

2019 Youth Week of Prayer

Title: Back to the Basics

Theme: Aspects of the Local Church

8 LESSONS ON ASPECTS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Daily Small Group discussion questions included.

WRITER: Charles Blythe

EDITOR: Pako Mokgwane

Official date for the Week of Prayer is:

March 16 - 23, 2019

Global Youth Day: March 16, 2019

Homecoming Sabbath: March 23, 2019

General Conference Youth Department

Translation Guidelines

To meet the needs of our youth, youth leaders, and those needing to use our resources, we are offering opportunities to translate from English into other languages. Below are some guidelines to help you produce culturally appropriate translations.

1. Be objective.
2. Please be faithful and accurate to the source text.
3. Translate for meaning (rather than word-for-word), in a culturally sensitive way. Translation should preserve the content and meaning of the original text, with cultural and linguistic adaptations as needed, so that the translated text sounds natural and is easy for the intended readers to understand and use.
4. Do not do literal, word-for-word translation; this can be confusing or misleading. Consider the differences in linguistic structure and complex connections between culture and language.
5. Be culturally sensitive. Cultural adaptation may be needed where necessary.
6. Reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the text and message at all times without omission or distortion. Do not soften, strengthen or alter the messages being conveyed.
7. Do not alter, change, add, or omit texts. Only alter a text with the consent of the GC Youth Ministries Department.
8. All pronouns used for God or Jesus should be capitalized. (E.g. “God Himself is the author and finisher of our faith. He is the beginning, He is the ending.”)
9. Do not add to what is written or said, nor provide unsolicited explanation, comments, or make recommendations.
10. Do not show bias towards the intended readers of the translated document.
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If you are using a copy editor to copy edit the translated work, the person name and contact information **MUST** also be listed.

ABOUT THE WRITER:



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He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Religion from Northern Caribbean University, and a Master of Arts Degree in Counselling Psychology from Caribbean Graduate School of Theology in Kingston, Jamaica.

Pastor Blythe is an invested Master Guide. He enjoys camping, swimming, playing scrabble and spending time with his family. He is married to the former Marvalyn Walker. They are the proud parents of two children: Charles Phillip, II and Charlyn Phioniq.

His philosophy is “Quality Preparation for Quality Service”. His desire is to see the youth maximizing their God-given potential and committed to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

EDITORIAL by Pako Mokgwane



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IMAGINE!

Imagine a faith without fellowship. Imagine a world without communal praise and worship. Imagine a church where sisterhood and brotherhood are nonexistent. Imagine the church as a social club. We are probably asking you to imagine the impossible. It's hard to imagine such a world.

The **local church** is an organized body of believers whose primary purpose is to proclaim, preserve and display the gospel and character of Jesus. It is not surprising that at the *2016 World Youth Advisory* the decision was taken to be intentional in making the **local church** a better place—an intergenerational spiritual home for our youth. While we affirm the significance of large corporate events such as summer camps, rallies, camporees and congresses, to foster fellowship with the wider youth community and to provide opportunities for decision making and cross-pollination, we have chosen to place ministry to young people in **local churches** at the center of our priorities and process. Our rationale lies in this, the **local church** is the spiritual home of our young people. Their membership is in the local church, not the conference, mission, or union, but the local church.

It is in their families and in their **local churches** that young people are spiritually nurtured, commit to follow Jesus, embrace His call to discipleship, and find their place in God's service. While many of them make decisions at or during wider church events, the location where they are mentored to become devoted followers of Jesus and to live out their Christian experience is the **local church**. In fact, it is the **local church**—not the conference or union—that experiences attrition. Therefore, our aim is to mobilize and encourage the youth to get totally involved in the mission of the church, starting with their local church.

Think Local Church!

READ THIS FIRST

Planning for the Week of Prayer

1. **Start Your Planning Now.** We know that leadership sometimes changes at the end of the year, but please, if you will no longer be the AY leader next year, do not let that stop you from planning for this special week. Start your planning, develop your target, get your team together, and make sure your pastor is a part of that team.
2. **Global Youth Day Information.** Get information on the Global Youth Day project. This day will be the launch of the Youth Week of Prayer. Please visit our website, youth.adventist.org, or contact your local youth director to find out how you can participate.
3. **Commit Your Prayer Warriors.** Get a team of adults together who will commit to praying for you and your ministry on a regular basis. Make sure this is a group with whom you can confidentially share both your personal and ministry prayer needs.
4. **Plan a Day of Fasting.** What is a Week of Prayer without prayer and fasting. Please make arrangement to include at least one day of fasting during the week. Our suggestion would be the middle of the week, Wednesday. It could begin from the night before (or whenever the last meal is eaten), and carry through until right before the meetings begin. If you are at a church where fasting is not a regular occurrence, then you may want to begin with a 12 hour fast. You would begin the fast 12 hours before your meeting time and break it right before the meeting. For example, if your meeting begins at 7:PM, then the fast would begin at 7AM. There are three main types of fast: Water Fast, where you abstain from all food and juices. Partial Fast, this is when you eliminate certain foods or specific meals. "Juice" Fast, this is when you drink only fruit or vegetable juices during meal times. Please visit our website after February 15th for tips on fasting and how to break your fast. Try to provide some light, healthy refreshment for those who will be breaking the fast at church.
5. **Choose a Theme Song.** Involve your youth choir. If your church does not have a youth choir, this is the perfect time to get one started. Pick out songs that you all like and which fit the topic of each evening, or choose a song for the entire week.
6. **Form a Week of Prayer Development/Review Team.** Depending on the size of your church, this group can be four to eight persons who will go through all

eight readings with you. Include on your team only interested and committed young adults and youth ministry leaders (Pathfinder, Sabbath School, etc., your pastor/s); this is important because it gives ownership to the entire group, rather than just you and your assistant. Ask the group to commit to meeting for at least three weeks—at least one week for four lessons, and an extra week to wrap things up. Be sure to identify the goal and direction you want to go, preferably at the first meeting, and choose a young person to speak for each day.

7. **Integrate Global Youth Day (GYD) into Your Week of Prayer Plans.**

Ideally, GYD should be a time to teach youth how to sacrificially give of themselves by providing opportunities in the church and the community. If you are a small youth group and do not have the resources to arrange a community-based GYD event, you can use this opportunity to break down denominational barriers in the area by partnering with and pooling resources and ideas with other youth groups from other churches in your area.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK WITH A SMALL OR LARGE GROUP

1. **Journal Space.** This book is designed to be filled with your thoughts. Use the space provided to record your reactions to the something you may hear in the sermon and the questions at the end of each day. It can also be used to write a prayer request or praise to God. Encourage participants to use it anyway they want. It's their journal! Tell them there are no rules, just guidelines. The important thing is to listen to the Lord and open their heart in response to His leading. Leaders, if you take the time to read the daily readings prayerfully and with the anticipation that God will reveal new things to you, you will be surprised at what will flow through your pen or pencil onto the pages of these journals.
2. **Start a Prayer Journal.** Nothing is greater for your personal spiritual growth than time spent in prayer. Your youth group will grow as you grow. Prayer journaling will help you encounter God in new and exciting ways. You will be able to "track" your walk with God as you go back and review answered prayers and see how He has led you step by step each day. New, fresh ideas will come to mind as you spend time in His presence journaling your prayers. You can find many ideas online on starting and keeping a prayer journal. Just go to www.google.com and type in the words "starting a prayer journal."
3. **Daily Questions.** At the end of each sermon are questions and statements designed to get you thinking from small groups and discuss these questions. Take a moment to really think about what they are asking. Listen to the Holy Spirit as He teaches you through Scripture. Encourage participants to record their thoughts in their journal.
4. **Global Youth Day** is set to launch the official week of the Youth Week of Prayer meetings. Ahead of time, please contact your pastor or conference youth leader to see what projects your church will be involved in on this day, March 16. If you are planning a full day event, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has an amazing activity, *In Their Shoes*, that can be done during your afternoon AY program.

In Their Shoes is an interactive poverty experience that takes teens on a 24-hour journey into the lives of teens from other countries around the world. Through the eyes of this new identity, they will begin to understand the challenges that millions of people in developing countries face every day. You'll discover what ADRA is doing to help and what the Bible has to say about living a life of Christian service.

The PDF instruction files can be downloaded at:
<https://youth.adventist.org/GYD/ItemId/745#bottom>

Aspects of the Local Church

1. **Sabbath:** *The Theology of the Church (Ekklesia)* – how the Bible brings to light the idea of the local church
2. **Sunday:** *The Mission of the Local Church* – how youth and young adults can be involved in mission.
3. **Monday:** *The Functions of the Local Church of the Body of Christ (Local Church)* – this is in relation to Spiritual Gifts and how youth can avail themselves for services in the operations of the church.
4. **Tuesday:** *The Stewardship Responsibility of the Youth and Young Adults* – how youth and young adults can be involved in the finances of the local church. How young adults can have spiritual accountability for the finances that God has blessed them with.
5. **Wednesday:** *The Leadership paradigm of the Local Church* – explanation of the structure of the local church and how the youth can benefit from being cooperative mentees
6. **Thursday:** *Importance of Worship* – how to express devotion to God. Unity in diversity!
7. **Friday:** *Adventist Identity* – what identifies you as an Adventist Youth
8. **Sabbath:** *The Church as a Bride* – how Youth ought to prepare for the coming of Jesus.



Keeping it Real by Maria Manderson

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Keep First Things First

Proclaim, Preserve, and Promote on God's Term

A lot of time when you ask people about the role of the Christian **Church** they think of it in terms of New Testament teachings, and the first scripture that comes to mind is Matthew 28:18-20, where Jesus commissions the apostles to proclaim the gospel to all the nations.

But is that all the **Church** was called to do?

No, the Bible says the **Church** belongs to God and was given the unique mission of proclaiming, protecting, promoting, and preserving the gospel.

Let's look at what the Bible (Old and New Testament) says about the role of the local **Church**.

Isaiah 12:14	Here we see that God is giving Judah a chance to tell others what the Lord has done to deliver the nation (Israel) from its sin.
Isaiah 45:22	In return, they are supposed to make known to the heathen (unchurched) nations around what God has done for them, and point them to the only true God.
Ezekiel 3:17-19	The local church's responsibility is to deliver the message of salvation to everyone. In this text God commissions Ezekiel to deliver His message and warnings. If we do not preach/deliver the message and fail to warn people they will not have that choice to

	choose/accept the message, and will die and it will be our fault. It will be on our shoulder.
Ezekiel 38:23	The local Church makes God's greatness known.
Malachi 1:11.	The local Church shares God's greatness with everyone

So, we see that the Old Testament ends with Malachi reminding the people to share God's goodness with everyone. Now, let's look at the role of the local **Church** in the New Testament.

Is it different or is it the same?

Matthew 9:35-38.	Jesus points out the importance of prayer in the ministry/mission of reaching the world with the gospel.
Acts 13:47	Christians/ Church members are part of God's goal of redeeming the whole world to himself.
2 Timothy 2:15, 4:2 2 Timothy 3:16 Romans 10:10-17	Proclaiming the gospel is central to the Church's mission and it is a necessary part of the process of salvation.
Romans 10:10-17	The local Church is the light of the world and is a necessary part of the process of salvation . The Church is here to get people saved .
Matthew 28:19-20 Acts 2:42 Ephesians 4:12 Colossians 1:28	To prepare members for the work of service so that the Church can be built up. Our regular services should be primarily aimed at teaching and ministering to the members <i>"to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. Eph. 4:12"</i>
Galatians 2:1-10 1 Timothy 1:3-4; 3:15; Titus 1:9 2 Timothy 1:13	Preserve the gospel. Paul refers to the Church as a stalwart and cornerstone of the truth. One of its duties is to preserve the truth of Jesus. The Church must faithfully deliver the gospel, disprove false teaching, and maintain doctrinal and moral purity among its members.
Ephesians 3:10 1 Cor. 12:12-26	Live the gospel and Promote the gospel. Paul says that through the Church God makes known his wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Through the holy lives of its members and its unity-in-diversity, the Church is called to be a kaleidoscope of the gospel it preaches.
Acts 13:47	Christians are part of God's goal of redeeming the whole world to himself.

The commission to be a missionary was given to every individual Christian, but in another sense, it was given primarily to the local churches. Sure, it is good that the **Church** fulfills our social needs (find friends, network) and social deeds (help the homeless, donate blood, participate in food drives, etc.), but if we fail in following God's command to proclaim, defend, preserve, and promote the gospel; as well as disciple and retain believers, then we have failed in our Christian mission.

Prayer, according to the Bible, is the number one priority in reaching people and pointing them towards salvation.

In a nutshell, the Church belongs to God and must operate on His terms.

These three statements should be highlighted in boxes

1. There are two things that the local church should always be operating as: a soul-winning station for the unsaved, and a soul-building station for the members. We reach (the unsaved) and we teach (the saved).
2. If we are reading the Bible, verse by verse, and book by book, we will be eating the kind of spiritual food that will nurture and strengthen us to be good followers of Jesus. We will become indoctrinated with the plans of God for our lives and the *Church*.
3. Did you know that if you read the complete 5-year Revival and Reformation Morning Watch series that's available on our website you would have read the entire Bible? Yes, in five years, a little at a time, and you can read through the entire Bible. That is nourishment for the soul. Visit the following link to download the Morning Watch: <https://youth.adventist.org/Resources/Bible-Readings>.

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Remember, a Week of Prayer is more than just a week of sermons preached. It is a week to reconnect spiritually, and prayer and fasting are two tried and tested ways to get closer to God and understand His will and purpose for our lives.

Suggested Order of Service

1. Prayer
2. Song Service
3. Welcome and Introduction
4. Individual Prayer Time
5. Congregational Song/Special Song
6. SERMON
7. Group Discussion and Prayer.

Break into groups of 7-10 and discuss the questions found at the end of each daily sermon.

Accept prayer request and pray for each other.

8. Congregational Song
9. Closing Remarks
10. Prayer (Corporate)

DAY ONE: Sabbath
The Called-Out Ones

Theme: The Theology of the Church (Ekklesia)
How the Bible brings to light the idea of the local church

Suggested Hymn: [SDA Hymnal #348 – The Church Has One Foundation](#)

Key Text: Matthew 16:18

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (**New International Version (NIV)**)

Key Thought: The church of God is solidly built on one foundation, which is Jesus Christ her Lord.

Introduction

Today we will discuss the Theology of the Church (Ekklesia). We will see how the Bible brings to light the idea of the church and its responsibility to share the good news of Jesus Christ. We will see that the church is an assembly of people who have been called out of the world with a special mission—to call others out also and make them disciples of Jesus. We will learn that the church is founded upon Jesus and that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. We will discover that the church is not a physical building, but that God’s called out people can meet anywhere for fellowship, worship and service.

As part of the body of Christ, God’s called-out people seek to be in his presence and to fulfill his will. They long to enjoy times of fellowship with each other. They meet regularly to strategize and organize for mission and witness, so they can continue making other disciples and inviting

them to become part the body of Jesus Christ. God's called out people are part of his body and comprise his church on earth.

Today's sermon teaches that:

- a. Church is more than a physical place or building
- b. Church is comprised of God's called-out people in all ages
- c. The church was founded on Jesus Christ
- d. God's called-out people have a responsibility to grow his church by seeking out other people and invite them to be part of his church.

The Sermon

Some called Him Master, others called Him Lord, and still others call Him Savior. But who is He? Was He just a teacher? Was He a healer? Or was He an ordinary carpenter? Well, it all depends on who you ask. This humble teacher from Nazareth was so many things to so many people.

His mother will tell you He was her promised gift whom she nourished and cherished from birth. The church leaders might tell you He startled them with His wisdom and authority. The common people will say that He was the humble teacher from Galilee, the healer and miracle worker, who spoke as One having authority and not as the scribes. His friends will tell you that He was their mentor, their teacher and friend.

But how could one from such humble upbringing command such authority? What was it that made Him so different? Why did He have so many followers?

The answer is simple. He was not just a prophet, a teacher or healer. He was and is the Son of God. All things consist in Him. This Carpenter of Galilee was the founder of the Christian church. He is the Son of God. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things and He is the reason we worship and pray and praise.

After His shameful death on a cross, and His resurrection from the dead, He gave power and authority to His followers and commanded them to go preach the gospel everywhere and make

disciples of all men (Mt. 28: 18 – 20). These men and women filled with the power of the Holy Spirit started a fire that would never go out.

They went from village-to-village, town-to-town, country-to-country preaching and teaching. They raised up churches everywhere they went. Soon the number of believers and congregations would expand so rapidly, they needed some kind of structure and organization. We will address structure and organization on Wednesday.

The most important concept of church to keep in mind is that it is founded by Jesus. Church happens and exists because of Jesus. Whenever the focus shifts from Jesus to anything else then it becomes just another ordinary social gathering. We should never lose sight of this focus. We should never allow the meaning of church to be diverted or distracted for any other purpose, other than to lift up Jesus, who alone is the author and finisher of our faith.

Today, we will spend some time understanding the origin of the Christian church and the meaning of the word church in its original context. It is very important that we lay this foundation right at the start, because, if our theology or teaching or belief is wrong our practices, behavior, or how we do church will also be wrong.

Jared is a faithful member of the Seventh-day Adventist church who was attending a secular university in a suburban town. He would regularly invite his classmates to a weekly Bible Study held at the home of a local church member close to the university campus. Each time his friends would respond cynically to his invitation expressing complete disdain and derision for religion and church folk in general.

One classmate was particularly skeptic about how church folk seemed aloof and insensitive to social needs in their community. Jared and a few others of his church friends started to look at how they could reflect the totality of the gospel of Jesus in a secular environment. They agreed to do an assessment of the needs. They found that many university students were struggling with taking care of basic needs and that many were too busy balancing daily chores and study schedules, to make time for church.

With the assistance of members of his Bible Study group they organized a “Let’s Do Your Laundry” project. Different church members volunteered to open-up their homes to assist busy

university students to do their laundry every week. Not only did Jared's university friends get their laundry done but they would be served a hot meal and given care packages courtesy of the local Adventist church members.

Over time Jared had no trouble getting some of these students to accompany him to bible study. Eventually Jared's project grew into a new church plant that was growing so rapidly that a young adult pastor was hired to nurture and disciple this group of mainly university students. This group continues to actively engage the community and is a classic example of what is possible when church is more focused on the needs of people than a physical worship center.

Many thinkers and scholars have wrestled with the concept and idea of religion and church. The secular mind and society in general struggles with the normal understanding of church as a physical worship center. In fact, I recently pastored a church in a progressive community. Just across the street a group of middle-income young adults meet frequently just to hang out with friends. They never responded to any of our invitations to traditional religious activities. A young university couple in our church organized a back to school outreach for the community. Several of these same persons who would never attend a religious service showed up. The predominantly conservative church members expressed dissatisfaction that these "non-church folk" were benefiting from church members generosity. Suffice it to say, that was the end of that project.

(Reader should pause slightly here and then continue with the questions below)

So, what is church? Or maybe where is church? Do we have to go to church, and if so where? Is church a physical building that we go to?

These are a few of the many questions we wish to address in today's message. We will be looking at the origin and definition of church to get a clear biblical understanding of the church as Jesus originally intended.

The word church comes from the Greek word, *Ekklesia*. *Ekklesia* simply means called out ones. In the early church or the New Testament church, the church never referred to a physical building with a structured worship service at a prescribed time.

We have adopted a bad theology of church which limits the church to a physical location or structure that people come to. So much so that my own childhood picture of church was this little wooden structure in the village or community with a huge bell that rings on a Sunday morning for people to know it is time to start assembling for service.

In my family, we grew up as Seventh-day Adventists. We did not have one of those bells on the outside that summoned people to church. However, we did have a smaller version on the inside to indicate the start of worship or the transition from one service to the other. We even had a song about it.

“There’s a church in valley by the wildwood

No lovelier place in the dale

No spot is so dear to my childhood

As the little brown church in the vale

How sweet on a clear Sabbath (Sunday) morning

To listen to the clear ringing bell

It sounds so sweetly a calling

Oh, come to the church in the dale.”

So, there is always these concepts embedded in our teaching and theology that church is only a place we go to. Church is just a physical place we attend at a set time each week.

In the early church and in the mind of church planters, we do not go to church, or come to church, a physical building, we do not go to 9:15 or 11:00 clock service, instead, we do church.

Church is the body of believers (called out people), who go from house to house, and community to community discipling new believers and raising up more disciples who go from house-to-house, and community-to-community discipling new believers to do the same thing. And so, the cycle continues, over and over and over multiplied infinity.

Here's what we read in Acts chapter 2:42–47:

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house-to-house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

That is the biblical theology of church; that's the New Testament model.

The New Testament concept of discipleship is that every member is a disciple or servant or minister.

In the days of the reformation it was very difficult, if not impossible for the called-out ones or those who belong to the body of Christ to settle in a physical location. Persons who accepted the teachings of scripture were persecuted and hunted down like wild animals to be killed.

These early reformers found refuge in the mountains and rocks and caves. They would huddle together in these caves and among the rocks, praying and reading the scriptures. because Bibles were scarce, children and youth were taught to memorize large portions of scripture, so they could repeat it from memory. They had no physical building to go to like we have today.

The church was very strong and alive and well, but their meeting place would be anywhere they could find to be away from their persecutors. In many parts of the world even today, groups of believers gather under trees, or in homes or anywhere they can find, just to enjoy oneness and fellowship with God. They go from place-to-place, village-to-village, sometimes travelling great distances on foot to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Bible is very clear, that as followers of Jesus this is what we should be engaged in when our hearts are transformed and we have the correct understanding of church. Consider the following statement from Ellen White:

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning, it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory.” (Acts of the Apostles, p. 9)

The Bible also states that these new believers were added to the church through baptism daily and became disciples of Jesus Christ. They were called out from their normal ordinary lifestyle to a new life in Jesus. This also included a lifestyle of loving service and compassion for others.

As new disciples joined the church they in turn were taught how to go and make new disciples, so the called-out ones were constantly engaged in calling out others. Today some persons call this model church planting. They nurtured the new church members and taught them how to replicate the discipleship model going from house-to-house, from village- to-village, from city-to-city, calling out, discipling, raising up, and then on to the next town or village.

This is the New Testament model of *Ekklesia*- church: an assembly of people who have been called out of the world with a special mission—to call others out also and lead them to disciples of Jesus. This is the biblical theology of church. As youth and young adults, let us pray this week for God to show us how we can be better engaged in this model of discipleship. Over the next seven days we will explore various concepts to make this become a practical application in each of our lives.

We will see how we can use our various gifts and talents in the growth and expansion of the church. We will find that being a church member means far more than a meeting together of people once per week for worship or fellowship. We will discover the real essence and joy and thrill that comes from personal, practical involvement in the discipleship process of the called-out ones or the church.

I want to go back to the very beginning of this presentation. Some called Him Master, others called Him Lord, and still others call Him Savior. But who is He? Was He just a teacher? Was He a healer? Or was He an ordinary carpenter?

Jesus asked similar questions to His disciples as they were talking one day. The Bible says He asked them, “Whom do men say that I am?” they gave Him many different answers. Some called Him Master, others called Him Lord, and still others call Him Savior. But who is He? Was He just a teacher? Was He a healer? Or was He an ordinary carpenter? Well, it all depends on who you ask. This humble teacher from Nazareth was so many things to so many people. “Some say you are a prophet, some say you are Elias, others say you are Jeremiah.”

But then Jesus made His question very direct to the disciples. He asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter, as usual spoke up, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” To which Jesus responded, “Indeed Peter, flesh and blood did not reveal that to you, but My Father which is in heaven.” He commended Peter for his insight and proceeded to give one of the most powerful declarations about His church yet.

He said, “Upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The church of God is built on Jesus. He is the foundation of His church. This is the truth that was revealed to Peter. Jesus is the Christ. He is the son of God. God builds His church on His son Jesus. As a result, the church is strong and will always be strong. God Himself is the author and finisher of our faith. He is the beginning, He is the ending.

The church of God is solidly built on one foundation, which is Jesus Christ her Lord. It is to this church that we are all called to be a part. When we accept Jesus Christ we not only become part of His church, but we become a part of Him. We are members of His body, and we become partakers of His divine nature.

No wonder we sing joyfully with the poet, “I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God.” Let us rejoice and be glad that we are a part of the family of God. Let us embrace our identity as part of this worldwide movement founded on Jesus Christ.

Let us spend some time each day this week asking God to fill us with His spirit and impress upon our hearts the need to be active participants in His discipleship model. Let us seek His power and guidance to replicate the early church’s passion of going from place to place calling out new people and disciple them to continue the cycle of making other disciples who will continue to call out others until there is an abundance of growth and harvest for God’s kingdom.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the meaning of the word Ekklesia?
2. Why is it said that we do church instead of going to church?
3. What is the responsibility of those who become members of the church?

DAY TWO: Sunday
Missionaries at Home and Abroad

Theme:

The Mission of the Local Church

how youth and young adults can be involved in mission.

Hymn #s 359: Hark! The Voice of Jesus Calling or 369: Bringing in the Sheaves

Key Text: Matthew 28: 19, 20

Key Thought: The lives we live each day is a powerful testimony to the transforming power of the grace of Jesus.

Introduction

In today's message we will learn about the Mission of the Church. We will see how youth and young adults can be involved in mission. There is always a role for everyone in the fulfillment of the mission that God gave to his church. Many organizations and businesses today display their mission statement in the lobby or reception area of the office. Some develop a complete document which include the vision and mission statement as well as the strategic goals for the company.

The Bible is God's official document which outlines his plan for the salvation of man. That plan of salvation is, in essence, God's overall strategic plan. Each book and chapter of the Bible gives detailed revelation and explanation of God's plan for man's salvation.

When Jesus came to earth, he gave a more succinct and specific mission statement to His church. This statement is found in Matthew 28: 19, 20. We will spend some time in today's message considering the following:

- a. What is Christ's mission for His church?
- b. How can young people contribute to the overall mission of God's church?

- c. We will identify specific opportunities and projects for mission in which young people have been and can be involved.
- d. Finally, there will be a call for each youth to commit to become actively involved in local or overseas mission.

The Sermon

Most of you reading this are too young to remember when Adventist Youth were called Missionary Volunteers. Some of the leaders might remember the song we used to sing back then. It says:

*“Missionary volunteers stand for service true,
As we bring the gospel message all the worldwide through.
Volunteers, volunteers, how I love the name,
Volunteers, volunteers, Jesus to proclaim.
Faithfully, we work each day,
On through coming years.
M – means that we’re missionaries
V – means volunteers.”*

This was the rallying call at every youth program. Young people were fired up and motivated to participate in God’s service each time we sang our theme song. Today, we will spend some time sharing how youth can be active missionaries in the local congregation.

Yesterday we established the biblical definition of the church. According to this definition those who are members of the church are called to go and produce more members. At the beginning of yesterday’s message, we established that the founder of the church is Jesus Christ. Another way to express that is that the church is founded in Jesus Christ.

This means that all who become members of the Christian church are automatically a part of the body of Christ and therefore we take our instructions from Him, who is the *Head and Foundation* of the church. After His resurrection from the dead, and before returning to heaven, Christ gave a clear and specific mandate to His disciples.

This mandate is found in Matthew 28, verses 19 and 20, and says,

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world.”

This passage of scripture is commonly referred to as “The Great Commission”. Put another way, this is Christ’s mission statement for His church. Because the church is a body of called out believers and not a physical place, this commission is for all those who are called out. It is the mission statement for all who belong to the body of Christ in all ages.

How do we know this? Because He says in the passage, “...and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.” Christ expects His faithful followers to carry this important mission for as long as the world lasts, for as long as there is one soul left to be disciplined and saved.

Now let me make one very important distinction again in our theology.

Because, you see, if our theology or teaching or belief is wrong our practice, behavior, and how we do church, will be wrong. This commission was not given to a select few in the church. This was not a commission for the apostles or evangelists or pastors or church leaders only. This is the mission for the church, the called-out ones, all who belong to the body of Christ.

The instructions were for the called-out ones to go and make disciples or followers who would follow them to make more disciples who would follow them to make more disciples until the end of the world. This is exciting and intriguing news for me. I am thrilled and excited to know that the reason I am a part of the church today is because somebody before me was faithful to the mission and followed the commission left by Jesus centuries ago.

Imagine what would have happened if five hundred years ago one group of disciples said this is no longer necessary or required. We have enough disciples, or the commission is no longer relevant. Let’s put a halt on teaching and preaching the gospel. Everyone who is to be saved is already saved. We can quit making disciples now.

I hope you get the point. There is never a time in the history of our world when this commission is irrelevant or outdated. Otherwise you and I would never have the privilege to be a part of this great movement which comprises the body of Christ. But more importantly, we would be a people lost without any hope or possibility of salvation.

Is there a role for pastors and elders in the great commission today? Sure, there is. Is there a role for deacons and deaconesses and evangelist and Bible workers? Most definitely? Is there a role for literature evangelists and teachers and doctors? Certainly. And is there a role for youth and young adults in the fulfillment of this great commission? You guessed it. Yes, you have a role. I have a role, we all have an important part to play in the fulfillment of Christ's mission.

In fact, young people can make an impact on other young people that pastors and leaders cannot. Youth and young adults have an influence on their peers that no adult or evangelist can. As members of the body of Christ you have a unique and enviable vantage point that no one else has. You not only have access to your friends and peers, but you also have the vast world of technology and social media. You have an influence and resources that are grossly untapped and unutilized.

“However large, however small, your talents, remember that what you have is yours only in trust. Thus, God is testing you, giving you opportunity to prove yourself true. To Him you are indebted for all your capabilities. To Him belong your powers of body, mind, and soul, and for Him these powers are to be used. Your time, your influence, your capabilities, your skill—all must be accounted for to Him who gives all. He uses His gifts best who seeks by earnest endeavor to carry out the Lord's great plan for the uplifting of humanity.” (*Messages to Young People*, p. 48)

Many churches are hemorrhaging and stifling because there is either an absence of youth or untapped youth resources languishing in the pews. Wouldn't it be thrilling and exciting if youth leaders could inspire and mobilize these disciples, so they too can be engaged in the commission Jesus left for all His followers? Is it not the right time now to bring our young people back to the teachings of scripture and inspire them to use their gifts and talents to help in the fulfillment of the great commission?

“With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world!” (*Education*,” p. 271)

Young people, you are as much a part of the body of Christ, the called-out ones, the church, as anyone else. Spend some time now to read again the great commission given by your Commander and friend Jesus Christ.

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world.” (Matthew 28: 19, 20)

The big question for consideration today is how. How do youth and young adults become active participants in the mission of the church? Where can we find useful service? How can we be engaged or involved?

I get questions like these many times. In fact, as the local pastor I am usually the go-to person for answers or perspective for these types of questions. Any question that the leaders cannot answer the easiest solution is, ask the pastor. And rightly so, because the pastor, as the spiritual leader of the body of Christ, should make it a priority to offer various options for involving every member in the mission of the church.

So how can young people be engaged in the mission of the church? *(I am aware that everyone cannot possess the same spiritual gifts or talents. We will address spiritual gifts in tomorrow's presentation.)*

But right now, as we are meeting to pray, there are many youth and young adults who feel a special call for missions and have committed one or two years to leave the comforts of home to travel to different countries to share the gospel. Some may not go overseas, but they commit to serve in their own country in places where their talents can best be utilized for service.

Many young people work alongside pastors and lay workers, in various branches of missionary endeavors. Some gifted musicians share the gospel in music or song. Youth and young adults skilled in medicine and healthcare offer to work alongside ministers offering a wide range of services from cooking classes to health lectures or conducting health clinics.

Young people who are skilled in building have travelled extensively volunteering their services to construct places of worship in remote villages and towns, all over the world. Sharing the gospel

is not just about preaching. Young people who are skilled in technology volunteer their services in helping to communicate the gospel through radio, television or a variety of internet platforms.

You might still feel that as a young person there is no place for you. You cannot play an instrument or sing or give health lectures or do construction work. But you are a teacher, a counselor or know how to pray earnestly to God. You may simply be the one, like Aaron, to carry the tools; or organize the material, or invite the community. There are just so many ways we can be useful in sharing the gospel commission.

Most importantly, youth can be a powerful testimony to the grace and redemption of God in our lifestyle. The way we live each day is a testimony, a living witness of the transforming power of the grace of Jesus. Everywhere we go we are preaching the gospel, we are influencing others by our deportment, our words and actions. The gospel is far more powerful when it is lived and practiced than when it is spoken or taught.

With so much shadiness in high places today, integrity, honesty and professionalism at the work place is a powerful witness for Christ. Our very speech and appearance and the difference in the things we eat or don't eat for lunch can be an opening for a witnessing opportunity. We should never underestimate the impact of our habits and everyday lifestyle. We are God's witnesses and ministers wherever we live, work and play. The sermons that leave the most lasting impression are the ones that are seen, not the ones that are spoken.

That is why in 2013, the Youth Department of the General Conference implemented a project called, "Global Youth Day." This is an initiative that engages youth in acts of benevolence and kindness on the third Sabbath of March each year. Hundreds of thousands of young people around the world take the gospel to the streets in a practical way. According to the overview on the GC Youth website:

The vision of GYD is to recapture the reality of Adventist youth as a global movement mobilized for service, contributing to the proclamation of the everlasting gospel and ushering in the second coming of Jesus Christ. There is a lot more to religious faith than simply going to church and listening to sermons. The true practice of religion involves the revelation of God's love in living out Jesus's gospel commission as He bade us to before He ascended to heaven: through all manners of selfless acts that point a

desperately needy world to the ultimate hope of the better world He has made possible for us. Grounded in the concluding words of Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:25-37), the theme of the Global Youth Day is “Be the sermon.”

On this one Sabbath in the year, youth purpose to be the sermon, rather than listening to or delivering a traditional sermon. This is real love in action. This is in practical terms fulfilling the great commission of Jesus to preach the gospel in all the world. There is no greater joy than to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to be His hands and feet in impacting and changing lives for the better.

Young people also serve regularly each Sabbath as greeters and in hospitality ministry. Some are excellent at preparing and sharing meals. Like the wise man Solomon says, “whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.” There is just no limit to the usefulness of one, who by setting self aside, allow for the Holy Spirit to use him or her.

My prayer is that you will make Christ’s mission statement your personal mission statement. In summary, never forget that the reason you are a part of God’s big family today is that the disciples before you were faithful to the great commission. They shared it with somebody who shared it with somebody who shared it with you, so you can be saved by the grace of God.

That someone who shared this good news with you might have been your father or mother, but guess what? They shared. That someone might have been a friend or neighbor, but guess what? They shared. That someone might have been a classmate or teacher. But they shared. It might have been a pastor or evangelist. But they shared. God has always had faithful, willing, obedient disciples who graciously shared the message of salvation which you and I now are privileged to share.

Do you know someone, anyone in your circles, in your community, school or any place else who needs to be saved? Do you know anyone whose life could be changed for the better if only they knew what God could do for them as He has done for you? Do you have one gift or talent or anything that you could use to help that person become a disciple of Jesus?

Let us spend a few minutes in prayer right now as you ask God to place someone on your heart who you could reach for Him.

Discussion questions:

1. Why is Matthew 28: 19, 20 referred to as “The Great Commission?”
2. What is the role of all those who are followers or disciples of Jesus in relation to the mission?
3. Discuss what it means to you that Jesus promises to be with us to the end of the age?

DAY 3: Monday
Embracing My Gift

Theme:

The Functions of the Local Church of the Body of Christ (Local Church)

This is in relation to Spiritual Gifts and how youth can avail themselves for services in the operations of the church.

Key Text: Joel 2: 28, 29

Key Thought: Each of us, no matter how young or old has a spiritual gift, which must be encouraged and developed for the building up of the body of Christ and the work of the ministry.

Introduction

Today we focus on the functions of the Church or the Body of Christ, in relation to Spiritual Gifts and how youth can avail themselves for services in the operations of the church. God's Holy Spirit is given to every disciple of Jesus Christ. On the day of Pentecost there was an unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the prophecy given by Joel in chapter 2: 27, 28.

God, The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to each member of God's church. These gifts are to be used for the building up if the body of Christ and the work of the ministry. All of the gifts and skillsets are needed in order to accomplish the mission. Youth are especially gifted in certain gifts and skillsets that can be very effective in the work of the ministry.

Some persons feel they do not have any gifts or talents or do not know how to identify their gifts. Young people can benefit from the insights of spiritual mentors in helping to identify their spiritual gifts. In addition, there are a variety of helpful spiritual inventory tools which can help in this process. One such tool is included at the end of today's presentation.

Today we will take some time to:

- a. Learn more about the role of the Holy Spirit
- b. Identify the gifts and skillsets in the local church.
- c. Understand why every gift and skill is required to accomplish the mission.
- d. Take the spiritual gifts inventory to identify your specific spiritual gift sets.

The Sermon

It is thrilling and exciting to know that in choosing men and women to be part of His worldwide movement, He would look to ordinary men and women who comprise the body of Christ, the church or the called-out ones. Whether we live in small towns or large cities, whether in humble villages or rural districts, wherever there is a group of believers comprising the body of Christ, there is always an anointing on our lives to be active participants in His worldwide movement.

But for what purpose? Couldn't God perform all the functions of the church Himself? Why does He need me to play a role in the salvation of men? Isn't that the prerogative of God? Does God really need me to be an active participant in my local church congregation? These are some of the questions to be addressed as we continue our dialogue about the church of God.

Tell me what you think it would be like if one day a group of local village potato farmers showed up on your High School or University campus to give a lecture on "Einstein's Theory of Relativity or Newton's Laws of Motion" or some other similar subject? What would be your initial reaction? Maybe shock. Disbelief. *No way. This isn't happening right now.* That might probably have been my reaction as well.

Now, can you picture yourself a young adult from Egypt, walking through the streets of Jerusalem one morning and hear a group of mostly fishermen, with no formal education eloquently speaking in your native language. By the way, these are not Egyptians, they are Jews from Jerusalem who speak Greek or Hebrew for the most part, not Arabic or Aramaic.

Well we read in Acts chapter 2 that some persons did exactly that. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the small group of believers who were gathered in an upper room. Peter stood up and began preaching to the large crowd who had traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover celebrations. The Bible says, as He spoke to the other disciples, mainly uneducated fishermen, began to interpret Peter's sermon in the languages of the people who had come from these various countries to celebrate the Passover.

During His presentation He quoted from this prophecy in the book of Joel.

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.” (Joel 2: 28, 29)

The prophet Joel foresaw an unprecedented manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the last days. Amazing and exciting exhibitions of talent will take place when the young and old experience the outpouring of God's Spirit as prophesied by the prophet Joel. Unprecedented talents, gifts and abilities will be demonstrated in those who are so gifted by God. According to the prophet young people will have enhanced visions and revelations of what God's purpose is for their lives. This will be affirmed and endorsed through the wisdom given to older Christians in dreams.

The Fulfilment

This prophecy was cited by Peter as having a partial fulfillment at Pentecost, but like many other Bible prophecies, it has dual applications and is very relevant and applicable for these last days. The Apostle Paul affirmed the role of the Holy Spirit in the equipping and distributing of gifts in God's church. In 1 Corinthians 12:4 – 11, he outlines a variety of gifts that are given to Christian believers by the Holy Spirit. These include gifts such as teachers, government leaders, pastors, and helpers, among others.

Ellen White writes:

"God has set in the church different gifts. These are precious in their proper place, and all may act a part in the work of preparing a people for Christ's soon coming." (*Gospel Workers*, p. 481)

It is very clear from scripture that God never intends for all of the spiritual gifts to reside in any one individual. Similarly, it is very clear that God desires and ensures that all who have been born again by His Holy Spirit becomes beneficiaries of one or more spiritual gifts. Please note that spiritual gifts are not natural talents, that is something that everyone has, but only the born-again Christian have spiritual gifts. All gifts, including the gifts of faith and grace are given to mankind by the Holy Spirit of God. It is our privilege to receive it and to use it for the purposes God intended. As Christian disciples, each Adventist Youth can be assured that this gift is as readily available to him or her as it is to every other Christian, young or old, mature or immature.

The Promise

Jesus made a promise to His disciples before leaving this world, that He would send them another comforter, whom He identified as the Holy Spirit. According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit would, among other things, convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit is functional and operational in the daily life of everyone, whether we recognize Him or not. One role of the Holy Spirit is to give gifts to God's children. These gifts will vary according to our abilities and Christian maturity. All the gifts are given to build up God's church and to equip each disciple for service.

"You are the Body of Christ. Thus, Scripture and assumptions in the church are often at variance with each other; appearances indicating that the congregation is destitute of gifts, while Scripture says, 'It is not so! You are the Body of Christ.' If we take God at His word, then we are committed to believe that He has endowed, or at least is willing to endow, each local church with all the gifts it needs for life, health, growth, and ministry." –*John Stott*

So how do I know what my gift is? Or do I even have a gift? What if I am not a beneficiary of the gift of the Holy Spirit? Is it possible for me to have a spiritual gift if I am not filled with the Holy Spirit?

The simple answer to these questions is this: once you are a member of the body of Jesus Christ it must be assumed that you have the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit of God which impresses upon the hearts of men and women the need to accept Jesus and to become part of His body of called-out ones. In other words, Jesus leads us to Himself through the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that draws men and women to Jesus. Jesus says, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing, the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life” (John 6: 63). In John chapter 16: 8, He says that it is the Holy Spirit that reproves us of sin. Once you accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and decide to become a member of His body, His church, you are a recipient of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The other truth is that all who have the Holy Spirit have at least one gift given by the Spirit.

Spiritual gifts may be identified in a variety of ways, but the most common and simple way is to be affirmed by other members in the body of Christ. I would encourage all our young people to prayerfully consider taking the [Spiritual Gifts Assessment](https://youth.adventist.org/Resources/Spiritual-Gifts-Assessment). You can find it on the GC Youth Ministries website (<https://youth.adventist.org/Resources/Spiritual-Gifts-Assessment>). This tool is very helpful in gauging your spiritual gifts and identify your strengths for the mission you’re called to engage in.

Each of us, no matter how young or old has a spiritual gift. These gifts are to be encouraged and developed for the building up of the body of Christ and the work of the ministry. Long before there were spiritual gifts assessment tools, members of God’s body were using their gifts to build up His church. In many instances, these gifts were affirmed by others with discernment in the body of Christ. The only spiritual gifts inventory they had was the spirit of discernment. Some gifts are more readily identified than others. When you discover your spiritual gifts and use them in your local church growth will take place in your life and in the congregation you serve.

It is very easy to identify those who are gifted singers or musicians. Persons who are given to hospitality are always warm and friendly and welcoming. Some people are natural cooks or chefs and enjoy preparing meals for everyone else. Others are gifted in teaching and sharing the Word

of God. There are others who simply study to ensure the correct understanding and interpretation of the scriptures.

Some persons are natural leaders and have the gift of organization and know how to delegate responsibilities. God has blessed others with the gift of healing and medical skills. Today there are increasingly numerous gifts and talents that are being utilized in the spreading of the gospel.

Young people who are gifted in media and audio-visual technology have been a great blessing to the body of Christ. Many have used their gifts in modern technology to stream church services on the internet live. Others create websites and visual images. There is simply no limit to the variety and possible number of gifts and talents that young people are employing to the benefit of the church of God.

There is simply no way the gospel could have reached some places of the earth that it has today if it wasn't for the wonderful gifts and talents of young people like you, who have dedicated their time and talents to the work of God.

All of God's children are called to be ministers. Pastors were appointed as shepherds. What is the role of a shepherd? Shepherds care for the sheep. Their primary responsibility is to keep the flock in order. A minister on the other hand is a servant. So, God has appointed to each member specific responsibilities to assist the pastor in his role as shepherd of the flock.

Elders, church leaders and officers, function more like ministers, assistants and helps to the pastor, every member in the New Testament church took on that role. They were not profilers with a name to correct the brethren and keep the pastor in check, that's bad theology, it's not biblical.

Part of the function of church leaders and pastors is to train the members to use their gifts and talents effectively in the mission of the church. While the gifts are dispensed by the spirit they must be properly channeled to achieve maximum benefits for the local congregation. Youthful gifts and talents are very critical to the fulfilment of the mission.

So, how can you use your gifts to help in the growth of your local church?

Please note that a spiritual gift is not a natural talent (everyone has natural talents but only the born-again Christian has spiritual gifts).

1. Take the Spiritual Gifts Assessment (<https://youth.adventist.org/Resources/Spiritual-Gifts-Assessment>).
2. Seek the counsel and guidance of wise and tactful mentors as they seek to utilize their God-given talents in the local congregation.
3. Take some time this week to ask God to help you identify your gifts and to seek for opportunities to make a contribution to the mission of Christ. Ask Him to help you discern the difference between true spiritual gifts and counterfeits.
4. Find someone who you trust in your local congregation to share your passion or burden for service in God's work. Ask if there are any available opportunities where your gifts may be used effectively.
5. Pray for the guidance and the filling of the Holy Spirit to make you an effective worker in your church.
6. If at first there is no positive response or feedback, do not be discouraged. It is very rare that young people are immediately enlisted in the areas they are most talented. Exercise patience and continue praying for God to open the door for your gift to be utilized. Sometimes it might take weeks or months or even years, but God is faithful and will send someone who will identify your gift and ensure that it is utilized effectively.

It is likely that you may have more than one spiritual gift. If so, God expects you to use all the gifts He has given you to serve Him. There is a work for everyone in God's great mission of saving the lost. You have a specific work that no one else can do. My young friend, please know that whatever God has assigned you to do, there is no other who can accomplish it. Never decline any opportunity to serve. Your talents are given to you by God to be used in His service. May you find your rightful place where that gift can be best developed in His service.

Discussion Questions:

1. The prophet Joel described a period in time when God's spirit will be poured out on young men and women and old men and women? Discuss the specifics of this prophecy.
2. What are some ways in which you can identify your spiritual gifts?

3. Take some time to outline a list of the spiritual gifts in the scriptures. Make a list of your own spiritual gifts.

Spiritual Gifts Inventory

Website: <https://youth.adventist.org/Resources/Spiritual-Gifts-Assessment>. It's a test that helps to identify spiritual gifts.

DAY 4: Tuesday
Who Has God's Money?

Theme:

The Stewardship Responsibility of the Youth and Young Adults

How youth and young adults can be involved in the finances of the local church

Key Text: 2 Corinthians 9: 7

Key Thought: The most important lesson in Christian stewardship is that God loves me. The second is that God made me and everything that I see around me.

Introduction

God gave of his best and all of himself when he gave Jesus his son as a sacrifice for our sin. Even before that he gave us everything in the world that he made including the air we breathe and the sunlight every day. There is just no way we can out-give God. Giving comes naturally with God and all those who benefit from his daily blessings.

Today we will spend some time looking at the concept of Christian Stewardship. We will discuss the responsibility of youth and Young Adults in relation to the support of the local church. The biblical concept of Christian stewardship is sometimes misunderstood, as a result not much teaching focuses on this topic.

We will learn today that God is the owner of everything. He made us and all living creatures. Humans are the most intelligent beings of all of God's creation. God has put us in charge of all of his creation to manage wisely for him. This includes all of creation as well as our time, talents, and material resources.

How we prioritize and utilize these resources has a lot to do with how much we value and appreciate all that God has done for us. We will spend some time examining how youth and young adults can support the local church with their time and talents and also discuss how they can be involved in the finances of the local church.

Today's message explores:

- a. The key components of Christian Stewardship.
- b. How youth can give of their time and talents to support the mission.
- c. Why does God need money?
- d. How youth and young adults can be involved in the financing of the local church and its mission.

The Sermon

In the latter part of the 17th century, German preacher August H. Francke founded an orphanage to care for the homeless children of Halle. One day when Francke desperately needed funds to carry on his work, a destitute Christian widow came to his door begging for a ducat and a gold coin. Because of his financial situation, he politely but regretfully told her he couldn't help her.

Disheartened, the woman began to weep. Moved by her tears, Francke asked her to wait while he went to his room to pray. After seeking God's guidance, he felt that the Holy Spirit wanted him to change his mind. So, trusting the Lord to meet his own needs, he gave her the money. Two mornings later, he received a letter of thanks from the widow. She explained that because of his generosity she had asked the Lord to shower the orphanage with gifts. That same day Francke received 12 ducats from a wealthy lady and 2 more from a friend in Sweden. He thought he had been amply rewarded for helping the widow, but he was soon informed that the orphanage was to receive 500 gold pieces from the estate of Prince Lodewyk Van Wurtenburg.

When he heard this, Francke wept in gratitude. In sacrificially providing for that needy widow, he had been enriched, not impoverished

W. A. Criswell, *A Guidebook for Pastors*, p. 154.

L. Kraft, head of the Kraft Cheese Corp., who had given approximately 25% of his enormous income to Christian causes for many years, said, "The only investment I ever made which has paid consistently increasing dividends is the money I have given to the Lord." J. D. Rockefeller said, "I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week."

Any amount of investment in time or talents or monetary gifts we give to the cause of God can never compare to the lavish blessings we receive every day. God owns everything in the world. His resources are unlimited. In fact, it is he who provides for all of our needs on a daily basis. Today we take some time to reflect on God's faithfulness to us and our response to him in return.

Many persons argue why God, or the church needs money. Since God is the owner of everything can he not supply all of the resources to take care of his business. So really and truly what does the church do with my money? What difference does it make whether I give or not? Does my giving or the amount I give make a significant difference to fulfilling God's purpose or mission for his work on earth?

An experience in the life of English preacher and theologian Andrew Fuller illustrates this truth. James Duff, in *Flashes of Truth*, told of a time when Fuller went back to his hometown to collect money for foreign missions. One of his contacts was an old friend. When presented with the need, the man said, "Well, Andrew, seeing it's you, I'll give you five dollars." "No," said Fuller, "I can't take your money for my cause, seeing it is for me," and he handed the money back. The man saw his point. "Andrew, you are right. Here's ten dollars, seeing it is for Jesus Christ." Duff concluded, "Let us remember, it is not the amount we give toward helping the Lord's work; it is the motive He looks at."

Here's what the Bible says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created" (Revelation 4:11). He needs us, all of us, not just our money and talents, and skills, but He needs our entire being, our souls to be with Him forever.

The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord. (Psalm 24:1)

So, when God made man He gave man everything He needed to be happy and comfortable on the earth. He gave us the rivers and the oceans, the sun and the stars, the trees and the fruits, everything. God needs nothing because He owns everything. However, God needs everyone and everything to be engaged and employed for His purpose to be accomplished on earth.

We already established that God's mission or purpose for us is to go and make disciples who will make other disciples, who will continue this work until all who desire to be saved are saved. As long as there are people on this earth who are not a part of God's church, this mission is always relevant. And, as long as this mission is relevant or necessary God will always require our help, He requires us, all of us, our lives, our time, our talents, our skills and yes, our money.

The most important lesson in Christian stewardship is that God loves me. The second is that God made me and everything that I see around me. Not only does God love me and made me, but He owns everything, including me. More importantly He is the one who provides for me, protects me, cares for me, and gives me life every moment that I live. He supplies the air that I breathe, so every breath that I take is His as well.

The eyes that I use to see are made by God. The brain I use to think and study is made by God. The hands I use to write and work, God made those too. The feet I use to run and jump in the games I play, God gave me those too. The fingers and eyes I'm using to type on my computer or send text messages on my electronic devices, yes, God made those as well. And the brain power and knowledge that the inventors used to make those devices, those also belong to God.

I guess the question is, "what is it that I have or own that does not belong to God or come from God?" The true and only answer is nothing. It is like this, whoever makes or creates something has the right to that creation. That person also gets the right to dictate how that property is used. Today we hear a lot about copyright. Whether it is a manufactured product or intellectual property or software or scholarly work, the creator or composer has the right to that property and dictates how it may or may not be used.

God is the owner of everything on this earth and has the right to dictate how all of His property is used. He can demand all of it, some of it or none of it. Whatever He chooses to do, He is still the owner and reserves the right to decide how He wants His creation to be used.

God made man to serve Him, to love, honor and obey Him. But He did not stop there, when man rebelled and turned away from God, He gave His only Son to save him or redeem man back to Himself. So, in fact, man belongs to God twice, by creation and redemption.

All God asks in return is that we honor Him as our Creator and Savior by giving all of ourselves to Him. When we surrender our all to Him, it is then natural that everything we have and are belongs to Him to be used by Him. But God gives us the freedom to use all that He gives us for our benefit. He simply asks that in recognition of His ownership we give some of those gifts and talents and time and money to be used in His mission.

There are so many other young people who do not yet know how much Jesus loves and cares for them. God needs all of us to help to make them His disciples. He needs all of our talents, our time and our resources to be used to reach them the same way somebody gave theirs to reach us. He does not demand of us anything that He has not already supplied. And yet, He is not asking for everything.

God says give your best. I'll take whatever you deem as best, the best portion of your time, the best of your talent, the best of your money, the best of your life. After all, He says, I gave the best for you. In fact, I gave you everything.

When God gave His son Jesus as a sacrifice for sin He gave not just His best, He gave His all. In giving Jesus, God was literally giving Himself. This gift of God was given freely to all whosoever would receive Him. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3: 16).

Because of this great sacrifice, all who accept this gift have the right to become sons and daughters of God. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1: 12). This is God's most precious gift which He gave freely to all. Because of this lavish gift we are privileged to be called sons and daughters of God, heirs and joint heirs with Jesus.

Even though it is only October, my daughter reminded me as I am writing that Christmas is almost here. In fact, she said, it is Christmas. Christmas for many means giving and receiving gifts. Most persons look forward to receiving gifts, but the example and principle given by our heavenly father is that giving is far more satisfying than receiving.

In fact, when we give our time and talents and resources to God we are simply giving back from what He has already given or what we already received. We do not give to God in order to receive. We give to Him out of the abundance of what we have already received. Whether it is our time or talents or material resources, all things come from Him and it is of His blessings that we return to Him. Paul underscores this principle when He says in Acts 20: 35, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And in 2 Corinthians 9: 7, He says, “God loves a cheerful giver. Giving is a joy for the ones who are experiencing the blessings of God.

The act of giving of our time, talents and material resources is as much a part of worship as is praying or singing or reading the Bible. Each time we come into the presence of God wherever that may be, we should bring our very best to Him. That is the best of our time, the best of our talents and the best of our material resources.

Paul again says, *it is required in stewardship that a man be found faithful.* 2 Corinthians 9: 7. As benefactors of the blessings of God, we are to be cheerful happy stewards.

When you consider all that God has given you, is there anything too precious or sacred to give to God?

Anything God asks of us, He has already outdone us in giving. For example, God requires that we give Him one seventh of our time each week in the form of rest and worship. This requirement is not that much considering that He already gives us six days for our personal use. All of time belongs to Him. He could say He demands or require any number of hours out of every day for Himself. Instead, He simply says, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it Holy.” This twenty-four-hour period is all that God requires exclusively for himself, but in truth and in fact all of time belongs to Him and should be used for His glory.

Similarly, God says one tenth of our financial or material resources belong to Him. All of our earnings and income really belongs to Him. He could easily say He needs more than one tenth, but He allows us to keep nine tenths to be used as we deem best. If God should remove the ability to earn or decide to withhold additional financial blessings from us we would have no argument because everything belongs to Him. If He decides to multiply your neighbors’ financial resources more than yours, you cannot argue with Him. That is His prerogative. He is the owner of everything and He decides how He distributes His resources.

But there's more. Not only does God own everything and require an amount of our resources for Himself, He says if we obey Him and faithfully return what He requires, He will multiply that which remains much more than we could ever imagine. Let us look at two passages of scripture where God makes those promises. First, we read Malachi 3: 8–10:

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

What a beautiful promise for those who are faithful in returning to God what is rightfully His. But note that there is also a curse for those who are unfaithful.

The second promise is found in Isaiah 58: 13, 14:

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Obedience to God always pays big dividends. When we take God at His Word and faithfully honor Him as good stewards He super sizes the blessings He already gave to us. God gave of His best and His all when He gave Jesus as the payment for our sin.

The question today is, what is too much or too valuable for me to return to God after all He has given to me. Is one tenth of my income and a sacrificial love offering too much to return to God? Are few hours of my time each day or each week too much to give to Him? Is it too much to use

my gifts and talents in His service to bless someone or be a witness for Him? Am I willing to make a sacrifice of love for Him after all He's done for me?

Remember: a good steward manages the time, abilities, resources, and money God gives them.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the basis of Christian stewardship? Why does God reserve the right to require us to give Him a portion of our time, talents and resources?
2. What portion of our time and financial resources does God say belong to Him?
3. Heaven gave its greatest gift, when it Gave Jesus as sacrifice for our sins. Discuss.

DAY 5: Wednesday
Following the Leader

Theme:

The Leadership paradigm of the Church –*explanation of the structure of the local church and how the youth can benefit from being cooperative mentees*

Key Text: Acts 6:3, 4

Key Thought: Church organization still contributes to the growth and development of God's church today.

Introduction

There is order and structure in heaven. Because God's church on earth is a reflection of himself, he expects the same order in the daily operations of his church. God established the organizational structure of his church starting from the days of the patriarchs and prophets. He always chose men and women to serve as leaders at different times throughout the history of his chosen people.

It is no different today. In fact, after Jesus came and went back to heaven, the church grew so rapidly, there was urgent need to address structure and organization. After much prayer the membership of the church appointed persons to serve in various leadership roles of the New Testament church. This proved to be of great benefit to the growth and development of the church.

In today's presentation, we spend some time examining the leadership paradigm of the local church and how it contributes to the order and growth of the church. The church today comprises of many different ministries with specific focus on various groups and projects. As the needs of the church increases, so does the need for help in all of the branches of mission.

Youth and young adults can benefit immensely from the experience of senior church leaders who can serve as mentors. As cooperative mentees young people have a lot to learn and benefit from their local leaders.

Today's message will focus on:

- a. Order and structure in the local church.
- b. How God choose leaders for service in his mission.
- c. The role of pastors, elders and other mentors in the local church.
- d. How youth can benefit as mentees.
- e. Explanation of the structure of the local church.

The Sermon

One of the reasons the church has been able to survive and continue to grow throughout the ages is because of the solid foundation on which it is built. If we go back to the original definition and concept of church, we recall that church does not refer to a physical building or space. Church is comprised of people, the *ekklesia* or called out ones. Church is the body of Christ, those who accept Him and believe His teachings and are committed to go and call out others to be His followers.

In other words, Jesus Christ is the founder and foundation of the church. This is not just a concept or theory. Here's what Jesus Himself says, "...and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16: 18). Many persons have tried over the years to destroy God's church or to raise up counterfeits, but the church continues to flourish and grow despite the odds and attacks.

I remember as a little boy, we used to hear the terms *Shepherd Rods* and *Brinsmead*. All I knew then is that they were not part of the original body of Christ or the called-out ones. They were offshoots or splintered groups from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As the years go by I realized that there have been many other splinter groups from the world wide Seventh-day

Adventist church. Most of these disintegrate or operate with very little influence over time, for various reasons, but lack of structure or organization is one key factor.

There are many different religious denominations in the world claiming to be the church of the living God or God's true church. Everyone claims their origin in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. As a young Christian, I was privileged to have dedicated spiritual mentors who helped me understand from scripture how to identify God's true church. One thing that is undebatable and unquestionable is that the church, as an organization, was founded and is built on Jesus Christ. That is what He says.

In other words, the Son of God, the Savior of the world Himself declares that the church is built or founded on Him, upon His authority and His alone. The New Testament church continued to grow and flourish under the leadership of the apostles long after Jesus returned to heaven. As the church grew it was apparent that some kind of structure and organization was needed. This is where the organization of the church became essential and the details for its operations are outlined in the book of Acts.

I believe it is helpful to reference the details of this development as outlined by Ellen White in the book, *Acts of the Apostles*.

The disciples of Jesus had reached a crisis in their experience. Under the wise leadership of the apostles, who labored unitedly in the power of the Holy Spirit, the work committed to the gospel messengers was developing rapidly. The church was continually enlarging, and this growth in membership brought increasingly heavy burdens upon those in charge.

There was necessity for a further distribution of the responsibilities which had been borne so faithfully by a few during the earlier days of the church. {AA 88.2}

The appointment of the seven to take the oversight of special lines of work, proved a great blessing to the church. {AA 89.2}

The foregoing passages gives a very detailed overview of the crisis facing the New Testament church. The church responded to this crisis by seeking counsel and took the matter to God in prayer. After much prayer and careful discussion, the leadership—led by the apostles—agreed to

appoint deacons to supervise specific aspects of the work. The deacons were not only responsible for distributing supplies to the members, but they were also involved in the preaching of the gospel.

We do not know what other specific responsibilities they had or what other positions might have been considered for the smooth running of the New Testament church. Clearly there was need for some financial oversight and other forms of administrative assistance. While the deacons were appointed to oversee the distribution, other persons were needed to assist with the collection of the supplies as well as monetary gifts. It is also evident that to ensure that all of the needy were taken care of, some form of record keeping was required. The fact that we even know the names of those selected as deacons means that someone was assigned the tasks of keeping the church records and maybe even a membership list.

While we do not have all the details, we can safely infer that there were other persons working alongside the deacons and the apostle in this process of meeting the many different types of needs in the church. The passage used the term officers, suggesting that there were various distinct persons appointed to carry out different functions of the church at the time. Ellen White continues to elaborate on this important process.

That this step was in the order of God, is revealed in the immediate results for good that were seen. "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." {AA 89.3}

It was at the ordination of the Twelve that the first step was taken in the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to carry on His work on the earth. {AA 18.1}

From these inspired writings, we see that very early in the ministry of Jesus the concept of ordination was introduced. The ordination of the twelve was performed by Jesus Himself. Ordination of selected church officers is still practiced today. It is an act of consecration which sets apart select individuals for important sacred duties in the church of God. This important ecclesiastical endorsement continues to be practiced in our churches today.

In the Seventh-day Adventist church specifically there are three categories of church offices to which this sacred authority applies. These are the pastor, the elder and deacons and deaconesses. Men and women who serve God's church have been set aside for these sacred functions—all in an effort to enhance and advance the mission God has given to His people. In addition to these ordained offices, there are numerous other categories of responsibilities that have become necessary to implement as the church grows and develops into a worldwide movement.

Among the many church offices and auxiliary departments in the church today is one specifically dedicated to youth and young adults. To this department of the church is given the responsibility to train and develop young people to serve in various branches of work to impact the local church and eventually the wider church family. The youth department provides mentorship and exposure for young people that is specific to their needs. We are thankful for the vision of youth pioneers Harry Fenner and Luther Warren, who started the very first youth meetings back in 1879. Today we stand on the solid foundation they laid as we continue to play an important role in the mission around the world. Church organization still contributes to the growth and flourishing of God's church. As young people, it would be helpful to engage your local pastor and leaders in a discussion on church organization. Furthermore, I encourage young people to initiate active engagement and participation in the mission and programs of your local church.

Does everyone need a role model?

Some years ago, when I served as Youth Leader in the Caribbean, we introduced an initiative called, "Youth in Leadership Month." It is just what it says, young people would be appointed to leadership of their local congregations for an entire month each year. They would be mentored by the leaders of the various departments of the church and would get a firsthand view of the operations and authority of the local church. It is particularly exciting to see youth and regular officers sit in church board meetings, with the common goal of planning for the mission of their local church. This initiative is still practiced in many of those churches today.

This program was specifically designed to give youth an opportunity to be mentored by adult church officers in areas such as church administration and heritage and doctrine. Throughout the month both the youth officer and the senior departmental leader would spend quality time together learning from each other how to enhance and improve the departmental objectives for

the local church. It is very important that the experience and wisdom of the senior members of our congregations be passed on to the next generation in a deliberate and systematic manner. Youth officers get to learn about church structure and organization and to have an appreciation for the decision-making process at the various levels of church organization.

Now what?

The impact, benefits and blessings of this initiative are felt long beyond the month. Youth officers participate in church board meetings before during and after the month. They participate in an exit meeting where they share their experiences and the impact it made on each of them. The testimonies of those who serve help to motivate and encourage other young people to become actively involved in the various ministries and initiatives of their local congregation. As the adult leaders pass on the heritage and the organizational structure they are leaving a legacy for, and making a lasting impact on the next generation that will live on long after they are gone.

While learning from their adult mentors, the youth officers are also bringing their wealth of creativity and versatility to the enhancement of the mission of the local congregation. The church is blessed with talented young people whose spiritual gifts can greatly enhance the ministries of each department of the local church. Their expertise in technology for example, can be a great asset in the way the gospel is communicated, making it more attractive and accessible particularly to their peers or the younger generation.

I believe this would be a good model to replicate across the Adventist church worldwide. Many of those young people who participated in the one month mentorship program still continue to serve the church with distinction. They were privileged to sit with the experienced leaders in meetings and observe and participate in the decision-making process of the church. They led out in the worship services and preached the sermons—in many cases for an entire month.

How did the mentorship program impact their feeling about the church?

1. Everything about their church has new meaning because there is now an open forum and a clearer understanding of the mission.
2. Participation in every decision-making process becomes more meaningful.

3. Youth develop a greater appreciation for church business meetings and all other services and meetings of the church.

Young people as well as adults are needed to create decorum and cohesion in the structure of the local church. It is a great blessing and asset for the church at every level when young people avail themselves to be mentored by experienced adult leaders. Youth must never shy away from leadership when called upon. Our skills and talents are needed for total involvement. God promises to equip all those who are called and willing to serve Him.

I have heard inspiring testimonies from young people of the positive impact and insight they gained by the exposure and experience acquired from this mentorship program. I encourage young people to be humble, willing disciples. There is so much to gain from listening to the voice of experience. Always stick to the original model and concept of church. It is a body of believers who are called out to mentor or disciple other believers to become part of the church or called-out ones.

There is so much we can learn from each other and especially from those who have been there and done that. One of the best ways to do that is to learn from experienced disciples how to make other disciples—this is what the youth mentorship program does. I am a proud beneficiary of the discipleship and mentorship programs of my church both at the local and higher church organizational levels. I can vividly recall the inspiration and motivation I received from my youth leader in my little village church in rural Jamaica. I was encouraged and inspired so much by my Missionary Volunteer (MV) leader. I repeat this story over and over because He has made a lasting impression on my mind.

From those humble beginnings, I rose through the ranks of AY leader and church elder. I was inspired from those early days to dedicate my life to full time service in the church of God. Throughout my years in college God provided awesome mentors along the way. Once I entered full time pastoral ministry I was blessed to have senior pastors who gave me the opportunity to develop the gifts of my calling.

When I was called to serve as conference, and then union youth director I could only reflect at where it all started, right there in my little country church in Jamaica, thanks to a faithful and motivated youth leader.

I encourage our youth to access the services for mentorship provided by the world church, specifically in the Adventurer and Pathfinder programs. I have been privileged to see firsthand the powerful impact this has been in the lives of so many of our young people. I believe one of the greatest blessings of the Adventist church is the Pathfinder ministry. I can identify hundreds and hundreds of young people whom I have observed over the years moving up the various ranks of leadership in the church because of the solid foundation they received in Adventurer and Pathfinder ministries.

Many have gone on to become Master Guides and youth leaders, and many others are now serving as elders and in various other key positions at the local church and in the higher levels of the church.

The divine plan of church organization has been a great blessing to the stability and growth of the Seventh-day Adventist church worldwide.

Young people, now is the time to act a part, to give of the best of your service. Have you been blessed with a unique gift or talent? Would you be willing to play an active role in the mission of your church? Then begin by becoming active in your local church. Participation in the local church is where it all begins. God is counting on you dear youth—will you answer His call?

Discussion Questions:

1. What prompted the apostles to appoint deacons in the New Testament Church and how were the deacons selected?
2. Why is church organization necessary?
3. Discuss some ways you believe youth can be more involved in the decision-making process and mission of the church.

DAY 6: Thursday

The Uniqueness of Worship

Importance of Worship – how to express devotion to God. Unity in diversity!

Key Text: Psalm 100

Key Thought: We must always consider who is the object of our worship, understand the purpose for worship and enjoy the experience of worship.

Introduction

Human beings are always seeking someone or something to worship. In a world as diverse as the one we live in worship can mean so many things to different people. Some persons worship animals, some worship other human beings, and others worship material things.

But what is true worship and why is it necessary and important to worship? Today we will take some time to understand how we express devotion to God. We will look at the importance of worship and its relevance in the life of young people in particular.

Is there a specific way or method of worship? Do we always have to follow a particular order in worship? Is there a role for culture in worship? What does unity in diversity mean? These are a few of the many questions we will address today.

Worship is born out of an individual experience with God. Human's response to God will be influenced by the relationship they share and the impact and impressions they have of God. Much of this experience comes from the environment or personal encounters of each individual.

In this message we will discover:

- a. That the object of worship must always be the one true God.
- b. That the purpose of worship is to glorify God and foster fellowship with all of God's children.
- c. That the experience of worship is born out of our personal and individual experiences.
- d. The role of culture or individual experiences in the worship experience.
- e. How we can achieve unity in our diverse ways of worship.

The Sermon

David and the other writers of the Psalms were avid worshippers. It is impossible to read the Psalms and not get a sense of praise, worship and adoration to God. Take Psalm 100 for example.

“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands! Serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing.... Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise...”

Then there is Psalm 150.

“Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in His sanctuary: praise Him in the firmament of His power.

Praise Him for His mighty acts: praise Him according to His excellent greatness.

Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet: praise Him with the psaltery and harp.

Praise Him with the timbral and dance: praise Him with stringed instruments and organs.

Praise Him upon the loud cymbals: praise Him upon the high-sounding cymbals.

Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.”

Depending on where we come from, and the experiences we were born into, the act of worship and adoration to God can be as diverse as somber and calm to upbeat and dramatic. Since we already established that the church is not a physical building, but a body made up of “the called-out ones” or God’s chosen people, then it must also be assumed that these persons are to be found everywhere, on every continent in a multitude of cultures.

Worship then takes on the styles and norms experienced in these variety of cultures. Worship is born out of an experience with God in the context of how we each experience Him. Some reading this may recall the story of Moses at the burning bush; there he encountered God through a bush that was on fire but was not consumed. God spoke to Moses from the bush. In response to God’s instructions Moses removed his sandals in respect for the presence of God.

Recently I attended a worship service where the preacher removed his shoes as a mark of respect from an encounter He had in a culture He experienced some years ago. It is clear to me that for persons who have had such experiences or who know nothing else but this culture, would presume that since God required it of Moses then it is automatic for every human being, it is the universal form or style of worship. Similarly, there is much confusion and long and empty debates on the issue of the correct or acceptable style of worship expression to God. Which cultural experience of worship is best? Which is more acceptable or pleasing to God? Which will God accept and which will He reject? This has become such a contentious issue that many persons, especially younger worshippers, become disenchanted, disillusioned, and discouraged. Some even walk away from the body of Christ because they are made to feel so terribly sinful

and ungodly because of the way they express themselves to the God they love and who loves them unconditionally.

There are three basic elements to keep in mind as it relates to worship. First, we must always consider who is the object of worship. Secondly, we must understand the purpose for worship and finally, we must look at the experience of worship.

Revelation 14: 6, 7, expresses clearly who the object of our worship is. It reads, “Fear God and give glory to Him...”. Earlier in chapter 4:11, we are given the reason why we worship God. It says, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created.”

God is the sole object of worship because He is the creator of everything. We live and move and breathe because of Him. We owe everything to God. It is He who made us. It is He who sustains us, and it is He who redeems us. We worship God because He is the only one deserving of all our honor and praise. We worship Him because there is no other who has the power to create and to destroy. He is God alone. He is the only omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient one. God and God alone is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise.

The second important element of worship is the purpose. Why do we worship? Human beings are always seeking to worship. It is intrinsically a part of our nature to give some form of homage or reverence to someone or something. That is why we find many nations as far back as history records, having various gods as their object of worship. In some cases, there are as many gods as there are needs or situations. These gods are usually crafted by hand or others are simply objects in nature which were created by God. Each god has a specific purpose and is summoned when there is that specific need. So, the question begs to ask: why do human beings worship?

Worship serves various purposes. It is to magnify and praise the God who made us. Worship serves to bring us into His very presence. In addition to bringing us into a deeper experience with God, worship also deepens and strengthens our fellowship with each other. It draws us closer to God and closer to each other. It is a time of fellowship with likeminded members of the body of Christ. But more than that, worship extends beyond the church into the community, where we serve as Christ served. Every act of Christian service is in itself, an act of worship.

Worship is giving of ourselves completely and totally in the study of the Word, in prayer, in our offerings, in service. Indeed, worship is an experience and an encounter with God and man, on a daily basis. Wherever we are and whatever we do, we should seek to share God's goodness and blessings in our every action. These daily acts of service culminate in a communal fellowship when we meet likeminded believers to celebrate God's blessings.

Finally, it is important that we understand the experience of worship. Everyone experiences God in a unique way. Similarly, everyone expresses devotion to God out of that experience. Most churches follow a prescribed order of liturgy. In most Seventh-day Adventist churches this order is very similar around the world, with a few variations, here and there. Very often format and style of worship are confused with the worship experience itself.

The worship style or format has very little to do with the experience of worship. It is the creativity of the worship leaders and the sincerity of each worshipper that determine, for the most part, the worship experience. The word of God encourages us to come into His presence with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. We are more likely to get out of the worship experience what we bring to it. While the pastor and worship leaders have a role to play, each worshipper is responsible for his or her ultimate fulfillment in worship.

The implication in this Psalm is that worship does not begin at the meeting place or at the time of the communal fellowship. Worship is instead a mindset, a lifestyle, a function of our daily activities and experiences. The more engaged the mind and heart is with God and His word every day, the more we stand to gain from the communal worship experience. It is very difficult to experience one without the other. Both the communal and individual worship experiences have a role in our overall worship experience.

I encourage each of you to make a decisive and deliberate commitment to focus on your personal encounters with God. This is a personal matter. Our parents and the church can do so much. But as individuals we must take ownership and responsibility for our spiritual relationship. This week is dedicated to young people as one of the opportunities for corporate worship and as a support for your spiritual encounter with God. No amount of prayer meetings or worship services can guarantee a solid Christian foundation. However, each corporate and individual worship experience provides assistance in our spiritual walk. Ultimately, each of us is responsible to maintain that relationship with God through daily communion with Him.

When the focus of worship shifts from the object of worship to styles and forms of worship there is always endless, empty debate and confusion. If we go back to the New Testament model, we will see that the called-out ones, or God's body of believers adapted their worship to whatever place or environment they found themselves in. In some instances they were by the river, other times they were in homes, or in a synagogue, and even in prison. The fact is the worship was not so much focused on a specific place or style or particular format, it was adapted to the situation or environment where they were and in some cases to the specific needs of that group or situation.

As a teenager, I still remember my most dramatic encounter with God. It was early 1980, and I was reading a *Youth Week of Prayer* sermon, similar to this one. Like most teenagers, I was having some serious identity issues. I remember reading and absorbing word for word the instructions in the *Youth Week of Prayer* booklet, called the *Accent*. The author said we can get real with God and talk to Him as a personal intimate friend. God already knows what we are thinking anyway, so whether we say it or not, He reads our thoughts. Even the terrible thoughts we have towards other individuals, He sees and knows them all. I took those words literally. I was having some real negatives thoughts and feelings toward almost everyone around me, as a result of my teenage identity crisis.

As I continued reading the author suggested that I should find an open space where I can look directly at the skies (in the heavens), and address God as if I was talking to Him directly. The instructions were to pray to God, talk with Him and express all the negative thoughts and feelings I had toward all those people I thought were against me. Once again, I followed those instructions verbatim and armed with my Bible and the *Youth Ministry Accent* I found an open space on my father's farm, and there among the fruit trees I poured out to God all my frustrations and anger and hurt I had toward everyone, including my parents and church family. I still remember as it were yesterday, the peace I felt after that encounter. It was such a rich experience that it became my usual practice to go to that very spot many mornings and worshipped God, pouring out my all to Him.

Those intimate encounters with God were my most uplifting worship experiences. In fact, it was during those wilderness experiences, amidst the fruit trees and bushes on my father's farmland that my call to full time ministry in God's church was confirmed. I always wanted to be a full-time pastor, but I had lost the passion and fire in my teenage identity crisis experience. I started

exploring other possible career paths. My experience as a teenage youth leader in my local church became such a difficult challenge, I almost lost my passion for ministry. It was in those mountain top experiences and serious honest talks with God, where I literally expressed all my negative feelings that I harbored to everyone, including myself, that's where I experienced real genuine worship for the first time.

This is by no means a formula that must be adapted and applied to every worship experience. I have since served as a youth director at both the conference and union levels and have been exposed to every kind, shape, form, and style of worship that you who are reading have experienced. And I have come from each of those experiences with a blessing and a great appreciation for the awesome God who delights in our diverse forms of praise and worship.

As a pastor and youth leader, I am amazed to see how the devil always seem to succeed in using our diversity to try to divide us. I see how Satan has made the focus of worship diverted from God to individual preferences and forms. Worship is intended to bring praise to God and fellowship with the body of believers. But the enemy of our souls has caused so many of Christ's body to become distracted, diverted and discouraged—because we make styles and personal preferences the focus, instead of God.

God delights in variety and diversity. He made us so. Whether it is in musical expressions or creative dramatic forms. In every culture and every language and people there is a variety of musical and other creative forms of worship expressions. God wants us to direct all these diverse forms of creativity in one harmonious act of worship. Each musical instrument produces a distinct sound. Whether played separately or in an orchestra or band the richness of these instruments when directed to the true object of worship uplifts the soul and bring glory to God.

I believe there are many young people, including millennials and those in succeeding generations whom God has gifted with a variety of talents, which can greatly enhance our diverse worship experiences. Some might be more suitable to one culture more than another but all giving praise and adoration to the one who has called out His body of believers from the world. God delights in creating new things. I believe He takes great delight in the creativity, variety, and diversity in our cultural expressions of worship.

Worship engages both our thought and feelings, the intellectual as well as the emotional. In fact, worship involves our whole being, the physical as well as the social. With all our expressions and cultural interpretations and experiences. God invites us to bring our entire beings, all of us, as living sacrifices, wholly acceptable unto God. This is our reasonable service. Let everything that hath breath from every nation, kindred, tongue and people, praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.

Discussion Questions:

1. Human beings are always seeking someone or something to worship. Agree or disagree?
2. In tonight's message we focused on the object, the purpose, and the experience of worship. Expand on these concepts.
3. What role does culture or individual experiences play in the worship experience?

DAY 7: Friday
Embracing our Identity

Theme:

Adventist Identity – what distinguishes an Adventist Youth?

Key Text: Revelation 12: 17

Key Thought: Seventh-day Adventists are Christians who accept all the teachings of scripture, including the ten commandments, the Seventh-day Sabbath, and who look forward to the literal Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Seventh-day Adventist Christians have a unique and distinct identity. Although we share much of the same fundamental beliefs as other Christian denominations, there are some distinctive teachings which set us apart and make us different in many ways.

Our understanding of bible prophecy and its relationship to current affairs for example, is a major influence on our view of biblical eschatology. Like most Christians, Seventh-day Adventists anticipate the second coming of Jesus. However, there is a sense of urgency that we have based on bible prophecy that is not always appreciated by other Christian denominations.

Furthermore, our understanding of the judgment in relation to the three angel's messages of Revelation 14 and the 2300 days prophecy is unique in many ways to what most persons believe and understand. At the same time, we do not believe this uniqueness make us superior or better than other Christians in any way.

Like all other believers, we accept that salvation is not achieved by good works or keeping the law. Adventists believe that salvation is by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This free gift of grace which is given to all is the only prerequisite for salvation.

In response to the gift of grace, we follow Jesus in total obedience to all of his commandments. Out of the overflow of the love of God for sinners, we have no choice but to love him in return and share this love with our fellowmen. We surrender to God's will by choosing to live in harmony with all of his commandments the same way Jesus submitted to His father's will and obeyed his commandments.

Today we will spend some time focusing on some of these core distinctives and see how these beliefs sets us apart from other Christian denominations and who we are as Adventist Youth.

The Sermon

In my time as Youth Leader we had a theme song that simply says,

“Adventist youth are we, from every land and sea,
Together we pray, and work, and play in happy harmony,
We have a faith to share, with people everywhere,
A message of love, from God above
To show the world we care. Adventist youth.”

But who are these Adventist youths? What do they believe in? How do we identify them? I am confronted so many times with this question when I introduce myself to persons as a Seventh-day Adventist. I also get a plethora of interesting definitions and interpretations of who we are based on individual experiences and interactions with members of this peculiar group of believers. I am sure you have heard your own variety of definitions and expressions from many different people. They vary from us being labeled as cults to strange, or people who worship on Saturdays and don't eat pork.

In fact, I know many members of the Seventh-day Adventist church who have serious difficulty expressing who we are or what we believe in one sentence. For a number of reasons, I can understand why it is so difficult to do that. Following up on where we left off yesterday, a lot of what we know and understand as Adventist comes from our individual cultural experiences. Most times we simply accept what we see and know in our local experience and use that as the standard for the entire body of believers around the world.

Sometimes those interpretations or experiences are positive and good, other times they may not be so positive and might even be incorrect. I do not presume to be an expert or to have the one true explanation or defining sentence on Adventist identity. However, I do have an understanding of what Seventh-day Adventists believe from my study of the scriptures and my time in the seminary and as an ordained minister.

So, before I begin to speak to the issue of identity let me share in one sentence my personal understanding of who Adventists are. ***Seventh-day Adventists are a group of Bible believing Christians who accept all of the teachings of scripture including the ten commandments, the Seventh-day Sabbath and who look forward to the literal Second Coming of Jesus Christ.***

There is a lot that can be deduced and interpreted from this statement. Most persons use the short version of Adventist when referring to this group of believers as the shortened form for Seventh-day Adventists. I will use the short form for the most part. Using the definition above there are many fundamental truths which readily stands out as core beliefs or identifying principles.

Bible Believing

Bible believing means we accept all of scripture as the revealed will of God. Adventists believe that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17). This means that the Bible is God’s Word, communicated through men and women who were inspired by God. These men and women were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit and they spoke and wrote as God inspired them (Read 2 Peter 1: 20, 21). All of scripture is equally inspired and therefore the entire scripture, Genesis to Revelation, contains God’s inspired truth and is always applicable and relevant to all people in all places.

The Bible is God’s sacred infallible Word. We do not believe that it contains all of God’s message to man, since God still inspires persons today and always seeks to communicate His truth. However, we believe that all truths and messages claiming to be from God must be tested by the truths that are already revealed in scripture. Any modern communication or revelations from

God would never contradict anything that has already been revealed. That is what Peter meant when He said, “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1: 20).

God has already revealed Himself very clearly in the Bible. Any other revelation or interpretation that will come must be in total and complete agreement with what He has already revealed. As Bible believing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists acknowledge that we do not possess autonomy on truth or on the scriptures. We are fully aware that there are many other Christian denominations who accept and believe in the Bible as the Word of God.

However, we are also aware that there are many and varied interpretations and understandings of the scriptures both within and outside of the church. God does not need any help to explain Himself. Whatever He wishes to communicate to humans He is capable of doing Himself, He has not left it up to our interpretations and understanding. Humans are fallible, God alone is infallible.

The all-knowing and all wise God knows that people would distort and misinterpret His Words. So, He ensured that He chose faithful men and women in different generations, over hundreds of years to speak and write His messages clearly, and to clarify and explain it so that no one would be confused, or misquote or misinterpret exactly what He meant to say. Human beings must be careful not to impose our own context and cultural understandings on the scriptures. God does not need our help. We take Him at His Word. We trust His Word, because He alone is perfect and holy and just and good.

Christians

Christians implies that we are followers of Christ. This means that Adventists, like most other Christian denominations, accept that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, lived a sinless life, was crucified, and is risen again. Adventists believe that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone. His death on Calvary atoned for our sins and provides full compensation for the sin problem.

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4: 12).

As a body of Christian believers, we adhere to all of the teachings and practice of Jesus, including embracing all humanity as our brothers and sisters in spite of race, creed, or religion. God is no respecter of persons. Wherever people are in need that is where Jesus and His followers should be offering love and hope and a helping hand. That is why Adventists worldwide are active in humanitarian missions. We are proactive in implementing developmental and educational projects, as well as respond in times of disaster, all across the world.

Adventist youth like you have answered God’s call for mission in remote parts of the earth. They take months and years off from school or work to be Jesus’ hands and feet to persons in need. That is true Adventist identity. It is in our demonstration of compassion and care for the oppressed and needy that Christians find our true identity. Christians mean that we are followers of Jesus Christ. The name gives us identity, but it is the practice of Jesus that gives us authenticity. Anyone can be called by any name, but it is what we do and how we behave gives us our true identity and authenticity.

Adventist Christians are called to reflect the life and work of Jesus everywhere we go. This is not confined to a specific time and place of meeting. Just look at the life of Jesus. Most of His most powerful teachings and miracles were never done in a physical building. He was always on the go. He was always seeking out opportunity to improve human condition and relieve human suffering. That is Christianity at its best. Jesus’ ministry like that of all of His followers, was most effective in the places where people were hurting the most. Jesus went out of His way to position Himself where He could do the most good to those who needed it most. That is true Christianity.

Seventh-day Sabbath

The Sabbath is a key element in Adventist identity. Adventist believe that all the Commandments of God are still relevant today as they are eternal principles practiced in every jurisdiction under the sun. As such, we do not have the luxury to decide which ones are binding

and which are not. All of God's commands are binding on all people in all places at all times. The Sabbath is just one of those many eternal principles which are given to mankind everywhere and is a sign of Christian obedience and identity.

Adventist do not teach or believe that the commandments or the Sabbath can save man from sin. On the contrary, the law condemns those who disobey it. However, just like any law in any land when it is broken it has consequences. When God's laws are violated there are both consequences and redress. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Salvation is not in the law or the Sabbath. Salvation is in Jesus only. That is true Adventist identity.

Adventists believe that all who are saved by grace in Christ Jesus experience a transformation that is both inward and outward. There can be no true conversion without total and complete transformation. This is a daily and progressive experience which is sometimes referred to as *sanctification*. That is a daily growing process of dependence on Jesus for victory over sin and temptation.

Seventh-day Adventist believe that as God's last day people we have a distinct message which is two-fold in nature. It calls people out of false worship and teaching and points them to the worship of the only true and living God. In response to this call from false teaching there will always be opposition from Satan, who is in opposition to the true worship of God.

According to Revelation 12: 7 – 12, this results in a warfare or conflict which actually began in heaven. Later in that same chapter the remnant, or last day people of God, are identified as those who keep the *Commandments of God and have the Testimony of Jesus Christ*. In summary, God's true church or called-out people will always be loyal to His commandments and will be guided by the testimonies of His prophets in all ages. This is a fundamental aspect of Adventist identity.

Adventists

The last piece of our identity I will address today is our belief in the literal and visible second coming of Jesus. Adventist believe that Jesus came the first time as a baby, just as He said He

would. After His crucifixion and resurrection, He returned to be with His father in Heaven, like He said He would. The word Adventist is derived from the word advent, which means appearing or coming. The first advent was when He came as a baby. The second advent is when He returns the second time in power and glory, just like He said He will.

Adventist place their hope firmly in this belief that this same Jesus who came as a baby, who walked among men, healing and teaching, will return one day soon to put an end to all the sufferings and pain on the earth. He will banish death and hell forever. Those who accept and believe in Him now will live and reign with Him forever and ever. This is true Adventist identity.

Unfortunately, when we speak of Adventist identity, most people focus on the customs, traditions, and norms which are predominantly cultural. These traditions and customs vary from culture to culture and are just what they are called, traditions. These include worship styles, music, dress, and even diet. The authentic Adventist Christian identity is not founded on tradition, but on the fundamental principles of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Traditions and cultural norms are all subject to individual interpretations and lead to confusion, simply because they cannot be practiced the same way every single place at every single time. In this maze of confusion, it is easy to lose our true identity. Adventist strongly believe that if we stick to the expressed will of God in Scripture we will avoid all confusion and preserve our true identity as it is in Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

1. Share your personal definition of Adventist identity with your group.
2. How does the name Seventh-day Adventist speak to our identity as a body?
3. What are some of the things non-members tell you about what Adventists believe?

DAY 8: Sabbath

Theme:

The Marriage Supper

The Church as a Bride – how Youth ought to prepare for the coming of Jesus (groom)

Key text: Revelation 19: 9

Key point: Jesus has long anticipated the reunion with His chosen bride, the church, and is making preparation for a glorious celebration.

The Introduction

The ultimate desire of Jesus is to be reunited with his church. Sin brought separation between God and man. Through Jesus Christ, this gap has been bridged. Christ fulfilled the demands of sin by his death on Calvary. This has opened up the opportunity for full and complete restoration with rebellious human beings.

Before Jesus returned to his father, he made his church a promise. He said he will come again to take his church, his faithful people to be with him. Revelation 19 describes this experience as a wedding ceremony in which Jesus Christ is the groom and his church is the bride.

Not long from now Jesus will come in splendor and glory to take his bride to be with him forever. It's going to be a grand reunion. It will be a joyful and glorious celebration, as God's people from all ages are once more reunited with their savior, never to part again.

Sin and sinners will be no more. The marriage supper of the lamb is come and his bride, the church has made herself ready. But all this was made possible only by the grace of Jesus who sacrificed himself for his people.

Adventist youth will be privileged to meet with other youth who sacrificed their lives for Jesus Christ. Oh, what a joyful celebration that will be!

Today we will take the time to study the promises of Jesus and reaffirm our belief in those promises. But more importantly we will emphasize the importance for each youth and young adult to live in a state of readiness and preparedness for the soon coming of Jesus and the marriage supper of the lamb. Maranatha! Jesus is coming soon.

The Sermon

As a child growing up in our small village in rural Jamaica, I have fond memories of going on trips, most times these were church trips either to some spiritual convocation or recreational tour. There was not a lot to do in my little community, especially at nights, so every opportunity to get out to attend tent meetings or youth rallies or beach trips was a big deal for us. I personally, can recall when we had to get up early in the mornings to catch the lone transportation to go to visit my relatives in the city of Kingston. This was very rare, and because we had to be up so early and the anticipation was so intense I hardly slept a wink. I was sleeping and watching. There were butterflies in my stomach. I would fall asleep for a few minutes and dreamt that the bus had come and left me. Only to jump out of sleep and realized it was just a dream and it was all due to my heightened excitement and anticipation.

We learned yesterday that one of our Adventist identity or distinctiveness is our settled belief in the promise of Jesus, that He will come again. We, more than many other denomination and religion, have been preaching this message for centuries. Our early pioneers in the early 19th century hung their hopes and faith on this promise.

But even before the 19th century, long before the birth of the Jewish nation, we find the patriarchs looking for this long-anticipated promise. In Hebrews 11:10 we are told that Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and ruler is God. Enoch also prophesied that God would come with ten thousand of his saints; see Jude verses 14 and 15. Job declared in chapter 19: 25 – 27, *“For I know that my redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself and not another....”*

In our very first lesson this week we learned that the church is comprised of God's called-out people in all ages. From the very beginning when man sinned it was God's intention to restore man back to Himself. This is the reason Jesus came so that He might save us from our sins. Before Jesus came God initiated a temporary plan, in the sacrificial system, as a reminder of His promise to send His son to be the sacrifice to pay the price for man's transgression. It has always been God's plan to bring man back to Himself forever. He desires to have His called-out people, His church, reunited with Him once and for all. Sin was never a part of God's plan, but once man made the choice to sin, God initiated the plan to redeem Him and to give man a new and eternal home.

All through the scriptures we find prophecies pointing to this long-awaited event. There are over 400 Bible prophecies about the second coming of Jesus. The message of the second coming of Jesus has been the theme for many of the writings of the patriarchs and prophets. The idea of God returning to reunite with His people has been a source of the greatest joy and excitement.

I spoke earlier to my childhood when we would go on trips. One of my fondest memories of outings was church trips to attend tent meetings. It was back in the days when pastors had many congregations. Tent meetings were very popular and exciting, especially because it provided an opportunity for us to get out of our community and our homes at night. For us as children, this was a rare opportunity for social interaction and exposure to meet and make new friends.

One feature of these church trips was the lively and joyful spirit which was expressed mainly in the singing of choruses as we traveled. Many of the songs we sang had an eschatological theme. I can still hear and picture specific church members singing songs like, "We Shall Have a Grand Time Up In Heaven." Another popular song was "When The Saints Go Marching In." Sometimes we sang hymns like "We're Marching to Zion, Beautiful, Beautiful Zion" or "When We all Get to Heaven."

The song that was most popular and etched indelibly in my mind is one that I have hardly heard or sang since my childhood. The words went something like this,

"Get on life's glory road, Heaven is now in view,

Although the road is rough, Jesus will carry you through,

He'll take you by the hand, Leading you through that land,

Get on life's glory road."

I'm sure by now all my young friends would realize that I love songs. Songs convey the message of the gospel to me like nothing else can. I just enjoy singing the good old advent hymns, and particularly those that have the theme of the Second Coming or of going home to be with Jesus.

Our planet has long been in rebellion. Every one of us has experienced pain and heartache, sickness and death of our loved ones. This was never ever God's plan for His church, His bride, His called-out people. An enemy hath done this. Sin brought this separation between God and His people. Jesus left the glory and splendor of heaven to come on a rescue mission to earth. His intervention through the plan of salvation makes it possible for sinners to be restored and reunited with our heavenly family once and for all.

That is why the theme of the Bible and of many of the songs we sing focus on what Jesus has done to redeem us to Himself. And that is why I personally enjoy the hymns that speak to this redemption and the return of Jesus, to finally restore and reunite man with God. This will be a grand and glorious reunion, and this time we shall never part again. This time sin and Satan will be destroyed forever. This time sorrow and heartache and sickness and death will be completely banished.

Now I can fully understand the meaning and the message in the songs we used to sing in my childhood on those rare church trips, and the songs I still enjoy today. The messages are potent, and outlast all time and all generations. Consider what it must have meant to my now deceased father and his contemporaries when they sang,

"We speak of the realms of the blessed

That country so bright and so fair

And oft are its glories confessed

But what must it be to be there."

Or "Let us sing a song that will cheer us by the way,

In a little while we're going home."

Or "How cheering is the Christian's hope

While toiling here below

It buoys us up while passing through

This wilderness of woe.

Or "How far from home? I asked as on,

I bent my steps, the watchman spake:

The long dark night is almost gone,

The morning soon will break....

"Not far from home! O blessed thought!

The traveler's lonely heart to cheer:

Which of a healing balm has brought,

And dried the mourner's tear.

Then weep no more, since we shall meet

Where weary footsteps never roam-

Our trials past, our joys complete,

Safe in our Father's home."

The Bible is filled with the precious promises of Jesus. He has given us His word and we can believe Him. We believe Him because He kept His promise to come and offer Himself as the substitute for our sins. He left the splendor and the glories of heaven to come down to our rescue. He gave His life as a full payment and sacrifice for our sins. God in Christ kept His word to redeem man from sin. Through His sacrifice He opened the way to glory that whosoever will might go in.

Today we talk about persons having a good track record, meaning that they have been consistent at a particular skill or career. They have always performed or delivered whenever they are required to do so. God has established that He has an impeccable track record. He kept His word the first time. He delivered on His promise of sending Jesus to pay the price of sin. On the basis of this track record we can be sure that He will deliver on His promise to come again to reunite us with Him forever.

In 1 Thessalonians 4: 16 and 17, one of the great New Testament writer, Paul the apostle, writes these words:

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

John chapter 14, verses 1 – 3 records the promise that Jesus Himself gave us just before He returned to heaven:

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

John the revelator persecuted for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and banished to the aisle of Patmos and placed in a cauldron of hot oil. But Christ appeared to Him in vision, and He saw a great marriage supper which He captures vividly in Revelation 19: 7 – 9.

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And He saith unto me, “Write, ‘Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” And He saith unto me, these are the true sayings of God.”

John uses the imagery of marriage to illustrate the joyous celebration of God’s people when Jesus returns the second time. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is depicted as the regal bridegroom. He has long anticipated the reunion and celebration with His chosen bride, the church. The imagery depicts a bride clothe in white linen which represents the righteousness of the saints.

Each wedding ceremony is a celebration of the love and commitment shared by the bride and groom. These are fundamental principles in any relationship, but especially in marriage. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, is the ultimate example of true love and commitment. As young people contemplate this important life-changing decision, it is important to understand that successful marriages are built on the foundation of God’s love and commitment to each other.

As we prepare and anticipate the return of Jesus, I encourage you to fall in love with Jesus over and over again. We love Him because He first loved us. Jesus is passionately in love with us and we lovingly respond to Him in giving Him full and complete commitment. We pledge our love to Him as we give of our best to Him sacrificially.

Jesus, our bridegroom is also faithful, He honors His Word and He keeps His promises. Faithfulness is fundamental to the marriage relationship. This sacred vow to keep inviolate is a bond of trust that husbands and wives establish to prevent any form of outside invasion of the marital relationship. When Jesus marries His bride, He does so forever.

Marriage is permanent. It was never in God’s plan for separation or divorce. If marriage is to last both husband and wife must possess the virtues of patience, kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness, just as Christ does for His bride, the church. Paul says in Ephesians 5, that the marriage relationship is a symbol of Christ and His church. Christ wants to be with His church forever and so should it be in our marriages as husbands and wives.

Just as it is with some marriages today, the church of God, His called-out people, may seem to be struggling and suffering now. The enemy of souls seeks to discourage, distract, and destroy

God's chosen people. But I have good news for all of God's children: You just hold on a little while longer. The promises of God are true and sure. The journey may seem long, and the battle might seem hard, but God has an impeccable track record. He keeps His Word. The bride of Christ will one day be reunited with Him.

In the words of yet another of the good old Advent hymns,

“Let us sing a song that will cheer us by the way

In a little while we're going home,

For the night will end in the everlasting day,

In a little while we're going home.”

As we wait patiently, for the fulfillment of the *Promise*, let us enjoy the journey. Let us hold fast to the profession of our faith, not wavering. He who promises is faithful. His Word is true. The promise is sure.

In Revelation chapter 22: 12, He says,

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as His work shall be.”

He will come just like He said He would. He kept His promise the first time, He will definitely keep it the second time. So “until then, my heart will go on singing, until then, with joy I carry on, until the day mine eyes behold the city, until the day, God calls me home.”

Let us be faithful until the promise is realized. “Even so come, quickly come, Lord Jesus.”

Revelation 22:20.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you believe the promise of the second coming means so much to believers throughout all ages?

2. What is the basis on which we believe the promise of Christ's second return?
3. As the bride of Christ, the church has long anticipated the return of Jesus. What is your number one expectation when Jesus comes?