

# MINISTRY

*International Journal for Pastors* December 2004



Stop  
Praying  
for The Harvest

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EVERY  
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# MINISTRY

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## I HAVE HEARD MANY HEART-RENDING STORIES OF HOW SONS AND DAUGHTERS HAVE BEEN SHUNNED AND EVEN REPRIMANDED BY OTHER CHURCH MEMBERS.

I was puzzled and saddened by Dave Gemmell's article "Sunday-Morning Evangelism: A Case Study" (April 2004). It seems that the study not only failed of positive results, but had some negative ones.

Perhaps it has partly to do with the design of the study. In health care, such an extensive and expensive study would have to first be approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). Actually, all studies have to go through this process. Many of the details which seem to have proven troublesome later would have been required to be spelled out and nailed down ahead of time.

Also, there would be a local Steering Committee made up of local people who would continue, throughout the study, to give guidance and advice.

A local Steering Committee could have given invaluable help on auditoriums, and how to involve the local Adventists and keep them involved. They might have been able to pick up immediately on things that would end up alienating the target audience.

Secondly, how did they involve a pastor who had a preaching style that didn't fit the study design? One would think that a person in a position as pivotal as pastor would have been included in the planning and design of a study of this magnitude. Hopefully a

good IRB would have picked up on this before the program could be implemented. That a good man, who was initially excited about the study, proved not only to not fit in, but left the ministry altogether seems catastrophic.

Dave Gemmell's summary of things learned is useful. Perhaps the most useful thing, however, might be to learn from other research models and implement their safeguards.

—Joseph L. Story, Yakutat, Alaska.

I want to express my appreciation for Helen Pearson's insightful article regarding "Controversies Great and Small" (April 2004). It will be a time of deeper love and Christian fellowship when, in relationships, families, and church, we move on from the cautious "unwritten commandments" that Pearson ably identifies and humbly and in Spirit power, graduate to the "beatitudes for peacemakers," especially in the wider community.

I do hope that Pearson's excellent article generates wide discussion, thought, honesty, and action. Only blessings can result.

—Mary Trim, Sydney, Australia.

Thank you so much for Jim Coffin's compassionate, Christ-centered approach to witnessing ("Fellowship:

Our Greatest Witness," April 2004). For a long time, I have been disappointed with the judgmental attitude sometimes found in our churches. In my ministry for other Adventist parents of gay and lesbian children, I have heard many heart-rending stories of how sons and daughters have been shunned and even reprimanded by other church members.

Just recently, grieving parents told me about their son's experience. Married for 17 years and serving the church as an elder, Pathfinder leader, and organist, he finally admitted his homosexual orientation to his wife, to whom he had remained faithful. At last understanding what had been wrong with their marriage and realizing that things would never get better, she soon left him, taking their two daughters with her and letting other church members know her reason for leaving him. The pastor immediately disfellowshipped him and informed him that he was no longer welcome in the church.

Such things should not happen. I long for the day when our gay and lesbian members, many of whom yearn for church fellowship even years after leaving the church in discouragement, will be welcomed with warmth, love, and support. ■

—Carrol Grady, Snohomish, Washington.

### Free Subscription

If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 *Ministry* has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.

# Shifting perspectives; eschatological challenges

**T**he world is reshaping—constantly. This has become an unrelenting reality for most of us. While we fervently wish that we could slow it down, it is likely instead to speed up. Change can be stimulating, exciting, and by all means necessary, but, as many have observed, in our time it seems to have become the only constant.

While our thinking, our institutions, and our very humanity used to remain unaltered long enough to provide us with trustworthy points of reference, a sense of moral direction, and a settled identity, now they regularly morph into shapes and sizes that may be almost unrecognizable. And the resulting changes are so far-reaching that, painfully, our world just doesn't feel as secure as it used to. The things that once were staunch and stable just aren't anymore, and we have come to instinctively suspect many of them.

Ravi Zacharias speaks of our world as congested with "historical drifts," "factors of influence," and of course, "pluralism." He describes how the omnipresence of these in many cultures has "reconstituted" our moral environment, and, in fact, ourselves. The global roaming and mixing of people has inevitably spawned all kinds of novel ways of viewing reality, one another, and our humanity.

On the demographic side, Zacharias points to the United States as having absorbed 8.6 million immigrants during the 1980s, saying by way of illustration that during that decade, 11 percent of those multitudes specified Los Angeles as their ultimate destination. At the same time, he quotes a popular local political figure who quipped, "Where else but in Los Angeles can you find a fast-food outlet where a Korean is selling kosher tacos?"<sup>1</sup>

It is not unfitting or difficult for us to

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vault from Los Angeles to our churches, many of which could have the same kinds of things said about them. The challenge for us ministers comes, of course, when the new factors of influence and interaction, and the resulting pluralism do not only have social, political, cultural, or ethnic manifestations, but when to those influences are added issues of basic faith, doctrine, and essential Christian morality. And all the shifting and displacement climaxes with the misplacement of those formerly unquestioned values and legacies which were so much a part of a Christian faith. Traditionally the faith has been crafted through centuries dominated by more distinctly spiritual outlooks and less by rationalistic-materialistic worldviews.

For pastors, the epicenter of the resulting pressure lies in the fact that these clashing but interactive influences have tended to cause serious shifts at the heart of our basic religious outlook, and more significantly, in the recesses of our deepest faith commitments and convictions.

In other words, the significant challenge to pastors is more spiritual than it is merely intellectual, philosophical, or even theological. It is not so much a matter of faith versus science as it is a matter of transcendent, spiritual certitude versus relativistic, postmodern materialism.

But perhaps the most challenging question is, How much of this kind of diversion or drift has occurred in the pastoral soul? What about the set of my spiritual sails, or the state of your deep-seated convictions?

What must prod us unceremoniously into internalized, reformative action is the realization that today our role demands a high degree of certitude (unspoiled by that pedantic, know-it-all posture that stands first in line in repulsing our fellow humans!). The world we live in cries out, despite our understandable questions, for a soundly based Christian and Seventh-day Adventist sense of identity and above all, for first-hand divine direction.

This is ours to seek, even while we face the extraordinarily complex issues of our time. It is ours to find before we cave in under the weight of the presumptions of a so-called brave, new, secularized world.

Is it too much to say that sorting through these kinds of challenges is important to the eschatological role of the Adventist minister? If so, then let's thank God, for it throws us back into the hands of our Lord in a way that we may not yet have known.

As we uninhibitedly open ourselves to God, He will use the challenge of shifting perspectives to firmly shepherd us into the very kind of experience with Him that we must have in order to successfully wade through the final swellings of Jordan. Thus we will be qualified to lead our people, hand in hand, to the far side of the river where lies the Promised Land. ■

<sup>1</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil* (United States of America: W Publishing Group, 1997), 75. (See also pages 74-79.) Note: We recommend the literary work of Ravi Zacharias.

# Stop praying for the harvest

James A. Cress

**O**ur Lord never instructed us to pray for the harvest; instead He instructed us to pray for the reapers of the harvest. He asks us to make it a matter of prayer that the Lord of the harvest will send forth reapers. The challenge, then, from Jesus' viewpoint does not lie in a shortage of harvestable grain, but a shortage of workers to help gather in that grain.

In the first three quarters of 2004—the Adventist Church's Year of World Evangelism, over one million baptisms have flooded the membership rolls—almost 3,000 new believers a day! It's likely that by December 31, this year will mark the greatest one-year baptismal total in the history of our denomination.

Even as we rejoice in these accessions, we ought also to repent for the shortage of workers to complete the discipleship task. Today, despite our best efforts to recruit the names of newly interested individuals, or even to baptize new believers through evangelism, we face the awesome challenge of integrating those we baptize into disciplined believers who, themselves, will become part of the harvest labor force. Rather than praying for greater quantities of converts, we ought to pray for a greater quantity and quality of harvesters.

## Pray for reapers who'll care for the harvest

"There was a great deal of work to be done,

and a great deal of good likely to be done, but there wanted hands to do it. . . . They that were ill taught were desirous to be better taught; people's expectations were raised, and there was such a moving of affections, as promised well. . . . Note, It is a blessed thing, to see people in love with good preaching. The valleys are then covered over with corn, and there are hopes it may be well gathered in. That is a gale of opportunity that calls for a double care and diligence in the improvement of it; a harvest-day should be a busy day. It was a pity when it was so that the laborers should be so few; that the corn should shed and spoil, and rot upon the ground for want of reapers; loiterers many, but laborers very few."<sup>1</sup>

Harvesting must consist of more than "mowing down" the grain; laborers also must preserve it in barns. Left untended, even though reaped, the good grain will rot if it's neglected or abandoned. For example, too often thousands of new accessions are added to the church without as much as a place for them to worship, a pastor or elder to watch over them, or even a song book to aid their worship.

One union president told me of a short-term effort that produced mass baptisms of thousands for whom they had neither names nor addresses. His members feared their already too-crowded facilities would be overwhelmed, not to mention that from these new converts no tithe or offerings would come in.

If numbers explode by the thousands and giving does not increase in proportion, such efforts are not true evangelism, but exploitation. If we are more focused on total accessions than integrated discipleship, the numbers we grab will not result in fruit for the kingdom. Massive additions to the church without commensurate efforts to preserve the fruit will result in massive apostasy of the newly converted, not to speak of members who might hold an antagonism against public evangelism. We can easily destroy the very process we desire to establish.

Sometimes glowing reports of evangelistic efforts fail to tell of abandoned and disillusioned new converts who end up as enemies of the faith they had embraced. If we lack sufficient time or resources to place the newly baptized in a church facility and provide them trained spiritual leaders—either pastors or lay leadership—to develop them into functioning disciples, we should not junket to



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distant places, but rather stay home and pray for genuine reapers.

### **Pray for the keepers**

The task is not complete once people are baptized. Much activity—even earnest evangelistic activity—without preservation of the harvest, leaves the results in worse condition than if they had never been contacted. “To labor at considerable expense to bring souls into the truth and then leave them to fashion their own experience according to false ideas they have received and woven into their religious experience, would leave that work far worse than if the truth had never been brought to them. To leave the work incomplete and to ravel out is worse than to wait until there are plans well devised to take care of those who do come into the faith.”<sup>2</sup>

Note the conundrum. Individuals brought to conversion without adequate follow-through end up worse than if they had never been contacted. Mass actions by people may result from Holy Spirit-inspired movements, as at Pentecost, or may result from the mob spirit of terrorists who eagerly consume and leave a track of destruction in their wake.

Activity alone is not the hallmark of progress. Hurricanes produce tremendous activity, but have tragic consequences. “God would be better pleased to have six truly converted to the truth as the result of their labors, than to have sixty make a nominal profession, and yet not be thoroughly converted.”<sup>3</sup>

Incomplete work curses rather than blesses both the new believers and the church. Jesus employed some challenging analogies to describe the effects of an incomplete reformation—good seed which birds snatch away, or which weeds choke out and into whose now empty space unclean spirits return sevenfold; a swept house with the last state worse than the first.

Pastors and local church elders are the keepers. We need to instruct, resource, and hold accountable these leaders to function as responsible

“keepers.” Their job is not complete when an individual is baptized, but only when those who are baptized are brought to responsible discipleship. “Souls are precious in the sight of God; educate them, teach them, as they embrace the truth, how to bear responsibilities. He who sees the end from the beginning, who can make the seeds sown wholly fruitful, will be with you in your efforts.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Pray to preserve more of the crop**

A Dakota wheat farmer once demonstrated that the task of reaping is not limited to a massive machine moving through the fields to mow down the grain. Mowing also must be “combined” with collecting, baling, storing, and preserving—or the efforts are wasted.

Ellen White uses the same language to describe the plowshare of truth, planting, reaping, and preserving. “Too often the work is left in an unfinished state, and in many such cases it amounts to nothing. Sometimes, after a company of people has accepted the truth, the minister thinks that he must immediately go to a new field; and sometimes, without proper investigation, he is authorized to go. This is wrong; he should finish the work begun; for in leaving it incomplete, more harm than good is done. No field is so unpromising as one that has been cultivated just enough to give the weeds a more luxuriant growth. . . . A minister might better not engage in the work unless he can bind it off thoroughly.”<sup>5</sup>

Discipleship is a process, not an event. The goal of the Great Commission is not numbers baptized, but numbers disciplined. Baptism is a vital, essential step and even a climactic point in the conversion process, but it cannot be “the event” that measures a completed work. Notice the command of Jesus: “In my authority go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things.”

Too often we have failed to under-

stand the difference between the event of accession onto the membership rolls of the church and the process of assimilation into the body of believers. As Peter Wagner so aptly declares to his church growth classes, “Any scheme which separates evangelism and follow-up has built into itself the cause of its own failure.”<sup>6</sup>

Churches are all too often raised up and then left to crash and burn, all the while new fields are being entered. “While we should be ever ready to follow the opening providences of God, we should lay no larger plans, occupy no more ground in branching out than there is help and means to bind off the work well and keep up and increase the interest already started.”<sup>7</sup>

This spiritual formation of new believers is not easy work. Of course, there is always adequate reason behind the temptation to rush off and start new work, rather than to stay by the original task and complete the work of developing the new converts into productive disciples. Nurture of newborn believers is challenging, difficult, and can be distasteful work; it requires constant and extended effort. It is far more exciting to make babies than to change diapers.

“After individuals have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after. The zeal of many ministers seems to fail as soon as a measure of success attends their efforts. They do not realize that these newly converted ones need nursing—watchful attention, help, and encouragement. These should not be left alone, a prey to Satan’s most powerful temptations; they need to be educated in regard to their duties, to be kindly dealt with, to be led along, and to be visited and prayed with. . . . No wonder that some become discouraged, linger by the way, and are left for wolves to devour. Satan is upon the track of all. He sends his agents forth to gather back to his ranks the souls he has lost. There should be more fathers and mothers to take these babes in the

truth to their hearts, and to encourage them and pray for them, that their faith be not confused.”<sup>8</sup>

### Pray and care for God’s new “children”

Neglect or rejection of new believers is neglect or rejection of the Savior Himself. Jesus describes new converts as “newborns of the water and the Spirit” and “little ones” who must receive nurturing care. Those to whom He refers are little ones who believe in Me—“those who have not [yet] gained an experience in following Him, those who need to be led like children, as it were, in seeking the things of the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>9</sup>

It is basic to the role of Spiritual leaders to patiently help new converts. “Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older members of the church to devise ways and means to provide help and sympathy and instruction. . . . The church has a special responsibility laid

upon her to attend to these souls who have followed the first rays of light they have received; and if the members of the church neglect this duty, they will be unfaithful to the trust that God has given them.”<sup>10</sup>

When you petition the divine Master of the Harvest to send forth reapers, remember “the need is always greater than the supply of workers. In praying for laborers, we must be willing to go ourselves, obviously.”<sup>11</sup>

This passage (Matt. 9:37, 38) constitutes one of the great missionary passages of the New Testament. “Jesus pictures the world as a great spiritual harvest in need of laborers to gather it into the fold. He urges the disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth the workers to gather it. . . . As so often occurs, those who prayed were themselves sent.”<sup>12</sup>

Everyone who loves Christ and the souls He died for should show this love by their earnest prayers to God (especially when the harvest is plentiful) that He would send forth

more skillful, faithful, wise, and industrious laborers into His harvest.

“Bind off your work thoroughly. Leave no dropped stitches for someone else to pick up. Do not disappoint Christ. Determine that you will succeed, and in the strength of Christ you may give full proof of your ministry.”<sup>13</sup> ❧

- 1 Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, 1996 ed. (Peabody, Mont.: Hendrickson, 1991); Matt. 9:37, 38.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn. 1946), 84, 85.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 320.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 335.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 332.
- 6 C. Peter Wagner, personal class notes, Church Growth I, Fuller Theological Seminary, March 1986.
- 7 White, 323.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 351, 352.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 341.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 351.
- 11 W. MacDonald and A. Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, 1997 ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995); Matt. 9:37, 38.
- 12 *KJV Bible Commentary*, 1997 ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994); Matt. 9:37, 38.
- 13 White, 325, 326.

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# The second coming of Christ

**Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Faith #24:** *"The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Savior's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is imminent. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times."*

The ultimate realization of God's plan for this earth climaxes with the second coming of Christ. The literal and personal coming of Christ is the point toward which world history moves. The Second Coming is God's ultimate solution to evil and injustice; it will also mark the beginning of God's eternal kingdom.

On what basis, however, can twenty-first-century Christians still hold to the relevance and certainty of "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13) when the promise of His soon return was first made some two thousand years ago?

## The certainty of the Second Coming

A promise is as certain as the person giving it. It is as certain as their integrity and their ability to do what they say.

The promise "I will come again" in the Bible is given by God, who, in the past, kept all His promises, the greatest of which was to assure humanity that Christ would come the first time. "When the fullness of time had come," He faithfully fulfilled His promise: The pre-existent Christ emptied Himself of His divine prerogatives and took human form. He then came down to earth as a

RANKO STEFANOVIC



helpless child to provide salvation for fallen human beings. After His death and resurrection, He went to heaven, leaving a clear, firm promise that He will come again, this time "not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb. 9:28, NIV).

The certainty of the second coming of Christ is ultimately rooted in His first coming. Christians have the firm assurance that Christ's promise to return will come true as completely as the promise of His first coming was fulfilled.

## The long-awaited wedding

In the New Testament, the long-awaited union that is to take place between Christ and His people at the Second Coming is portrayed in terms of the ancient Hebrew wedding practice. This concept is best reflected in Jesus' promise to His disciples: "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" (John 14:2-4, NIV).

"I am going there to prepare a place for you" must be understood in the context of ancient Hebrew weddings, which were preceded by a betrothal that took place at the bride's father's house. After the groom had paid the

dowry, the two were considered husband and wife, though the groom then returned to his father's house to prepare the place where he and his bride would live. During that time, the bride stayed at her father's home preparing for the wedding. When both the place and the bride were ready, the bridegroom would return to take his bride to his father's house for the ceremony (cf. Matt. 25:1-10).

Two thousand years ago, Christ left His Father's house in heaven and came to earth to betroth His bride—the church—to Himself. At Calvary He paid the dowry for His bride. Then He returned to His Father's house to prepare a place for her (cf. John 14:1-4). In the meantime, His bride remains on earth.

While waiting, the church longs for His return and prepares herself for Him, keeping herself "in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:27, NASB). When the dwelling place becomes ready and the bride has done her part in preparing herself, the wedding—the Second Coming—will take place (see Rev. 19:7, 8).

## Manner of Christ's coming

The second coming of Christ will be *literal, personal, and visible*. The Bible assures us of the *real* coming of the *actual* person of Christ. Jesus stated clearly that His return will be visible to physical eyes and audible to physical ears (Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26). He further compared it to the visibility of lightning (Matt. 24:27). When, after His resurrection, He ascended in a cloud, two angels assured the disciples that His return will be as literal as His departure: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11, NIV). "Every eye will see him, even those who

pierced him" (Rev. 1:7, NIV).

The Bible evidence excludes the notion that the coming of Christ will be a secret or invisible event to be experienced by some special group of the faithful.

The Second Coming will be an event impossible to simulate. First, Christ will return in the full glory of the Father accompanied by innumerable heavenly hosts (Matt. 16:27). His coming will bring the ultimate gathering of all God's people by two miraculous events: First, the dead in Christ will be resurrected and clothed in immortality (1 Thess. 4:16), and, then, the living saints will be transformed from mortality to immortality (1 Cor. 15:51, 52).

Both the resurrected saints and the transformed living saints will be taken together up into the sky to meet Christ—like the Hebrew bride going out to meet her husband at the time of their wedding.

While the Second Coming will bring salvation to the faithful, it will bring devastating terror and destruction to those who have rejected God's salvation. They will be destroyed by the glory of Christ's coming (2 Thess. 2:8).

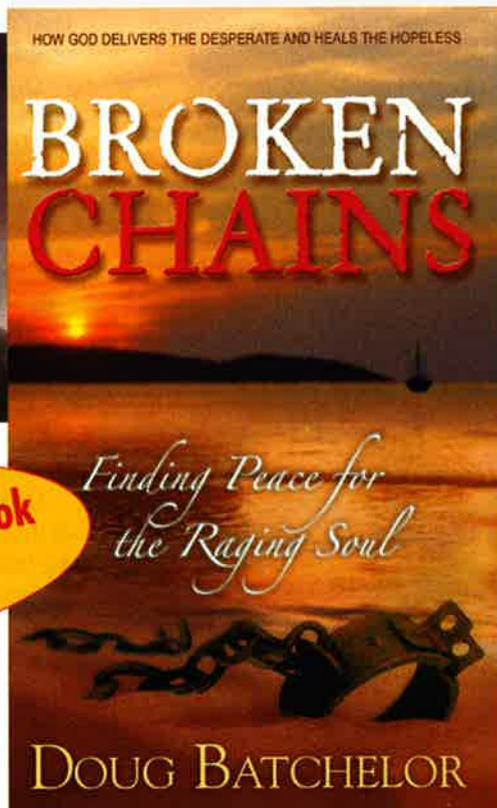
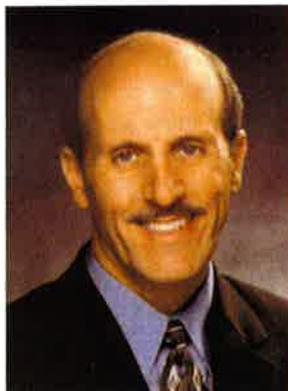
Those apart from Christ will not be granted a second chance. By then the eternal destiny of every person will have been determined at the conclusion of the pre-Advent judgment that will mark the close of probation and an end to the opportunity for repentance.

### The timing of the Second Coming

Jesus stressed that the exact time of His return is known only to God (Matt. 24:36). Before His ascension, the disciples asked about the time when His kingdom would come. Jesus made it very clear that they were not "to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Acts 1:6, 7, NASB). They were rather given, as Jesus further explained, the task of faithfully doing the work they had been given to do (verse 8) until His arrival.

Christ's words to the disciples denote a timeless message for the church: While waiting, Christians should not be

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occupied with speculations about the time of Christ's return. Any time-setting for the Second Coming or drafting of detailed prophetic charts with dates and sequential final events that purport to calculate the time when Jesus will come, are clearly contrary to God's will. If God had wanted us to know the exact time of Christ's return, He would have revealed it in His Word.

On the other hand, although the exact time of the Second Coming is not revealed to us, there will be indications that it is near. These indications are referred to as "the signs of the times."<sup>1</sup> Jesus described them in terms of insurrections, civil/political and economic strife, treason, prejudice, disease, disastrous events in the natural world, spiritual decline and increase of wickedness, apostasy, psychological distress, absence of love, persecution, and the preaching of the gospel (Matt. 24:4-14).

One might observe, however, that all these signs already took place during the lifetime of the disciples (in the first century) as well as in different periods of history. How then should Christians understand the meaning of these signs?

A closer look at Matthew 24 indicates that it was not Jesus' intention for these events to be understood as the signs of the end of the age, and thus to be taken as the basis for calculating the date of His return. The purpose of the signs is not to tell us *when* the end will come (cf. Matt. 24:6-8), but what would happen with increasing intensity as His people await His return.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus portrayed these events as constant reminders to every generation of Christians of Jesus' promised return. "Whenever one of them takes place, His people make the connection with the Second Coming. Second, each event identified as a sign by the community of believers keeps alive the element of expectation and hope. They know that the Lord has not forgotten them and that history is moving toward God's appointed goal."<sup>3</sup>

Three points become clear regarding the significance of the signs of the Second Coming. *First*, as we've established, the purpose of the signs of the

times in Matthew 24:4-14 is not to pinpoint the time of the Second Coming.

*Second*, although these events—pointed to by Jesus as the signs of His coming—have taken place in different epochs in history, they will progressively intensify as the time of Christ's return approaches. The intensification of these events in the natural and social/political world, together with the deterioration of moral and religious conditions, will, before Christ's coming, reach a point unprecedented in this earth's history.

There is no doubt that the world today is experiencing events unprecedented in this earth's history. There are, for instance, natural calamities, such as earthquakes, floods, and tornados; there is atmospheric pollution as a potential destroyer of all human population; "wars and rumors of wars" referred to in terms of the weapons of massive or total destruction, joined by the most recent international terrorism; famines and epidemics (including the threats of AIDS and cancer) need no further comment. These and other events, together with moral and religious decay, make Christians today realize that they live closer to the day of Christ's return than any previous generation.

The *third* point regarding the significance of the signs of the Second Coming is that there will be specific signs/events to take place prior to the coming of Christ. In particular, Revelation 13–18, together with some other New Testament prophetic evidence, points to end-time religious and political movements.

Their obvious characteristic is the union of religious and secular/political powers characterized by religious oppression and intolerance. These events—together with decayed world conditions and the worldwide proclamation of the gospel—will be the clear indication of the imminence of Christ's coming.

We must remember, however, that prophecy is not given to satisfy our curiosity about the future. Prophecy tells us *what* will happen prior to the coming of Christ to move us to readiness. "I have told you now before it

happens," Jesus said to His disciples "so that when the time comes, remember that I warned you" (John 14:29; 16:4, NIV).

Exactly *when* and *how* end-time events will take place, will be clear at the time they are being fulfilled. Their complete fulfillment will be the clear indication to God's people that Christ is "at the door" (Matt. 24:33, NIV). The fulfillment of end-time prophecies is not to be a subject of speculation and sensationalism, but rather for strengthening faith in the prophetic word.

### **Imminence of the Second Coming**

The imminence of Christ's coming is, in the Bible, consistently expressed with "I am coming" (rather than "I will come"). The future present tense denotes the future event as a present reality. This form of expression stresses the certainty as well as the imminence of the Second Coming.<sup>4</sup>

When a respected person says, "I will come to visit you," such a saying expresses a promise eventually to become reality (and Jesus does use this mode of expression in John 14:3). However, when he says, "I am coming," one is moved to make more immediate preparations for his arrival.

But how may we understand the question of the imminence of Christ's coming when almost two thousand years have elapsed since the promise was given?

It must be, first of all, understood from God's perspective: With Him a thousand years is like one day (2 Peter 3:8). The goal that He has set to return defines its imminence.

Here the aforementioned metaphor of the wedding is again illustrative: With Christ's first coming—when He "betrothed" His bride, the church, and "paid the dowry" on the cross—this earth entered into the period of preparation for His return. This is why from His perspective His coming is "soon." (Rev. 22:12).

Furthermore, the imminence of His return has a special application with regard to His people. With His first com-

ing and His death on the cross, the earth has entered into the last period of its history. For two thousand years the signs have kept fresh in the mind of His people the certainty of His return. The time and opportunity to be ready for His coming is always now, rather than in the future.

Christians are urged to realize the imminence of Christ's return in their own time. The Second Coming was "soon" for Jesus' disciples and the early church; and since then it has been potentially near for every generation.

Further, in His parable of the ten waiting bridesmaids in Matthew 25, Jesus strongly implied that there would be a period of waiting, a time during which the bridegroom would "tarry" or be long in coming (verse 5). He could see that this period of tarrying would seem so long for those who were waiting that many would find it difficult to be fully ready when He actually appeared.

### **Readiness for Christ's coming**

After describing the events that would happen as His people wait for His return (Matt. 24:1-35) and stating that nobody knows the exact time of it

(verse 36), Jesus exhorted His disciples to live a life of constant expectancy and readiness (Matt. 24:36-25:13).

Just as before the Flood and at the time of Lot, when people were pursuing their daily life routines, so it will be prior to the coming of Christ (Matt. 24:37-41). Everything will look as usual. Three times Jesus gives the warning to be on guard and to be ready, "because you do not know on what day the Lord will come" (Matt. 24:42, 44, 13; Mark 13:33). The New Testament is replete with texts emphasizing the suddenness of Christ's coming (cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 16:15).

Christians waiting for Christ face two dangers. The first is to focus strictly on the future and lose the reality of the present life; the second is to live a life of apathy or indifference regarding the Second Coming. These are illustrated by Jesus in the parables of the two servants and again in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 24:45-25:13).

In the first, the wise servant lives with the assumption that the master might come at any time, while the evil servant lives under the assumption that the master will come sometime in the dis-

*continued on page 27*

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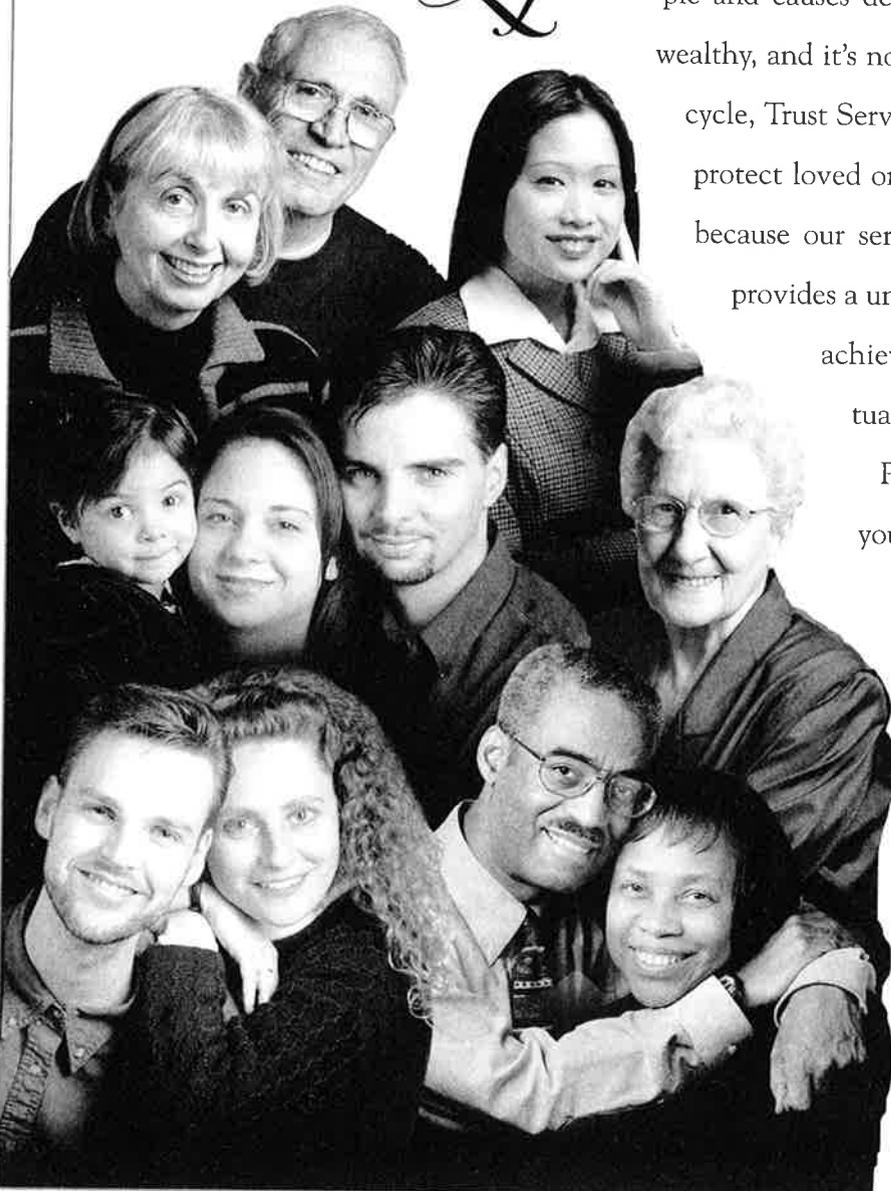
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# Three steps to stronger soul winning

**M**ost Seventh-day Adventist churches recognize that they should be "soul-winning" churches. They want to see people added to the church through baptism, but either they get distracted from their mission or they aren't sure how to go about winning souls. Here are three steps that will strengthen soul winning in our churches and our lives.

## Step 1: Remember "the harvest is plentiful"

The Holy Spirit is working on the hearts of everyone from the day they are born until the day they die (John 3:5-8; 16:8; 2 Peter 3:9). Some are very receptive right at the time our paths cross them. Mark Finley says he believes at least 5 percent of the people in every part of the world are desperately looking for something better.

I live in Wenatchee, Washington, the apple capital of the world. One Sunday morning last January, I went to the airport to catch a flight. The ticket agent told me, "Your flight has been cancelled because of fog."

"So how am I going to get to Anchorage, Alaska, to make a presentation this evening?" I asked.

"Your best chance is to drive over the passes to Seattle and catch a flight from there. You have just enough time if you leave soon. Would you like me to change your reservations?"

After weighing my options, I said, "Yes."

A young man and woman standing at the next counter looked at me and asked hopefully, "Are you driving to Seattle?"

"Yes. Would you like a ride?"

"Sure! Thanks!"

We ran out to my car. They threw a suitcase in the back seat and the

DAN SERNS



woman said Goodbye to the man, then hopped in the front seat of my car.

All of a sudden this became a rather different situation from the one I had thought it was. I climbed in behind the wheel, my mind spinning. I thought, *Lord, what should I do? Pray out loud* was the answer.

"I always like to pray before I go on a trip," I told the woman.

She broke down crying. "You're a Christian," she said. "It's another answer to prayer!"

As we began the long drive, I told the woman that as a Christian married man I don't normally take a trip alone with a woman I am not related to. She told me she was a flight attendant desperate to get home to be with her three children. A year ago her husband of 12 years had left her to move in with a 21-year-old woman who was seven months pregnant with another man's child. When her world had crashed around her, she had called out to God and found that He was helping her through the emotional and financial crises she faced each day.

"Even though it has been hell, I would go through it all over again because of what it has taught the kids and me about trusting God each day. In December I told the kids that we couldn't afford anything for Christmas. The next week we

received \$1,000 from an anonymous donor who 'wanted to help a flight attendant in need.'

"I came to Wenatchee this weekend on a free flight to meet a blind date, but then I was worried I would get stuck here. Now here you are, a Christian giving me a ride to Seattle so that I can get home."

As the miles ticked away, she shared other answers to prayer. Later in the conversation she said, "I felt so bad that I would be missing church this Sunday morning. But this has been like church."

All around us are people God is working on. Is it the mailman? The student whose desk is near ours? The neighbor we have never really talked to? The clerk at the grocery store? Someone we work with? The relative or friend who never showed any spiritual interest before? Each day we can ask the Lord to open our eyes to see what He is doing and to help us become a part of it.

As a church, how can we cooperate with what God is already doing?

## Step 2: Understand the harvest cycle

We need to understand the harvest cycle and integrate it into our plans. Last autumn I was meeting with the church board of the Abundant Life Seventh-day Adventist Church to plan soul winning for the new year. I looked over at Mike Skeels, head deacon and an apple orchardist, and began quizzing him.

"Mike, I've been living here four years and watched the apple harvest each year. I have some questions for you. Why don't you just take those big bins used during the apple harvest, put them under the trees, and just accept whatever God gives you, whatever falls off the trees into the bins?"



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"As orchardists we understand very clearly what is God's part and what is our part," he replied. "We can plant, cultivate, spray, and harvest, but only God can make the sun shine, the rain fall, and the fruit grow. There is a certain sequence we need to follow."

"How many years have you been involved in the harvest, Mike?"

"Thirty."

"Wow, you don't look that old!"

"I helped with my first harvest when I was ten years old. It wasn't my choice, but my dad told me I was going to help since he's an orchardist, too."

"Have you gotten any better at harvesting during the last 30 years?"

"Of course. Each harvest I do my best and then try to learn what will help me do better the following year. Now I'm a consultant for the largest Braeburn apple orchard in the state of Washington."

"Oh, now that you're a consultant, you don't need to be directly involved in the harvest anymore, do you?"

"Oh, yes, I do. If I'm not directly involved in the harvest, I won't be a good consultant because I'll forget what it is really like. When harvest time comes, almost everything else is put on hold. The barn may need to be painted or the fence fixed, but they will have to wait because it is harvest time and we need every willing worker to help bring in the harvest."

"During harvest do you pick every apple?"

"Not the first time. The pickers need to learn how to tug on the apple. If it comes off in their hands, the fruit is ripe. If it doesn't come off and they keep pulling on it, the apple might come off, but it will later rot and spoil other apples in the bin. If they don't pick an apple when it's ready, it will fall on the ground and rot. With some types of apples, we may need to sweep through the orchard as many as four times to get the maximum number of apples because they ripen at different rates."

By now, as we sat in the planning meeting, we were all making mental notes:

1. Lots of church members have sim-

ply "watched" the soul-winning harvest over the years but have never been personally involved in it.

2. In the harvest of soul winning, God does His part and He helps us do our part. We shouldn't just wait to see who will fall into the church and into the baptistry!

3. There is a certain sequence to follow to have the best harvest of souls. If we make plans with this in mind, we will see more people involved in outreach, soul winning, and discipling new members.

4. The more times we are involved in the harvest of soul winning, the better we get at it, if we are humble learners. We are not thinking clearly if we say, "We tried soul winning and it didn't work." Instead it is better to say, "What can we learn from previous soul-winning experiences so that we can do better next time?"

5. Some people get involved grudgingly at first but then learn to love soul winning. Once you've seen God use you to win someone to Him, you will be hooked!

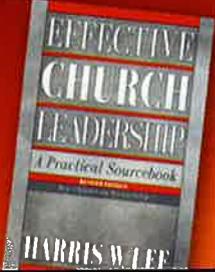
6. Soul winners become more and more excited about soul winning and can become good "consultants," showing others how to become soul winners.

7. Every pastor and member needs to be involved in soul winning activities every year of his or her life, especially if they are church leaders. The "consultants"—those who receive part of their paycheck from tithe money (pastors, teachers, conference leaders) and those who serve on local church boards—need this yearly involvement if they are to stay focused on the mission God has given all of us.

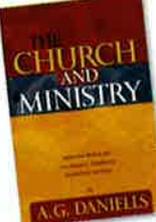
8. During "reaping meetings," almost everything else in a church should be put on hold because every willing person is needed in the harvest of souls.

9. When inviting someone to make a decision for baptism and church membership, we should give gentle "tugs" or invitations. If the person is ripe, they will make the decision. If they aren't and we come on too strong, they may decide but later cause problems in the church.

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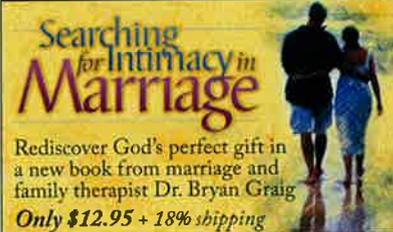


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10. If people are not "ripe" to make a decision, we should come back soon and give them another invitation because they may have ripened by then. After reaping meetings it is valuable to have a follow-up plan so that those who weren't quite ripe during the meetings will have an opportunity to make decisions for Jesus and His church.

In our church board we decided to have two harvest cycles during the coming year. We wrote the following introduction to our "Harvest Cycle" plan and then listed five basic actions we felt we needed to enter into, based on what Jesus said about soul winning:

We believe the Holy Spirit is at work continually to gather people out of the harvest and prepare them to be future missionaries for the Adventist message. Here are five things we can do to cooperate with what the Holy Spirit is doing:

1. *Fast and pray.* "Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast him [an evil spirit] out?' So Jesus said to them, 'Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting'" (Matt. 17:19-21).

2. *Sow.* "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:13-16).

3. *Go.*

4. *Reap.*

5. *Disciple.* "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

*continued on page 28*



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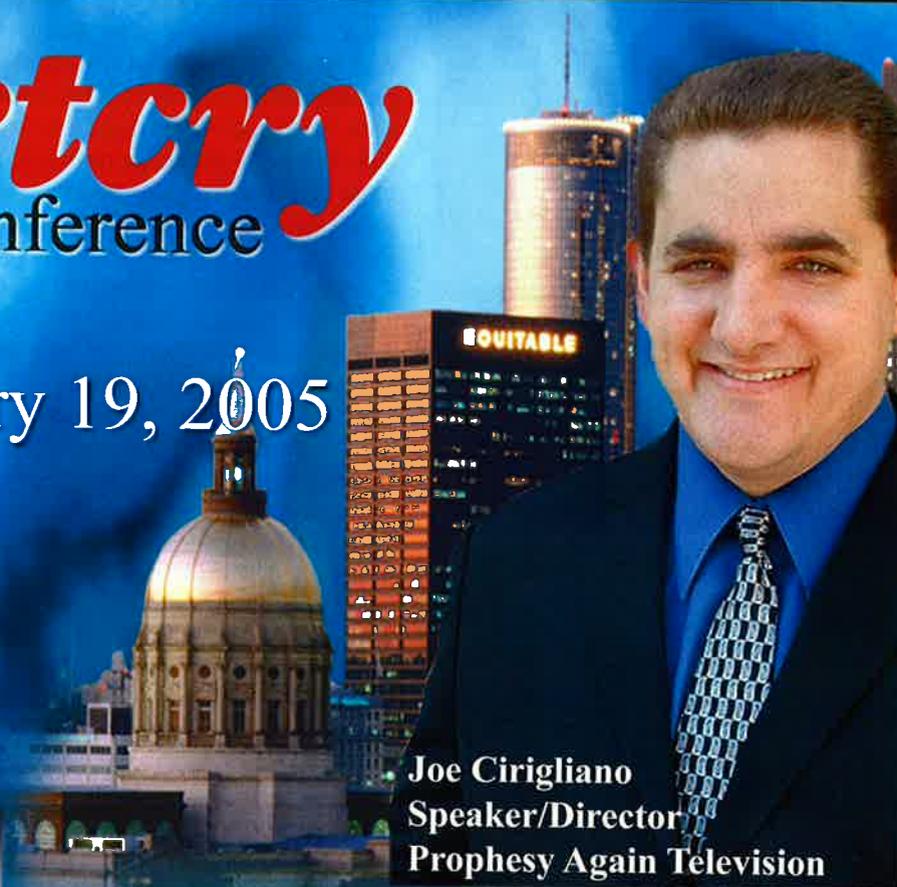
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# Criteria for pastoral success

Dennis Smith



*Dennis Smith is a pastor in the Southern New England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.*

**W**hat is success in pastoral ministry? We often judge ministerial success by the same standards generally used in the secular world.

Business, for example, measures success in terms of heightened production, more extensive operations, larger profits, more imposing organization, and staffing. Bigger, better, and higher positions are touted as marks of a successful person.

After serving the church as a pastor for some 25 years, I have come to identify a similar philosophy in the church, one by which we tend, almost unconsciously, to define success in ministry. Such a philosophy has encouraged us to believe that higher production (more baptisms), bigger operations (larger and more modern church facilities), larger organizations and staffs (senior pastor of large multistaff congregation), or becoming a CEO (conference president) are the criteria by which we define success in ministry.

## **Promotion of success criteria**

These success criteria might often be upheld when we bring very successful pastors to ministers' meetings. If this is done simply to show the attendees how to grow a bigger church, raise more dollars, or be more impressive, we will have, consciously or not, played into the hands of these secular definitions of what makes for "success" in ministry.

In short, in such cases a simple message is broadcast: This is what success is and this is how to achieve it. After such meetings, one can come away feeling somewhat overwhelmed and even a little defeated, and perhaps not quite know why. After all, it has just been demonstrated what success really is. If, after several years of ministry, my church has failed to become a "super" church with a multimember staff, then I as a pastor must be something of a failure.

A further implication is almost inescapable for some . . . "I am not close to God. If as a pastor I were closer to God and more connected to Him, my church would grow phenomenally. There must be something wrong between God and me . . . or simply something wrong with me, period."

## **Another look at success criteria**

The book of Acts reveals that God chose certain individuals to be used in more dramatic ways than others. While Peter and John are mentioned frequently, the other disciples are not; yet I am certain they too were faithfully serving their Lord, just as the more frequently mentioned apostles were.

Just because some disciples were not mentioned as being used in dazzling ways does not mean that they were less successful in their service, or within the sphere to which God had called them. Each disciple had a purpose in God's plan for the advancement of the gospel. As they fulfilled that plan, they were successfully ministering for their Lord.

It might appear that perhaps Peter, John, and Paul were doing more for the Lord than the other disciples. Peter saw thousands accept Christ as a result of his ministry, 3,000 following one sermon. We don't read of James having such phenomenal success in soul winning. However, we do read of him mediating a very important meeting dealing with an issue that could have divided the early church (Acts 15).

It appears that God did not call Peter, John, or Paul to be such crisis mediators, even though Peter and Paul did play important roles at the Jerusalem Council. Nevertheless, this leading mediation function was James's mission from God, and not the mission of the other disciples.

When we consider Paul's ministry, it would seem that he influenced more people to accept Christ than any of the original apostles. He took the gospel to the then known world. He

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raised many churches in several countries. But does this mean that he was more successful than others? No. He was simply fulfilling the ministry God called him to do; a ministry different from the ones God had called the others to perform.

We see the same varied ministries in the lives of the original seven deacons. Philip was called to be an evangelist. We read of some of his service for the Lord in Acts 8. Stephen became a marvelous expounder of God's Word. God performed "great wonders and miracles among the people" through Stephen (Acts 6:8). We don't read of such a marvelous ministry being done by the majority of the deacons, the remaining five.

Does this mean that Stephen and Philip were more successful than the others? No, no one would conclude such a thing. Again, each of the deacons was called to do a specific ministry, and as long as they were fulfilling the purpose God called them to, they were a success. Yet in human eyes, some appeared to be more successful than others.

### Body analogy

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses the analogy of the human body to describe the various functions of the members of the church. Each member or part of the human body has a function. Some parts of the body function in a more visible way than others do. Some members of the body are considered less significant than others. The heart would be considered more important than the appendix.

The important point is that each member and organ has a function whether seen or not, and whether considered important or not. When observing the human body, it is easy to judge the function of a given part and to determine if that member is functioning successfully. In the spiritual body of Christ (the church), it is much more difficult to make such assessments.

In every case, it depends on our criteria for success.

This brings us back to the beginning of this article. If we decide that success means that a pastor baptizes 50 people every year, the church grows by 100 percent each year, the tithe increases by 100 percent each year, and the church plants a new congregation every three years, then if that is not happening, the pastor appears to be unsuccessful in our eyes, and probably in his or her own eyes also.

However, what if God does not call each pastor to do exactly the same kind of ministry as every other pastor? What if God calls some to be a Peter, another a John, another a James, another a Paul, and another a Bartholomew? The point is clear.

I believe God calls pastors to fulfill a specific mission in their ministry. I also believe the New Testament clearly illustrates this through the ministries of the various individuals mentioned. What that mission is will become clearer as each pastor seeks to know God's call to him or her, and as time and circumstances make such things clearer.

The results of each pastor will vary widely. The important thing is that pastors keep their hands in the hand of God, continue to be filled with the Spirit, yield to the Spirit's leading, and do their best to serve God faithfully where they are.

### An illustration of success

In a little book titled, *They Found the Secret*, V. Raymond Edman gives brief life sketches of men and women over the past couple centuries, and their experience in finding God's mission for them in their life. One individual, Samuel Logan Brengle, clearly illustrates the premise of this article.

He accepted Christ at a young age

and became a circuit preacher in the Northwestern Indiana Methodist Conference in the United States. After two years, he attended a seminary in Boston.

Brengle's "ambition was to be a great preacher; and he sought the power of the Holy Spirit to that end. He rationalized that a great preacher would do more for the glory of God than one who was mediocre.

"Finally, in utter desperation, he prayed, 'Lord, I want to be an eloquent preacher, but if by stammering and stuttering I can bring greater glory to Thee than by eloquence, then let me stammer and stutter.'"<sup>1</sup>

As Brengle continued to seek a closer experience with his Lord, God led him to understand the grace of Christ more fully. Through God's leading, he experienced the Holy Spirit's outpouring in his life and ministry.

He describes his experience with the words: "It was an unutterable revelation. It was a heaven of love that came into my heart. My soul melted like wax before fire. I sobbed and sobbed. I loathed myself that I had ever sinned against Him or doubted Him or lived for myself and not for His glory. Every ambition for self was now gone. The pure flame of love burned it like a blazing fire would burn a moth."<sup>2</sup>

In time the euphoria of his initial Spirit infilling subsided. Brengle wrote: "In time, God withdrew something of the tremendous emotional feelings. He taught me I had to live by my faith and not by my emotions . . . He showed me that I must learn to trust Him, to have confidence in His unfailing love and devotion, regardless of how I felt."<sup>3</sup>

Edman describes Brengle's experi-  
*continued on page 26*

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# The magnetic church

Ricardo Norton



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**T**he magnet's ability to attract and retain certain metallic objects reminds us of the task of the church to attract and hold people in Christ's body. Jesus clearly had this task in mind when He said, "I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16, NIV). Attracting and retaining new members is essential to the survival of the church. Without a constant influx of newcomers, the local church will stagnate and eventually die.

The attraction properties of magnets depend on the magnetic forces they irradiate. The closer the objects are to the magnet, the stronger they are pulled to the attracting force. Objects attached to the magnet become magnetized and able to attract other objects to the body.

In spiritual matters, Jesus is the magnetic force that attracts people to His body, the church. Jesus explained this with the following words, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," and "who comes to me, I will by no means cast out" (John 6:44, 37, NKJV). The closer people are to Jesus the stronger they will be attached to His body and the greater the magnetic power they will exert in attracting other people to Christ's church.

Jesus, like a magnet, attracted people in His days "from everywhere" (Mark 1:40-45). He founded the church to be an attracting force.

He expects His church to attract people from everywhere and to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7). In order to become an effective attracting agency every church member and activity needs to be magnetized and become an attracting force. Here are five magnetic forces of growing churches.

## Magnetic preaching

Preaching has been one of the most effective Christian magnets used in history to bring people to the church of Christ. The book of Acts describes a single evangelistic sermon by Peter that was instrumental in the conversion and baptism of about three thousand people (2:14-41). Nonetheless, not all preaching is magnetic. On the contrary, there is preaching that is repulsive, preaching that is more endured than enjoyed.

Magnetic preaching requires magnetic preachers. However, to be a magnetic preacher in the same congregation fifty-two weeks a year is challenging indeed. This is especially true in long-tenure pastorates, where congregations have heard the pastor preach week after week for years. The preparation of inspiring sermons is time-consuming and in most cases, pastors have a limited number of hours to schedule for weekly sermon preparation. There is a lot more to do in ministry than just preparing sermons.

The pulpit is the nerve center of church ministries. It is the table at which the congregation is spiritually fed, inspired, and motivated. It is the classroom podium where members are instructed and challenged. As long as the sheep under their care receive healthy nutritious spiritual food, local church pastors do not need to be the main weekly spiritual food provider. Ministers can invite guest speakers to provide the right quality of spiritual food. Inviting well-chosen speakers once a month will allow the local pastor more time for other ministerial responsibilities and for the preparation of quality sermons.

Magnetic preaching is rooted in Christ and propelled by the Holy Spirit. Jesus and the Spirit form a dynamic and transforming duet. Magnetic preaching is Christocentric. Christ melts hearts and the Spirit convicts and transforms them.

## Magnetic people

Magnetic churches have magnetic people in their congregations. Friendly and loving

members, who reflect the love of God in their words and deeds, constitute invaluable human magnets. One of the reasons why the unchurched are not attracted to churches is because their members are often unfriendly.

Restaurant employees are frequently more gracious and friendly toward their customers than some churches are toward visitors. People return to restaurants because they enjoy their attention and good food. God's church should not be less appealing than a place of commerce. It should provide the best spiritual food and attention to visitors.

Although ministers are not the main reason people come to church, they are usually one of the main reasons they stay in the congregation. Pastors can profoundly affect the magnetic power of the church. "Like people, like priest" (Hos. 4:9). Congregations tend to assimilate the personality, attitude, and approach of their leaders and reflect that identity as a mirror image. Rarely does outstanding church growth occur without a strong magnetic leader.

Magnetic people are not necessarily sophisticated, well-refined individuals; but humble dedicated persons who love people and desire their salvation. Our society suffers from a serious shortage of love. People are love-starved.

Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Church visitors are more interested in knowing how much church members care for them, than in how much they know about the Bible. Loving dispositions and caring attitudes are powerful magnets that will draw visitors to the church.

### **Magnetic programs**

We live in a world where goodness has been replaced by indifference, and where social pollutants are corroding society and moving people away from true joy and happiness. Anxiety, stress, and fear eclipse society today. People are attracted to programs where they

can learn to cope with the problems they encounter in everyday life.

Church programs should be intentionally people oriented. They should aim to attract, educate, and help them grow. Magnetic programs address a variety of concerns in order to meet the various spiritual and emotional needs of the community. They should feed the mind, stimulate the spirit, and enhance relationships. Programs on drug addiction, stress, physical fitness, happiness, and hope are among the many programs churches can offer to attract people.

Magnetic churches contextualize programs with specific age groups and needs being targeted. Churches need to create structures of participation where all age groups of the congregation can use their God-given gifts. Children and the elderly are two groups often ignored by church programming.

To be relevant, programs need to be constantly evaluated and adapted to the changing needs of the community. The same old stereotyped programs should be improved to bring a fresh attracting relevance. Programs must be of superior quality if people are to continue to come to church.

Many good church programs and activities are poorly attended due to poor advertising. Good advertising gets people's attention. The creation of banners, email, a well-designed Web site, personal invitations, mailing flyers, and even simple, dramatized announcements a few weeks before church events will help to guarantee good attendance.

### **Magnetic facilities**

Church buildings were not very important for early Christians. Early churches grew and disseminated the gospel meeting in houses and even outdoors. Things have changed considerably today. Christians are reaching a society that places much emphasis on looks and comfort.

The church cannot reach a twenty-first-century society with first-century methods. We are reaching a genera-

tion for whom the very word "church" has changed its meaning. For many people, this word no longer denotes a company of people but a physical structure. Before we are able to educate them about the true meaning of the word "church," they need to be attracted to a building where they feel comfortable.

Magnetic churches possess magnetic buildings; buildings with inviting pews, good lighting, clean bathrooms, and sufficient parking space. Buildings that look good outside and inside offer good heating in winter and air conditioning during summer. Society has become accustomed to beautiful malls, cinemas, and other entertainment venues, and is not attracted to comfortable dilapidated buildings. Rundown churches with unkept lawns are a sign of death.

Appropriate children's facilities are very important for an attractive church. Parents would rather take their children to a well-equipped church than to a church with uncomfortable classrooms. At the same time, children would rather go to a place that is architecturally and pedagogically designed for their age and needs and will resist attending a Sabbath School class where they don't feel at ease.

### **Christ the ultimate magnet**

The sanctuary is where the creature meets the Creator. It is the dwelling place where God especially reveals His presence: "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8). The atmosphere and appearance of His dwelling place should be designed to honor Him. It should be a little heaven on earth.

The church attracts people to be saved in Christ. Ultimately, preaching, church members, programs, and comfortable buildings, without the magnetic power of Christ become an end in themselves and will not lead people to the magnetic saving power of Jesus. The church is Christian because of Christ. The moment the church stops being Christ-centered, it stops being Christian. ■

# Lost and found

Pat Habada



Pat Habada, Ph.D., is assistant director of Sabbath School and personal ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

**N**ow the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1, 2, NIV).

Jesus was in the pasture lands of Perea speaking to a "mixed multitude," (see *The Seventh-day Adventist Commentary*) most of whom were eager to hear what He was saying. But along with them were some Pharisees and teachers eager to catch Jesus in some wrong word or deed. Their principal concern seemed to be that Jesus spent so much of His time with common people, even fellowshiping with them on a level that they felt was improper. If sent by God, He should be spending time with them, not with the rabble.

"Strict Pharisees also considered the common people . . . as 'sinners', beyond respectability."<sup>1</sup> "They regarded themselves as educated, refined, and pre-eminently religious . . .,"<sup>2</sup> well above the lower classes. Some of these rabbis "were doubtless commissioned by the Sanhedrin to follow Jesus wherever He went, to listen, observe and report back."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus knows their thoughts, their grumblings, and what they would report to the Sanhedrin. But He does not openly condemn them. Instead, He tells three stories that have significance to this day.

## Lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7)

In the uplands of Perea, raising sheep was a common occupation. Many of Jesus' listeners were shepherds. Years ago, one of the Sabbath School quarterlies gave this explanation about the shepherd and the sheep: "Sheep often remain with a flock for eight to nine years, long enough for the shepherd to name them (John 10:3) and for them to recognize their shepherd's own signature call (verses 3, 5). Furthermore, when the flock entered the fold at night, the shepherd held his rod across the entrance a few inches above the ground. As each sheep passed under the rod, the shepherd inspected it for injuries and illness. Thus the shepherd most likely could identify his own sheep rather quickly." The shepherd also counted his sheep and would know immediately if even one was missing.

Connecting these things with Jesus' story and entering deeply into it, we are able to see some of the characteristics of the search for the lost sheep and what was behind it:

1. The search was definite and purposeful, focused upon one lost sheep.

2. It was an all-consuming search. For the shepherd leaves his other 99 sheep and goes in search of the lost one in the surrounding countryside. He searches diligently and thoroughly.

3. This is an active, personal search—the shepherd does not call a hired hand. He himself does the searching.

4. It's a persistent search—the shepherd does not give up. He searches until He finds the sheep.

*But what about the sheep?* Does it know that it's lost? Yes. It's crying for help.

How did it get lost? Apparently it wandered away from its flock, not taking the path that would keep it safe.

Perhaps it was looking for greener grass.

Many of the lost sheep of today have wandered away not because they no longer believe what they did but because they have become careless or are too busy with the cares of everyday life.

For some it might have started one Sabbath when, overcome with weariness from work and worry, they decided to stay home and rest. These people are not angry, they have not suffered insult or indignity from others in the flock. They still believe. They know the Bible.

"The fact that the sheep became lost was evidently due to its own ignorance and folly,

and once lost it seemed completely helpless to find its way back. It realized that it was lost, but knew not what to do about it."<sup>4</sup>

How many of our "lost sheep" are waiting for us to come to them, to encourage them, to invite them to return to the "fold"? They want to come back, but they need our help and encouragement.

What do today's lost "sheep" need? They need what the sheep in Jesus' story received: a deliberate effort to make contact, to have someone actually seeking to be in touch with them, someone to give encouragement in a particular time of distress and simply to show genuine caring. Shall we do as the shepherd did?

*And what happens when the shepherd finds the sheep?* Does he scold it? Beat it? Put a rope around its neck and drag it back to the flock? No. He picks it up and carries it back to the fold. And then, of all things, he celebrates.

### Lost coin (Luke 15:8-10)

This woman had lost something precious. The coin was probably one of ten she received from her family when she married; a kind of dowry, something to fall back on.

Most women of Jesus' day had no voice in their future. Husbands were selected for them; some girls were betrothed as early as 12 or 13. A married woman was "owned" by her husband, who could treat her as he chose. But the dowry was hers to keep—the one thing that was hers alone.

If these coins were part of the woman's dowry, she would have valued them and done everything possible to save them, perhaps planning to pass them on to her daughter.

Maybe the woman of Jesus' story had moved the coins while cleaning the house. She probably kept them in a box or cloth bag, but somehow one had slipped out and gotten lost.

Probably these coins were drachmas. In Jesus' time, the Greek drachma was silver and approximately equal in value to the Roman denarius, a typical day's wage for a farm laborer.

So losing this coin was more than a sentimental loss, it was also a significant financial loss.

In Jesus' world, the houses of the common people usually consisted of one room, often windowless and dark. The room was rarely swept, and a piece of money falling on the dirt floor could easily be covered by dust and rubble. Even in daytime, the inside of the one room was dark and dreary. The only light would come in through the open door, so a candle or lamp had to be used.

So this woman lights a candle and looks carefully around the simple furniture. But she sees no sign of silver. She removes the furniture, takes her broom, and begins to sweep. Every spot, every corner is swept clean.

Suddenly, with a rush of joy and relief, she sees a tiny glow of metal in one corner. She picks up her beloved coin, rubs it on her sleeve, and carefully places it with the other coins.

She has found that which was lost,

and she rejoices, calling for her neighbors to come and celebrate with her. Apparently she had been so concerned about her coin that she had told them about it. Now they must be involved in the joy of the find.

*But what about the coin?* The coin did not know it was lost. It was the housewife's carelessness that caused it to be lost. And it was lost at home!

How we grieve for our children who have turned away from God. Have we sent them on that journey by our careless ways, our neglect of spiritual guidance, our lack of love and caring? What a tragedy to be lost in the midst of one's home and not know where one is! What a tragedy to be lost in the midst of one's church family and not know it.

What about those of us who come to church each week? Is it possible that we ourselves are becoming indifferent? Discouraged? Careless? Do we still study the Bible daily? Do we still pray? Do we simply take part in

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church activities and functions planned to encourage and support us in our walk with Christ? Have we become like those Timothy describes—"having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5)? Are we perhaps about to drop to the floor and roll across it, ending up in some dark corner of the church where we will lie in what is a state of effective lostness?

"The lost coin represents those who are lost in . . . sins, but who have no sense of their condition. They are estranged from God, but they know it not . . . even those who are indifferent to the claims of God are the objects of His . . . love. They are to be sought for that they may be brought back to God."<sup>5</sup> We can reach out to these through prayer, friendly contacts, and encouraging words, giving them help when it's needed.

### **Prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)**

Then there's the story of the prodigal son, the lost boy. Here is a son who rebels against all he has been taught. He knows the rules but doesn't want to live by them. He knows right from wrong but resents parental restrictions.

In the time of Jesus' story, fathers, while still alive, sometimes divided their property among their sons, even though a father was not obliged to do this. According to Mosaic law, the eldest son was to receive a double portion of his father's estate. The younger sons would receive a single portion each. In this case, because there were only two sons, the elder son would receive two-thirds and the younger would receive one-third. In such a case, however, the property was to remain intact until the father's death.

So here comes the younger son, demanding his portion now. In essence this young man is suggesting that his father should die so that he can inherit what he considers rightfully his, or at least give him his share immediately.

When we rebel, we usually go as far away from home as possible—so it

was with the prodigal. He takes the proceeds from his inheritance and travels to a "far country." There he lives a high life until his money is gone and his friends along with it. In a land of famine, he is forced to work in a pigpen. The prodigal literally sold himself to a man, probably a Gentile who had little to offer him and who knew nothing of God.

He is hungry and no one cares. No one offers him food or shelter. For the moment, his ambitions in life are no higher than the swine's. He is reduced to extreme hunger and to longing for the pods he feeds to the pigs.

And so the young man faces reality and begins to think of home, where even his father's servants have it better than he does. He is afraid of the reception he might receive if he goes home and wonders how he will be received. He hopes he may at least become one of his father's well-fed servants. So he decides he will go back and throw himself on his father's mercy, ask to become just one of the servants, and accept the results.

So he journeys homeward, barefoot and in rags, without that special ring that tells others he is part of a wealthy family, a ring he probably sold so that he could continue enjoying the good life.

And the father shows his love by his actions. He covers his son's embarrassment with his own robe, then calls for the best garment, the signet ring, and shoes—all signs of belonging to the family. Thus the young man is welcomed back into the family. The father not only demonstrates his love as he provides for the needs of his son but honors him with a feast.

This son represents those who have deliberately turned their backs on God. They choose to live as they please. They go as far away from God and church as they can get. They become absorbed into a way of life that is contrary to everything Christian. We usually think of them as being teenagers or young adults.

Even though they have "left," they may still be found on our academy

and college campuses, seeking an education that will afford a prosperous lifestyle, while ignoring the God who wants to be a part of their lives. They are hard to reach, and it's only as they "come to themselves" that they turn back to God.

And so in Jesus' story, the prodigal returns, planning to ask that he simply become one of his father's servants. But the father doesn't give him a chance to finish that request. Instead, he receives him as a son. The son acknowledges his sin, and the father orders his servants to prepare a banquet.

But then there's a twist in the story, as it takes a direction different from the other two parables in Jesus' repertory. Here comes the elder brother from the fields, where he has been working to extend the wealth that would one day be his. He hears the music and feasting. "What's going on?" he asks. And when he learns that his father is giving a party for his despicable younger brother, he refuses to participate.

He probably feared that his father would not only take the prodigal back but give him another portion of inheritance, thus diminishing what the elder brother would receive.

The older son had served his father for what he thought would be his reward. As he speaks to his father, he seems to imply that his lot in life has been difficult. He has not been "merry" in serving his father, devoting himself slavishly to the work of the estate. So it is not surprising that in speaking to his father about the his brother's return, he sarcastically calls him "this son of yours," thus refusing to acknowledge his own brother.

And so the story closes with the father outside, pleading with the older brother to come in and rejoice with the family. In this pleading, Jesus describes His own pleading with the scribes and Pharisees. He loves them as much as He loves the "publicans and sinners."

We do not know the full end of the story. It is left to our imagination, and

perhaps that is best, for Jesus had used the second part of the parable to tell the rabbis of their own refusal to acknowledge those who followed Him as brothers and sisters in the faith.

### Conclusion

The lost sheep knows that it is lost and needs only to be encouraged and gently guided back to the fold. Friendly contacts, encouraging words, help in times of need, that phone call to invite them back—all are important. But most of all, we must find ways to lead them to fully accept the Shepherd.

The lost coin knows not that it is lost. It does nothing to save or find itself. But even as the woman sought diligently until she found her coin, we must seek and find those who have become lukewarm and do not know they are lost. We must begin by praying for them and for ourselves. We must search them out, surrounding them with love. We must encourage them, involve them in Bible study and positive activities so that they come to worship God and to know Him as their friend, their source of

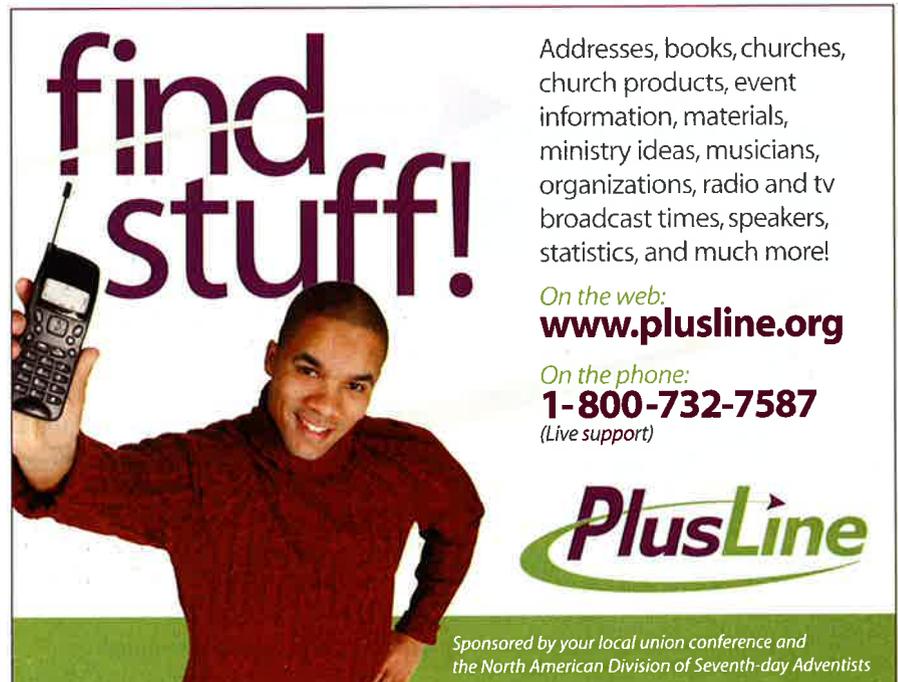
joy, and the one who empowers them to meet each day as it comes.

The prodigal son doesn't care that he is lost. He is caught up in life and rebels against the rules that are intended to guide him. The prodigal represents those who have deliberately turned their backs on God and do not even think of Him until they are in serious need or trouble. Someone has said that some men never look up until they are flat on their backs. That is the position in which the prodigal found himself.

These prodigals must make the first move. Like the father, we are to watch for them, pray for them, and be ready to run out to meet them, and with loving care bind their wounds, feed them, and rejoice with them because they have chosen to return home. We must accept them as they are, rejoicing that they have chosen to reach out to us.

Will we do this? Or will we be like the older brother, rejecting those who have been in a far country, who have turned their backs on God and His children?

"God might have committed the  
*continued on page 27*



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## Pastoral success

*continued from page 19*

ence: "And what resulted from the continuance of that crisis experience of cleansing and the filling of God's Spirit? Brengle's preaching changed perceptibly. Before this he had preached for human appreciation, now alone for the exaltation of the Savior. He preached to disturb and not to please. The reaction of his audiences was conviction of sin rather than commendation of the preacher."<sup>4</sup>

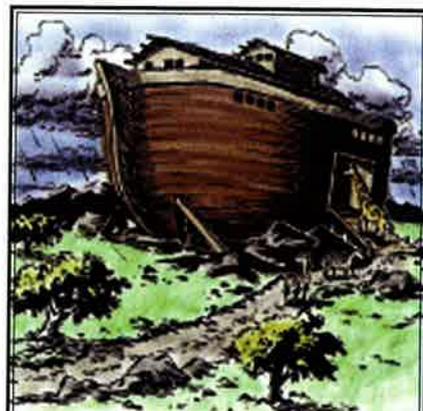
God led Brengle into a totally different direction of ministry: "The deliverance from pride and ambition for ecclesiastical promotion led him into untrodden pathways of service. From the preferment and security of Methodism he was called into the ranks of the Salvation Army when that organization was little known and not highly regarded."<sup>5</sup> In human eyes such a move would be considered a real demotion.

Brengle's pride having been subdued, God led him to appointments with the Salvation Army that were in small places and new assignments. None of these compared to what he could have had if he had stayed serving God in a more conventional way.

Edman describes one of Brengle's experiences with these words: "When stationed in Danbury, Connecticut, he led his little contingent of faithful ones, consisting of a lame lieutenant, a big Negro, and a little hunchbacked girl, to a street meeting to the tune of 'We're the Army that Shall Conquer!' Suddenly he came abreast of a large and imposing . . . church and for a moment red hot were the thoughts that burned through his soul, *Fool, you might have been a pastor of a great church like that!* But the sting was only for a moment, for the Sanctifier steadied the soldier to obey His orders."<sup>6</sup>

God blessed Brengle's ministry in the Salvation Army. He was an inspiration to all those he ministered to, and he also authored a collection of articles titled, *Helps to Holiness*.

To the casual observer, one might



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conclude that his life of ministry was a failure compared to some of his previous colleagues, who went on to pastor large congregations and were promoted to administrative positions in their church organizations. However, in God's sight Brengle was a success. He had fulfilled the purpose for which God had called him.

### Ministry today

God has indeed called some to perform what we generally consider to be "very successful" ministries. On the other hand, He has called others to perform "less successful" ministries, from a human perspective, that is.

If this is true, then "super successful" pastors and "less successful" pastors, by our reformulated criteria, may both be "equally successful" according to God's criteria of success for them. If they have done their best to fulfill the mission God has placed before them, they are successful.

This article is by no means an excuse to be lazy. I believe the criteria for success on a personal level is simple. We must constantly maintain a meaningful study and prayer life, daily renewing our commitment to Christ. We must seek the baptism of God's Spirit every day with a willingness to yield to His leading personally and professionally.

Our goal must be to have an experience like that of Paul: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Then no matter how we are judged by human criteria, we will be a success by God's standard. We will be fulfilling the mission He has called us to fulfill. Every ministry has a purpose. We are successful when we fulfill that purpose. ■

## Second coming

*continued from page 11*

tant future. In the second parable, the wise bridesmaids made provision for the possibility of a long waiting period, while the foolish virgins simply assumed that the coming would be as timely as their calculations and expectations indicated and, therefore, did not ready themselves for any sort of "delay."

A Christian's life stretches between two realities. The first one is that Jesus is coming soon; the second is that we are still here. It is important to find the balance between living with our daily routine and living with the expectation that Christ could come any day. The blessed hope will prompt in us an

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## Lost and found

*continued from page 25*

message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose. But in His infinite love *He chose to make us co-workers with Himself*, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry.<sup>6</sup> May God help us all as we reach out to reclaim lost members and bring new ones into the family. As this church looks for ways to reach out and touch the lives of others, may we be ready to celebrate with them as we welcome them home. ■

earnest longing for the wedding day to come sooner, and to get ready to meet Christ.

In concluding His eschatological talk on the Mount of Olives, Jesus explained that our longing for His return will prompt us to live a life of active—not passive—waiting by faithfully fulfilling our present responsibilities in the world in preparation for His return (Matt. 25:14-36). Ellen White stresses, "Belief in the near coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven will not cause the true Christian to become neglectful and careless of the ordinary business of life. The waiting ones who look for the soon appearing of Christ will not be idle, but diligent in business. . . . Those who flatter themselves that careless inattention to the things of this life is an evidence of their spirituality and of their separation from the world are under a great deception. Their veracity, faithfulness, and integrity are tested and proved in temporal things. If they are faithful in that which is least, they will be faithful in much."<sup>5</sup>

The wedding day is approaching, and as in the case of any wedding, preparations must be made. While heaven is in the process of preparation, the church is preparing herself for that long-anticipated day when Christ will come "to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed" (2 Thess. 1:10, NASB). Then united together, Christ and His bride will make their way to the place prepared in heaven. Until then, the church is the place where Christians should be and patiently wait. ■

*Ranko Stefanovic, Ph.D., is professor of New Testament studies, Department of Religion, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

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1 V. Raymond Edman, *They Found the Secret* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1984), 26.  
2 *Ibid.*, 29.  
3 *Ibid.*, 29, 30.  
4 *Ibid.*, 30.  
5 *Ibid.*  
6 *Ibid.*, 34.

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1 See *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* on Luke 15:1.  
2 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900), 185, 186.  
3 *SDABC* on Luke 15:2.  
4 *SDABC* on Luke 15:4.  
5 White, 194.  
6 White, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1892), 79. Italics added.

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1 Richard Rice, *Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997), 359.  
2 John Brunt, *Good News for Troubled Times* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1993), 65.  
3 *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* (May 11-17, 2002), 62.  
4 See Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2002), 67.  
5 Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1885), 4:309.

# Soul winning

continued from page 15

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20, NIV).

### Step 3: Put specifics on the harvest cycle

Put specifics on the harvest cycle for yourself or your church, such as how and when the harvest sequence will be carried out, who will lead out with each phase, how much it will cost, and how it will be paid for (see box at right).

Sometimes Sabbath School classes can take the initiative to develop a harvest cycle plan. Individual members can talk with pastors or church leaders about how they can be a part of something the church is doing in addition to what they do as individuals. In heaven we will get to spend eternity with those we have brought to Jesus and His church.

Here is a scene to be imagined: "With unutterable love, Jesus welcomes His faithful ones to the joy of their Lord. The Saviour's joy is in seeing, in the kingdom of glory, the souls that have been saved by His agony and humiliation. And the redeemed will be sharers in His joy, as they behold, among the blessed, those who have been won to Christ through their prayers, their labors, and their loving sacrifice. As they gather about the great white throne, gladness unspeakable will fill their hearts, when they behold those whom they have won for Christ, and see that one has gained others, and these still others, all brought into the haven of rest, there to lay their crowns at Jesus' feet and praise Him through the endless cycles of eternity."<sup>1</sup>

*Dan Serns is ministerial director and head of soul winning, global missions, and church planting for the North Pacific Union Conference in Vancouver, Washington.*

Here's what emerged at Abundant Life Church from our prayer and discussion. You can easily adapt it to your own situation:

### Calendar—Winter/Spring

1. *Fast and Pray.* January 3-10, Week of Fasting and Prayer. Fast from anything that might distract us from fulfilling Jesus' commission. Pray often—as individuals, families, and as a combined church family. (Elder X to lead out in this.)

2. *Sow.* January. Every willing person commits to passing out 100 pieces of literature (*Sow 1 Billion* Bible study invitations) during the month. Willing people give away literature at work, school, etc., as well as signing up for a specific neighborhood if they like. Sabbath afternoons of January 10, 17, and 24, the church family passes out literature together. (Sabbath School superintendent, leader.)

3. *Go/Cultivate.* February-April. Bible study groups (using *Amazing Facts Basic Course* or other appropriate materials). A leader and partner meet each week for Bible study in the homes or places of work/study of interested people. (Personal Ministries leader.)

4. *Reap.* April 9-24 (sixteen evenings and three Sabbath mornings). DVD evangelism at church facility by lay person. (Team of six: speaker, assistant, secretary/treasurer, deacon/deaconess, two children's ministry leaders.) Church members and attenders bring friends. Mail 5,000 handbills to area around meeting place. Schedule baptisms for Sabbaths April 24 and May 8. (Pastor/elder and team of six: Elder Y, speaker/leader.)

5. *Disciple.* May-July. Mentoring of new members (Spiritual Friends 13-week follow-up plan). Involve new members in Bible study or other small groups; develop friendships. New members share their faith with family and friends. (head deacon: \_\_\_\_\_; head deaconess: \_\_\_\_\_)

### Summer

*Reach Out 2005 Youth Outreach.* July. (Youth leader.)

### Fall

Repeat the process beginning in July, with reaping October 8-23 (schedule baptisms for October 23 and November 13) in one of the unentered communities in our valley.

### Budget for each cycle

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| Fast and Pray . . . . .   | 0              |
| Sow (Literature/donated) . . . . .                                | 0              |
| Go (Bible study guides, 25 sets @ \$3/set) . . . . .              | 75             |
| Reap (5,000 handbills and mailing @ \$300 per thousand) . . . . . | 1,500          |
| Hall rental (if needed) . . . . .                                 | 500            |
| Children's ministry activities . . . . .                          | 100            |
| Miscellaneous and contingency . . . . .                           | 125            |
| Disciple Miscellaneous items . . . . .                            | 100            |
| <b>Total Cost</b> . . . . .                                       | <b>\$2,400</b> |

### Funding

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| Local church . . . . .                  | \$1,400        |
| Request conference assistance . . . . . | 1,000          |
| <b>Total Cost</b> . . . . .             | <b>\$2,400</b> |

As pastors or church leaders, you can discuss this with other church leaders and develop a plan that fits your situation.

1 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1888; rev. 1911), 647.

## Slippery slope

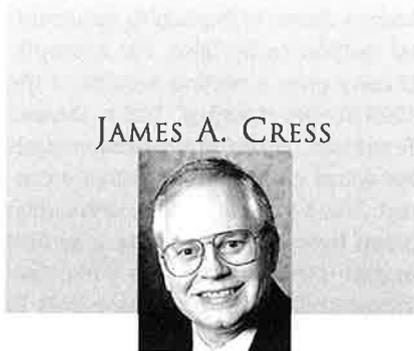
Prophecy indicates God's church of the last days will experience the same challenges as the early church. "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:30, NKJV).

The first steps down any slippery slope seldom appear dangerous. In fact, many begin a fatal spiral believing they are strengthening Christ's kingdom and following God's will. However, most independent groups follow virtually the same tragic path.

**Good intentions.** Even worthy plans need the balance of the entire body. Scripture warns against one body part attempting to be all or do all. Nothing is quite so dangerous as someone with only one good idea. Despite their best attempts to reform the church, such narrow focus rejects a broader picture or varying viewpoints and ends up harming the very body they intended to enhance. "These one-idea men can see nothing except to press the one thing that presents itself to their mind."<sup>1</sup>

**Reject counsel.** Refusing the counsel of leadership demonstrates disregard for the God of heaven who places individuals in positions of responsibility. Although God does not require uniformity of opinion or methodology, an independent spirit which rejects good advice reflects more the sociological attitudes of our culture than spirituality, or even creativity. "These devoted souls consider it a virtue to boast of their freedom to think and act independently. They will not take any man's say-so. They are amenable to no man. I was shown that it is Satan's special work to lead men to feel that it is God's order for them to strike out for themselves and choose their own course independent of their brethren."<sup>2</sup>

**Harbor resentments.** Corrective guidance, perceived insults, slights—



JAMES A. CRESS

whether real or imagined—too easily form a root of bitterness which poisons the once-tender mind until fruitful ministry is devoured. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Heb. 12:14, 15, NKJV).

**More responsible management.** Unchecked, such resentments soon metastasize into expressed opinions that the organized church cannot be trusted to expend the finances through voted, budgeted, and audited processes. Advocacy of independent agendas and personal priorities soon ripens into receiving offerings, soliciting tithe, and attacking others. Fervent solicitations disguise irresponsibility, unvoted priorities, and undocumented utilization.

**Narrowed focus.** Independents, concentrating on recruiting individuals or resources from the established church, inevitably neglect the wider task of winning the lost. Self-focused interests become so consuming that the very evangelistic mission which may have originally propelled their agenda is neglected.

**Subtle distinctions.** Independents quickly realize the brevity of their window of opportunity to recruit the attention and money of loyal members.

Even while professing adherence to the doctrines and mission of the church, they urge subtle distinctions designed to demonstrate their holier, historical position. Typically, these are minor points blown out of proportion into major issues. "We sought most earnestly that the Scriptures should not be wrested to suit any man's opinions. We tried to make our differences as slight as possible by not dwelling on points that were of minor importance, upon which there were varying opinions. . . . Men will make a world of an atom and an atom of a world."<sup>3</sup>

**Masked disloyalty.** Claims of loyalty to God's prophetic gift, presents an appearance of piety, devotion, and education. Lengthy quotations are selected to substantiate assertions of error. "It will be found that those who bear false messages will not have a high sense of honor and integrity. They will deceive the people, and mix up with their error the Testimonies of Sister White, and use her name to give influence to their work. They make such selections from the Testimonies as they think they can twist to support their positions, and place them in a setting of falsehood, so that their error may have weight and be accepted by the people."<sup>4</sup>

**Belief abandonment.** Downsliding is as spiritually dangerous as backsliding. Remember, slipping and sliding is never skiing or sledding. If it seems easier to continue careening down the slope than to accept heaven's help to change, pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal your spirit of godless independence. If tempted to follow such sophistries, remember: "He [God] is leading, not stray offshoots, not one here and one there, but a people."<sup>5</sup> ■

1 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 216.

2 ———, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1923), 29.

3 *Ibid.*, 25, 165.

4 *Ibid.*, 42.

5 *Ibid.*, 61.



## BOOK REVIEW

***By Design or By Chance: The Growing Controversy on the Origins of Life in the Universe***, by Denyse O'Leary (Kitchener, Ontario, Canada: Castle Quay Books, 2004). US \$14.95.

*By Design or By Chance* is a fresh intellectual breeze, clearing away much of the irrational smog and dust obscuring core issues surrounding the origin of life. The author, Denyse O'Leary, brings to bear skills developed over many years of textbook writing and journalism; using them with precision to make plain the strengths, weaknesses, and foibles of all major positions in the debate between Darwinism and its most promising scientific alternative, Intelligent Design (ID) theory. This is no mean feat considering the ground she covers: From cosmology to theology, from the philosophy of science to the text of Genesis, O'Leary addresses all with refreshing clarity. The readability of *By Design or By Chance* is remarkable given its scope, its depth, and the twin temptations of oversimplification or jargon-laden waffling to which so many other authors have succumbed.

From page one, O'Leary demonstrates the skills of a genuinely good writer. Her prose embraces the reader in a fast-paced stream of information and analysis carefully paced to stimulate the intellect while never overwhelming with technical terms or obscure scientific concepts. Reading *By Design or By Chance* may, however, be a humbling experience, as much of what one thought they

knew is shown in thoroughly documented fashion to be false. For example, O'Leary gives a riveting account of the 1925 Scopes "Monkey" Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, which dramatically reveals the actual events in their historical context. This is a most valuable contribution given how profoundly the play and motion picture *Inherit the Wind* have influenced thinking about events in Dayton. Understanding the motivations of the main players in the drama and the actual events that occurred provides profound insights into both how real historical events can be twisted for political purposes and why the teaching of evolution remains such a contentious issue.

Ease of reading is enhanced by extensive use of sidebars containing summaries of historical facts, quotes from prominent players in the field, definitions of terms and theories and other information pertinent to what is being discussed in the main text. This device keeps the main text flowing smoothly and logically without chasing down every possible side-path suggested by the subject matter. Many readers will find themselves enjoying the sidebars as much as the main text and wondering why concepts presented elsewhere in muddled ways could not always be explained with such depth, precision, and clarity. One of O'Leary's greatest skills is the ability to summarize complex subjects in remarkably few words while remaining faithful to the truly nuanced meaning of what she is writing about.

The impact of ID on scientific thought is a genuinely complex subject, which pales in comparison with its impact on theology. ID claims that (1) the action of intelligence is empirically

detectable, and (2) intelligent causes can be inferred from at least some natural phenomena—for example, molecular machines in cells and information stored in DNA. These twin claims profoundly impact concepts of God, His existence and nature. To O'Leary's credit, these theological implications are not ignored to concentrate on the easier scientific questions, instead they are laid out with a sharp precision rarely seen in the writing of professional theologians, let alone science writers.

In a world where miracles are not supposed to happen, *By Design or By Chance* may represent the impossible: a clearly written, thoroughly researched book that avoids the arm-waving, bluster and politics of the most controversial question in science—Where did we come from? Given its breadth, clarity, and accessibility to those who are not specialists in the field, O'Leary's book is an outstanding introduction to ID for lay readers. Any pastor who wishes to invoke ID in a sermon should first be required to read *By Design or By Chance*. In fact, many of those who either oppose or support ID in the scientific community could greatly benefit from reading this book. If this were done, much of the incoherent dust kicked up as the merits and difficulties of ID are discussed might be avoided. More clear thinking on these issues has to be a good thing. The result would be a much more productive engagement between proponents and opponents of the fascinating and potentially revolutionary new theory of Intelligent Design. ■

—Timothy G. Standish, Ph.D., research scientist, Geoscience Research Institute (GRI), General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

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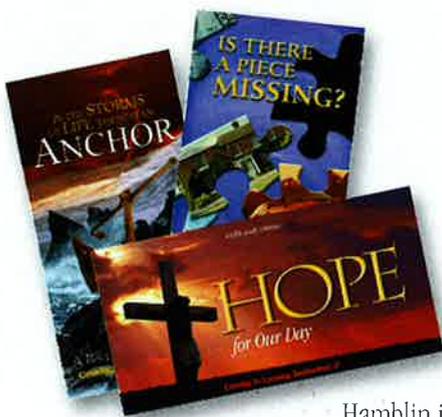
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