leadership Bible, p. 754.) Safety is a habit that is learned by example and repetition of doing the right thing the right way all the time. As an elder, the members of your congregation will be looking to you for leadership and guidance during church activities. If you cut corners or take unwarranted risks you can expect other church officers to do the same. The words you say and the things you do will establish the example others will follow. As a leader you have a responsibility to uphold the standards that will lead to the safe achievement of your ministry objectives.

You need to be sure that appropriate training of volunteers takes place so each individual understands their roles and responsibilities. It is dangerous to assume that just because the person is an adult volunteer, they will automatically know what is expected of them in their given ministry role. Remember it takes training and practice in order to learn your duties, regardless if it is giving a bible study, supervising a children’s outing, setting up a fellowship dinner or conducting a church work bee. Your congregation needs to establish codes of expected conduct and standards of safety. Volunteers perform each and every day for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They truly are the unspoken heroes to whom we owe our greatest thanks for being – “That good and faithful servant,” who share of their time, talents and resources motivated by a loving heart.

Arthur F. Blinci, ARM eMBA
Vice President – Adventist Risk Management, Inc.
A LEADER WHO IS NOT GUIDED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO GIVE A GOOD REPRESENTATION OF CHRIST.

The first insight Tutsch highlights is related to the most basic characteristic of a spiritual leader. She asserts that a spiritual leader is one who uses his/her influence to promote Christ. Ellen White on Leadership underscores the fact that true leadership cannot exist without the knowledge of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The author emphasizes that Ellen White’s view regarding the necessity for the leader to be empowered by the Spirit seems stronger than that of any current leadership author. This is especially significant in today’s world, where the spiritual authority of leaders has experienced numerous attacks. Another reason why this is significant is that a leader who is not guided by the Holy Spirit will not be able to give a good representation of Christ. Furthermore, the spiritual leader’s effectiveness is directly connected to his or her relationship with God or the quality of the time he or she spends with God. Channeling one’s influence to promote Christ comes from a connection with God. Certainly, spiritual leadership is centered on a leader’s relationship with God, whereby he or she uses his or her influence to honor God.

In addition, Tutsch shows that Blackaby and King, Christian leadership authors, concurred with Ellen White’s perspective on spiritual leadership when they argued that experience alone cannot be our guide; every experience must be controlled and understood within the realm of Scripture. The high view of Scripture proposed by Blackaby and King was emphasized by Ellen White more than a century ago. This is extremely vital for the future of spiritual leadership because relativism, postmodernism, and the New Age movement seem to be engulfing today’s society, leading most people to look to reason and situation ethics as the guiding light of their lives. For the spiritual leader, reason, feelings, and societal norms are certainly not enough. In fact, these things have been found to be inadequate. The only sure foundation is the Word of God. Another significant outlook is that only the Word of God (written or living) is able to transform lives and enhance character development. History is full of examples which illuminate the fact that experience alone is insufficient when it comes to spiritual leadership. There is an urgent need for spiritual leaders to return to the foundation of leadership, the Bible. Obviously, this insight will lead spiritual leaders to be more conscious of the fact that spiritual leadership is rooted in the Word of God.

The idea that spiritual leadership is servant leadership is emphasized by Tutsch in reference to Ellen White’s leadership principles. The term “servant leadership” was coined by Robert Greenleaf. According to Ellen White, spiritual leaders serve, sacrifice, and engage in selfless behavior not because of their innate goodness but rather to emulate Jesus’ humility demonstrated in the incarnation. God, who is the source of true leadership, has set the example of what it means to be a servant leader. Self-sacrificing leadership has become popular today, but only in theory. In reality, the principle of servant leadership appears to be missing from the lives of many of today’s spiritual leaders. The world needs spiritual leaders who exemplify and embody servant leadership.

Furthermore, the essential components of empowerment and mentorship were insights gleaned from Ellen White on Leadership. Tutsch writes that spiritual leaders empower individuals and function as mentors to those who have been empowered. A spiritual leader whose responsibilities do not entail mentorship and empowerment ceases to function as an effective leader. Motivating people is a crucial leadership component because leaders who do not train anyone to take over after they leave are deemed ineffective leaders. In other words, leaders who are not creating successors are not really leading. This is significant because the success of one’s leadership is not solely dependent on the success the organization experiences when he or she is leading. On the contrary, its success also depends on the accomplishment it experiences after the leader has left. Certainly, empowerment and mentorship are directly connected to spiritual leadership.

In conclusion, Ellen White on Leadership is one of the most comprehensive books written on spiritual leadership. The way in which the author presents the information empowers leaders to be relevant and practical as they seek to embody and exemplify Christian leadership in this postmodern age. Likewise, the parallels that are drawn in this volume between contemporary writers and Ellen White could certainly change the way leaders approach ministry. The parallels used by Tutsch in this volume are similar to the object lessons that were used by the true Servant Leader, Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly, this book is a masterpiece on spiritual leadership.
SHARING THE GOOD NEWS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

One afternoon while I was standing on a river bank, I saw a huge box floating downstream with the river's current. It was full of goods, but I didn't know its contents. It was floating past me without any effort from me. I knew it wasn't mine, it was just floating by. I knew I had to do something about it.

What was the difference? It was LIFE!

The box was very impressive looking, well decorated with all kinds of designs but it did not have life, which is why it was going downstream with the flow.

However, the fish, tiny as far as its size or capacity was concerned, was small but it wasn't good enough for Sushi – "Tuna" I mean, but it was going upstream because of its life. Its life was its mission.

The mission of the church is outreach. Outreach is not just an activity of the church; it is the mission of the church. However, its institutional preoccupation, some of the churches have abandoned their real identity and reason for existence. They developed a very inward-looking passive culture. "Come and get it!"

Their message to people outside the church is to become like us, believe like us, dress like us, eat like us, act like us, like what we like and dislike what we don't like. But look at Jesus' evangelism strategy: instead of "Come and get it," it was "Go Get 'em!"

Jesus went to places where people were. Therefore we need churches where people are. Most people are not coming to us; we have to go to them.

There are times that we as Christians in the church are great at speaking the truth without love. We have the truth and know that people desperately need the truth, but the challenge is that people cannot hear it from us because we have not earned the privilege and trust to share it.

This will require shifting our efforts from just growing churches into transforming communities. Are we making any impact on the communities where our institutions are located?

Consider our churches, schools, and hospitals: Are the communities a better place to live because of our existence?

Not about our ability to do this; it is about our pride and our lack of concern for people that God cares about.

Ellen G. White said, "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior 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.'" (Ministry of Healing, p. 148)

If we paraphrase the above statement, it says Jesus mingled with people, identified their needs, met their needs, and developed a trust relationship.

Through the trust relationship He built a bridge, and then He said to the people, "Follow Me."

In Jesus' eyes, it is more important to be a good neighbor than to know WHO your neighbor is. Let us proclaim the Good News and demonstrate the love of God.

Sung Kwon, National Executive Director
North American Division Adventist Community Services

It's a different world...

A common challenge to the response of sharing the gospel today, yet the commission has not changed.

Kwon ardently believes that we are called to serve. His series explores effective ways to live the gospel in the context, using biblical principles to extend social justice and Christian moral responsibility beyond relief work to include community development.

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It’s a different world...
The condition of those who are lost is not always apparent. Three parables in Luke 15 merit a closer study as several areas of our world field launch an intensive search for former and inactive members.

Although their individual journeys are unique, those represented by the lost sheep, coin, and son all end up the same: Each of them begins as part of the “saved” and ends up lost. They start off as part of the group and end up all alone.

The sheep wandered off alone. Its journey away was not a bold move or a mad dash; if it had been, the shepherd would have noticed immediately and launched a rescue mission. More likely it was unintentional drifting of such a gradual nature that neither the group nor the shepherd (or even the sheep itself) realized it was leaving until it was all alone. The coin never left the premises, it remained in the general vicinity of the group and was found right where it had remained. Nevertheless, it was alone. A person can be lonely even in a group of familiar faces.

The son deliberately chose to leave. He put Palestine in his rearview mirror and probably slammed the door as he left. His choice was clear and his exit was announced. Everything but the end result was carefully planned. He did not plan to end up alone.

Alone! Perhaps the worst part of “solitude” is the separation—from Christ or from His body. Regardless of how far we exit our fellowship, far too many are left alone at the very time we should be searching for them.

HOW TO FIND THOSE WHO ARE LOST

These three parables offer helpful insights into what it takes to find those who have ended up alone, regardless of why they left.

Count.
The shepherd would never have known that one sheep was missing if he had not counted the others. A careful record of those who are regular in their attendance and who participate in fellowship is essential in determining who is missing or inactive.

Risk.
The shepherd risked the safety of the 99 sheep to search for the one that was lost. Somehow I had always pictured the group safely protected within the sheepfold. My perception was that the shepherd ventured out into the wilderness only doing everything possible to assure security and comfort for the group. But the text says the shepherd left the 99 exposed to the dangers of wild places while he sought the lost.

Labor. When the woman determined to find the coin, she went to work! Nothing of value comes without effort. The greater the value, the greater the effort that is demanded. To find her coin, the homemaker stirred up some dust as she cleaned thoroughly. Stirring up dust probably aggravated her allergies. Have you ever noticed that some people are allergic to soul-seeking? We need to cure these allergies.

Wait.
God’s timing is not my timing. The parable of the lost son reminds us that God never gives up—and neither should we. At the very point when all seems hopeless, heaven becomes most patient. How can I know what circumstance or event might trigger an awareness of need?

Pray.
Prayer—that key in the hand of faith that unlocks heaven’s blessing—is not for the purpose of changing God’s attitude toward the lost. Prayer changes my attitude and my ... to see them as Jesus sees them. And what a thing to pray for—to view every person’s potential through heaven’s eyes!

Love unconditionally.
Jesus does not picture the father as placing any conditions upon his love for his runaway son. Love, acceptance, and forgiveness were always ready. This was what the father also offered the son who remained. In fact, loving those who remain is sometimes the greater challenge.

Welcome.
The whole atmosphere was conditioned to embrace the prodigal. The father ran to meet his son. His boy had nothing to prove except that he understood which direction to head when he wanted to go home. Everything expressed warmth and welcome.

Restore.
The prodigal son has squandered much with his foolishness, but all was restored when he returned home. The robe, the shoes, and the ring declared his status. The prodigal came home expecting to be a servant and discovered that he was a son! He expected little; he received everything!

Rejoice.
Throw a party when the lost are found. Invite the crowd and celebrate the good news of resurrection. Dead sons and daughters are alive! Lost souls are saved! All of heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. The least of us can do is sponsor a potluck lunch and a special worship service to welcome the wanderer back. God won’t give us more blessings than we are happy to receive!

Yes, we need to seek even those who may not appear to be lost.
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MARCH 13, 2010

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