PRAYER IN THE MIDST OF COSMIC CONFLICT



ADVENTIST REVIEW
November 2026

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Editorial

THE PLAY AND INTERPLAY OF ANGELIC POWERS AND PRAYER



JUSTIN KIM

Presuppositions exist, and they are everywhere. These are premises, assertions, and beliefs that are not explained but assumed to be understood. For example, in the fantasy world of Cinderella, no child questions why the fairy godmother's magic runs out at midnight (why not bring a portable charger?); why everything reverts except the glass slipper; and who the fairy godmother is.

These presuppositions exist also in the world of science. Assumptions are made that truth itself exists, observations can be measured and compared, and the laws of reason and logic apply universally. No one questions whether numbers exist or not.

Presuppositions are also found in Scripture. Though many would like to think so, the Bible does not directly engage the question of whether God exists. He simply exists. Holy Writ is not a philosophical treatise that seeks to present proofs. Rather it is God's message of salvation and restoration revealed to humanity.

One fascinating presupposition of Scripture is the existence of supernatural beings, that is, other than God. Other sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord (Job 1-2). God made other worlds (plural; Heb. 1:2). The Bible is replete with verses about angels of different types and their earthly activities. No explanation is given, but we encounter presuppositions to their activity. In Mark 1:21-27 Jesus and the unclean spirits interact in a manner that puzzles the reader. In Matthew 8:31 why do the demons have to go anywhere anyway, especially why into a herd of swine?

Daniel 10 showcases these presuppositions starting in verse 12, when Daniel sets his heart to understand and to humble himself before God. Though his prayer is heard, and Gabriel is dispatched to Daniel's side, the angel is delayed. Apparently, Gabriel was busy: The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood him for 21 days, until Michael came.

Who is Michael but the archangel found in Jude 9. Meaning the "One who is like God," Michael is equated with the Son of God (1 Thess. 4:16; John 5:25). Jesus as the Archangel, or ruler of the angels, comes to Gabriel's side in the spiritual battle. Christ is often seen as the Angel of the Lord, especially in the Old Testament. Not a created angel, this divine messenger Archangel helps Gabriel.

Daniel 10 describes the prince of Persia as stronger than Gabriel, but weaker than Michael, or Christ. The "prince of Persia" was not Cyrus, who is referred to as the "king of Persia" (verse 1). This chapter showcases the unseen spiritual warfare between Gabriel and a fallen angel behind world leaders.

Seven lessons emerge: 1. Our prayers are heard when prefaced by heart preparation and humility. 2. Our prayers impact the play and interplay of angels. 3. Our prayers are real-time text messages in the midst of spiritual warfare. 4. The answering of prayers may be delayed by real-time events of angels. 5. Christ is stronger than any angelic power. 6. Political leaders and the history of the nations are impacted by the influence of angels. 7. We don't battle against other individuals, nations, or human elements, but against spiritual entities (Eph. 6:12).

None of the angels receive worship except one: Michael the Archangel is not a created being, as some assert. Rather Scripture points to Him as the Almighty Leader of legions of angels. He can raise the dead. He dispatches angels to aid us. He won the battle against the prince of Persia, and He will win the final war of heaven and earth. A powerful presupposition indeed.

Cover illustration by Adrià Voltà

News in Brief provided by ANN

"I have always wanted to be part of the Adventist community, but I did not have the opportunity. Through attending this crusade, I have finally fulfilled that desire."

—Thokozani Davison, one of the 150 people baptized after a two-week evangelistic campaign run by the Central Malawi Conference Women's Ministries Department. About 30 of the 150 baptisms took place in Sitolo Village, which had no Adventist members before the meetings began, and the campaign was designed for those with little to no experience with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.



Community members visited the Seventh-day Adventist Church world headquarters to receive back-to-school packages and other items collected by staff members. Photo: George Nelson/ANN

"We don't want to be a box with people in it who don't seem to care. We want to reach out and let our neighbors know that we care about them and that we're doing something."

—Marcia McEdward, General Conference (GC) employee transitions associate and health educator, who led a back-to-school community outreach event at the GC headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States. The GC partnered with Adventist Community Services, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Hope Channel International, and the Southern Asia Seventh-day Adventist Church to provide clothes, backpacks, hygiene kits, food, and a prayer booth to more than 100 families that were helped—including 33 Afghan refugee families.

"It was faith moving beyond the four walls of the church to embrace the pain of the community."

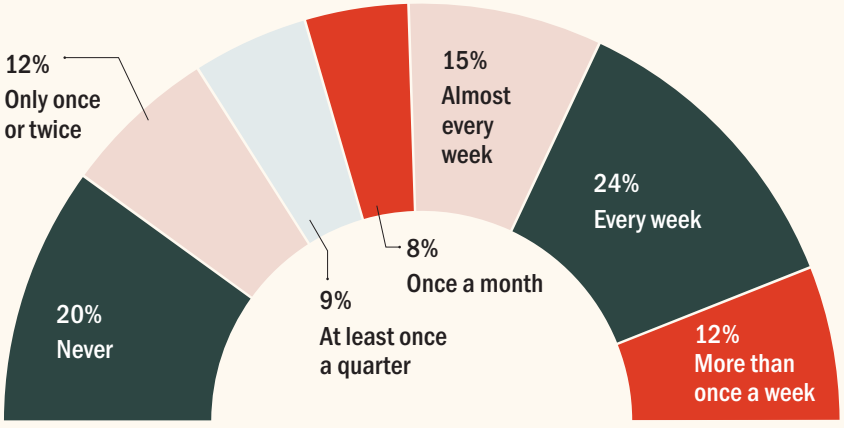
—Sandra Pinto, Women's, Children, and Youth Ministries director for the Inter-American Division, seeing the mobilization of church members across the territory as they marched on the global enditnow® emphasis Sabbath. Members called for an end to violence, distributed literature, held educational programs, and distributed food and other practical assistance.

23.8 MILLION

Estimated digital reach of the OneVoice27 Global Launch Day posts in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, representing what the division's media team was able to track across the region. Church members around the world were encouraged to post on their social media platforms in preparation for next year's campaign.

500

The number of bags of garbage collected during a community cleanup in Betio, Kiribati, as part of the Kiribati for Christ program. Kiribati is the only country in the world that straddles all four hemispheres. In the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Kiribati struggles with plastic waste, much of which ends up littering beaches and entering the ocean. Church members conducted the cleanup in partnership with Kiribati's Ministry of Women, Youth, and Social Affairs, donating US 71 cents for each bag of trash collected.



HOW OFTEN DO YOU ATTEND A PRAYER MEETING?

Church members were asked how many times a week they attend a prayer meeting at their local congregation.

N = 145,617
Source: 2022-2023 Global Church Member Survey
Data provided by the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research.

"I've known Jayden since he was 4 years old, and even then it was clear he was destined to shine. His impact today is a testament to what happens when young people are nurtured, encouraged, and given space to lead."

—Craige Young, director of United Children and Youth (UCY), speaking about Young Hero Award winner Jayden Melius, an 11-year-old attendee of Balham Seventh-day Adventist Church and long-standing UCY member. He volunteers at his local care home, spending his free time engaging residents (many of whom live with dementia) through artwork, games, meaningful conversation, and music. He also picks up litter in his local park and has raised money for Cancer Research UK, in addition to being a budding preacher and musician in the church.

8

The number of participants who completed a hairdressing course in Khabarovsk, Russia, with the support of Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Far East regional office director Roman Medvid and professional hairdressers Alina Marchenko and Tatyana Apolikhina. After receiving a certificate and a professional hairdressing kit from ADRA, the charity hairdressing salon at the "Kind Heart" social center welcomed its first visitors. Apart from free haircuts, the ministry center also provides clothing and other essentials.

"Every miracle flight has been underwritten by a legacy of sacrifice. To fly for the gospel is to step into a realm in which the risks are as real as the rewards."

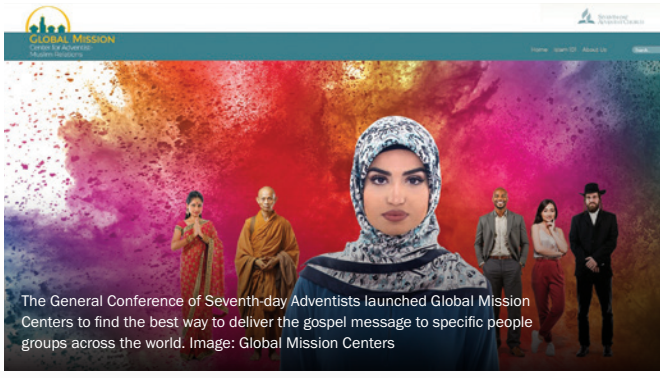
—Nathan Tasker, flight center director for Pacific Union College, at which a new Adventist Aviation Museum was launched during the 2026 Homecoming Weekend. Attendees heard from mission pilots who served in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Kenya, and other hard-to-reach places. The museum will showcase Adventist aviation history and missionary accounts, and honor those who served.

ADVENTIST REVIEW NEWSLETTER

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MISSION CENTERS PROVIDE EXPERTISE TO REACH ACROSS PEOPLE GROUPS

Director explains what they are, what they do, and why they are essential.



The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists launched Global Mission Centers to find the best way to deliver the gospel message to specific people groups across the world. Image: Global Mission Centers

Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist Review*

When we try to deliver the gospel message to different cultural or religious contexts, what can happen? The reception of the message can be damaged, acknowledged Chanmin Chung, director of the Global Mission Centers.

Addressing Seventh-day Adventist Church executives in Bangkok, Thailand, in August, Chung explained what those centers are and how they help Adventist mission to connect to specific people groups and eventually share the gospel message.

The Message and Its Audience

At the beginning of his presentation Chung shared the story of a missionary serving in Asia who wished to discuss the Genesis story of Joseph with the local people. "His intention was to communicate such values as integrity, sincerity, and diligence to the village people," Chung shared.

Chung explained how people sat and listened to the story of Joseph. When the missionary was done, he asked his listeners, "What did you learn from the story?" An elder of the village raised his hand. "This man, Joseph, is a good man, because he never forgot his homeland. He asked his bones to be carried to his homeland. So he is a good man."

The local man had different values, Chung explained. He appreciated the story for a different reason than the one the missionary had in mind. "So," Chung said, when dealing with specific people groups across the world, "our intentions and the delivery of the message are two different issues."

Mission Centers to Support Outreach

Against this background Chung explained that the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists launched Global Mission Centers to "find the best way, with our field workers, to deliver the gospel message." Currently there are six centers of this kind, whose stated goal "is to help Adventists know how to build bridges of understanding and friendship with people from major world religions and philosophies."*

"What we are doing is not just intellectual activity," Chung emphasized. "We work closely with our field workers . . . and church leaders."

Chung shared some stories from people who have been impacted by the targeted efforts to give hope to various people groups around the world.

He first introduced a video report by Bledi Leno, director of the Center for Secular and Post-Christian Mission. The center provides resources, training, and special projects to people serving in secular contexts.

A Customized Approach

The video report featured Daniel, a missionary serving in Tallinn, Estonia, alongside his wife, Svetlana, and their daughter. In Tallinn he shared, "We realize that one pastor or missionary doing the work alone will not have the same effect as mobilizing the membership and the youth to work together, to bring their friends and their community to God."

Breakthrough in a Secular Environment

After discussing it with Leno, the regional church in Estonia decided to open a place for young people to meet and play board games. They meet twice a month, as every young Adventist also invites a non-Christian friend "just to connect and be together." After a few months there are several regular attendees with whom they are developing deep friendships, Daniel shared.

A second step includes inviting them to a movie night and a discussion after the screening. "The discussion builds around spirituality, faith, and the meaning of life." From there, leaders offer Bible studies, and everyone is invited to attend. The method has proved successful, as even a self-declared atheist has not missed a single church event, Daniel reported. That same young person spent four days at a youth camp and listened to spiritual messages "all the time."

It's for this kind of person that the center is there, Daniel said. "We are not only doing a project but finding different ways to connect to people, and through these connections we invite them to something else." R

* Retrieved from https://www.globalmissioncenters.org/home.

ADVENTIST CREATORS CALLED TO TURN DIGITAL INFLUENCE INTO MISSION

Leaders challenge them to use connections to reach others.

Libna Stevens, Inter-American Division News

For Bledi Leno, director of the Center for Secular and Post-Christian Mission (CSPM), reaching people for Jesus in an increasingly secular and digital world begins, not with winning arguments, but with listening, building relationships, and living out faith.

It was a key challenge he presented to nearly 200 Adventist content creators and influencers at the 2026 Creator Summit, held July 20-24 in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States: Look beyond followers and views and use digital influence to reach people who may never enter a church.

The emphasis comes as the Seventh-day Adventist Church prepares for OneVoice27, a global initiative that will call members to use their voices, gifts, and platforms to share Jesus and prepare for a worldwide evangelistic thrust in 2027.

Leno challenged creators to understand the people behind their screens before deciding how to communicate with them. In societies in which institutional religion is increasingly viewed with skepticism, the personal witness of individual believers can open doors that an organization may not, he said.

"You are not the institution. You are a person. But you are part of the movement," Leno told participants. "You, the person who connects with other people, represent the global organization, the movement that we are as a church."



Bledi Leno, director of the Center for Secular and Post-Christian Mission, speaks to nearly 200 content creators and influencers during the 2026 Adventist Creator Summit in Silver Spring, Maryland, on July 22. Photo: George Nelson/ANN

Understanding the People Behind the Screen

Leno described secular and post-Christian audiences as people who may distrust institutions and reject traditional expressions of religion but still wrestle with loneliness, identity, purpose, hope, and belonging.

Behind skepticism and apparent disinterest, he said, many people are still searching for connection, healing, and meaning.

For creators, that reality requires a different approach to digital mission.

"It's not about telling—it's about showing," Leno said, urging creators to communicate faith through both words

"YOU ARE NOT THE INSTITUTION. YOU ARE A PERSON. BUT YOU ARE PART OF THE MOVEMENT," LENO TOLD PARTICIPANTS. "YOU, THE PERSON WHO CONNECTS WITH OTHER PEOPLE, REPRESENT THE GLOBAL ORGANIZATION, THE MOVEMENT THAT WE ARE AS A CHURCH."

and the way they live. He encouraged an approach marked by listening, humility, honest questions, and invitation rather than imposition.

That emphasis was intentional, said Alyssa Truman, Communication director of the General Conference, who helped shape the mission focus of the summit. Creators were introduced to several challenging mission audiences to broaden their understanding of the people they may already be reaching or could intentionally seek to reach.

"As content creators I think it's important for them to understand some of the most challenging audiences in the world," Truman said. Creators, she added, often concentrate on producing content without fully understanding the people consuming it.

The goal was not simply awareness, she said, but equipping creators and leaving room for a deeper sense of calling.

"It's also allowing the Holy Spirit to place burdens on people's hearts," Truman said. "Maybe somebody feels very called to create for a very specific audience."

From Audiences to People

Leno illustrated that approach through the story of a woman he met while planting a church and center of influence in New York City. She initially made clear that she did not believe in God and was attending only because of a friend.

Rather than pressuring her, Leno and his ministry partner gave her space and built a relationship. Later, after experiencing tragedy, she reached out with a question: "What would you tell someone who has lost hope completely?"

That question opened the way for deeper conversations about faith, purpose, and meaning. She was eventually baptized publicly in New York and later began leading a Bible study group. Leno said the experience demonstrates what can happen when believers listen and remain present long enough for trust to develop.

The same principle can extend into the digital space, he said.

"You can do that from your screen today," Leno told creators, pointing to people around the world who may be searching for something they cannot yet identify.



General Conference executive secretary Rick McEdward challenges content creators to use their digital influence to carry the gospel across geographic and language barriers. Photo: George Nelson/ANN

Taking Mission Beyond the Screen

Rick McEdward, executive secretary of the General Conference, broadened the challenge by asking creators to consider populations, cities, and languages that the Adventist message has seldom reached.

"You as content creators are the creative brain trust of the church," McEdward told participants, challenging them to use available tools to communicate the gospel across language barriers.

But digital reach alone is not enough, he said.

McEdward challenged creators to move from online influence toward personal discipleship by praying for at least one person with whom they could personally study the Bible during the next 18 months.

"If you're a digital influencer, you need to take the next step and lead somebody to Jesus," he said.

For McEdward the opportunity lies in connecting digital influence with personal relationships. "You never know how God will bless your prayer if you but take a risk beyond the digital into the personal," he said.

Preparing for OneVoice27

That call takes on added significance as Adventists prepare for OneVoice27, which seeks to mobilize members around the world to use their voices and influence to share Jesus.

The mission emphasis at the summit underscored for content creators that participating in such a movement involves more than producing religious content, organizers said. It means understanding the people receiving it, communicating in ways that connect with their questions and experiences, and creating pathways from online engagement to Christian community and discipleship.

Leno encouraged creators to connect their online ministry with local churches, community projects, and centers of influence so that relationships that begin digitally can develop in person.

His challenge ultimately returned creators to the person on the other side of the screen, meaning someone who may appear indifferent to faith but is still searching for identity, hope, belonging, and something beyond the present.

The opportunity for creators, Leno suggested, is to become not simply more effective influencers but more intentional missionaries, using the platforms already in their hands to open doors through which people can encounter Jesus.



PRAYER IN THE MIDST OF COSMIC CONFLICT

The times demand a life of prayer.

John Peckham

Can you imagine showing up to play a basketball game in a hockey uniform—ice skates, helmet, shoulder pads, and all? That would be ridiculous. You'd be entirely unsuited to perform. Even worse, imagine showing up to play a hockey game in tennis clothing. Without ice skates, a helmet and other protective gear, or a stick, you'd have no chance. Those are just sports, you might think—trivial matters. But you'd never even consider showing up to play such games with the entirely wrong gear.

How much less would you even *think* of entering a nuclear facility and putting your body in the presence of radioactive materials without the proper protective gear? That would be a matter of life and death.

We would never show up unprepared in those ways, yet I fear we sometimes do not take the life of faith and the practice of prayer in the midst of spiritual warfare seriously enough. Do we think that spiritual matters are *not* matters of life and death?

Illustration by Adrià Voltà



The Priority of Prayer

"Of course I believe spiritual matters are of utmost importance!" you might answer. But do you and I live like that? Do our priorities—the way we spend our time, energy, and money—match what we claim to believe?

If we are serious about our faith—at least as serious as we would be about mere games—why do we so often neglect to put on the armor of God? Why do we so often pray without realizing we are embroiled in a life-and-death struggle—a cosmic conflict in which "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19, NASB)? Why do we so often neglect to spend uninterrupted time in prayer altogether?

Christ Himself often withdrew for dedicated times of prayer, sometimes even spending entire nights praying. He who was sinless and in perfect relationship with the Father recognized the need for dedicated, uninterrupted prayer. How much more do *we* need this?

Given how busy life is today, it is easy to neglect prayer—or to neglect praying with the seriousness that these days of earth's history demand. Yet what could be more important than one's relationship with God?

Simply defined, prayer is communication with the living God. As Ellen G. White once put it: "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend."[1] It includes praise, confession, thanksgiving, lamentation, surrender, and petition.

Indeed, without neglecting other aspects of prayer, Scripture consistently highlights petitionary prayer—prayer that calls on God to act in our lives and the lives of others. Indeed, the New Testament is filled with intercessory prayers, and calls for

Christians to offer them. Notably the vast majority of such prayers are focused on the mission of advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ—the advance of the light against the darkness.

Spiritually "Armored" Prayer

From the front lines of mission Paul often called for petitionary prayer, and in Ephesians 6 he directly locates such prayer in the context of the great controversy, with specific instructions for how we are to prepare for spiritual conflict.

Paul writes, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:11, 12).

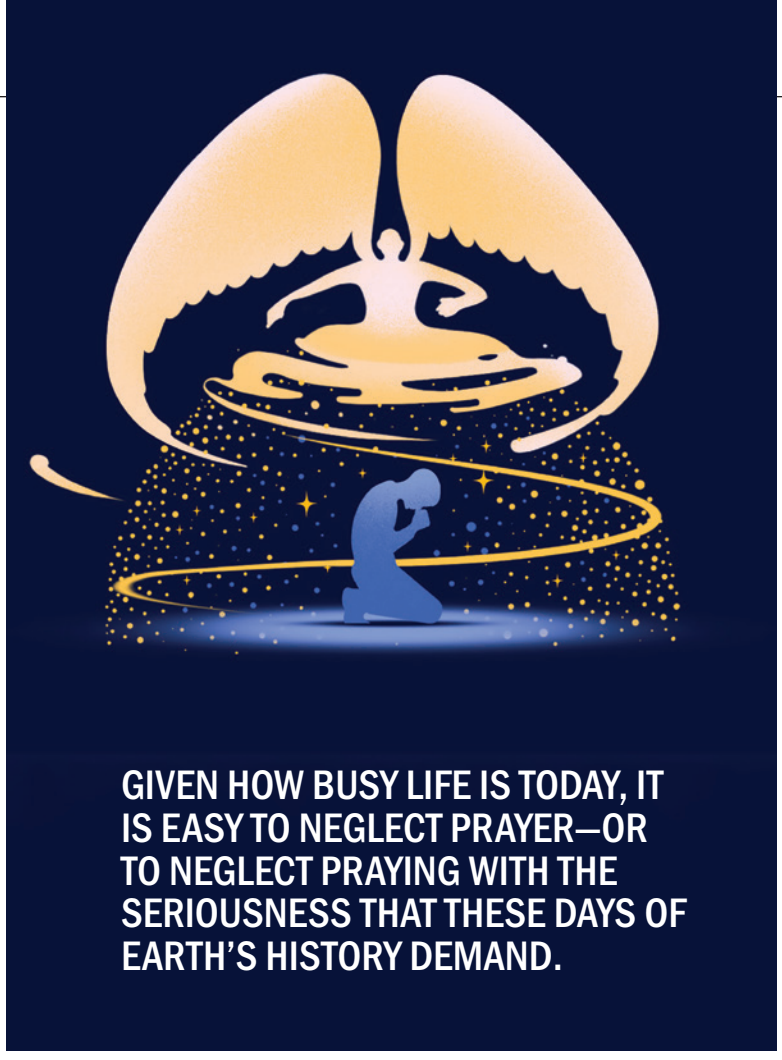
Our struggle is *not* against other humans, and any understanding of the cosmic conflict that causes us to demonize other humans is not of God. This conflict is a *cosmic* struggle "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (verse 12, NIV).

In this context of cosmic conflict, just a few verses later Paul calls for fervent petitionary prayer: "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf" (verses 18, 19, NASB1995).[2]

To pray as Paul calls us to pray, we must understand that this spiritual warfare is not like earthly warfare. This is a conflict of a different kind, a conflict over the truth and whom to trust, in which the devil is "the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9, NRSV), relentlessly waging a war of disinformation.

Thus, elsewhere Paul writes, "We do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5, NRSV).

To this end, Paul instructs us to "put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" in this "struggle . . . against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:11, 12, NIV). It is no coincidence that the spiritual "armor" Paul exhorts Christians to put on is suited for a conflict over truth, with an arch-deceiving enemy—the devil, whom Jesus calls "the father of lies" (John 8:44, NIV) and the temporary, usurping "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).



GIVEN HOW BUSY LIFE IS TODAY, IT IS EASY TO NEGLECT PRAYER—OR TO NEGLECT PRAYING WITH THE SERIOUSNESS THAT THESE DAYS OF EARTH'S HISTORY DEMAND.

Accordingly, Paul first calls us to wear "the belt of truth" (Eph. 6:14, NIV), which makes sense against the "father of lies," whose modus operandi is continual deception, slandering of God's name, and accusations against God's people (cf. Gen. 3; Job 1; 2; Rev. 12:9, 10). Here and elsewhere Scripture makes clear that the truth matters far more than most realize.[3] Thus, in His quest to ultimately "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8; cf. Heb 2:14), Christ came to "bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37) and called His disciples to also bear witness to the truth (John 15:27).

Second, Paul instructs, put on "the breastplate of righteousness" (Eph. 6:14), highlighting the importance of goodness and justice, which are intrinsic to God's nature and character (e.g., Deut. 32:4; 1 John 1:5). Since all have sinned, we must pray in a spirit of repentance, yet with confidence that we can come to the Father and be accepted through Christ (see Heb. 4:15; cf. 1 John 1:9; Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:30).

Putting on the breastplate of righteousness, then, does not give license to self-righteous prayer. Quite the opposite. Praying in right relationship with God involves confessing sin, seeking God's mercy and forgiveness even as we forgive others, and asking God to cleanse us and make us people of justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Next Paul calls believers to "shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace" and further instructs to take "the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:15-17).

Illustration by Adrià Voltà

Here Paul emphasizes the importance of faith as a shield against the devil's arrows that are designed to undermine faith in God by deception and slander. To have faith, particularly when it comes to prayer, is not to presume that God will act exactly as we might think He should. Faith involves trust that God hears, God cares, God is all-powerful, and God is perfectly good—even when we cannot see all that is involved. Even when our prayers are not answered in the ways we had hoped, faith holds fast in confidence in God's character while we continue to pray, "Your will be done" (Matt. 6:10).

Paul likewise highlights salvation (cf. Rom. 13:11, 12), which comes only by faith and God's Word. Here we must remember that prayer depends not on the adequacy of our performance, but on God's saving work.

And, in light of "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," we must make sure our prayers are formed in accordance with God's Word. Prayer detached from Scripture and the mission of God can easily become an echo chamber of our own desires. Prayer shaped by Scripture, on the other hand, is oriented toward God's mission of love and light to a world filled with darkness.

Persevere in Fervent Prayer

Just after this, Paul urges Christians to persevere in fervent prayer: "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf" (Eph. 6:18, 19, NASB1995).

Likewise, Paul elsewhere instructs believers to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). I remember as a young man thinking that verse called for the impossible. It must be hyperbole, I thought, meaning something like "pray when you can."

But Scripture repeatedly calls for constant prayer. If we take these instructions as referring only to formal prayer, that would indeed be impossible. But prayer is not limited to kneeling with our eyes closed beside a bed or in church. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, you can speak to God right now, for He is *always* with you. "There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God."[4]

Not only can you pray to Him at all times, but Jesus Himself is also always interceding for you. "He always lives to make intercession" for "those who come to God through Him" (Heb. 7:25). And the Holy Spirit also intercedes for you, too: "The Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us" (Rom. 8:26).

And there is still more good news. Lest you think that the Father needs to be convinced or persuaded to desire and do good things for you, Scripture is clear that—in Jesus' words—"the Father Himself loves you" (John 16:27). You and I pray as one whom the Father already loves more than we can possibly imagine, and He gladly gives "good things to those who ask Him" (Matt. 7:11).

Why Not Pray?

Why, then, do we need to ask at all if God is such a good and loving Father? That is a big question—a bigger question than I can answer sufficiently in an article like this; I have written an entire book about that.[5] Here, suffice it to say that in this cosmic conflict we are temporarily in enemy territory—living within what the New Testament calls the domain of darkness (cf. Col. 1:13). In this context Scripture consistently portrays prayer as playing a genuinely significant role, including with respect to unseen realities in the cosmic conflict.

Remember, though, that prayer throughout Scripture is most often ordered toward mission. It is not wrong to pray for ourselves and our needs—Christ Himself instructs us to do so (see Luke 11:1-13). But we must make sure we pray with motives shaped by unselfish love (see James 4:3). Scripture consistently calls us to spend a great deal of time praying for others, and calls us to also to act accordingly—doing what we can to bring about good in others' lives by our own hands and feet.

Pray for daily bread, healing, deliverance, and whatever else you may need, then. But also pray for those who hunger, suffer, wander, and grieve. Pray for God's people. Pray for God's work. And ask how God is calling you to act as part of the answer to those very prayers.

Paul urges Christians to always be prepared to stand against evil with the armor of God and perseverance in prayer. We cannot stand against evil without divine power. But there is hope: God makes a way. He provides everything we need.

So what are you waiting for? If you have not done so, commit to daily putting on the armor of God and fervently praying not only for yourself and your needs but also for God's people and God's work in this world.

Although we are very often focused on merely mundane matters, Scripture pulls back the curtain and shows us that we live in the midst of a cosmic conflict. Yet we are to pray, not in fear, but in faith. We pray in the confidence that the Father loves us, the Son intercedes for us, and the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We pray in accordance with God's call to participate in His mission of light, truth, righteousness, peace, and love until the day the light finally fully dawns and darkness is no more. ℜ

[1] Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 93.
[2] Bible texts credited to NASB1995 are from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.
[3] See John Peckham, "Liar, Liar: The Devil's Strategy of Deception and Slander," *Adventist Review*: https://adventistreview.org/magazine-article/liar-liar/. For a more academic treatment, see John C. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2018), also available as an audiobook on Audible.
[4] E. G. White, p. 99.
[5] On this question and the problem of why so many prayers for obviously good things seem to go unanswered (and much more about prayer in the context of cosmic conflict), see John C. Peckham, *Why We Pray: Understanding Prayer in the Context of Cosmic Conflict* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2024), also available as an audiobook on Audible.

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At Home Before the Throne

The beauty of God's transcendence and immanence

Valentin Zywietz



Every now and then, when our church gathers for worship, during the announcement of the congregational prayer the service leader invites us to come forward "to the throne of God" if we have any special praises or requests on our hearts. I wonder how you picture this phrase in your head.

Perhaps your first thought would be to imagine a vast expanse of indescribable splendor, filled with multitudes of angels, hushed, all eyes on the human visitors to their blessed realm. This would be somewhat like the visions described in Daniel 7:22 or Revelation 4 and 5. Or do you perhaps picture a high and lofty throne in a smaller but still very imposing temple setting, as described in Isaiah 6? Or perhaps a scene in which God appears inscrutable, surrounded by beings, forms, and shapes that defy comprehension, as in Ezekiel 1? In any of these cases, the throne of God, the place God

resides, has an element of otherworldly beauty, pure holiness, and absolute power.

Coming before the throne of God, so it seems, can be a rather overwhelming experience. Why did God choose to present Himself like this, not only on these but on many occasions in Scripture? And how does this affect me as I prepare to move toward the front of my church for prayer?

God's Otherness

The greatness of God makes me feel small. The otherness of God makes me feel as though it is difficult to come close to Him. God is above; I am below. This way of describing God's relation to me emphasizes His *transcendence*. Transcendence means that God is over and beyond His creation; that He is independent from it. Picturing God in this way, even as I write these lines, fills me with awe. When I pray, it helps me tune out my doubts and concerns and fills me with confidence that whatever I bring before Him will not burden or perplex His infinite majesty. Turning away from the turmoil and temptations of this world, I can say with Habakkuk: "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab. 2:20).

The emphasis on God's transcendence can be taken too far, creating an undue distance between God and me. Yes, God rules the universe, and we are finite, flawed, and in need of mercy . . . but note that in all these throne scenes, God's primary concern is humanity and the person standing before Him. There is no sense in which God's greatness and otherness make Him less involved with us!

God's Closeness

Furthermore, there are numerous occasions on which God is described as coming very close to humanity. Think, for example, of God coming to chat and to eat with Abraham in Genesis 18, or God meeting with Elijah as a still small voice in the desert in 1 Kings 19:12, 13! Also, would a God, entirely defined by His transcendence, care about the widow's debt in 2 Kings 4:1-7? Would He ensure that the sons of the prophets' effort to collect food for communal meal is not wasted because of their oversight in adding a poisonous plant (2 Kings 4:38-41)? Would He make an iron axhead float (2 Kings 6:6)?

Clearly God manifests His presence with us, even in the mundane details of human existence. But God went much further than this when He sent His Son, Jesus, to live as a human among humans. Jesus ate the same food we do, and experienced hunger, sadness, and joy (Matt. 11:19; 4:2; John 11:35; Luke 10:21). Finally, when Jesus was about to leave earth and return to His Father's side, He promised His disciples in John 14:23 to not only stay close but come even closer: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." Is it not remarkable how Solomon thought it a paradox that the God who cannot be contained in the universe could come to live in the temple he had built (1 Kings 8:27), but Paul feels confident in 1 Corinthians 3:16 to claim: "Do you not know that *you* are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

Despite its transcendent magnificence and without detracting from its holiness, the throne room of God is a warm and welcoming place.

Warm, Welcoming Magnificence

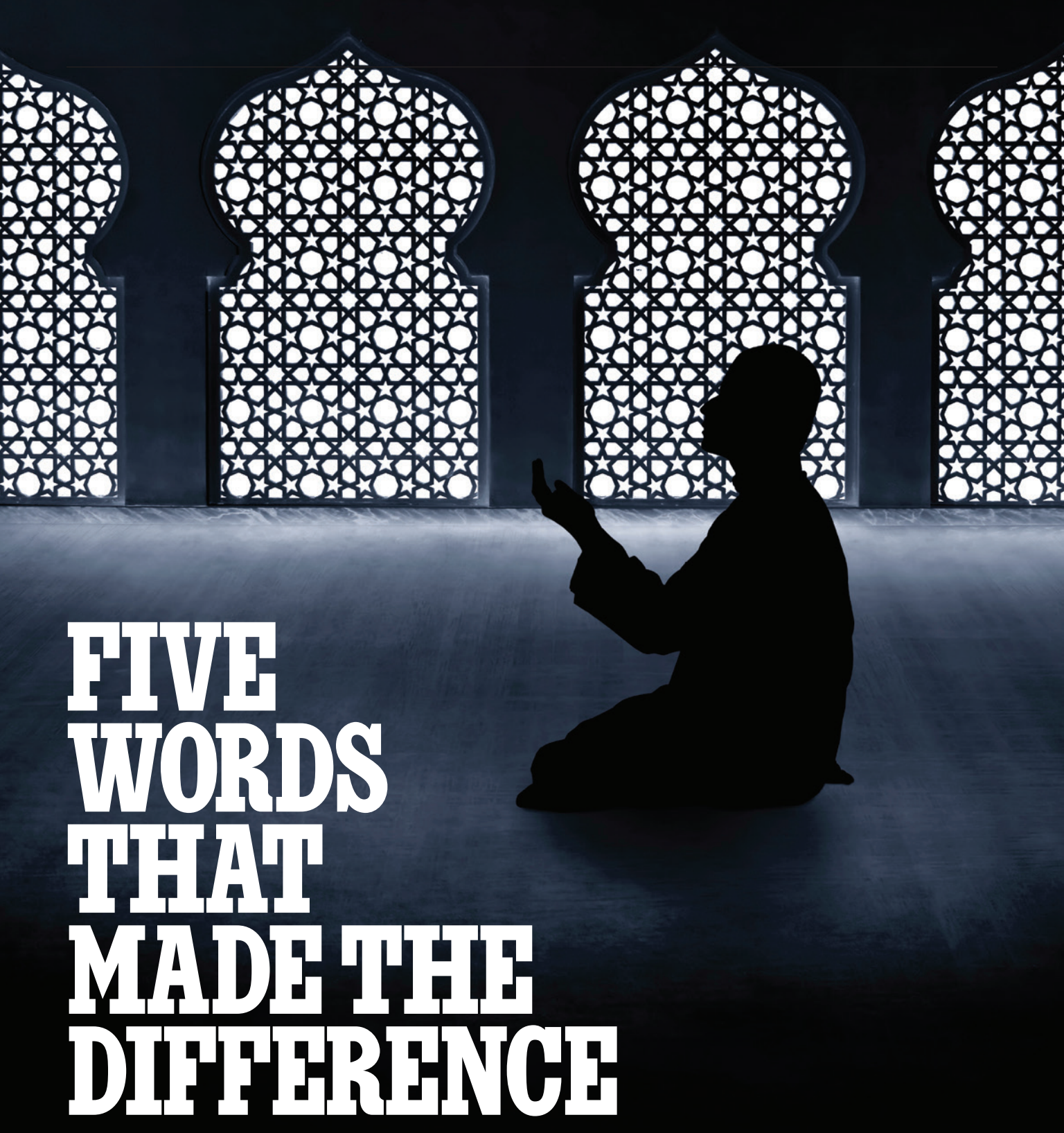
These texts show that God is not only transcendent but also very close to us. He is *immanent*. Immanence is the opposite of transcendence, describing God's closeness to His creation. The combination of texts that emphasize God's transcendence with those that emphasize His immanence gives strong evidence that the infinite deity, Creator of the universe, is also able and willing to come infinitely close to me.

In fact, as we ponder the grandeur of the heavenly throne room, we should realize that all the power and wisdom displayed are not just for show but are being exercised on our behalf. They are not a measure of the distance between you and God. Just the opposite. They are meant to increase our confidence in God's ability to fulfill His promises, which include, for example, that where He is, we may be also (John 14:3). And the multitudes of angels: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). There is no coldness in their glance, no annoyance at the uncouth troublemakers from a backwater planet. Despite its transcendent magnificence and without detracting from its holiness, the throne room of God is a warm and welcoming place.

As I walk down the aisle to "come before the throne of God," I make myself aware that, in a sense, I am entering the presence of the One who is absolutely beyond me. It is good that I feel the infinite difference between me, as a creature, and God, as the Creator, for this is the basis of my worship. I know there is much I do not understand about God; even the mysteries of His creation are largely hidden from me. This puts me in awe. And that is as it should be. But God smiles; He is happy that I have come. This makes me feel at home. And that is also as it should be. ℜ

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FIVE WORDS THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE

A personal testimony of prayer, power, and the pursuit of grace

Ishmael Ali

It was a normal Friday evening in Trinidad. The kind of evening during which the air hangs warm and still and nothing particularly remarkable seems likely to happen. I was walking with some friends when I noticed a large tent set up near the road. Music drifted out from inside, voices lifted together in song, and something I cannot fully explain compelled me to stop and step through the entrance.

I did not know then that this was the beginning of a journey that would change everything—my family, my faith, my entire understanding of who God is and how He works in the lives of ordinary people. I was a young Muslim man, raised in the traditions my father's family had brought from India. I was not looking for conversion. I was merely curious.

That evening the minister made an announcement: anyone who brought five or more guests to the meetings would receive a free book. The offer intrigued me. The next night I returned with an armful of family members and friends. I collected my book. Then, having satisfied my curiosity, I stayed away.

But my family kept going.

Among those who continued attending was my older brother, George. Night after night he sat under that tent, listening, asking questions, weighing what he was hearing against everything he had ever been taught. And what he heard began to change him. The weeks passed, and the change grew undeniable.

One day George came to my father with an announcement of his own: he intended to be baptized as a Seventh-day Adventist.

My father's response was swift and absolute. If George went ahead with this decision, he would no longer be welcome in our home. The threat was not idle. In our culture, in our faith community, in the family my father had spent his life building, what George was proposing was more than a personal choice. It was a rupture. A betrayal. A shame that could not easily be undone.

I added my own voice to my father's. I pleaded with my brother. I begged him to reconsider, not because I believed he was wrong about everything he had heard, but because I knew what this decision would cost him—cost all of us.

George listened to everything I said. Then he was baptized anyway.

He was thrown out of our home the same week.

Then tragedy arrived.

The Only Name That Worked

My 15-year-old sister lay motionless on her bed. It happened without warning, without explanation. She would not eat. She would not drink. She lay there as though life itself had stepped back from her body and was waiting on the threshold, uncertain whether to return.

We took her to doctors. We sought specialists. We emptied our finances pursuing every medical avenue we could find. Nothing helped. No diagnosis came. No treatment offered relief. The medical establishment looked at her and came away with only uncertainty.

So we turned to religion.

We invited three imams to our home. They came with incense and ritual prayers, with the weight of centuries of Islamic tradition behind them. They performed everything the tradition called for. When they left, my sister had not moved.

We went to Hindu temples. The priests prayed with sincere devotion. They invoked the names of gods who had been worshipped long before any of us were born. When we carried my sister home, she was the same.

Desperate, we drove her up the mountain to a Catholic monastery. A priest came out and sprinkled holy water over her, and, strangely, temporarily, she showed signs of improvement. We drove home filled with cautious hope. But before we reached the bottom of the mountain, my sister began speaking in a heavy, strange voice that made our blood run cold. Whatever was holding her was not going to release its grip easily.

Baptist ministers prayed over her. Pentecostal believers interceded with everything they had. Our home became a procession of earnest, well-meaning people, each carrying their tradition, each leaving in silence. Nothing changed.

Through all of this, George had made a quiet request. He asked if he could bring someone from his new church—an elder, he said—who wanted to pray for our sister.

We refused. We had not yet forgiven him for what he had done to our family. And besides, so many had already tried.

But eventually, desperation overruled pride. When there was nothing left to try, we agreed: Let George bring his elder.

I remember the day clearly.

A man arrived at our door. I will be honest with you: I was not a gracious host. Before he had even crossed the threshold, I confronted him.

"So many churches," I said. "So many people. All of them have prayed for my sister. What difference can you make?"

He did not argue with me. He did not defend himself or his Adventist Church or his God. He simply looked at me and said, "Take me to her room."

We walked up the stairs together. When we entered the room in which my sister lay, he asked if we could kneel in prayer. I had never knelt in prayer like that before, not in that position, not with that posture of complete humility before God. Something in me resisted, but I knelt.

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The religion my father's family had brought from India . . . had been silent in our family's greatest hour of need.

He asked us to close our eyes.

I closed one eye and kept the other open.

The elder began to pray. His voice was calm, unhurried, utterly without theatrics. He did not shout or perform. He prayed the way that a man who is personally acquainted with the One he is speaking to would pray.

And then I closed both eyes.

I cannot tell you exactly why. Something in the atmosphere of that room shifted. Something in the quality of his prayer demanded that I be present for it fully, not as a skeptic watching from behind a partially opened eye, but as a person in a room in which God was being addressed.

Then he said words I will carry with me until I die: "Satan, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus."

Immediately—not gradually, not eventually, but immediately—something happened.

My sister, who had not eaten or drunk anything for days, sat up. She looked around the room with clear eyes. And she asked for something to eat and drink.

We stood there in silence, unable to speak.

As I write these words, my sister has never suffered from that condition again.

The Ripple Effect

What happened that afternoon in that small room changed our family forever. Not all at once—the journey of faith is rarely so neat—but the stone had been thrown into still water, and the ripples would continue long after the original splash. In the years that followed, hundreds of our Muslim and Hindu relatives came to faith in Jesus Christ. A family that had carried its religious traditions across an ocean from India, through generations, through every hardship and triumph, began, one by one, to bend the knee to a different name.

For me, however, understanding did not come immediately. I had witnessed something I could not explain and could not deny, and the combination of those two realities was almost more than I could hold.

Two weeks later I left Trinidad for Canada. I told myself I was leaving for opportunity, for a new life. But deep within me I knew I was also leaving because I needed distance to think, to wrestle with what I had seen.

The religion my father's family had brought from India, the faith I had been raised in, the tradition that had shaped every aspect of our household, had been silent in our family's greatest hour of need. And then one man spoke five words—"in the name of Jesus"—and my sister rose from her bed.

I could not argue with that. I could be confused by it. I could be unsettled by it. But I could not argue with it.

My own journey toward faith in Christ unfolded over time through honest searching, through study, through conversations I did not expect to find myself having.

I came to Christ at 21 years of age. And in the years since, as I have stood at bedsides and gravesides, prayed with the desperate and the doubting, walked with people through the deepest valleys of their lives, I have come back again and again to what I know—not merely as doctrine, but as lived experience: There is power in the name of Jesus. Not a theoretical or metaphorical power, but a real, immediate, present-tense power that shows up in the places in which everything else has already failed.

I often think about George, my brother who was willing to lose his home rather than silence what God had done in him. I think about what it cost him to make that choice, and what his courage, in the end, made possible. Sometimes the person who suffers most for their faith becomes the doorway through which others find it. George was that doorway for our family.

I think about that elder, too, who walked into a home in which he was not welcome, and knelt on the floor of a sick girl's bedroom with no drama and no performance. He did not know what would happen. He simply prayed. He placed a name into the room and trusted the One who owned that name to show up.

When every avenue of human effort has been exhausted, when the room is quiet and hope is thin and you are kneeling on the floor of your last resort, the name of Jesus still works.

It worked for my sister. It worked for my family. It worked for me.

It will work for you. 𝔄

Ishmael Ali serves as rural ministry coordinator for the Alberta Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and Family Ministries director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada. He is the author of *God Shall Hear: A Journey of Prayer, Pain, and Power*.

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KEYS TO ANSWERED PRAYER

The secret to a successful prayer life

Prayer," Ellen White famously wrote, "is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him."*

That is perhaps one of the warmest thoughts about prayer ever put to paper, leading us to wonder why we tend to emphasize answers to prayer more than the relationship involved. When we spend time with our loved ones, after all, is it to see what we can extract from them, or is it about the relationship? Perhaps one of the greatest keys to answered prayer is to emphasize the relationship first.

In what order does Jesus prioritize relationship and prayer requests? (Matt. 6:31-33)

God already knows what you need (an important distinction from what you *want*), and tells us not to worry about those things. Instead, we are to prioritize seeking Him.

Some feel that answered prayer belongs to a special class of believer: the "prayer warrior." What does the Bible say about that? (Matt. 7:7, 8)

Notice how answered prayer is for "everyone" (verse 8). Prayer does not belong to a privileged class of believers; it belongs to *you*. Also notice that Jesus promises that when you *do* seek God sincerely, you will find Him.

What key to answered prayer is found in the Gospel of John? (John 14:14)

Some treat the name of Jesus as a magic talisman; all you have to do is verbally tack it onto the end of the prayer, and suddenly heaven has no choice but to answer you. But never forget that the third commandment tells us that it is possible to take God's name in vain. God's name is more than a label; it stands for His character (see Ex. 34:5, 6). To pray in Jesus' name is to align yourself with Christ, choosing to live as He did, and to allow His character to be lived out through your life. Answers to prayer naturally follow that alignment.

How do 1 John 3:22, 23 and 1 John 5:14 emphasize this idea?

John reminds us that "whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments." God's moral law is a transcript of His character, a powerful description of who He is. When we align with God, of course, we will not be praying for things that He wouldn't want us to have—a virtual guarantee that our prayers will be answered. In our present sinful state, we won't always get it right—but God is gracious, and loves our intent. David was far from perfect, after all, but is remembered as a "man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22).

What important promise helps us understand a "No" from God? (Rom. 8:28)

When we *do* get it wrong, it's important to remember that God is working out "all things . . . together for good." He will always do what's best for us, giving us what we need rather than what we want. Other times God is simply telling us to wait. This is why a prayer life that opens the heart to God as to a friend is so critical: we are growing closer to Him so that our trust deepens, and we rest in His stated intent to bring us into the kingdom.

Prayer, in other words, *always* gets answered—just not always as *we* would want. And the more we prioritize the relationship over making a wish list, the better prayer gets. ℟

* Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 93.

Shawn Boonstra is an associate editor at Adventist Review.



Photo by Sixteen Miles Out / Unsplash



CAN HE HEAR ME?

Why do some prayers go unanswered?

This is an important and deeply personal question that confronts every believer. But it may help to rephrase it: Why does God sometimes answer differently—or later—than we hope? Scripture assures us that God hears our prayers. He may answer "Yes," "No," "Not yet," or "I have something better," but His response is always shaped by perfect wisdom and love.

Some prayers receive an immediate and certain "Yes"—as when we sincerely confess our sins and seek forgiveness. God promises: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Also, God always welcomes the person who turns to Him for salvation. Jesus promised, "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). He will answer our prayers for wisdom (James 1:5) and has promised the Holy Spirit as we witness for Christ (Acts 1:8).

Other prayers may be answered differently from what we request. Moses pleaded to enter Canaan (Deut. 3:23-26), but God refused because of his disobedience at Meribah (Num. 20:7-12). Yet God had not rejected Moses. Scripture indicates that he was later raised from the dead and brought to heaven (Jude 9; compare Matt. 17:3). What appeared to be a painful "No" was not the end of the story.

God's larger redemptive purpose may also require an answer we do not initially understand. Jesus prayed that, if possible, the cup of suffering might pass from Him, yet He submitted to His Father's will. Through Christ's sacrifice, humanity could be redeemed. Paul prayed three times for his "thorn in the flesh" to be removed, but God gave him something else: sufficient grace and divine strength in weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10). God did not abandon Paul; He sustained and strengthened him.

> We can think of prayer as an invitation to trust our loving heavenly Father, who sees the whole picture.

Even when God's answer is "Yes," we may need to wait, keeping in mind that God's timing is always best. Abraham waited many years for the promised son. He tried to speed things up through human plans (Gen. 15:2, 3; Gen. 16:1-3). Nevertheless, God fulfilled His promise when, from a human perspective, it seemed impossible (Gen. 18:11; 21:1-3). Delay did not mean "Deny."

We can think of prayer, then, not as an attempt to persuade a reluctant God, but as an invitation to trust our loving heavenly Father, who sees the whole picture. We may not always understand His timing, methods, or reasons, but we can be certain of His character. He freely grants forgiveness to those who confess their sins, and salvation to those who come to Christ. With every request we can trust that His answer will serve His redemptive purposes and our eternal good.

Therefore, we are invited to "trust in the Lord" with all our heart rather than lean on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5, 6). As we place our requests in His hands, the peace of God will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). ℟

Clinton Wahlen is an associate director at the Biblical Research Institute.

When a church becomes a community interested in the lives of real people

Manuel Arteaga

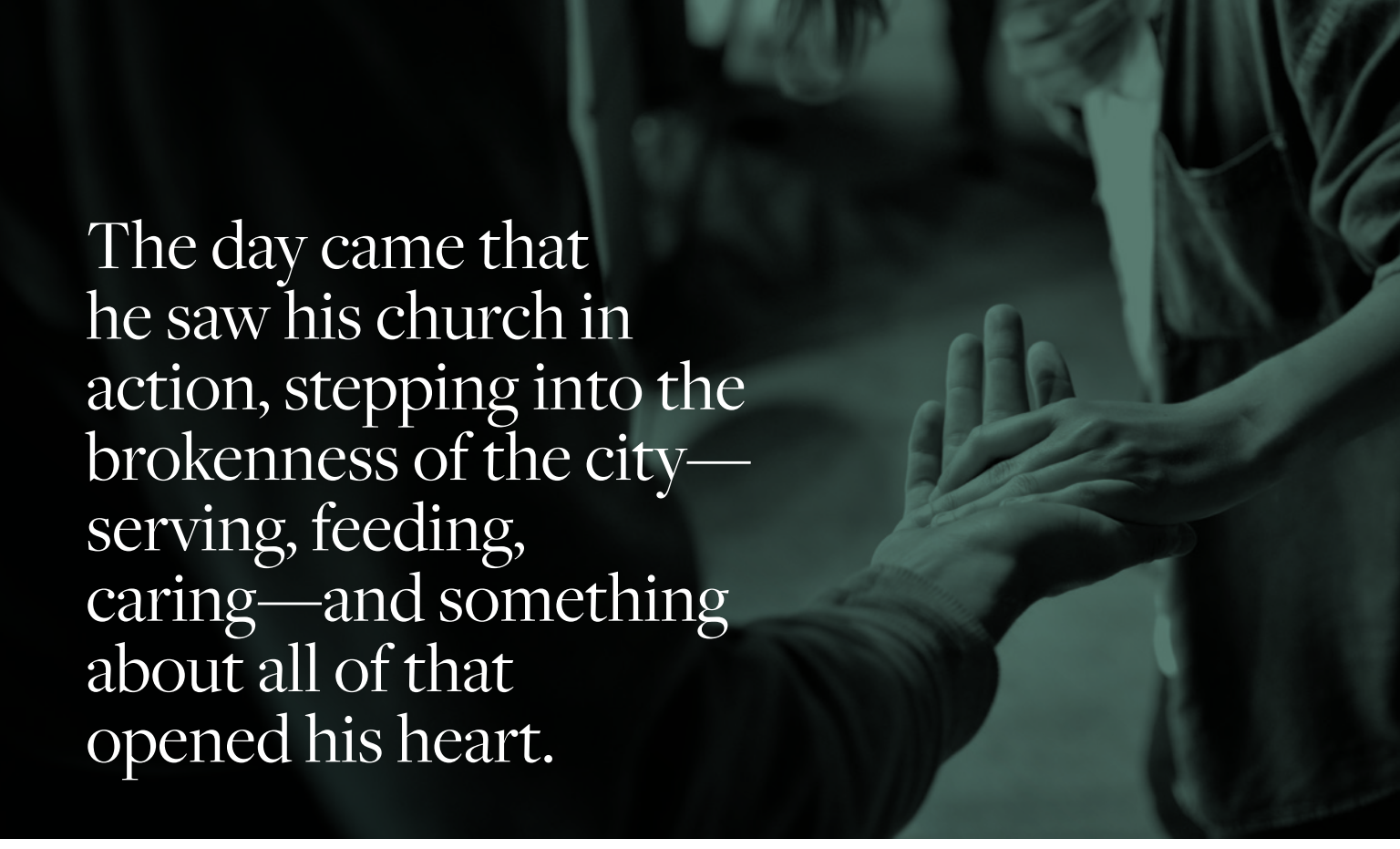
FROM SKEPTIC TO DISCIPLE

No one expected the surprise that awaited at the White Memorial church's Resurrection Sunday service—least of all Barry's wife. For 15 years, out of love and commitment to his Adventist wife, he had attended church alongside her, but never out of his own conviction. A former Baha'i and a skeptic, Barry often scoffed at religion. It seemed, somehow, naive and unserious to him. But the day came that he saw his church in action, stepping into the brokenness of the city—serving, feeding, caring—and something about all of *that* opened his heart. Though for years he had been unmoved by the gospel they preached, he became captivated by the gospel they practiced.

Barry: The Skeptic Who Longed for a Better World

To understand why this moment was so surprising, one must first understand Barry's spiritual journey. As a Baha'i he was no stranger to

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The day came that he saw his church in action, stepping into the brokenness of the city—serving, feeding, caring—and something about all of that opened his heart.

conversations about faith, spirituality, religion, and even God. Yet a personal commitment to Christ was the furthest thing from his mind. His perception of Christianity was something of a caricature of faith—an institution more invested in power than in people, more complicit with injustice than resistant to it. Over time his skepticism deepened as he grew more sure that organized religion had little to offer a world marked by injustice and suffering.

When Barry married Arnie, he occasionally accompanied her to church. He sat, semi-politely, through sermons and classes, scoffing subtly from time to time. He served when needed, and connected, in a charming way, with members of the congregation. He always remained an attentive observer, but inwardly he just wasn't buying it. It wasn't people he was struggling to connect with; he struggled to connect with the concept of God and the framework of religion, which seemed silly to him, especially considering the pressing realities of people outside church walls.

Arnie never stopped praying. Neither did her parents, nor other members of the congregation who came to know and love Barry. They were patient, trusting that the Holy Spirit was at work in ways they could not yet see. And through their own lives they provided a compelling picture of what it means to live as disciples of Jesus. As they prayed on, Barry remained present and active in the life of the church, but he had not encountered a gospel that felt tangible and compelling enough to embrace as his own.

A Church That Showed Up

The turning point in Barry's story began, not with a sermon, but with a church willing to rethink the way it did mission. Fifteen years of prayer were about to be answered in an unexpected way. White Memorial pivoted to a ministry model that aligned with Ellen White's well-known description of Christ's method of ministry. She says that He "mingled with [people] as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence."* As she explains it, this all came *before* He extended the invitation to follow Him.

This shift proved to be more than a ministry strategy; it reoriented the church's entire identity. Rather than waiting for people to come *to* the church, the church increasingly entered the life of the city through neighborhood partnerships, community events, and meaningful presence in the life and rhythms of the city. Barry noticed. He watched church members build genuine relationships with people beyond their own circles, making a space for people from all walks of life. It felt genuine to him. He started seeing the church as less of an institution he attended, and more of a community interested in the lives of real people.

A Church That Listened

As the church learned to mingle more intentionally with its neighbors, it also learned to listen—a discipline that earns a congregation credibility in its community. Following Christ's example meant

Photo by Remi Walle / Unsplash

paying attention to the narratives, fears, struggles, joys, and hopes of the people around it. Alongside its evangelistic vision, the church embraced a deeper commitment to seeking the *shalom* (flourishing and wholeness) of the community, as God instructed the people of Israel, in Jeremiah 29:7, when they were exiled in Babylon. Members found that this "seeking the *shalom*" felt more aligned with the method of Christ, who chose to meet practical needs and build relationships before extending invitations to follow Him.

Barry noticed as the church practiced sympathy—sitting with people's pain and valuing their humanity without expecting anything in return. This began to challenge one of his deepest reservations about organized religion, namely, that it often talked more than it listened. Suddenly compassion wasn't just a talking point in a sermon, but an embodied reality that was changing people's lives—including his own.

A Church That Served

Presence and listening ought to lead to action. There is no church without ministry. White Memorial committed to embodying Christ's love by tangibly meeting the needs of the city. Its members grew increasingly engaged in supporting the underserved, accompanying immigrant families, advocating for the dignity of the marginalized, and standing alongside those navigating uncertainty and hardship. Through food distributions, support of the vulnerable, and ministries of justice and compassion, the church demonstrated that the gospel is more than simply a ticket to a blissful afterlife; it addresses the whole person. When devastating fires swept through Los Angeles in 2025, members mobilized quickly, organized relief efforts, and helped approximately 5,000 families.

Barry watched his church step into the pain of the city, and suddenly religion felt more credible to him. Maybe Christianity wasn't as self-serving as he had thought. He was seeing a gospel far more powerful than what he had known in the past, and Jesus was becoming impossible to dismiss.

A Church That Earned Trust

Trust takes time. For Barry it wasn't won through a persuasive Bible study or a compelling sermon, but through years of faithful presence. He was loved by a community that was committed to reflecting Christ's love through prayer, compassion, and genuine friendship. And the church's love for its city demonstrated to him that its members truly cared for people, not simply for increasing their ranks.

Slowly Barry's assumptions about Christianity began to change. The faith he once saw as disconnected from the real world he now began to recognize as being deeply invested in its healing. Confidence was eventually won. It wasn't in a single conversation, but through a long period of faithful presence and visible love. Somehow, now, for Barry, the idea of following Christ no longer seemed unreasonable. There was something likable about this Jesus, and Barry found himself drawn to Him.

A Man Who Followed

Barry, the quiet observer, eventually became convicted. No one pressured him. No one insisted on baptism. The church simply loved. Barry saw a gospel being lived out in ways he could no longer ignore, and he found it irresistible. The Christ he encountered while loving the city was the same Christ he now wanted to follow with his whole life.

Quietly he had held these thoughts as conviction grew. Then during one Resurrection Sunday service came the moment no one saw coming—except the pastor who had conspired with Barry to surprise the entire church, including Arnie. That morning the members gathered to celebrate the risen Savior. After 11 beautiful baptisms, the pastor revealed that there would be one more—an Easter surprise. Barry came forward. The church gasped, and Arnie nearly collapsed. What felt like an ordinary Resurrection Sunday celebration became the answer to 15 years of prayer. This was more than a baptism; this was a victory. It was a joyful culmination of years of patient witness, embodied compassion, and the quiet, gentle work of the Holy Spirit.

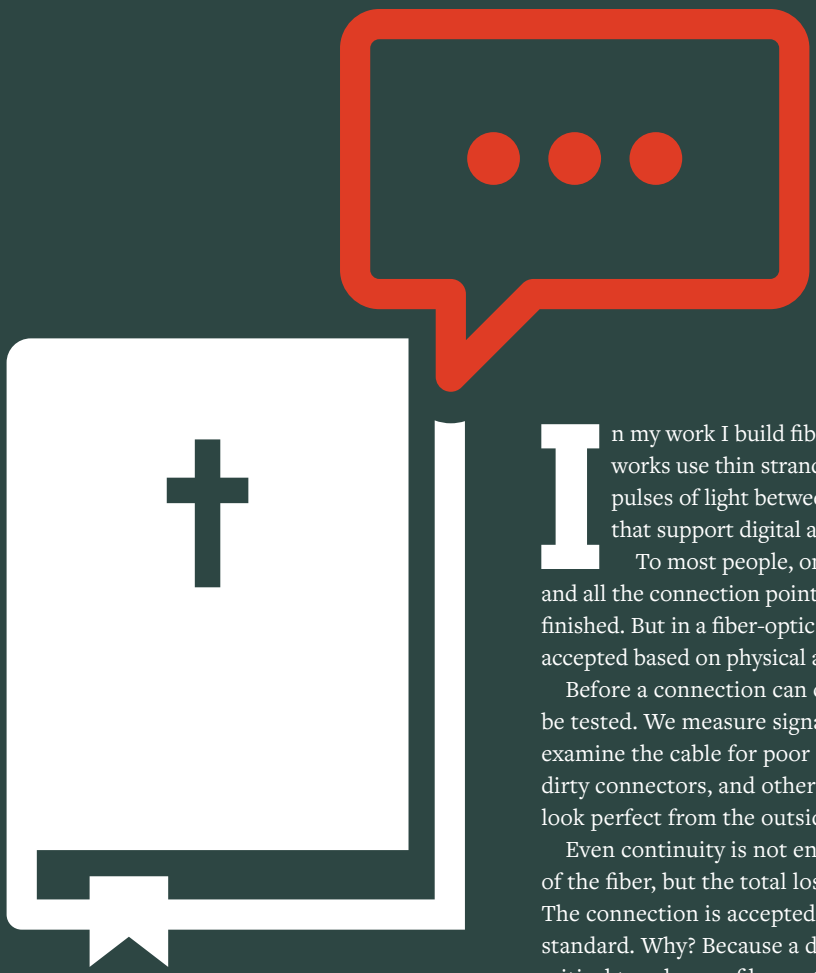
A City Church and Its Mission

Barry's story reminds us that urban mission *is* possible. It begins by entering the life of the city, listening, meeting needs, earning trust, and eventually inviting people to follow Jesus. Christ's method remains as relevant in today's cities as when He first practiced it in the dusty streets of Capernaum and Jerusalem. In our cities, rich with diversity, yet marked by skepticism, injustice, and loneliness, the church's credibility is strengthened when the gospel is embodied before it's proclaimed.

As we seek the well-being of our communities through justice, compassion, and faithful presence, we create a space for the Spirit to accomplish what only He can. Barry's baptism is a reminder that transformed cities and transformed lives often begin the same way: with people willing to live out the gospel before asking others to believe it. ℟

* Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 143.

Manuel Arteaga is the director of the Global Mission Center for Urban Mission.



TESTING PROPHETIC CLAIMS

How Scripture helps us discern true and false prophecy

Seth Amankwah

In my work I build fiber-optic networks. These networks use thin strands of glass to carry information as pulses of light between data centers, the large facilities that support digital and internet services.

To most people, once the fiber cable is installed and all the connection points are made, the work may appear finished. But in a fiber-optic network a connection is not accepted based on physical appearance alone.

Before a connection can carry live internet traffic, it must be tested. We measure signal loss, confirm continuity, and examine the cable for poor splices, sharp bends, damage, dirty connectors, and other hidden problems. A fiber may look perfect from the outside yet fail an acceptance test.

Even continuity is not enough. Light may reach the far end of the fiber, but the total loss may exceed the approved limit. The connection is accepted only when it meets the defined standard. Why? Because a data center connection is too critical to rely on a fiber network assessment based solely on physical appearance.

The apostle John gives the church a similar warning: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

John does not tell us to reject every spiritual claim or accept one without examination. His instruction is simple: test it.

In fiber-optic network construction, we test the connection before we accept it for service.

In the church we test every prophetic claim before accepting it as a message from God. This includes the messenger, the message, the predictions, the ministry, and the fruit.

The Command to Test

God has always used prophets to speak to His people. Through them He has warned, corrected, comforted, and instructed. A true prophet does not replace the Bible or compete with it. A true prophet leads people back to God, His Word, and a life of faithful obedience.

The purpose of prophecy is not merely to satisfy curiosity about the future or create spiritual excitement. Prophecy

reveals the will of God, corrects error, warns of danger, and encourages God's people to live faithfully.

But the Bible is clear that not every prophet is from God. Jeremiah warned about prophets who spoke visions "of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord" (Jer. 23:16). A message can sound spiritual and still have no divine source.

False prophets are dangerous because they rarely look false. Jesus said they come in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). They may quote Scripture, speak about love, mention Jesus, and sound completely sincere.

But sincerity is not the test of truth. Confidence is not the test of truth. Popularity is not the test of truth.

The Word of God is the standard by which *every* spiritual message must be measured.

The Standard Already Exists

During fiber-optic network testing, the technician completing the test does not create the standard in the field. There is an approved limit for how much signal strength can be lost and clear requirements the connection must meet. The measurements, not the appearance alone, determine acceptance.

Isaiah gives us the spiritual standard: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

This message from Isaiah came at a time that people were seeking guidance from mediums and spiritists instead of seeking God. He directed them away from seeking guidance through mediums and spiritists and back to *God's revealed Word*. Every message had to be measured against what God had already revealed in His Word.

God does not contradict Himself. The Holy Spirit will not inspire a message that opposes the Scriptures He inspired. A true prophet will not lead people away from God's commandments, the gospel, or the clear teaching of the Bible.

Ellen White applied this standard to her own ministry. She wrote, "If the *Testimonies* speak not according to the Word of God, reject them. Christ and Belial cannot be united."* Her point was clear. Scripture remains the standard by which every prophetic claim must be tested.

Scripture therefore gives us five questions for testing a prophetic claim. Does it agree with the Bible? Does it honor Jesus Christ? Does the messenger's life bear good fruit? Do the predictions prove reliable? What fruit does the message produce in those who receive it?

False prophets are dangerous because they rarely look false.

Does the Message Agree With Scripture?

The first test is the most basic: Does the message agree with the Bible?

Finding a supportive verse is not enough. Scripture can be quoted accurately and still be applied inappropriately. During the temptation in the wilderness, Satan quoted from the Psalms. Jesus answered with Scripture understood in harmony with the rest of Scripture (Matt. 4:5-7).

Deuteronomy 13 makes this test even stronger. Moses warned that a prophet might announce a sign that actually occurred. Yet if the prophet led the people to follow other gods, they were not a true prophet.

An accurate prediction, a supernatural sign, or a remarkable experience is not enough. No sign can make error true, and no miracle can overrule the Word of God.

Does the Message Honor Jesus Christ?

John points to a second test: What does the message teach about Jesus?

In John's day false teachers denied that Jesus Christ had truly come in the flesh. John responded, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2).

A true prophet presents the Jesus revealed in Scripture. He is the eternal Son of God who became fully human, lived without sin, died for our sins, rose from the grave, ministers for us in heaven, and will return in glory.

Confessing Christ is more than mentioning His name. It means presenting the true Jesus revealed throughout Scripture and submitting to His authority. True prophecy lifts up Christ. It leads people to trust His grace, receive His righteousness, follow His teaching, and prepare for His return.

Any prophetic claim that makes the messenger more important than Jesus has moved away from the purpose of true prophecy

Does the Life Bear Good Fruit?

The third test is fruit. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). Fruit takes time to grow. A powerful sermon can be delivered in an hour. Character is revealed over a lifetime.

This does not mean a true prophet must be flawless. Biblical prophets were human beings who needed grace. Moses lost his temper. Elijah became discouraged. Jonah resisted God's mercy. Peter had to be corrected publicly by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14).

But the direction of the messenger's life matters. Does it show humility or pride, service or greed, moral faithfulness or hidden corruption? Is there accountability? Does the life point people toward Christ, or does it create devotion to a personality?

While numbers can measure reach, they cannot measure truth. The messenger's character alone does not prove a prophetic claim is true, but a life that consistently contradicts Scripture and the character of Christ is a serious warning sign.

Illustration by Prixel Creative / Lightstock



We must test the message, hold fast to what is true, and obey it.

Do the Predictions Prove True?

The fourth test concerns prediction. Moses said that when a prophet spoke in the name of the Lord and the prediction did not happen, the Lord had not spoken that word (Deut. 18:21, 22). Jeremiah gave a similar test when he stood against Hananiah (Jer. 28:9).

When God gives a clear, unconditional prediction, it will not fail. But the Bible also contains conditional prophecy. God explained through Jeremiah that judgment could be withheld when a nation turned from evil, while promised blessing could be withheld when a nation turned to evil (Jer. 18:7-10).

Jonah is the clearest example. He preached that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days. The people repented, and God showed mercy. Jonah's warning did not fail. It accomplished its purpose by leading the people to repentance.

Prophetic predictions must therefore be examined carefully. We should not excuse a failed prediction by changing its meaning later. Neither should we accuse a conditional prophecy of failure when repentance brought the response God desired.

What Fruit Does the Message Produce?

The fifth test examines the fruit produced in those who receive the message. True prophecy exposes sin, invites repentance, strengthens faith, and leads people toward faithful obedience.

Does the message produce repentance, love, obedience, and deeper trust in God? Or does it create fear, confusion, dependence on the messenger, and loyalty to a personality?

This does not mean every true message will be easy to hear. The false prophets in Jeremiah's day announced peace because that was what the people wanted. Jeremiah warned of judgment and was treated as an enemy. A message is not false because it is uncomfortable, and it is not true because it is pleasant.

All the Tests, Not Just One

A fiber connection is not accepted because it passes one test. It must meet every requirement. The same is true of prophetic claims. Quoting Scripture, making one accurate prediction, or appearing to have good character is not enough.

The biblical tests work together. The message must agree with Scripture and honor Christ. The messenger's life must bear good fruit. Predictions must prove reliable. The ministry must lead people toward repentance, faith, and obedience. Strength in one area cannot excuse failure in another.

Become a Trained Tester

An inexperienced technician may see a completed fiber network and assume everything is fine. An experienced technician knows how to read the measurements and identify results outside the acceptable limits.

Likewise, believers who do not know Scripture will struggle to evaluate prophetic claims. We may accept what sounds deep, reject what feels uncomfortable, or confuse strong emotion with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The command to "test the spirits" assumes that God has given us a standard and that believers can learn to use it. We become trained testers by studying the whole Bible, comparing scripture with scripture, praying for the Spirit's guidance, examining claims carefully, and seeking wise counsel.

This matters when sermons, dreams, and predictions can reach thousands within minutes. Testing a prophetic claim is not a lack of faith. It is an act of faithfulness. The Holy Spirit who gives the gift also commands the church to test the claim.

Test, Then Hold Fast

Finally, Paul gives a balanced instruction: "Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:20, 21).

Scripture calls us neither to accept every claim nor to reject every claim. We must test the message, hold fast to what is true, and obey it.

The Word of God tests not only the prophet but also the hearer. Will we accept truth when it corrects us? Will we follow Jesus when obedience is costly? Will we choose Scripture over feelings, culture, tradition, and personal preference?

God has not left His church without a standard. His Word remains clear and dependable.

A data center connection is too important to accept without testing. The eternal destiny of souls is far more important.

Know the standard.

Test the claim.

Hold fast to what is true. And when God speaks through His Word, obey.

* Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), p. 691.

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THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

Every breath a prayer

Ellen G. White

We, too, must have times set apart for meditation and prayer and for receiving spiritual refreshing. We do not value the power and efficacy of prayer as we should. Prayer and faith will do what no power on earth can accomplish. We are seldom, in all respects, placed in the same position twice. We continually have new scenes and new trials to pass through, where past experience cannot be a sufficient guide. We must have the continual light that comes from God.

Christ is ever sending messages to those who listen for His voice. On the night of the agony in Gethsemane, the sleeping disciples heard not the voice of Jesus. They had a dim sense of the angels' presence, but lost the power and glory of the scene. Because of their drowsiness and stupor they failed of receiving the evidence that would have strengthened their souls for the terrible scenes before them. Thus today the very men who most need divine instruction often fail of receiving it, because they do not place themselves in communion with heaven.

The temptations to which we are daily exposed make prayer a necessity. Dangers beset every path. Those who are seeking to rescue others from vice and ruin are especially exposed to temptation. In constant contact with evil, they need a strong hold upon God lest they themselves be corrupted. Short and decisive are the steps that lead men down from high and holy ground to a low level. In a moment decisions may be made that fix one's condition forever. One failure to overcome leaves the soul unguarded. One evil habit, if not firmly resisted, will strengthen into chains of steel, binding the whole man.

The reason why so many are left to themselves in places of temptation is that they do not set the Lord always before them. When we permit our communion with God to be broken, our defense is departed from us. Not all your good purposes and good intentions will enable you to withstand evil. You must be men and women of prayer. Your petitions must not be faint, occasional, and fitful, but earnest, persevering, and constant. It is not always necessary to bow upon your knees in order to pray. Cultivate the habit of talking with the Saviour when you are alone, when you are walking, and when you are busy with your daily labor. Let the heart be continually uplifted in silent petition for help, for light, for strength, for knowledge. Let every breath be a prayer. . . .

It was through faith and prayer that Jacob, from being a man of feebleness and sin, became a prince with God. It is thus that you may become men and women of high and holy purpose, of noble life, men and women who will not for any consideration be swayed from truth, right, and justice. All are pressed with urgent cares, burdens, and duties, but the more difficult your position and the heavier your burdens, the more you need Jesus. . . .

Nothing is more needed in our work than the practical results of communion with God. We should show by our daily lives that we have peace and rest in the Saviour. His peace in the heart will shine forth in the countenance. It will give to the voice a persuasive power. Communion with God will ennoble the character and the life. Men will take knowledge of us, as of the first disciples, that we have been with Jesus. This will impart to the worker a power that nothing else can give. Of this power he must not allow himself to be deprived.

We must live a twofold life—a life of thought and action, of silent prayer and earnest work. The strength received through communion with God, united with earnest effort in training the mind to thoughtfulness and caretaking, prepares one for daily duties and keeps the spirit in peace under all circumstances, however trying. ℟

Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of ministry. This excerpt is taken from *The Ministry of Healing,* pp. 509-512.

Burn the Bibles

How a plan to destroy Bibles helped multiply them

Dick Duerksen



Two men, casually attired as common tradesmen, walked purposefully down the dingy alley in Antwerp, Belgium. They had been sent there with clear instructions: go directly to the house at the very end of the alley, where they would find the man and the goods they were seeking. The directions were clear, easy to follow. At last their quest would end.

They tested the door, easily breaking through its rusty latch. Inside, the house was empty and the shelves bare. In the back room, where they had been told they would find stacks of freshly printed New Testaments, they found only dusty floorboards.

Betrayed, they returned to the alley and strode angrily back toward their lodgings.

Hidden behind the filthy panes of a nearby window, William Tyndale watched them go, breathed deeply, and returned to his stacks of New Testaments. Several hundred were there, prepared for shipment to friends in England. He had been warned and had moved the Bibles to this place only hours before the king's emissaries broke through the old door.

Tyndale was accustomed to danger, having experienced numerous last-minute escapes from dishonest friends. Even one of his most trusted printers had betrayed him. Now, watching two of the most powerful men in England stride angrily away, he was unsure of his next step.

Those men represented all who desired him dead.

The year was 1529, and the New Testaments were beautiful, each word and phrase painstakingly translated from Greek into the common dialect of his English countrymen.

Blessed are the meek, he thought. Though those words were simple and clear, none of his countrymen had ever heard Jesus speak them. Certainly not in the same English they spoke in their kitchens and above their plows.

Oh, there was so much he wanted them to hear!

The two men? Cuthbert Tunstall, bishop of London, and his traveling companion. Tunstall was one of the most powerful

Photo by Fethi Benattallah / Unsplash

men in England, and he had joined Sir Thomas More, the king's Lord Chancellor, in a quest to destroy Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament before its truths could threaten the comfortable power both church and crown enjoyed over the people of England.

Tyndale watched them walk out of the alley, his heart heavy with dread. He had tried so hard to follow God's command and make His Word available to every man and woman who spoke the English language. A few thousand copies had been delivered, and he had heard them being read beside kitchen fires and in the dark corners of village pubs. He had seen tears of joy as people heard God say that He loved them.

He looked over the bundles of God's Word around him in the room. *Every Bible must get to England*, he thought, almost saying it out loud. There was a weighty problem, however. He was completely out of funds and could not afford the cost of shipment, much less the massive expense of printing the thousands more copies that would be needed by the people in England.

An Unlikely Solution

Tyndale worked with the Bibles until nearly sundown.

The tap on his door was frightening.

"It's Packington," a welcome voice whispered.

Tyndale unlatched the door, and his merchant friend slipped into the room.

"I have a proposal for you," his friend said. "I see you got the message and moved the Bibles before the bishop found them."

The two men talked a bit, then Augustine Packington put a hand on Tyndale's knee.

"I have just come from speaking with Bishop Tunstall."

"You? With him? Why?"

"I have an idea," he said, "and wanted to see if he might buy in. I told them that I knew a man who had access to a collection of New Testaments that were about to be shipped to London. Then I offered that, if he were willing to pay well, the man might be willing to dump the shipment where he could find it."

"The bishop has promised Sir Thomas More that these New Testaments will be shipped to London and burned publicly at Paul's Cross in London."

"You what?" Tyndale exploded.

"Hear me out," said Packington. "I told him that the price would be steep and that it would need to be paid immediately to purchase the shipment."

"Why?" asked Tyndale, feeling betrayed.

"William, you are a poor man, yet you have some New Testaments, the printing of which has both endangered your friends and beggared yourself. I have found you a merchant with ready money to purchase all you have. It is a very profitable deal for you."

"Why does this always have to come down to money?" Tyndale asked.

Packington threw his friend a victorious smile. "The bishop has agreed to pay about three times the value of the Bibles you have here in this room. That's enough money for you to re-edit, print, and ship three times as many New Testaments in the coming months! You will lose a few but gain thousands more!"

Tyndale sat on the dusty floor and stared at the bundles of Bibles, carefully prepared for smuggling into London.

Finally, he looked at Packington and asked, "How much have they offered, and what will happen to these Bibles?"

Packington named a higher amount than Tyndale had dreamed possible. Then he added, "The bishop has promised Sir Thomas More that these New Testaments will be shipped to London and burned publicly at Paul's Cross in London."

Tyndale flinched, then smiled wryly. "When he burns the books, the public will be enraged and will demand their own copies. If he pays well, his generosity will allow us to print thousands more. I guess this is a small price to pay."

A few days later, as the stacks of Bibles were loaded onto a ship as part of Bishop Tunstall's luggage, William Tyndale began arrangements for the next printing of the New Testament in English, a new version that would not have been possible without the extra money.

Later, when Tyndale was finally captured, he was commanded to reveal the names of those who had helped him meet the expense of printing the Bibles.

"The bishop of Durham did more than any other person," Tyndale replied.[1]

Historian John Foxe records this fitting conclusion to the story: "The bishop of London had the books, Packington had the thanks, and Tyndale had the money."[2]

[1] This account is based on the story of William Tyndale and the bishop's purchase of his New Testaments as recounted in multiple sources, including Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), pp. 246, 247. Some dialogue, thoughts, and scene details have been reconstructed for narrative purposes and should not be understood as recorded quotations.
[2] John Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, chap. 12, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, https://ccel.org/ccel/foxe/martyrs/files/martyrs.html.

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AN ENTERING WEDGE

Where health and hope meet

Supriya Kar

Earlier this year I was returning from a meeting at Southern Adventist University in Tennessee, United States, when I boarded a two-hour flight home. Exhausted from the trip, I chose a window seat, hoping to rest and catch up on some sleep.

But God had other plans.

The man sitting beside me was a sales executive traveling to a work meeting, and before long we began talking. What started as a simple conversation quickly turned toward health. As it turned out, we were both on journeys to improve our health, and we found plenty to discuss—from documentaries and podcasts we had watched to articles we had read and lessons we had learned along the way.

He was not plant-based, as I was, but we discovered we shared many common values. He had eliminated sugar and processed foods from his diet, something I had not fully done myself but could appreciate and relate to. He was also a Christian, which opened the door for an even deeper conversation.

Our discussion moved from health to faith—from the church and salvation to prophecy and the second coming of Christ. I even shared a few resources with him so he could continue learning after our conversation ended.

The irony was that he lived in Collegedale, Tennessee, and had met several Adventists over the years. Yet he told me he had never had a deep conversation about our beliefs. And there I was, sitting beside him on an airplane, suddenly representing Adventism to someone who had questions and an open heart.

That responsibility is always daunting, but it is something I have become accustomed to through my work in the corporate world. In an environment in which faith is not always part of everyday conversations, I have often had opportunities to explain my beliefs and share the reasons behind my choices.

As I walked off that plane, I was amazed by how God had orchestrated the entire encounter. This was not simply a conversation between two passengers. It was a divine appointment. A discussion that began with health had opened the door to matters of eternal significance.

A Small Opening

This experience reminded me of a phrase that appears multiple times in the writings of Ellen White: "the entering wedge."

In *Counsels on Diet and Foods* we read: "When properly conducted, the health work is an entering wedge, making a way for other truths to reach the heart."[1]

Health reform has an important place in our message. It is not meant to replace the gospel or become the focus above salvation. Rather, it is a way God can prepare hearts to receive deeper truths.

The metaphor of an entering wedge becomes even more meaningful when we consider how wood was split in the nineteenth century. Farmers did not waste energy repeatedly striking the hardest part of a log. Instead, they carefully studied the wood, looking for a small crack or opening. Into that space they placed a slender iron wedge. With a few deliberate taps, the wedge created an opening that allowed the larger tool to split the log.

The wedge was small, but it was strategic. The farmer needed wisdom—not only in using the wedge but also in knowing where and how to place it.

This simple illustration offers profound insight into how we share the health message. The question is not only whether health is important. The question is how we present it and how we allow God to use it to reach hearts.

> A lifestyle lived with joy, balance, and authenticity can open doors that information alone cannot.

As I reflect on that airplane experience, I realize how far God has brought me—not only in my own health journey but also in my ability to share with others.

I remember the first time someone at work asked why I do not drink alcohol. I am embarrassed to admit that I barely knew how to answer. I gave a quick response and changed the subject. I was not sure what to say or how to explain my beliefs in a way that reflected both truth and grace.

At that time I also struggled to find positive examples of health within the church. The people I knew who emphasized health

often seemed extreme or legalistic to me. I struggled to understand why they cared so much about certain health practices, and I did not see much balance in how the message was presented.

But as I faced my own health challenges and experienced the benefits of a healthier lifestyle, my perspective began to change. I came to understand the value of the health message. When you experience the blessings of better health, you naturally want others to experience those same blessings.

Achieving Balance

The more I study our health principles, the more I recognize the balance within the message. Health is not meant to become the entire focus, but it is a tool God can use to reach hearts.

In *Selected Messages* Ellen White gives this important counsel: "Health reform, wisely treated, will prove an entering wedge where the truth may follow with marked success. But to present health reform unwisely, making that subject the burden of the message, has served to create prejudice with unbelievers and to bar the way to the truth, leaving the impression that we are extremists."[2]

This has been true in my own experience. Even within our church there can be a wide range of perspectives on health. What one person considers balanced, another may view as extreme. But the central principle is wisdom—wisdom in how we present health, and wisdom in understanding its proper place within the broader message of the gospel.

So how can we share the health message in a way that truly becomes an entering wedge?

I am reminded of my college days and the professors who made the greatest impact on me. They were not necessarily the ones with the most knowledge or the most impressive credentials. They were the ones who were passionate about what they taught. They understood their audience, knew how to connect with students, and made the subject meaningful and relevant.

I believe the same is true when sharing health principles. Knowledge is important, but knowledge alone does not reach hearts. People are more likely to listen when they see that we genuinely care about them and when they can see the difference these principles have made in our own lives.

This has become my prayer: that God would help me share the health message in a way that serves as an entering wedge.

Willing and Available

My own journey began with asking God for help with my health. And the more healing and transformation I have experienced, the more I have wanted others to experience those same blessings.

I care about the health and well-being of my friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Although I do not always know how to begin a conversation or what words to say, I trust the Holy Spirit to lead. Our role is simply to be willing and available.

My coworkers know that health is something I am passionate about. They see it in my lifestyle, but they also see that I am open and authentic when discussing it. Some conversations have started simply through everyday interactions. I invite colleagues to join me on walks during lunch. It is a simple way to get outside, move our bodies, and enjoy fresh air together.



Photo by Prixel Creative / Lightstock

One coworker, after seeing the meals I bring for lunch, asked me for vegetarian recipes. Another asked for help creating healthier meal plans. These conversations did not happen because I started with a presentation or tried to convince anyone. They happened naturally through relationships, trust, and living out what I believe. Small interactions opened the way for genuine friendships and deeper conversations.

Throughout the Spirit of Prophecy we find references to medical missionary work and the role it plays in reaching people. Ellen White writes: "Doors that have been closed to him who merely preaches the gospel will be opened to the intelligent medical missionary. God reaches hearts through the relief of physical suffering."[3] She continues: "Do medical missionary work. Thus you will gain access to the hearts of people. The way will be prepared for more decided proclamation of truth."[4]

For much of my life I connected medical missionary work primarily with those in health-care professions or with the natural remedies we learn about in our health centers. I never thought of myself as a medical missionary.

But as I have reflected on these passages, I have realized that using health as a way to serve others and open conversations about the gospel is also medical missionary work. It is not limited to doctors, nurses, or health-care professionals. It is something all of us can participate in.

When we allow God to guide us, even ordinary interactions can become divine appointments.



Regardless of someone's education, wealth, or success, health is something every person values. No amount of money can purchase a healthy lifestyle or the experience of feeling well.

People who are seeking to improve their health are often willing to talk about their journey. Yet in a world filled with endless information, one of the most powerful testimonies is not just what we know—it is what people can see in our lives.

A lifestyle lived with joy, balance, and authenticity can open doors that information alone cannot.

I think back to another airplane experience from a few years ago. On that flight I sat next to the CEO of an artificial intelligence startup. But our conversation did not begin with his career or my work. It began with something much more ordinary: our shared desire to improve ourselves.

We started talking about health and finding balance in life, and soon discovered we followed the same online influencer and had watched many of the same videos. Within the first 30 minutes of our conversation a connection had formed. He knew I understood his journey, and because of that trust, our conversation moved far beyond health.

He shared stories about his family, how he met his wife, lessons from his career, and other personal experiences you would not normally discuss with a stranger on an airplane. Eventually our conversation turned to faith. Though he was not a Christian, he was genuinely interested in what I believed.

When I shared my goals of promoting healthy cooking online, he told me that I had an "ordained destiny." It was the first time I had heard that phrase, especially used in reference to me. But as I reflected on those words, I realized something important: I'm not the only one who has an ordained destiny. All of us do.

As a church, we have been given a beautiful calling. We have been entrusted with a message of hope, healing, and restoration. Health is one of the ways God can use us to reach people—not as a replacement for the gospel, but as an opening through which hearts can become more receptive to truth.

The question is not whether God has a purpose for us. He does. The question is: How can God use us to fulfill that purpose?

Perhaps it begins with something as simple as a conversation. A walk with a coworker. A shared recipe. A question about our lifestyle. A moment on an airplane with a stranger. We may never know the full impact of those small moments. But when we allow God to guide us, even ordinary interactions can become divine appointments.

Health truly is an entering wedge. And when it is shared with wisdom, humility, and love, it can open the way for something far greater—the opportunity for people to encounter the One who brings complete healing.

[1] Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1938), p. 73.
[2] Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), p. 285.
[3] Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 513.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 514.

When she's not managing software products, **Supriya Kar** enjoys investing in what matters most—family, healthy nutrition, and personal wellness. She lives in California, United States.

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THREE CALLINGS. ONE MISSION.

Finding people God has prepared for you

Acts 9 is usually remembered for one man—Saul. He dominates the narrative, and rightly so: his conversion remains one of the most remarkable turning points in Scripture. A persecutor becomes a preacher. An enemy of the church becomes one of its greatest missionaries. Yet a closer reading reveals something even more remarkable. God not only was working in one life but was simultaneously preparing Saul, speaking to Ananias, and using Judas, an almost unknown disciple. Three separate lives were moving toward a single appointment, and not one of them fully understood it.

Before Damascus, Saul believed he was defending the truth. Stephen's death strengthened his determination to stop the followers of Jesus. Yet what Saul intended as destruction became expansion. "Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Then Christ interrupted both Saul's journey and his certainty with one question: "Why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). In an instant Saul realized that the One he thought he was serving was the very One he had been resisting.

While Saul waited in darkness, God was arranging the rest of the story: Judas opened his home without knowing why, and Ananias received the assignment no one else wanted, questioning God's judgment. God simply replied: "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine" (verse 15). Nothing more was needed. God had already prepared the person Ananias feared to meet. This detail may be the most encouraging lesson in the entire chapter.

Long before Ananias knocked on the door, Christ had already entered Saul's heart. The missionary did not initiate the miracle; he simply walked into one that God had already begun.

The same is true today. Somewhere someone is already searching for answers. A family is praying. A young person is questioning the direction of their life. A neighbor is carrying a burden no one else can see. God is already at work before any missionary arrives, before a Bible study begins. That means mission is never about persuading God to act. It is about joining what He is already doing.

> Somewhere someone is already searching for answers.

Perhaps He is impressing you to visit someone. Perhaps to send a message. Perhaps to open the Bible with a friend. Perhaps simply to listen. None of those moments appear extraordinary. Neither did Ananias' walk across Damascus. Yet someone may already be waiting for *you*!

Acts 9 is not only Paul's story but ours, too. God still prepares hearts before He sends His people. He still knows names, families, streets, and cities. He still brings lives together at exactly the right moment.

The question is no longer whether God is calling. It is much more personal:

Who is already waiting for you?

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ADVENTIST REVIEW
Vol. 203, No. 11

Founded 1849. Published by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Northern Asia-Pacific Divison

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