Church growth

Membership and money: Beware of those who emphasize the following terms either in spiritual or business matters:

- Power and passion
- Power-packed
- Creating maximum leaders
- Creating maximum achievement
- Huge earnings potential
- How to retire a millionaire

These most likely are used to attract membership and money and in a way that is not approved of by the Creator. The power being stressed today is not the power which comes from God. The desire to become rich and remain that way does not describe those who are waiting for Christ’s return.

Luke 12:34: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 370: God never meant that the widespread misery in the world should exist. He never meant that one man should have an abundance of the luxuries of life, while the children of others should cry for bread. The means over and above the actual necessities of life are entrusted to man to do good, to bless humanity.

The Signs of the Times, July 24, 1901: Those who have the Spirit of Christ will not selfishly spend on self that which would provide homes for the homeless, and give the destitute food and clothing. They will not lay up their money for the sake of increasing gain. Those who do this are controlled by covetousness. They love neither God nor man. Their fellow-beings are perishing all around them, and yet, though it is in their power to be a blessing to them, they shut their eyes to their wants.

The Great Controversy (1888), p. 595: The spirit which actuated those priests and rulers is still manifested by many who make a high profession of piety. They refuse to examine the testimony of the Scriptures concerning the special truths for this time. They point to their own numbers, wealth, and popularity,
and look with contempt upon the advocates of truth as few, poor, and unpopular having a faith that separates them from the world.

**Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 266:** There is no sin in being rich if riches are not acquired by injustice. A rich man is not condemned for having riches, but condemnation rests upon him if the means entrusted to him is spent in selfishness. Far better might he lay up his money beside the throne of God, by using it to do good. Death cannot make any man poor who thus devotes himself to seeking eternal riches. But the man who hoards his treasure for self can not take any of it to heaven. He has proved himself to be an unfaithful steward. During his lifetime he had his good things, but he was forgetful of his obligation to God. He failed of securing the heavenly treasure.

**Counsels on Stewardship, pp. 231-234:** The spirit of gain getting, of making haste to be rich, of this all-absorbing worldliness, is painfully contradictory to our faith and doctrines. Should the Lord most high be pleased to impart His Holy Spirit, and seek to revive His work, how many would be hungering for the heavenly manna, and thirsting for the waters of life?...

I see there is danger of some of our brethren saying, as did the foolish rich man, "Soul, thou has much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Many are forgetting that they are God's servants, and are saying, "Tomorrow shall be as this day and much more abundant." God is looking on your every business transaction. Be on your guard. It is time that deep, earnest thought should be given to laying up treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.

The desire that some of our brethren possess to earn means fast, leads them to engage in a new enterprise and invest means, but often their expectations of making money are not realized. They sink that which they could have spent in God's cause. There is an infatuation in these new enterprises. And notwithstanding these things have been acted over so many times, and they have before them the example of others who have made investments and have met with an utter failure, yet many are slow to learn. Satan allures them on, and makes them drunk with anticipated gains.

When their hopes are blasted, they suffer many discouragements in consequence of their unwise adventures. If means is lost, the person looks upon it as a misfortune to himself;--as his loss. But he must remember that it is the means of another which he is handling, that he is only a steward, and God is displeased with the unwise management of that means which could have been used to advance the cause of present truth. At the reckoning day the unfaithful steward must give an account of his stewardship.
Some will strike out into flattering speculative money-making schemes, and others will quickly catch the spirit of speculation. It is just what they want, and they will engage in lines of speculation that take the mind off from the sacred preparation that is essential for their souls in order for them to be prepared to meet the trials which will come in these last days...

Every movement of this order, which comes in to excite the desire to get riches quickly by speculation, takes the minds of the people away from the most solemn truths that ever were given to mortals. There may be encouraging prospects for a time, but the end of the matter is failure. The Lord endorses no such movements. If this work is sanctioned, many would be attracted by these speculative schemes that could not in any other way be led away from the work of presenting the solemn truths that must be given to the people at this time.

If the SDA Church is ever to finish the work, its members must not only focus on character perfection but give financially as they have received from God and in the right spirit.

**Baptisms:** Almost all those who promote the modern church growth movement are promoting spiritual formation through the spiritual disciplines. Theological seminaries prepare graduates to spread this so-called spirituality to the churches through different programs. Pentecostals, Charismatics, Protestants, and Roman Catholics are spreading contemplative prayer with lightning speed.


Church Growth emphasizes missionary work and social awareness. Would-be converts are seen as “seekers.” Church Growth began with Donald McGavran's book *The Bridges of God.* In 1965, he organized the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary, making it the home base for church growth studies by tens of thousands of pastors and missionaries by scores of denominations. Church growth includes the “great commission,” research to attract members, rock music, new forms of worship, and activities for families at different stages in life. The New Age preacher, Norman Vincent Peale, was a large influence in the church-growth movement. He was inspired by Florence Scovel Shinn, a teacher of the occult. Peale also united psychology and religion and is the father of the self-help movement that formed the groundwork for the church growth movement.

**Evangelism, pp. 308-309:** The test of discipleship is not brought to bear as closely as it should be upon those who present themselves for baptism.... When they give evidence that they fully understand their position, they are to be accepted....
There is need of a more thorough preparation on the part of candidates for baptism. They are in need of more faithful instruction than has usually been given them. The principles of the Christian life should be made plain to those who have newly come to the truth. None can depend upon their profession of faith as proof that they have a saving connection with Christ. We are not only to say, "I believe," but to practice the truth. It is by conformity to the will of God in our words, our deportment, our character, that we prove our connection with Him. Whenever one renounces sin, which is the transgression of the law, his life will be brought into conformity to the law, into perfect obedience.

In the book *Half a Century of Apostasy*, Russell and Colin Standish revealed how in 2002 many in villages of India had been bribed into the SDA Church through baptism. There were also “converts” who were baptized still smoking and drinking alcohol.

In an email received by the For My People Ministry, a testimony was shared about an SDA man in India who learned of the SDA truths through an online course. He was dismayed to learn that the SDA church in his neighborhood was different from what the course taught, especially in dress, health reform, and obedience.

In another email, an SDA couple revealed the following from a mission trip they took outside the United States:

- As they mingled with union and conference presidents, treasurers, secretaries, pastors, elders and members of the SDA Church, the couple noticed that many of them seemed to be motivated by money.

*Counsels on Stewardship, pp. 213-214:* It is the purpose of Satan to make the world very attractive. He has a bewitching power which he exercises to allure the affections of even the professed followers of Christ. There are many professedly Christian men who will make any sacrifice in order to gain riches, and the more successful they are in obtaining the object of their desires, the less they care for the precious truth and its advancement in the world. They lose their love for God, and act like men who are insane. The more they are prospered in material wealth, the less they invest in the cause of God.

The works of those who have an insane love for riches, make it evident that it is impossible to serve two masters, God and mammon. They show to the world that money is their god. They yield their homage to its power, and to all intents and purposes they serve the world. The love of money becomes a ruling power, and for its sake they violate the law of God. They may profess
the religion of Christ, but they do not love its principles, or heed its admonitions. They give their best strength to serve the world, and they bow to mammon.

- The majority of them ate meat.

**The General Conference Bulletin, April 3, 1901:** The principles of health reform have been proclaimed by us as a people.... And yet there are among us ministers of the gospel and members of the church who have no respect for the light that God has given upon health reform. They eat as they please, and work as they please. God calls for a straight testimony to be given to those who claim to believe that we are living in the last days of this earth's history. A line of distinction must be drawn between those who serve God, and those who serve him not.

**Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 383:** The common use of the flesh of dead animals has had a deteriorating influence upon the morals, as well as the physical institution. Ill health in a variety of forms, if effect could be traced to the cause, would reveal the sure result of flesh eating.

**Counsels for the Church, p. 230:** Greater reforms should be seen among the people who claim to be looking for the soon appearing of Christ. Health reform is to do among our people a work which it has not yet done. There are those who ought to be awake to the danger of meat eating, who are still eating the flesh of animals, thus endangering the physical, mental, and spiritual health. Many who are now only half converted on the question of meat eating will go from God's people, to walk no more with them.

It has been clearly presented to me that God's people are to take a firm stand against meat eating.... By the use of flesh meats the animal nature is strengthened and the spiritual nature weakened.

**Ibid., p. 233:** Those who have received instruction regarding the evils of the use of flesh foods... and who are determined to make a covenant with God by sacrifice, will not continue to indulge their appetite for food that they know to be unhealthful. God demands that the appetite be cleansed, and that self-denial be practiced in regard to those things which are not good. This is a work that will have to be done before His people can stand before Him a perfected people.

**Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 383:** Those who use flesh meat disregard all the warnings that God has given concerning this question. They have no
evidence that they are walking in safe paths. They have not the slightest excuse for eating the flesh of dead animals. God's curse is resting upon the animal creation. Many times when meat is eaten, it decays in the stomach, and creates disease. Cancers, tumors, and pulmonary diseases are largely caused by meat eating.

- **Two other incidents, which shocked the couple, was when a number of church leaders, including the union president and several others took them to a restaurant to eat dinner on a Friday night (late) and the next day during Sabbath.** The couple was surprised that everyone in their team was happy to eat there and made excuses that they needed to eat and that in our colleges and other institutions that our students need to be fed on Sabbath.

  **Exodus 16:23-24:** And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD has said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein.

  **The Review and Herald, June 8, 1897:** Speak not lightly of the restrictions placed upon Israel in Sinai regarding the cooking of manna. The Lord has placed barriers around his Sabbath, that it may not be regarded with the least carelessness or irreverence. When the Lord said, "Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that ye will seethe," he meant that Friday should be our preparation day, in which we are to do all our cooking. The Sabbath is not to be a day when titbits shall be prepared or cooked. If it is really essential to have beans on the Sabbath, let them be cooked on Friday, and kept warm in the oven. They need not be eaten cold unless preferred. But let no remarks be made as though it were a very light thing whether or not we regard the special requirements of God in regard to the Sabbath. It is not left for any man or woman to venture to disregard one requirement of God.

  I see no question in this matter as to what we shall have on the Sabbath day. The food which we have provided on the preparation day can be placed on the table warm, especially in cold weather. In traveling, persons eat cold lunches for days together, and realize no inconvenience or harm. We want palatable, healthful food every day of the week; but upon the Sabbath, let your cook have her day of rest, in the place of cooking for a family. Let every provision be made on Friday. But do not let the Sabbath be regarded as a day
in which to get something especially gratifying to eat. Educate your children and every member of the family to enjoy plain, simple food, and to be ready to receive the blessing which the Lord of the Sabbath is waiting to bestow upon all who are in an attitude to receive it.

**Counsels on Health, pp. 489-490:** A scene passed before me. I was in our restaurant in San Francisco. It was Friday. Several of the workers were busily engaged in putting up packages of such foods as could be easily carried by the people to their homes, and a number were waiting to receive these packages. I asked the meaning of this, and the workers told me that some among their patrons were troubled because, on account of the closing of the restaurant, they could not on the Sabbath obtain food of the same kind as that which they used during the week. Realizing the value of the wholesome foods obtained at the restaurant, they protested against being denied them on the seventh day and pleaded with those in charge of the restaurant to keep it open every day in the week, pointing out what they would suffer if this were not done. "What you see today," said the workers, "is our answer to this demand for the health foods upon the Sabbath. These people take on Friday food that lasts over the Sabbath, and in this way we avoid condemnation for refusing to open the restaurant on the Sabbath."

The closed doors on the Sabbath stamp the restaurant as a memorial for God, a memorial which declares that the seventh day is the Sabbath and that on it no unnecessary work is to be done.

- Depending on where the couple went, the music for the services sounded either like dance music at a night club or hypnotic tribal music—all with “Christian” words. The excuse was that it was their culture.

**The Great Controversy (1888), p. 384:** What was the origin of the great apostasy? How did the church first depart from the simplicity of the gospel? By conforming to the practices of paganism, to facilitate the acceptance of Christianity by the heathen. The apostle Paul declared, even in his day, "The mystery of iniquity doth already work." 2 Thessalonians 2:7. During the lives of the apostles the church remained comparatively pure. But "toward the latter end of the second century most of the churches assumed a new form; the first simplicity disappeared, and insensibly, as the old disciples retired to their graves, their children, along with new converts, ...came forward and new-modeled the cause."--Robert Robinson, Ecclesiastical Researches, ch. 6, par. 17, p. 51. **To secure converts, the exalted standard of the Christian faith was**
lowered, and as the result "a pagan flood, flowing into the church, carried with it its customs, practices, and idols." --Gavazzi, Lectures, page 278.

S.D.A Bible Commentary, Vol. 3, p. 1138: We need increased discernment, that we may distinguish between truth and error. The history of the children of Israel shows the sure result of turning from Bible principles to the customs and practices of men. The Lord will not serve with any plans which gratify the selfishness of men, and blight His work. He will not give prosperity to devices that lead away from fidelity to His commandments. He demands that the talents lent to man shall be used in keeping His way, in doing justice and judgment, whether it be to break down or to restore and build up. God would not have us follow the wisdom of men who have disregarded His Word, and made themselves a reproach by their practices and counsels.

- Most of the women wore jewelry, like earrings, nose jewelry, and necklaces. It was noticed that this was very prevalent in the culture of that country.

Evangelism, pp. 270-271: A sister who had spent some weeks at one of our institutions in _____, said that she felt much disappointed in what she saw and heard there... Before accepting the truth, she had followed the fashions of the world in her dress, and had worn costly jewelry and other ornaments; but upon deciding to obey the Word of God, she felt that its teachings required her to lay aside all extravagant and superfluous adorning. She was taught that Seventh-day Adventists did not wear jewelry, gold, silver, or precious stones, and that they did not conform to worldly fashions in their dress. When she saw among those who profess the faith such a wide departure from Bible simplicity, she felt bewildered. Had they not the same Bible which she had been studying, and to which she had endeavored to conform her life? Had her past experience been mere fanaticism? Had she misinterpreted the words of the apostle, "The friendship of the world is enmity with God, for whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"?

Mrs. D, a lady occupying a position in the institution, was visiting at Sr. _____'s room one day, when the latter took out of her trunk a gold necklace and chain, and said she wished to dispose of this jewelry and put the proceeds into the Lord's treasury. Said the other, "Why do you sell it? I would wear it if it was mine." "Why," replied Sr. _____, "when I received the truth, I was taught that all these things must be laid aside. Surely they are contrary to the teachings of God's Word." And she cited her hearer to the words of the apostles, Paul and Peter, upon this point, "In like manner, also, that women
adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but, as becometh women professing godliness, with good works." "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaighting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel. But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit."

In answer, the lady displayed a gold ring on her finger, given her by an unbeliever, and said she thought it no harm to wear such ornaments. "We are not so particular," said she, "as formerly. Our people have been overscrupulous in their opinions upon the subject of dress. The ladies of this institution wear gold watches and gold chains, and dress like other people. It is not good policy to be singular in our dress; for we cannot exert so much influence."

We inquire, Is this in accordance with the teachings of Christ? Are we to follow the Word of God, or the customs of the world? Our sister decided that it was the safest to adhere to the Bible standard. Will Mrs. D and others who pursue a similar course be pleased to meet the result of their influence, in that day when every man shall receive according to his works?

God's Word is plain. Its teachings cannot be mistaken. Shall we obey it, just as He has given it to us, or shall we seek to find how far we can digress and yet be saved? Would that all connected with our institutions would receive and follow the divine light, and thus be enabled to transmit light to those who walk in darkness.

The SDA Church is very focused on mission, evangelism, and growth, which is admirable. However, does it make sense to do this while the Church is in apostasy? What are new members being brought into? Would it not be better to “clean up the Church” first? The “cart is before the horse,” and the cart is filled with “cherished idols.” Until we recognize what we need to repent from, true repentance will never come.

The Faith I Live By, p. 221: A union with Christ by living faith is enduring; every other union must perish.... But this union costs us something.... There must be a painful work of detachment, as well as a work of attachment. Pride, selfishness, vanity, worldliness--sin in all its forms--must be overcome, if we would enter into a union with Christ. The reason why many find the Christian life so deplorably hard, why they are so fickle, so variable, is, they try to attach themselves to Christ without detaching themselves from these cherished idols.
So many are excited because the new worship trends are bringing in members by the thousands. Yet if they are led into error and not well grounded in truth, they will not be truly converted and eventually will leave the Church, being in a worse condition than before their baptism. The Church leadership likes to say that it is all about quality not quantity. However, if our eyes are open to what is really going on, we will see the opposite.

Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, pp. 31-32: If you lower the standard in order to secure popularity and an increase of numbers, and then make this increase a cause of rejoicing, you show great blindness. If numbers were evidence of success, Satan might claim the pre-eminence; for in this world his followers are largely in the majority. It is the degree of moral power pervading the college that is a test of its prosperity. It is the virtue, intelligence, and piety of the people composing our churches, not their numbers, that should be a source of joy and thankfulness.

Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 370: The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?

Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 624: Unless there is an evident victory in favor of truth, the matter is left worse than before the conflict. Those who might formerly have had convictions in regard to the truth set their minds at rest and decide in favor of error, because in their darkened state they cannot perceive that the truth had the advantage.

Romans 6:1-6: What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

The April 2010 issue of Adventist World featured an article entitled “Positioned for Success.” The question was asked, “Did your conference set a record with the
number of baptisms during the Year of Evangelism?” The question must also be asked: Why is the worldwide SDA Church competing to see who can baptize the most members? The article also promoted the following ideas:

- “Whenever you have a few quiet minutes, close your eyes and see yourself reaching an important goal.” This is in order that success may come “more easily.”
- Lay members and pastors should “squelch your fears by picturing yourself in a positive position.”
- “Envision your church as known and respected in the community.”
- “Imagine how thrilling it will be to see people accept Jesus.”
- “Visualize the vitality that new members will bring to your church life.”
- “Picture yourself in the pulpit preaching the Word with power, knowing that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are with you.” These are all part of visualization and the power of positive thinking. (See this chapter’s section entitled “New Age movement”/Positive thinking as well as Visualization.)

The Review and Herald, January 18, 1906: The real power of God's people lies not in numbers, nor in the wealth and worldly prosperity that may be displayed, but in steadfast adherence to his Word. The truth, obeyed, is made the power of God unto salvation.