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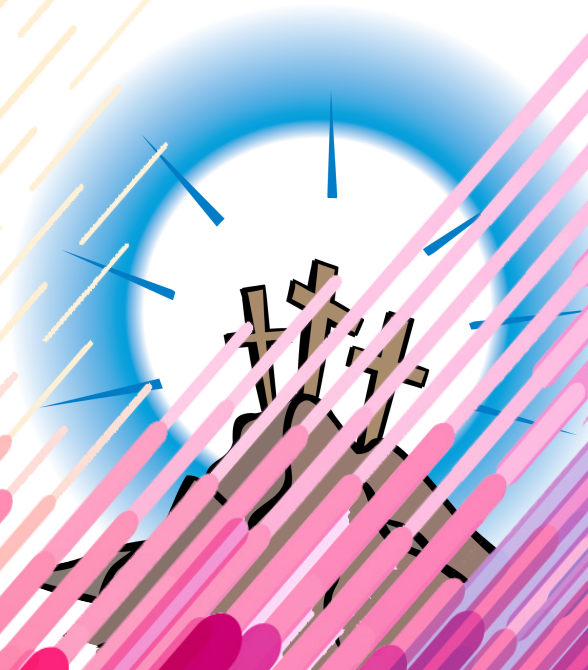
HOLY SPIRIT

Week

January 12-19 2019

BIBLE HEROES

BIBLE HEROES





SURINAME IMPACT 2019

- ◆ 20 SITES
- ◆ 20 PREACHERS
- ◆ Massive Convention
- ◆ Exciting Concert
- ◆ 500 Baptisms

Please pray for all the activities of this impact.

March 25 to April 6

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A Message From the Assistant to the President

Dr. Claudius Morgan



The genius of the President of the Caribbean Union to have eight of our outstanding pastors write for the Holy Spirit Week 2019 is commendable. Holy Spirit Week is a Union program and initiative that has been happening every year over the past 10 years. It is not a suggested activity of the churches in the fields of the Caribbean Union. It is an integral part of the churches' program as we face the challenges of this year. In short, every church must be involved.

This year we are looking at Bible heroes. Bible heroes are noteworthy to observe. From them we can learn about the winning attitude, the power of prayer, the necessity of obedience, the powerful effect of sacrifice, the longing after humility, love and patience and the benefits of morality.

At various times in the Bible we read precious words spoken by Bible heroes of the faith as they were in the midst of an unusual, fiery trial. Many others, under the same circumstances, would (or did) deny God and/or his truth. As the heroes of the faith stared death in the face, their loyalty to God shone bright. The Bible heroes were looking beyond the insurmountable, lethal obstacles and stood like a rock. Again, some of these dear spiritual family members and heroes of the faith were tested with circumstances that very few will ever know. Some actually died as they remained faithful to God.

The winning attitude of the Bible heroes of the faith was resident in people who were just like you and me - they didn't want to suffer or be hatefully persecuted either. The Bible heroes wanted to be accepted and appreciated; not hated, rejected and martyred, but they also stood for truth, even when all alone and didn't consider their physical lives as of ultimate importance! They thought of others, as well as themselves, especially in a spiritual way and were cognizant that firmly knew one's soul's salvation was most important. They were firmly committed.

As you listen and internalize the sermons prepared by these spiritual men of God, ponder the heroes of faith and their winning attitude for your own spiritual nourishment and upliftment.



First Sabbath

Moses A Model of Humility

Pastor Stanton Adams

Scripture Reading: Numbers 12:3

INTRODUCTION

It was through the providence and protection of the most High God that the life of Moses was preserved. The inhumane, infanticidal decree of the hostile Egyptian monarch was nullified by the divine doings of the King of the universe whose plan and purpose no earthly ruler can interrupt.

Moses was fitted to take pre-eminence among the great of the earth, to shine in the courts of the most glorious kingdom and to sway the scepter of its power. At first sight Moses might not make it on to anyone's list of history's most humble leaders, yet the Bible puts him at the top of the list.

With the world before him, he had the moral strength to refuse the flattering prospects of wealth and greatness and fame; "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season." This choice definitely hints at an initial pre-disposition to meekness which quality the Lord will later develop to its fullest in His chosen servant.

"Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3. NKJV). The term used in this verse is not the normal Hebrew word for humility, meekness or weakness, but one that conveys an individual's devout dependence upon the Lord. It may also describe a state one must experience before one is honored by God or man.

The description of Moses as 'very meek' is important for understanding what God prizes most in human kind. Many people have the wrong idea about God, the Bible and humility or being humble. It does not mean a whimpering, spineless, uncommitted weakling; one who thinks he is no good and others are better. Godly humility means you are free from pride and arrogance. It is knowing that in the flesh you are inadequate. It is knowing who you are in Christ. A humble person does not view others as inferior or superior to himself. Humility entails an awareness of one's identity in relationship to God. No other human of his time had a closer relationship with God than Moses and consequently none would be more mindful of his own relative inadequacy.

BODY

The Moses whom God called and commissioned from the burning bush at Mt. Herob was not the Moses that left Egypt forty years before. Moses had no problem with pride at this point in his life. The God who called him took care of that character defect by having him do some desert time. God moved him from the sumptuous abode of a palace to the pristine pastures of Midian. From a palace to a pasture?

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Moses A Model of Humility

Pastor Stanton Adams



Some see this as humiliating, but this was Moses' own choosing, and God used the circumstance for his grooming and tutoring, to show what infinite possibility can result with the human vessel who is humble and submissive to His divine will. It is comforting, even encouraging to note that Moses did not start out as the most humble man on earth. He grew proud and confident in his own abilities, having the propensity to take things into his own hands. But it was time, time in the desert with God, lowly time, that made him humble, teachable and a greatly useable man.

One does not easily acquire experience, maturity, and true leadership qualities and Moses in his last murderous act in Egypt gave evidence that he did not yet possess them sufficiently for the arduous task ahead of him. He still needed to enter God's classroom to learn what the schools of Egypt did not teach: meekness, gentleness, self-distrust, selflessness, love and complete dependence upon God. One Christian writer suggests "Moses' meekness, gentleness and longsuffering are necessary qualities for every laborer for the Master to possess in order to be a successful worker in His cause."

The pride and arrogance of Pharaoh is shown by the question he asked "Who is the lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" (Ex. 5:2). But we see the humility of Moses in his encounter with the Lord on Mt. Horeb in the burning

bush. Moses realized his humanness, his limitations and so he asked "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Ex 3:11). Instead of thinking of himself as someone important, he genuinely felt inadequate. He knew he needed God. With the assurance of the divine presence, "I will be with you" (Ex 3:12) he went forth by faith even though initially reluctant and was used by God in ways that far surpassed human comprehension. "His humility in this matter far exceeds that of any other person on earth." (New American Commentary p202) "Humility is not thinking less of yourself – it is thinking of yourself less" (C. S. Lewis).

Moses did not let the authority given him by God get to his head. Often when a man receives a little authority, his humility or lack thereof quickly becomes evident. Robert G. Ingersoll puts it this way: "Most people can bear adversity. But if you wish to know what a man really is, give him power." In that sense, Moses sets a sterling and compelling example of humility. Moses received great authority, for God called and commissioned him to lead Israel. Yet that power never made him proud.

Moses' example of humility teaches us not to place too much importance on our status or authority, our giftedness, talents or natural abilities. We never want to let power or talents or natural abilities get to our head. Remember, in order to be useful to God and his cause, our humility should always exceed our ability.



First Sabbath

Moses A Model of Humility

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Let us notice how he handled a most difficult question about inheritance rights (Numbers 27:1-11). This question was significant, since the decision would set a legal precedent for generations to come. How did Moses respond? Did he reason that as the leader of Israel, he was qualified to make such a major decision on the matter? Did he lean on his natural ability, his years of experience or his intimate knowledge and privileged communion with God? Perhaps a proud and egotistic man would have done so, but not Moses. The Biblical record tells us, “Moses presented the case before the Lord” (Numbers 27:5). Notwithstanding his track record after some forty years of leading the nation of Israel, Moses relied not on himself, but on the infinite wisdom of the Most High God. Here again we see Moses’ humility at its best.

Moses did not jealously guard his authority. He rejoiced when God allowed other Israelites to act as prophets alongside him (Numbers 11:24-29). When Jethro, his father-in-law, saw that he would soon suffer from compassionate fatigue and suggested that he should delegate some of the responsibilities to others, Moses humbly accepted and applied the suggestion (Exodus 18:13-24). Towards the end of his life, still being physically strong, Moses asked God to appoint a successor for him.

When Joshua was selected, Moses wholeheartedly supported the younger man, urging the people to follow Joshua’s leading into the Promised Land (Numbers 27:15-18 and Deut. 31:3-6). While Moses counted it a privilege to lead the people of God, he did not put his authority above the welfare of the people of God.

Numbers 12 presents a wonderful display of the patience and humility of Moses under provocation (Numbers 12:1-3). The accusation this time was not from the rebellious, undisciplined, murmuring multitude. It was from his own family, his siblings who shared the leadership role with him. “The fundamental mistake Miriam made was one of disrespect for, and rebellion against, lawfully constituted authority – in this case appointed by God Himself.” (SDA Commentary Vol 1 pg. 861). If this genuinely humble man was accused of pride and acting in a dictatorial manner, it should show us that accusations can be made and are made against others who do not deserve it. Moses took no notice of it but the Lord heard it. (Numbers 12:2) Moses took no notice of it for he was very meek (verse 3). He had a great number of reasons to resent this affront. It was ill-natured and ill-timed, when the people were predisposed to mutiny. But he, as a deaf man, heard not.



First Sabbath

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We should not conclude that Moses' non response meant that he was weak and vacillating as a leader. Notice that where the honor of God was concerned, as in the case of the golden calf, no man was more zealous than Moses, but when his own honor is touched, no man was more meek. He was bold as a lion in the cause of God, but as meek as a lamb in his own cause. Sometimes the unkindness of our friends is a greater trial of our meekness than the malice of our enemies.

When a leader perceives accusations are petty, false or self-motivated, the right thing to do is to ignore them. Leave it to God and keep busy doing what the Lord has called you to do. Even as Jesus was oppressed and afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth (Isa 53:7), do likewise.

Notice again the humility of Moses in Numbers 12:6-9, 13. God spoke for the vindication of Moses but Moses is speaking for the protection of his accuser. This was the only time Moses spoke. This was what made him so special. What extraordinary display of humility. This pattern of humility exhibited by Moses is typical of Christ, who prayed "Father forgive them." This petition was for those whom He came to save, who mocked Him and crucified Him. Miriam here is healed by the prayers of Moses whom she had accused, abused and disre-

spected. What a lesson for us!

Those who are under censure and rebuke for sin ought to be treated with a great deal of tenderness and not be over loaded with the shame they might deserve, not counted as enemies (2 Tess 3:15), but forgiven and comforted (2 Cor. 2:7). This is how humble leaders treat the erring. Was not this the way that Jesus treated people? Moses was a man of great integrity and fidelity. "He was faithful in all my house," says the Lord. God honored the meekness of Moses. The meekness of Moses was demonstrated in his faithfulness in following and doing the will of God. "My servant Moses is not so, he excels them all," says the Lord. To recompense Moses for his humility, God not only cleared him, but praised him, and took the opportunity to give him an encomium which remains upon record to his immortal honor.

Yes Moses understood that it was by God's grace that he became the person he was. Looking at the back side of the tapestry, Moses at first could not see the purpose for all that had happened to him, but when the tapestry was turned over, he could clearly see the greatness and the mercy of God in his life. Then Moses really understood: "Who is the Lord that I should obey?" How humbling this must have been.



First Sabbath

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Conclusion:

Like Moses, God has called us and has a plan for us. We can look back and see God's hand in our lives before we knew him personally. Like us, even after his conversion, Moses made mistakes (Numbers 20:1-12), became discouraged (Ex 17:4), even doubted his calling (Numbers 11:10-15), and even limited God (Numbers 11:21-23). But as Moses learned and we should never forget, God will not forsake us. Knowing all of this should humble us as it humbled Moses. And like Moses, when the humility is there, God can do powerful things through us, both individually and collectively.



Pastor Stanton Adams is a Guyanese pastor from Sandvoort Village in Berbice County who works with the South Leeward Mission on the Island of Nevis as a district pastor. He serves the Charlestown, Brown Hill and Ginger Land SDA Churches. Before moving to the SLM, he served the Guyana Conference as Ministerial and Family Life Director and Executive Secretary. He has been in ministry now for some 30 years and is married to Carol, who also hails from Guyana. They have 4 children: Carlston, Christan, Charis and Amber.



Sunday

Joseph An Example of Morality

Pastor Brent S. Jean



Text: Genesis 39:6-9

Privilege is preparation for persecution! These were the words of one of my favourite preachers. When God elevates you, it usually comes at a price. When you are chosen for greatness, the battle against the devil is more intense. Shakespeare put it nicely when he said, “Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.” The word of God also says in Luke 12:48, “...For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” Joseph is a true example of what it means to be favoured. As we look at his life and more specifically his unwavering moral principles, we will see that all his life, God was preparing him for something magnificent.

Joseph was the son of Jacob. According to Genesis 37:3, Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons because he had Joseph in his old age. It is evident that Jacob also loved him because he was the son of Rachel, the wife that he loved most and worked fourteen years for. Because of this unhealthy love, Jacob treated Joseph better than his other sons and made him a coat of many colours. This provoked his brothers and because of this reality, they were bent on destroying him. Ellen White states in the great controversy that “the favour with which Jacob regarded Joseph could not be concealed, and the gorgeous coloured coat which he had given him was clear evidence to his sons of his

partiality. This they thought gave them sufficient reason for harbouring jealousy, hatred, and revenge in their hearts.”

What makes Joseph special is the fact that he was born in a far from ideal family. His father was not the best example to his children and this had a serious impact on his family. Ellen White says that “the sin of Jacob caused a chain of events that led to evil. His sin showed its bitter fruit in the character and life of his sons. As these sons became men they developed serious faults. The results of polygamy were clearly seen in the household. This terrible evil dries up the very springs of love, and its influence weakens the most holy ties. The jealousy of the several mothers made family relationships bitter. The children had grown up quarrelsome [fighting] and did not want to be controlled. And the father’s [Jacob’s] life was shadowed with worry and sadness” (Patriarchs and Prophets, page 208).

Joseph is a true example of what it means to be favoured. As we look at his life and more specifically his unwavering moral principles, we will see that all his life, God was preparing him for something magnificent.



Sunday

Joseph: An Example of Morality

Pastor Brent S. Jean

Joseph had good reason to be a poor example. He could have blamed his environment and how he was nurtured for any bad habits that he cultivated. However, Joseph wanted to be different. Psychologists say that we are influenced by nature and nurture. In early research, it was believed that nurture was the most critical element when determining the choices people make. However from about the 1970s to the end of the 20th century, a noticeable shift occurred as direct knowledge of the brain and genetics started to swing the pendulum back to an increased appreciation of nature as a critical influence on a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour (psychology today: nature vs nature, 2017). Joseph was in trouble in both areas. By nature, he was the son of a thief, a conman and a liar. His mother was also a liar, and she was also very competitive. As far as nurture is concerned, Joseph was raised in a volatile and emotionally charged environment. There were four mothers in the home who were all fighting for his father's love and attention. He had no example from his other brothers who were aggressive and brought much pain to their father Jacob.

The odds were stacked against Joseph, but he still stood for what was right. Joseph's morals were so outstanding that the book of Genesis hardly associates his name with Jacob, but rather Israel. Examining the distribution of appearances of each name, we find that in connection with Joseph the name "Jacob" is mentioned only 8 times, as opposed to 17 for "Israel", while in other contexts we find almost the opposite: "Israel" appears only 5 times, whereas "Jacob" appears 37 times. Thus, there appears to be a connection between the use of the

name "Israel" and the appearance of Joseph on the stage. When the Bible writer speaks about Joseph's brothers, he refers to them as the sons of Jacob, but when Joseph is mentioned, he is referred to as the son of Israel. It says to us that we can make a difference in spite of our environment. We can still stand out amidst the vicissitudes of life and be counted faithful.

It is of interest to note that being morally grounded does not mean that you are immune to the challenges and perplexities of life. Living for Christ is not a ticket to a stress free life. The opposite seems to be most likely. The Bible says that a true follower of Christ must suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12). The good news is that in spite of the challenges and afflictions, the Psalmist lets us know that the Lord will deliver his people (Psalms 34:19). What we can take as comfort is that the Lord knows the road that we are traveling and our steps are ordered by the Lord. Joseph stood for what was right. He stood for God and did what was required of him as a true example of godliness, but he was still hated, he was still ridiculed; as a matter of fact he was thrown into a pit. Standing for right and living morally before God and man may cause family members to ostracize you; it may cause you to end up in pits of pain and betrayal. It may cause you to be victimized, but we have the confidence that he who began the good work in us will bring it to completion (Phil 1:6).

When the Bible writer speaks about Joseph's brothers, he refers to them as the sons of Jacob, but when Joseph is mentioned, he is referred to as the son of Israel.



Sunday

Joseph: An Example of Morality

Pastor Brent S. Jean

Joseph did not remain in the pit. His purpose was bigger than the pit. The pit was just a stepping stone to get him to the place where God would use him to save the world. Never complain when you find yourself in the darkness of your pit experience. Never think that you have been forgotten because you cannot see your way out. The song writer tells us that “the God of the mountain is still God in the valley.” The original plan of his brothers was to kill him. The pit was actually an escape from death. Instead of complaining about your pit, thank God that you are alive to fight another day. Praise God that the pit gave you more time for God to open the doors of blessings.

Joseph’s destiny was not in the pit, so the Lord allowed him to be sold into slavery. To Joseph, being sold into slavery did not seem to be better than death. Ellen White says that “to become a slave was a fate more to be feared than death. In an agony of terror Joseph appealed to one and another of his brothers, but in vain. Some were moved with pity, but fear of derision kept them silent; all felt that they had now gone too far to retreat.” Joseph believed that slavery was worse than death, but he did not know that the greatest blessings come from the most adverse and perilous circumstances. He was not just on his way to being a slave, but he was on his way to taking his rightful place that God had prepared for him. It may seem that you are being dragged down the road to your downfall, but stay faithful and believe that God will use your pain to fulfil your purpose.

Genesis 39 is a refreshing example of sexual purity. Joseph was purchased from the Ishmaelites by Potiphar, a powerful and prosperous man. Potiphar was

a servant of Pharaoh. He owned what appears to be a large and lucrative ranch. Initially, Joseph was probably acquired to work with the flocks. Over a period of time, it became apparent to Potiphar that God’s hand was on Joseph – everything he touched seemed to turn to gold. Before long, Potiphar had put everything under Joseph’s authority. The only decisions Potiphar made concerned what he would have for dinner (39:6).

The problem was that Mrs. Potiphar (a woman whose name is never given – she is only referred to as Potiphar’s wife) began to take note of Joseph. She tried in various ways to seduce him, but Joseph purposed to avoid her. One day she managed to trap Joseph in the house alone, where she once again sought to seduce him. He found it necessary to flee, leaving his outer garment in her grasp. When one examines the history of foreign slaves in Egypt, it is of interest to note that they used little clothing and were often bareback. The fact that Joseph had a coat says that he was given preferential treatment and special favours. Privilege is really preparation for persecution. Somehow Joseph’s coats always seemed to get him into trouble. The same coat which was a reward for his faithfulness, ended up being the catalyst in implicating him, though falsely. There is a lesson for all of us here that we should not ignore. The very thing that God has blessed us with can end up being the cause of our greatest temptation or greatest adversity. Joseph’s coat of favour at a young age was the reason for his biggest challenges at home and now his coat received in Egypt served as evidence in his wrongful conviction.

Sunday

Joseph: An Example of Morality

Pastor Brent S. Jean



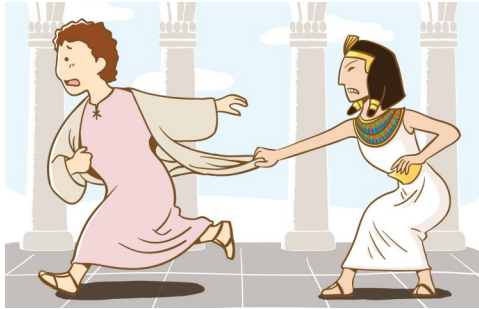
It tells us that we should be careful with how we perceive even the blessings we receive from God. We cannot take anything for granted in our spiritual walk. Satan will try to use favour received from God to try to make us pompous. He will use our own testimony against us.

Potiphar's wife then accused Joseph of attacking her, and Potiphar, her husband, had Joseph thrown into prison. Joseph did not have far to go from the "executive suite" to the prison, because they were all in the same house. In those days prisons were really dungeons, under the house of an official like Potiphar. Potiphar was, in fact, the "captain of the guard" (39:1; 40:3). In prison, as in the executive suite, God's hand of blessing continued to be upon Joseph.

It is of interest to note that standing for what is right will not always give us the result we anticipate. Joseph did everything right. He was presented with the opportunity for temporary pleasure while being a slave. If there was anyone whom we think would have been justified in falling for this temptation it would have been Joseph. Life was not good to him. He got the worst treatment for being the most faithful. He could have blamed God for his troubles and compromised his standards, but Joseph realized that standing for God was not dependent on his circumstances. He realized that morality was not conditional. He recognized that turning his back against God was not an option. Like Job, Joseph realized that we cannot only expect good from God. We have to be prepared to go through the difficult situations as well. What we should focus on is the fact that He will not give us more than we can bear.

It must be said that Joseph may have gotten favours if he had compromised his moral integrity. Potiphar's wife may have given him special treatment and made his life easier in the home. There were a lot of earthly blessings at stake, yet Joseph understood that his first obligation was to God. This is similar to what persons encounter on a daily basis. Many times we will be asked to compromise morality for earthly promotions and favours. Persons will offer monetary blessings, fame and popularity in exchange for stifling your conscience or lowering your standards, but like Joseph, we need to say with no apology that we cannot do this sin and great wickedness against our God. It may get you fired, it may get you ostracized, it may get you punished, you may lose some friends and you may lose certain privileges, but standing for God is always the best decision a person can make.

President Gordon B. Hinckley put it nicely when he said, "You face tremendous temptation. It comes at you in the halls of popular entertainment, on the Internet, in the movies, on television, in cheap literature, and in other ways—subtle, titillating, and difficult to resist. Peer pressure may be almost overpowering. But ... you must not give in. You must be strong. You must take the long look ahead rather than succumbing to the present seductive temptation." Many persons make bad moral decisions because the immediate gratification is given more value than the long-term benefits. As Christians, we must always be 'kingdom minded'. Our focus should be so much on making it to heaven and pleasing God, that temporal satisfaction and vindication are given little or no value.



Sunday

Joseph: An Example of Morality

Pastor Brent S. Jean

It is exciting to see that wherever Joseph went, God still allowed him to shine. When he got into prison, Genesis 39:21-23 tells us that Joseph received favour even in the prison, because the keeper of the prison realized that there was something special about him. Joseph did not allow his unfair conviction to allow him to be bitter. He understood that trusting God is not dependent on your present situation. Some of us are part-time Christians. We only serve God when there is money in the bank, when our children are doing well, when our marriage is blooming, when the bills are paid, when we are physically well. A true Christian still gives God the 'prison praise', true Christians give God dominion in their dungeon, true Christians serve him as Lord even when there is nothing in the cupboard. A true Christian respects God's sovereignty even when the bank account is empty. We need to understand that our morality is not tied to our favour. Job said that even if God slays him, he will still trust him.

What is exciting about Joseph's prison experience is that it was God's appointment. If Joseph had not gone to prison, he may not have had the opportunity to meet the Pharaoh's butler and baker. Joseph's path to the palace ran through the prison. The prison was a fundamental part of his preparation for the palace. The dreams of the butler and baker set the foundation for Joseph's appointment to see the Pharaoh when he got his dream. Joseph could have been bitter for being sent to prison, though innocent, but he remained faithful and took the time to interpret the dreams of these two prisoners. It was that willingness which allowed him to be recommended to Pharaoh. It is therefore very important that we maintain our high standards in spite of our

situations. Joseph's privilege and favour caused him much suffering, but his high moral principles made him shine wherever they placed him.

We know the story very well. Joseph goes to pharaoh and tells him the interpretation of his dream and how there was an impending famine which Egypt would not survive if proper planning was not done. Pharaoh sees wisdom in Joseph and I am sure he would have heard from Potiphar, the ruler of the prison and the butler about the impeccable character of Joseph. It goes to show that nothing we go through in life is wasted. Every betrayal, every wrong conviction, and every challenge comes together to work out for our good. The next time you find yourself in a troubled situation or a mountain to climb, just remember that God is preparing you for something magnificent. He allowed Moses to go to the wilderness, he allowed David to take care of sheep and guard a man's vineyard, he asked Abraham to go to a place that he did not know of, and he allowed his son to go through death by crucifixion. Our God takes us through hard experiences, but he rewards greatly. He took Moses to heaven, he called David a man after His own heart, he made Abraham the father of many nations and He gave Jesus a name higher than any other name. Paul sums it up nicely when he says in 2 Corinthians 4:13, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

What is exciting about Joseph's prison experience is that it was God's appointment.



Sunday

Joseph: An Example of Morality

Pastor Brent S. Jean

Joseph is now the second in command in Egypt because of his wisdom and high moral principles and he now has all he wanted. People from all over the world came to Egypt to get food. It was just a matter of time before his family members are hit by the dreadful famine and are forced to come to Egypt to get food. Joseph has to now face his greatest moral conundrum. The very persons who betrayed him, the very ones who showed no mercy, the very ones who caused him to go through so much pain, are standing before him and depending on him for their sustenance. Their fates are now in his hands. What do you do when the very ones who persecuted you are at your mercy? The challenge Joseph faces is that these men are family members. The Bible says in Genesis 42:8 that Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not know who he was. It meant that Joseph could have taken revenge and still be anonymous.

Joseph wanted to see if they were the same and tested them by setting a trap. He accuses them of being spies and keeps Simeon in prison and asks them to bring their youngest brother. When they return home to Canaan, the brothers tell their father Jacob everything that happened. Jacob is very sad. 'Joseph is no more,' he cries, 'and now Simeon is no more. I will not let you take my youngest son Benjamin.' But when their food begins to run out, Jacob has to let them take Benjamin to Egypt so they can get more food.

Now Joseph sees his brothers coming. He is very happy to see his younger brother Benjamin. Of course, none of them know that this important man is Joseph. Joseph now does something to test his brothers. He has his servants fill up all their bags

with food. But without letting them know, he also has his special silver cup put into Benjamin's bag. After they all leave and have gone a little distance on the road, Joseph sends his servants after them. When they catch up with them, the servants say: 'Why have you stolen our master's silver cup?'

'We have not stolen his cup,' the brothers all say. 'If you find the cup with any one of us, let that person be killed. So the servants search through all the bags, and they find the cup in Benjamin's bag. The servants say: 'The rest of you can go, but Benjamin must come with us.' What will the brothers do now?

They all return with Benjamin to Joseph's house. Joseph tells his brothers: 'You can all go home, but Benjamin must stay here as my slave. 'Judah now speaks up, and says: 'If I go back home without the boy, my father will die because he loves him very much. So please, keep me here as your slave, but let the boy go home.' Joseph can see that his brothers have changed. They are not mean and unkind anymore.

Some persons may be tempted to say that Joseph took some form of revenge against his brothers, but as Katrina Schumann and Michael Ross point out, revenge is an action provoked by a wrong, unlike aggression which requires no provocation. Similarly, revenge and punishment are distinguished by motivation and goals: revenge seeks to have the transgressor suffer, while punishment looks to improve the transgressor's behaviour or to deter future bad behaviour. Joseph has no intention of seeking revenge. He just wanted to see if his brothers had learned from their mistakes and whether he could trust them again.

Sunday

Joseph: An Example of Morality

Pastor Brent S. Jean



Joseph then reveals himself to his brothers and tells them that the evil that they did to him was all part of God's plan. They meant it as evil, but God meant it for good. He asks them to bring the entire family to Egypt and they could now live together as a family again. Through it all, the hands of the lord was in every situation in the life of Joseph.

I cannot end this message without pointing out something special in the life of Joseph. I call it the journey of the "P's". Joseph started out in a position of Privilege, he was then thrown into a Pit, he was then sold into slavery to Potiphar, from Potiphar's house he was sent to Prison, and then from the prison he went to the Palace. I do not know what your situation is at this time. You may have gone from privilege to a pit experience. You may have just recovered from your pit and now find yourself in the devil's prison, but there is hope. Keep on fighting this good fight of faith. Never compromise your morality, even if it means being thrown into prison, if it means losing your job, even if it means being ostracized by your friends and family. Remember that there is something greater that we are all striving for. Just remain faithful; keep on keeping on, and the God who sees things in private will reward you openly.

Let us always remember that we are pilgrims and strangers and heaven is our ultimate destination. Like Joseph, let us set high moral values and stick to them in spite of the consequences. We cannot lose sight of the bigger picture. The song writer tells us in hymn 449 in the SDA Hymnal, "Could we but stand where Moses stood and view the landscape o'er. Not all this world's pretended good could ever charm us more." There is nothing in the world that

is worth missing heaven for. Keep focused and keep pressing for that incorruptible crown. Privilege is preparation for persecution, but morality is preparation of eternity.



Pastor Brent St Jean is a Dominican who lives in St Vincent and the Grenadines. He started his ministry in 2007 in Dominica. It lasted for two months and he was transferred to SVG where he now serves as the Youth Director and the Assistant to the President for Evangelism, Training and Development. Before becoming a pastor he taught at the Roseau SDA Primary School in Dominica for 3 years. He is one of the effervescent and dynamic evangelists of the Caribbean Union. He is married to Anya a Vincentian and they have a 2 year old daughter Breanna.



Monday

Esther: A Demonstration of Decisiveness

Pastor Enoch Isaac

Scripture Reading: Esther 4:15, 16

Life and background of Esther

INTRODUCTION

The story of Esther is undoubtedly one of the most intriguing episodes recorded in the biblical narrative. It is filled with suspense and drama, while at the same time demonstrating the super courage of an unlikely hero.

To fully understand and appreciate the lessons and values conveyed by the story of this unique personality –Esther, I think it will be helpful to first acquaint ourselves with her background, beliefs and upbringing.

First of all, it would be reasonable for one to conclude that Esther was not born into a privileged family. In fact, the record states that she was a Jewish orphan Girl of the tribe of Benjamin whose Hebrew name was Hadassah (meaning Myrtle) a symbol of peace and thanks giving (Esther 2:7).

After her father Abihail died, she became orphaned and was adopted by her cousin Mordecai who lived and practised his Jewish religious beliefs in secret.

While her exact age at the time of her parents passing is not clear, it is evident that Esther received early training in values such as faithfulness, respect, honesty, truthfulness, diligence and morality.

God's leading in the affairs of Men

Although there is no evidence that the name of God was ever mentioned in the entire story of Esther and her rise to prominence, it is without contradic-

tion that her life was spirit led and her ascendancy to the throne was “manipulated” by God himself.

Ellen white commenting on such occurrences state: “In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as dependent on the will and prowess of man. The shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.” Ed. P.173.

Indeed, while it might seem incomprehensible to accept that God had something to do with the circumstances that resulted in the removal of Queen Vashti from the throne, and the subsequent rise of Esther, we are compelled to conclude that his hands are nonetheless the guiding force in the affairs of mankind.

Like Joseph and Daniel, Esther gave early signs of discipline, principle and decisiveness.

Esther received early training in values such as faithfulness, respect, honesty, truthfulness, diligence and morality



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According to the account in Esther 2:15 - Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.

If we should correctly understand this passage, we must first consider the contents of verse 13, which reads: "Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house."

However, unlike the other young ladies appearing before the King, Esther did not request any further accessories beside what was given to her. Esther could have requested golden ear rings, golden necklaces, golden bracelets and other expensive, elaborate trimmings. But I believe she was confident that God was going to beautify her with his salvation, and secondly, she accepted that natural endowments are the easiest passport to general favor.

In addition to her extreme beauty, her simplicity, humility, modesty and integrity of character made her the enviable favorite. And with the blessings of God, Esther became queen of Persia.

From that day onward, Esther would face the most difficult and challenging period of her life. She will be called upon to intervene and save the Jews (her people) from utter destruction.

At this juncture, permit me to mention some important characteristics and qualities of decisive spiritual leaders.

They are not time wasters.

They take illogical actions.

They are usually very determined.

They do not allow negative possibilities to determine their course of action.

They spend time with God.

They are usually prepared for any eventuality.

They are usually prepared to work, but ultimately rely on divine favour.

These characteristics and qualities formed the bedrock of Esther's life before and during her reign as queen.

A strange request

According to the biblical narrative, in the 12th year of king Ahasuerus's reign, Prime Minister Haman planned the elimination and destruction of all the Jews throughout the Persian Empire.

Esther, being a Jew herself, was made aware of the plot by her cousin Mordecai who requested that she intervene to avert destruction.

However, she realized that the call by Mordecai was likely to incur a great danger, since he requested her to go at once to the king, and to intercede with him for her people (Esther 4: 8).

However, unlike the other young ladies appearing before the King, Esther did not request any further accessories beside what was given to her.



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In reply, the queen pointed out the extreme risk which she would run in entering the royal presence uninvited, and the little chance that there was of her receiving a summons, since she had not had one for thirty days (verse 11).

Her initial response recorded in Esther 4:11 may suggest some level of cowardice. However, on closer scrutiny of her leadership in the entire situation, we can conclude that it was Esther's way of ensuring that she made the correct decision.

She used the opportunity to verbalize the dire, almost hopeless situation to which she was asked to intervene.

Esther's apparent reluctance to approach the King is met by stern words from Mordecai. In Chapter 4:14 he says:

For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Decisive action

Esther eventually agrees to appeal to the King. Prior to this, she asks Mordecai to organise a time of fasting for her. She was well aware that she needed God's favour if she was to succeed.

Undoubtedly, some of the most decisive words recorded in the entire Bible are contained in these verses – Esther 4:15,16 - Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer,

“Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in

Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.”

Spiritual leaders ensure at all times that God is directing their actions and activities. I believe Esther was confident that she was on the right track, but she nonetheless wanted to be absolutely certain that divine guidance was with her every step of the journey.

If I perish, I perish!

According to the Pulpit commentary, the bosom of the queen must, when she uttered these affecting words, have been rent with diverse emotions. The entreaty of Mordecai, the danger of her people, the benevolence of her own nature, all urged her to venture into the presence of the august yet capricious king.

Yet her knowledge of the court rules, her fears for herself, must have withheld her from the daring act. She faced the possible consequences, she prepared herself for the worst.

Doubtless she commended herself to the care of Heaven, and, forming the resolve, exclaimed, "If I perish, I perish!"

These words were profound, decisive and absolute in their declaration. However, they were filled with unexplained emotions. J.R. Thomson, in the Pulpit Commentary suggests the following:



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I. The cry is the utterance of sincerity and earnestness. The language is full of feeling, of passion. It was no feeble emotion which could prompt to such a determination. This is the spirit in which a sinner should come into the presence of the King, seeking for pardon.

II. It is the utterance of felt unworthiness. And none can come aright unto God save he who comes with the cry of the penitent publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

III. It is the utterance of conscious need. Nothing but the keenest sense of the necessity of the case could have impelled Esther to the course of action she took. Similar is the motive which brings the sinner to the Lord.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling."

IV. It is the utterance of mingled fear and hope. Uncertainty and dread mingled in the queen's mind with some gleam of hope. It is not unnatural that the poor helpless sinner should shrink from the view of a holy God; should scarcely dare to hope for his favour.

V. It is the utterance of a mind upon which the King had mercy. As Esther's fears were dispelled by the attitude and language of her consort, so the penitent, lowly, believing, and prayerful suppliant shall never be rejected by a God who delighteth in mercy.

Indeed, the crisis was grave. Esther 4:3 states, "In every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and

wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes."

The decree of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked; apparently there was no hope; all the Israelites were doomed to destruction. But the plots of the enemy were defeated by a Power that reigns among the children of men. God had orchestrated the rise of Esther for that very purpose.

As I indicated, previously, the crisis that Esther faced was unprecedented and demanded quick, earnest action, but both she and Mordecai realized that unless God should work mightily in their behalf, their own efforts would be unavailing.

So Esther took time for communion with God, the source of her strength. "Go," she directed Mordecai, "gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

A closer look at her command to Mordecai reveals some important truths:

Unity is always preferred over disunity.

Instead of conveying the request to fast to all the Jews at their respective locality, she requested that they come together for the said purpose.

It is not unnatural that the poor helpless sinner should shrink from the view of a holy God; should scarcely dare to hope for his favour.



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We must be ever mindful that a united church is a powerful church, a united church is a growing church, a united church is a progressive church. On the other hand, disunity is satanic, devilish and unchristian. And therefore, as men and women of God we are to resist every attempt to create schisms in the body of Christ.

Fasting, the abstinence from food for a pre-determined period, is a godly exercise which brings us closer to God.

Esther knew the spiritual value of denying herself physical food so as to gain spiritual power to accomplish the task at hand. There are times when we must be prepared to ignore, and even starve the physical so as to gain strength to fight the spiritual.

Just as she indicated, Esther appears unsummoned before King Ahasuerus, who not only does not kill her, but promises to grant her request. In a superb moment of understatement, Esther asks the king to a dinner party. This I believe, was an attempt to get the timing right before she informed the king about Haman's plot to kill the Jews of which she was one. It must be noted, until this incident, Esther had hid the fact that she was a Jew from the King on Mordecai's advice.

Meanwhile, Haman's hatred for Mordecai was at its peak and on the advice of his wife and close friends, he had special gallows prepared beside his house on which to hang Mordecai.

However, chapter six reveals God's plan to save the Jews. A sleepless night of the King resulted in his commanding the reading of the record books aloud, in which the deeds of Mordecai in saving the king in the past were read out.

Hence, in an extraordinary twist of events, the King asks Haman what should be done to a man whom the king wants to honour. Haman, in his arrogance, thinks the king is referring to himself and advises a lavish display of wealth and honour to be bestowed on that man publicly. The King then orders Haman to do this for Mordecai.

One can imagine the shock, horror, humiliation and embarrassment Haman must have suffered.

But there is a great lesson here. God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. Further, we are admonished by the apostle Paul in Philippians 2: 3 to esteem others better than our selves. As Christians, we should be constantly looking out for the good of others, not merely seeking our own interest

In chapter seven, Esther reveals to the king that she is a Jew and that Haman has plotted to kill them all. Events then take a drastic turn for Haman, who ends up getting hanged on the gallows he erected for the death of Mordecai.

Here too is another important lesson to be learnt by all who maliciously seek the destruction of others in an attempt to gain favour, fortune and praise. It is never prudent to devise mischief on the part of others, while hoping to achieve happiness and satisfaction. In fact, the wise man Solomon reminds us in Proverbs 26:27-Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.

As Christians, we should be constantly looking out for the good of others, not merely seeking our own interest.



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The final three chapters of Esther, record in minute detail how the Jews were saved, but also provides heart breaking information about the destruction of Haman's children.

Writing in her book Prophets and Kings, Ellen white states that Satan himself, the hidden instigator of the scheme, was trying to rid the earth of those who preserved the knowledge of the true God {Prophets and Kings, pg. 601}.

But God used a brave Queen to stand up to a powerful king as his only method of saving his people. Her life can teach us several vital lessons

1. **There is a preparation time.**

She allowed herself to be prepared for the task. God's preparation time can sometimes be long and uneventful. Moses spent 40 years in the desert looking after sheep before coming to deliver the Israelites. The refining of our characters is very essential to God's plan for our life. God cannot use a proud woman or man.

2. **We need the favour of God.**

Esther found favour with the King and so did Mordecai. Even Jesus grew in favour with God and man (Luke 2:52). When you live a life pleasing to God, by obeying His will you will find favour with Him. God will also give you favour with people.

3. **God works in His own time and season.**

Esther got her timing right. Maybe God has put it on your heart to do something for Him. Don't just jump into it but wait for his time. Joseph was in jail until it was God's time for him to be released. God will move in His time when we remain faithful and alert to His leading.

Furthermore, as believers, we must be ever mindful, God's timing is always best. We need to wait for God's timing in doing things. It is dangerous to jump out before time.

4. **Your background does not hinder your future with God.**

Esther was an orphan. God still exalted her and used her. Some of Jesus' disciples were fishermen, tax collectors and one was a doctor. Your background does not determine what God can do with you. Your faith does.

Decisive Leadership

Esther showed herself to be a very decisive leader. One of the most basic duties of any leader is to make decisions. Highly effective leaders aren't afraid to be decisive and to make tough calls quickly when circumstances require it.

Moreover, we are advised, once we have all the information we need to make an informed decision, not to hesitate - make it, and once the decision is made, then stick with it unless there is a particularly compelling reason for it to be changed. Of course, a decisive leader should never be confused with an impulsive one.

Additionally, a decisive leader carefully weighs the potential effects of each option and chooses the opportunity that works best for his or her team. To be decisive, one must also feel comfortable taking responsibility for the results of his/ her choice.

Your background does not determine what God can do with you. Your faith does.



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The best leaders make sound, defensible decisions in a timely fashion, especially in times of crisis and uncertainty. However, it must be noted that leaders who make mostly good decisions recognize that it happens as a process, not at a single point in time (Tim Morin, 2008).

Seven Traits of a decisive leader

1. Demonstrates competence, credibility and trustworthiness.
2. Exercises sound judgment.
3. Delegates tasks and responsibilities
4. Gathers information from a broad range of sources.
5. Honestly considers the alternatives.
6. Tests assumptions. The leader must be able to discern between “facts” that have been carefully tested and those that have been merely asserted or assumed.
7. Remains involved with the execution. A decisive leader doesn’t simply “pull the trigger” and move on, but rather stays engaged with the execution, and provides active support of those involved in carrying it out (Tim Morin, 2008).

Indeed, the above seven mentioned traits, were evident in the life and ministry of Esther.

Conclusion

When we consider the life and character of Esther, we no doubt have to conclude that indeed she was a true spiritual hero. Esther’s character is needed in today’s world.

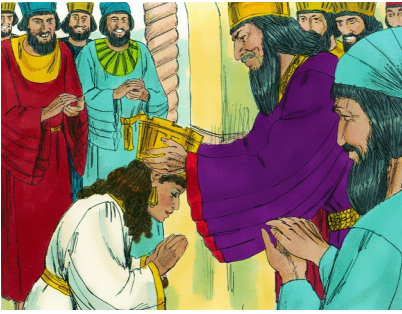
Ellen white commenting on this subject says- “The

greatest want of the world is the want of men- men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall”(Education, p, 57).

Today, we need to ask God to develop our character as he did for Esther, so we too will be able to stand and rightly represent him in the difficult days that lie ahead.

Finally, it must be noted, the trying experiences that came to God’s people in the days of Esther are not peculiar to that Age alone. The apostle John, looking down the ages to the close of time, has declared, "The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17).

Spiritual leaders ensure at all times that God is directing their actions and activities. I believe Esther was confident that she was on the right track, but she nonetheless wanted to be absolutely certain that divine guidance was with her every step of the journey.



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Ellen White writing in her book *Prophets and Kings* says, today, the same spirit that in ages past led men to persecute the true church, will in the future lead to the pursuance of a similar course toward those who maintain their loyalty to God.

The decree that will finally go forth against the remnant people of God will be very similar to that issued by Ahasuerus against the Jews...The reverence of God's people for His law is a constant rebuke to those who have cast off the fear of the Lord and are trampling on His Sabbath. On this battlefield will be fought the last great conflict in the controversy between truth and error (*Prophets and Kings*, P. 606).

However, we have the full assurance that the God of Esther and Mordecai is indeed the same God whom we serve today. And therefore, we need not be fearful, for the Lord will indeed vindicate His truth and His people.



Pastor Enoch Isaac, a Grenadian by birth serves the Grenada Conference as a district pastor. He pastors 4 churches namely Westerhall, St David, Marl Mount, and Crochu. He has been in the Church's employment now since graduating in 1997. He served the Grenada Conference as youth director for 8 years.

He is married to Camille who is a pharmacist on the island of Grenada. Together they have three children, Ishod, Candace and Zaina.



Tuesday

Daniel: A Portrait of the Purposeful life

Pastor Martin Luther Babb

Scripture Reading: Daniel 1:8

Our passage transports us to the context of war and conquest. The Chaldean king Nebuchadnezzar has now captured the land of Judea and laid siege to Jerusalem. As standard operating procedures of invading rulers, Nebuchadnezzar took prisoners of war. He didn't just remove articles from the temple, he took the best and brightest of Israel's children including Daniel. Daniel was now detached from the embrace of his godly parents because he was being taken to Babylon. No longer would he be able to attend the school of the prophets because Nebuchadnezzar was taking him to Babylon. No longer would he be able to attend The University of the Southern Caribbean because Nebuchadnezzar was taking him to be a royal courtier. And as these inconsolable, teary eyed parents watch Daniel's shadow disappear through the dark desert, they realize that the influence of their parenting would not be what he did in their presence, but what he would now do in their absence.

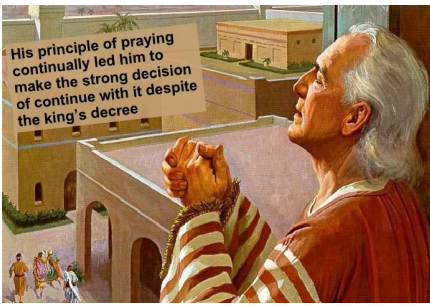
I would submit that the impact we have on our children is not dictated by what they do when they are with us, but what they do when they are away from our presence. And the fact of the matter is that there's coming a day when you will cease being present, a day when your protection and provision will cease enveloping them. The question then will be, what does your child do when you're not looking? Therefore, it is incumbent on parents and godly leaders to encourage a sense of purpose and meaning early in the life of our young people.

Parents should teach their children to live knowing that they are serving and trusting a God they cannot

see. They must be taught to live in the presence of an all knowing and all seeing God. Daniel was brought up in a godly home. He was taught the importance of fidelity to God even in times of widespread apostasy. Daniel, I can imagine, made his resolve while living in his parents' house that he will correspond to Elijah's seven thousand in Israel who did not bow their knees to Baal.

Many of our youth have a wide array of purposeful interests and aspirations. Some are motivated by family and vocational purposes. Others are driven by civic duty and sports, but the key to attaining the purposeful life is the presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Ellen White tells us to, "cherish an ambition that will bring glory to God because it is sanctified by the Holy Spirit." It is the Holy Spirit who will nurture the desire for truth and right. The Holy Spirit will help us to analyze our feelings and perspectives in light of the Word of God. Therefore, with the impartation of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to take our position firmly upon the platform of eternal truth" (Letter 123, 1984).

I would submit that the impact we have on our children is not dictated by what they do when they are with us, but what they do when they are away from our presence.



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Daniel submitted his life to the Holy Spirit and is now a prisoner of war in Babylon. The Bible says that as he entered into Nebuchadnezzar's court he was instantly enrolled into a training program. Daniel 1:3-4, "Nebuchadnezzar instructed his highest official Ashpenaz to choose royal descendants and members of the ruling class from the Israelites, good-looking young men without defects, skilled in all wisdom, possessing knowledge, conversant with learning, and capable of serving in the king's palace." The purpose of this program was for Nebuchadnezzar to continue to develop his large array of wise thinkers and astrologers of the day.

Daniel will achieve remarkable proficiency and expertise in many disciplines. The Bible tells us that one of the prerequisites of entering into this apprenticeship program is that Daniel is given a new name. While this was a common practice by conquering nations, the power to name something or someone showed your authority over it (Gen 2:20; Gen 1:28). In addition, Nebuchadnezzar didn't want him to keep his Hebrew name which honored Yahweh (Daniel means God is my judge). Instead, he was given a name which honored the gods of the Babylonians. Their aim was to separate Daniel from his previous godly upbringing. Therein marked the continuation of the attempt of the Babylonian king to change the identity of the vulnerable Hebrew captives; the commencement being control of their education.

Friends of God, there are situations the enemy will put you in to confuse your identity. The devil will cause those circumstances to attribute

labels to you that are intended to distract, frustrate and reprogram your purpose. But child of God, your purpose is not dictated by what man says but by what God has ordained. No set of circumstances will ever reverse your purpose in God. Not even a name change! Throughout the narrative, Daniel never calls himself Belteshazzar but Daniel.

Upon entering the program Daniel had to eat from the king's rations. In other words, he was forced to eat the king's food. This presented not only a dietary challenge but a challenge to his worship. You must understand that eating the king's food is synonymous to worshipping the king as god. Therefore, if Daniel ate the food he would be literally signaling his homage to the Babylonian king.

But the Bible says in Daniel 1:8 that "Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself..." Sometimes we just have to make up in our minds that our purpose forbids us from going there. We need to stop this 'I'm just a man. I'm so weak. I'm only human talk and establish a resolve deep in our innermost being that only God will get the glory. The word of God is clear that the reason Jesus died on the cross is so that he can give power to weak people (Phil. 4:13). Daniel made up his mind. He said, "I don't care what the king serves. It may look appetizing, it may smell appealing, even taste delicious, but my resolve is to serve Jesus and Jesus only."

All scripture is used from the Common English Bible except stated otherwise.

NKJV



Tuesday

Daniel: A Portrait of the Purposeful life

Pastor Martin Luther Babb

Daniel said that which contradicts, compromises and defiles my worship I will avoid. Therefore, Daniel's decision was not born out of self-righteousness, but God's righteousness. The world needs Seventh-day Adventists who will not be overwhelmed by the attractiveness of sin but who will stand firm with the help of the Spirit of God. The text seems to be deliberate about telling us the names of the captives who withstood the corrupting influence of Babylon. Only four names are given in Daniel 1:6, "Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah..." Where are the others? They have compromised their faith. And by the time you get to Chapter 3 of the book of Daniel, they are unable to stand against blatant idolatry because of their initial compromise in Daniel Chapter 1.

Notice that as he makes his mind up, he does not show disdain or disrespect to the king. He politely requests to be excused from the king's diet. The Bible says in verse 8 "...he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." This is instructive to some of us who are suffering from an acute condition of Christian seriousness. Sometimes we are so dogmatic of our faith. But God reminds us that he is calling his people to be obedient with tact. Ellen White reminds us, "In dealing with unreasonable and wicked men, those who believe the truth are to be careful not to bring themselves down to the same level, where they will use the same satanic weapons that their enemies use, by giving loose rein to strong personal feelings..."

Today, Jesus is calling his people to be straight forward but respectful! God is teaching us that we

can be holy and pleasant at the same time. Daniel teaches us that the purposeful life merges these two qualities; holiness and agreeable. You can stand for something and not make everyone else around you feel like you're putting your religion in their face.

The Bible says Aspenaz responded by saying, "I'm afraid of my master the king...what will happen if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men in your group? The king will have my head because of you." Then Daniel responded. "Daniel spoke to the guard...why not test your servants for ten days? You could give us a diet of vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance to the appearance of the young men who eat the king's food. Then deal with your servants according to what you see."

The eunuch literally said, you mean to tell me that you will eat pumpkin and lentils and drink water and look better than the boys eating KFC? I don't believe that, but though I don't believe your God I'm willing to test his plan. I'm not sure about this God who is able to give you calories and minerals from your diet, but even though I don't trust your God, I am willing to step out and test his plan.

The world needs Seventh-day Adventists who will not be overwhelmed by the attractiveness of sin but who will stand firm with the help of the Spirit of God.



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I suggest today that the God we serve is so awesome and powerful, that sometimes when he is growing our faith he will allow us to test him as we learn to trust him. God says if you don't believe I'm merciful, just test me. If you don't believe I can make a way out of no way, just test me. If you don't believe I can unlock doors only God can unlock and close doors only God can close, just test me and see who I am. We are reminded today that after resolving to stand firm for Jesus, the purposeful life leaves God responsible for what comes next. Daniel remained loyal to God facing roaring lions because he learnt to trust God. When we learn to trust God he allows us to experience supernatural blessings that defy natural reasoning. Now is the time to trust God where we can't trace him. Now is the time to believe God when there is no way out.

The Bible says Nebuchadnezzar interviews Daniel at the end of the program and finds him "...ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm." The evidence of God's miraculous power and what happens to the purposeful child of God who learns to trust him is found in the final verse, "And Daniel stayed in the king's service until the first year of King Cyrus." By trusting God, Daniel became qualified to live his entire life in the presence of the king. I submit there's a kingdom coming more powerful than Babylon. There's a king that's coming who is more powerful than Nebuchadnezzar. God says today, if you learn to trust me like Daniel, you will be able to live your entire life in the presence of the king.



Pastor Martin Babb graduated in 2013 from the University of the Southern Caribbean. He is a Guyanese and works for the Guyana Conference in the Essequibo South District. He serves 8 churches; three over the river: Bethany, Mashabo and Caria Caria. The other five are on the coasts namely, Queenstown, Red Village, Pomona, Good hope and Aurora. He has baptized over 400 persons to date.

Wednesday

John the Baptist: None Greater Than Him

Pastor Shane Butcher



Scripture Reading: Matthew 11:7-11

ILLUSTRATION

A little boy was overheard talking to himself as he strutted through the backyard, wearing his baseball cap and toting a ball and bat: "I'm the greatest hitter in the world!" he announced.

Then he tossed the ball into the air, swung at it, and missed. "Strike One!" he yelled. Undaunted, he picked up the ball and said again, "I'm the greatest hitter in the world!"

He tossed the ball into the air. When it came down he swung again and missed. "Strike Two!" he cried.

The boy then paused a moment to examine his bat and ball carefully. He spit on his hands and rubbed them together. He straightened his cap and said once more, "I'm the greatest hitter in the world!" Again he tossed the ball up in the air and swung at it. He missed. "Strike Three!"

"Wow!" he exclaimed. "I'm the greatest pitcher in the world." Author Unknown

There is an ongoing debate among many sports enthusiasts that has been fueled by the media. The question that consumes their discussion is who is the greatest in each sporting discipline?

In soccer, is it Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi?

In tennis, is it Roger Federer or Rafael Nadal?

In basketball the question that is at the centre of much discussion and debate is who is the G.O.A.T (Greatest of All Time)?

Is it LeBron James or Michael Jordan?

The truth is that many of the responses to these controversial questions are purely subjective and are therefore devoid of objectivity; they are subject to personal opinion. However, from the biblical account, we are given enough evidence that can help us lay this subject to rest. Jesus in Matthew chapter 11:11 clearly points us to the greatest mortal man that has ever lived: John the Baptist.

Mat 11:11 says, "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

By the time Jesus said these words John the Baptist was in prison. After selecting and training his twelve disciples, Jesus sent them out to the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel (Matthew 10:5, 6). While Jesus, being accompanied by other disciples set out for another part of Galilee that was untouched by the Twelve, the Bible tells us that two of John's disciples visited Jesus with a message:

"Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? (Matthew 11:2-3)

The question itself indicates the level of stress coupled with feelings of perplexity and abandonment under which the spiritual giant suffered. If he was God's trusted servant, then why would God allow him to suffer in isolation behind prison bars for doing the right thing? Sometimes we ourselves are plagued with the same question.



Wednesday

John the Baptist: None Greater Than Him

Pastor Shane Butcher

If we serve God, why would he permit, in our estimation, some of the most frustrating challenges to come our way? John the Baptist reminds us that we are not alone, for at times He permits His servants to go through experiences that seem to suggest that He has forgotten them [SDA Bible Commentary vol. 5 pg. 758].

But the Word of God counsels us:

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4).

God permits the most severe trials to come to His servants so that He can develop their characters and make them ready for heaven.

It happened to Elijah after Mount Carmel. It happened to Job after he lost his family, possessions and health. It happened to John the Baptist while in prison for preaching righteousness, and it will most certainly happen to us today but we ought not to use this as an opportunity to complain. Rather, we should use it as an opportunity to rejoice knowing that God is working His perfect will out in our lives.

The disciples asked ... Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

In Matthew 11:4 -6, Jesus answered and said unto them, “Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he,

whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

After the two disciples returned, Jesus turns his attention to the multitudes around him and delivers what some refer to as the eulogy of John the Baptist.

“And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses” (Matthew 11:7-8).

Speaking of His cousin, John, Jesus asked the multitudes around, “What did you go out to see? A reed shaken in the wind?”

In the original language the word used here for reed is ‘kalamoV’. It refers to a plant or a stem. When the wind comes into contact with a plant or stem, it will bend and bow in whatever direction it is carried. But John was not like a reed in the wind because he did not waver or shift in his commitment. He preached without fear or favor the ‘thus saith the Lord’.

What did you go out to see? A man in soft raiment?

It happened to John the Baptist while in prison for preaching righteousness, and it will most certainly happen to us today but we ought not to use this as an opportunity to complain. Rather, we should use it as an opportunity to rejoice knowing that God is working His perfect will out in our lives.



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One would expect royalty and those who serve in the palace to wear soft raiment. Your profession plays a significant role in determining the clothing that you wear. The original word for soft used in this text is the Greek word ‘malakóV’. It means fine or exquisite. John was not attired in exquisite clothing. In fact the Bible tells us how he was dressed:

“And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey” (Matthew 3:4).

Jesus asked several rhetorical questions in this passage and each question draws us closer to the answer concerning the personality of John the Baptist.

By a process of elimination Jesus is helping us to understand who John the Baptist was by first ruling out who he was not.

He was not a reed shaken in the wind - he stood for the right even when he stood alone.

He was not a man dressed in soft clothing— he was dressed in camel’s hair, which was the garb of the prophets of old.

He was not just a prophet – he was more than a prophet.

Who was John if not a reed shaken in the wind, if not a man dressed in soft clothing or just a prophet? He was a mortal man whose greatness on the earth has been unparalleled.

Very often when we think of greatness we associate it with the skills that one has, the possessions, the position or status that one holds in society, but Jesus takes a completely different approach to the subject of greatness.

In the estimation of Heaven, what is it that constitutes greatness? Not that which the world accounts greatness; not wealth, or rank, or noble descent, or intellectual gifts in themselves considered. If intellectual greatness, apart from any higher consideration, is worthy of honor, then our homage is due to satan, whose intellectual power no man has ever equaled, but when perverted to self-serving, the greater the gift, the greater curse it becomes.

It is moral worth that God values. Love and purity are the attributes He prizes most. John was great in the sight of the Lord when before the messengers from the Sanhedrin, before the people, and before his own disciples, he refrained from seeking honor for himself, but pointed all to Jesus as the Promised One. His unselfish joy in the ministry of Christ presents the highest type of nobility ever revealed in man (DA 219.3).

What made John the greatest? It was not his clothing, it was not his popularity, it was not his money or achievements in life. There were four things that made him the greatest: Character, Conviction, Commitment and Calling.

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Wednesday

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Character

“Political theorist Thomas Paine said, “I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. ’Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death.” What gives a leader the strength to exhibit such admirable qualities? The answer is character.

Excerpt From: John C. Maxwell. “The 360 Degree Leader.” Page 144

Such was the character of John the Baptist. It was through his connection with the Holy Spirit and through the perplexities that he experienced that he developed such a moral standing that is rarely seen today.

The angel predicted as he spoke to Zacharias,

“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb” (Luke 1:15).

When you are filled with the Holy Spirit you will display the fruit of the Spirit, according to Galatians 5:22-23. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

Conviction

John the Baptist was so convicted in his belief that he was willing to die for his beliefs. God is calling for such men and women today.

As Ellen G. White states, “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall” (Ed 57.3).

Commitment

John the Baptist committed his entire life to preparing the way for Jesus. His sole purpose was to proclaim the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven and the arrival of its King. This purpose he fulfilled until his dying breath in prison.

Calling

What made John the greatest was his calling. No other Prophet has had a greater privilege than that of being the personal herald of the Messiah at His first coming.

“For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Matthew 3:3).

All of the prophets that preceded John dreamt of being alive to welcome Jesus and prepare the way for him but that honor was reserved for this man of God.

It was through his connection with the Holy Spirit and through the perplexities that he experienced that he developed such a moral standing that is rarely seen today.



Wednesday

John the Baptist: None Greater Than Him

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Jesus declared,

“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11).

Jesus used the superlative ‘greater’ when referring to John the Baptist: There has not risen a greater person than John the Baptist thus implying that John the Baptist was the greatest mortal man.

However, after settling the issue about the identity of the greatest mortal man, Jesus makes another shocking statement. He introduces another superlative- least. He says even though John the Baptist was the greatest mortal man, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Notice also that when speaking of John he uses the perfect tense and speaks in the passive voice but when speaking of the least in the kingdom, Jesus uses the present tense and speaks using the active voice. John the Baptist was the greatest mortal man but the one who is considered least in the kingdom today is greater than John.

In order to understand who are the least we need to identify the kingdom to which Jesus is referring. According to the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Volume 5 pg. 384, this kingdom is the kingdom of divine grace in the hearts of men proclaimed by both John and Christ, which Christ brought to the earth in person. The least in the kingdom of grace represent those who in humility accept the gift of divine grace through Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the least in the kingdom of grace is greater than John the Baptist. This gives me hope because it suggests that

if we in humility accept this gift of grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit then we are part of the least.

Conclusion

What matters to God is not the office or status that one holds. God is more interested in the character that is forged in the fire of persecution and tempered with humility. Persons who possess this character; who have accepted God’s divine grace and who are filled with the Holy Ghost, are considered least in the kingdom of grace but it is this fact that makes them eligible to be greater than the greatest mortal man who has lived- John the Baptist.



Pastor Shane Butcher works in Barbados, the land of his birth. A graduate of the 2008 class at USC he serves the St James District and pastors four churches: Gardens, rock Dundo, Victory and Holder’s Hill. He is married to Kisha a St Lucian.



Thursday

Stephen: The Martyr

Pastor Marco Salas

Scripture Reading: Acts 6: 8-15

INTRODUCTION

On April 17, 1976, the Helios B probe, as a result of a joint project between the United States and Germany whose purpose was to study the influence of the Sun in the interplanetary environment, became the fastest object created by man. That day and due to the enormous gravitational impulse of our star, the 371.2 kg of Helios B shot out to an incredible speed of 252,792 km / h, that is, 70.22 kilometers per second. If we could travel at this speed, we would take about one minute and 20 seconds between Paris and New York.

Some biblical characters appear quickly to leave behind an extraordinary example of teachings about the wonderful work that the Holy Spirit can do when we submit to his power and love. That is the case of Brother Stephen. His name appears in seven verses, all in the book of Acts of the Apostles. Five have to do with his acts and two with the influence of his work. Following with the illustration of the Helios B, there was created a vehicle as part of a strategy that seeks to help humanity and that is why there were assigned extraordinary characteristics to it. Stephen was qualified by the Lord so that his life became another miracle that would positively impact the life of millions. By putting his life in the hands of the Spirit, he enjoyed, like few of us, his days of service. We are sure that when we meet him at the renewed land, he will tell us that if he were to experience his experience again, he would never change what these few verses present about himself.

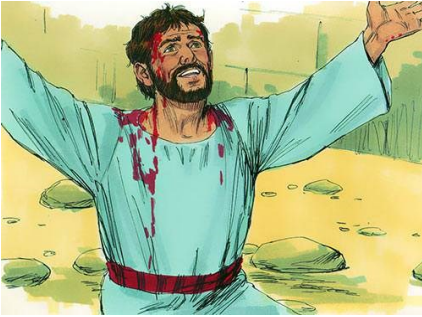
The Helios B also has the reputation of being the object created by man that has been the closest to

the Sun and yet has survived. Today in our Week of Prayer "Studies of Lives full of the Spirit", we will have the opportunity to analyze with prayer and humility the life of one of the first Christian deacons, without a doubt, one who was very close to the Sun of Justice. We hope today, the same Spirit that made his life a work of art, will continue to show us what other things we can allow Him to do in us to remain happy within His team.

Stephen, Super Deacon.

This shining star in the universe of the sons of God appears in the Scriptures at particular times. The church was experiencing a unique development and it had had its first conflicts with the leaders of the Jewish nation. It was a new church that stood firm in the teachings of the apostles, in communion, breaking of bread and in prayer. Some brothers have received the privilege of being agents of the Spirit to work miracles. Even though the believers shared the same feelings and thoughts and there were no needy in the community, the development brought demands to the organizational structure. The death of Ananias and Sapphira his wife, clarified to the listeners the concepts of the authority of God and the need to take good care on some issues within the church; the need to face new challenges with the collaboration of other's minds. In this context our brother Stephen appears.

Stephen was qualified by the Lord so that his life became another miracle that would positively impact the life of millions.



Thursday

Stephen: The Martyr

Pastor Marco Salas

In his last speech registered in the Scriptures, Stephen pointed out a spiritual condition in his hearers: "Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your parents did, so do you" (Acts 7:51). It is an overwhelming statement and destructive to those who receive these words, since this condition breaks down the only source of power and communication with God. Stephen knew about this. It seems that he dedicated his life to be controlled by the Spirit. Understanding this will help us to answer the most disturbing questions in the life of this first deacon. Why or what was the purpose of God allowing his early death? What was God's plan to exempt his church from the blessing of counting with this bulwark of faith during its development? Above all, it helps us answer our own concerns in those dark moments of our existence where it seems that God walks away from us.

The name Stephen originates from the Greek name Stefano which means "Crowned with laurel or victorious". It only appears in the book of Acts of the Apostles.

It is assumed that he lived in Jerusalem and it is not known the exact moment of his conversion to Christianity. The fact that he was selected among the first deacons, could indicate that he had some time with the disciples or he could even be among the followers of Jesus before His death.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, his ministry and death collaborated with some of the events that triggered changes in the worldview of the primitive church and in the condition of Israel as the people of God. Definitely, Stephen was a super Deacon, a

martyr led by the Spirit.

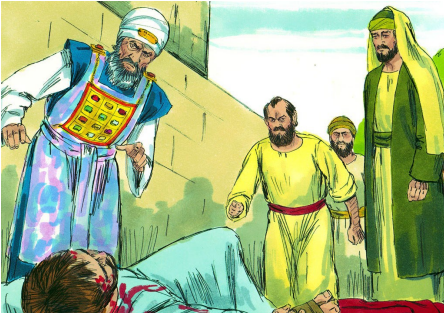
Ministry of Stephen.

The Holy Spirit raises different types of leadership according to the need of your church. Read Acts 6: 1. It is not easy to serve people who complain. In a church where most of the people were willing to sacrifice themselves so that everyone could have the essentials, it is surprising that there was favoritism among the distributors of aid. But this is how we are; most of us human beings even in our best moments.

The Holy Spirit based his ministry on service and this helped him to serve with the best attitude. Would Stephen have imagined that today we would be talking about him for the simple fact of accepting the call to help in God's work? No wonder the Servant of the Lord wrote:

"There is no limit to the usefulness of those who, putting aside the ego, give place to the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts and they live a fully consecrated life to God."

He had no qualms about performing, as his Master, acts to help the humble and the minorities. He recognized that knowledge, faith, love and skills are developed in the places chosen by God so that there we may serve Him. He did his best sharing with sisters who had lost every human support and may have allowed some bitterness to start to pollute their hearts.



Thursday

Stephen: The Martyr

Pastor Marco Salas

He saw the miracles of the Lord multiplying the things that were necessary in carrying out his mission.

We can imagine this man of God bringing hope and faith to those ignored by society with the same intensity that he had when defending his faith before the leaders of the nation. Here we find the key to the greatness of Stephen's character. He served Jesus regardless of his social or physical condition.

The Holy Spirit taught him to work as a team member. Read Acts 6: 2.

He understood that it is far more important to serve where God needs us than to climb in leadership positions. When the apostles explained the requirements, he understood that it was his privilege to face that challenge so that the preaching of the Word of God had no obstacle. He knew that in God's service there is no important positions.

If the preacher can carry out his mission correctly, it is because the one in charge of cleaning the temple fulfilled his assignment. Stephen did not care if "privileged people" would receive the glory while he did the rough work. Honoring his Savior and the fulfillment of the mission of the church was what really mattered to him. The positions of leadership were understood as something normal and necessary throughout organization.

The Holy Spirit gave him a ministry of "good testimony or good reputation", meaning that due to the circumstances, he had a character similar to his Lord and people thought well of him.

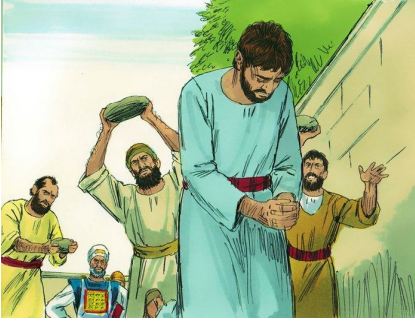
It can also be understood that thanks to his service he had achieved a special reputation in the middle of those Paul met in Jerusalem after his conversion

(Galatians 2: 2). It is very likely that both options combine in our brother Stephen. Whatever the case is, Stephen allowed the Holy Spirit to help him building a good reputation.

Stephen had a ministry full of the Spirit and wisdom.

As Luke declares in Acts 6:5, the Holy Spirit controlled the life of this servant of the Lord completely while transforming his character. However, we could also understand the word "Spirit" as a characteristic or gift that gives the Holy Spirit, as well as He gives wisdom. In most versions the word "Holy" is omitted in this verse. In the Bible this word, spirit, can mean: vitality (Judges 15:11), courage (Josh.2: 11), mood (Isaiah 54: 6) or moral character (Ezekiel 11:19). That was what Elysee wanted to receive from God when appointed as a prophet; twice the spirit or vitality, of the value, of the willingness that his teacher Elijah had. It means then that the Holy Spirit made Stephen a man with a vitality and a value controlled by wisdom. He knew how to direct his energy to those things that really mattered. This controlled intensity is perceived in the verses that tell us about the life of this man of God. Even the abrupt closure of his courageous sermon before the Sanhedrin indicates that he did it because he considered it was useless to continue giving "pearls to pigs". His words fell on hearts that were determined to deny the truth.

Definitely, Stephen was a super deacon, a martyr led by the Spirit.



Thursday

Stephen: The Martyr

Pastor Marco Salas

The Spirit made him "a man full of faith".

The book of Acts shows Stephen sharing a rating with another great biblical hero, Barnabas. They understood that a strong faith is the result of years serving the Lord

with the conviction that He always responds to the needs of his people according to his eternal wisdom and love. In the Scriptures we see Barnabas by faith selling his property to help his brothers. By faith he looked for Saul in Tarsus so that he would help with the preaching in Antioch. His faith was translated into deeds that changed the direction of the church. As it happens with all those who allow God to develop in them trust in Him, Stephen and Barnabas, strengthened their confidence or faith by taking time to study the Scriptures. They claimed biblical promises, they saw the power of God acting and that led them to face greater challenges with faith in the name of Jesus.

It is not strange that the root of the growth of evangelization in the NT was that the Word of the Lord grew (Acts 6: 7). Faith comes as result of a constant exposure to the Word of God combined with a life of service under the banner of the Spirit. By exposing ourselves to the sun we get visible traces. This is what happens when we study constantly the Word with a sense of mission in mind. The Spirit taught Stephen that thousands must be touched to be saved and that the only chance of success was exposing them to the Word.

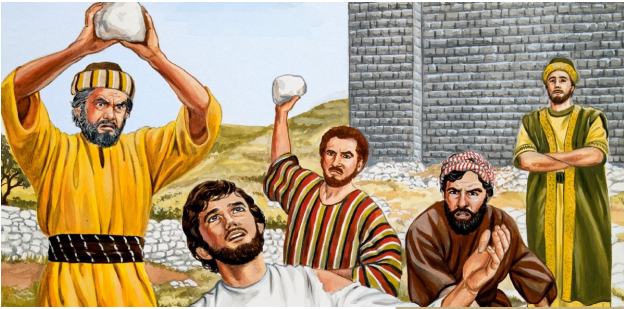
The consequence of believing in God and exposing his Word was that "the number of disciples multiplied greatly..." (Acts 6: 7). These men of God ac-

cepted that they were pawns in the wise and all-powerful hands of the Spirit. They knew that the only thing they could do was to talk about their experience with the God of the Bible and that He would do his part to convince thousands. Stephen believed that if Jesus had died, if the Holy Spirit was manifesting so overwhelmingly and the Father was holding his people in the face of adversity, thousands had to convert. Even this must occur among those who were responsible for opposing and killing his Master. Surely "Many of the priests obeyed to the faith" (Acts 6: 7), since for he who believes, everything is possible.

The Holy Spirit also made Stephen "full of grace" (Acts 6: 8).

Grace is all that God does within his Plan of Salvation. This is reason by which the Bible qualifies as something that can be measured. That is why this joint work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, saves us and sustains us in salvation. Also, that is why Stephen had his mind filled with the promises of God and evidence of his accomplishment; his life was replete with acts of God, leading him to love Him above all things and his neighbor as himself. That caused his testimony to be so powerful and irresistible.

His faith was translated into deeds that changed the direction of the church.



Thursday

Stephen: The Martyr

Pastor Marco Salas

Stephen let the Holy Spirit make him an instrument of his power.

Jesus Christ promised his church that she would have power when the Holy Spirit came upon her. The main reason for giving us that power has to do with the fact that we are the tools to preach the gospel worldwide. The church is made up of sinners who are saved, but who are still in the process of transformation or sanctification. They live in a world where sin reigns. They have the mission to help transform thousands of hearts full of evil.

That's why the church needs power. The amount of power that a Christian has, is related directly to his commitment to the work of God. The only way to bring down the bastions of evil is with the power of the Spirit. For this to be the case, we cannot continue inside our trenches supporting the onslaught of the enemy of souls. As an army, each one fulfilling a job that is complemented by his brother, we go from passive to offensive and that's why we go to every hospital, every jail, every house, getting more people to study the Word and be saved in Jesus Christ. We are raising new small groups, new churches and new institutions.

The only way to be powerful Christians is to see and feel the power of God in and through us while His cause advances. The fulfillment of the mission makes us hunger for the Word and desire to speak with our God to be able to share our challenges with Him and praise Him for the victories. Thousands of Christians want to study the Bible and soon get discouraged. It seems boring to read it, as well as to spend time in prayer. If we do not have a challenge to overcome in the work of God How can we be eager to learn from the Word? What are we

going to talk about with our God? The mission is the reason why Jesus, Martin Luther, Ellen White, Paul and all the Christians of yesterday and today are recognized as men and women of prayer.

Stephen was an instrument of the Spirit to do "great wonders and miracles".

At this point in our study it would be good to ask ourselves, did God plan that all Christians do great wonders and miracles in all ages? We say this because Abraham, Daniel and David to mention just a few, did not cure the sick or resurrect the dead, as far as we know, James White nor John Wesley did not perform these kinds of wonders. Few can deny that these men had the power of God supporting their work. Then why didn't they do the types of miracles of the primitive Church? The answer depends on the mission. The power of God acting in us is evidenced in many ways depending on the challenge we face. In Stephen's time the Jews asked for a sign and the Greeks for wisdom. Accepting that God had come to die on a cross to save us and then to resurrect us was for some people a stumbling block and for others a great madness. That is why God accompanied his people with a special manifestation of his power in this sense because listeners needed this kind of demonstration to believe in the message.

The only way to be powerful Christians is to see and feel the power of God in and through us while His cause advances.



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On the other hand, wonders are the result of a heart full of faith. Today we do few wonders because we do not have the kind of surrender that Stephen had. If we prayed like those Christians of yesteryear and we were as excited about the mission as they were, then there would be more wonders done by God among us.

The mission should be understood as a team effort led by the Holy Spirit. Many times our corrupt nature prevents God from manifesting Himself in our environment. Envy, strife and non-Christian words keep God's power away from his people. The Humility and love are fundamental in the team of the Holy Spirit. That is why Ellen White wrote inspired by the Spirit of the Lord:

"The secret of our success in the work of God will be found in the harmonious work in our community. There must be concentrated action. Every member of the body of Christ must play his part in the cause of God, according to the capacity that God has given him. We must move forward together to overcome obstructions and difficulties, shoulder to shoulder, and heart with heart" (Review and Herald, December 2, 1890.).

"If the Christians acted in concert, advancing as one man, under the direction of a single Power, for the realization of a single purpose, they would shake the world" (Testimonies, volume 9, page 221).

In order to have this kind of success, of course, we need God to do wonders and miracles. We give thanks to our Lord because He has promised us something special for his people at the end of time.

"The great work of evangelization will not end with less manifestation of the divine power than the one

that marked the beginning of it. The prophecies that were fulfilled in time of the outpouring of the early rain, at the beginning of the gospel ministry, must be again fulfilled in the time of the latter rain, at the end of that ministry. . . Servants of God will come with faces illuminated and resplendent of holy consecration, and will hurry from place to place to proclaim the heavenly message. Thousands of voices will preach the message throughout the earth. Miracles will be performed, the sick will heal, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan will also perform his false miracles, even making fire fall from the sky in sight of men (Revelation 13:13). This is how the inhabitants of the earth will have to decide for or against the truth..." Maranatha Cap. The Third Angel's last Warnings

The match that lit millions.

Without a doubt, the death of Stephen greatly helped the early church. Thousands of Christians left Jerusalem for other places preaching about Jesus Christ. The heart of Saul received such an impact that he devoted his life to exterminate Christians as a longing to take out of his mind the convictions that the Holy Spirit, through Stephen, had placed inside him.

"The secret of our success in the work of God will be found in the harmonious work of our town. There must be concentrated action. Every member of the body of Christ must play his part in the cause of God, according to the capacity that God has given him..."



Thursday

Stephen: The Martyr

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It is very interesting that the Bible records that the face of Stephen resembled one of an angel when he stood before the council that would determine his death (Acts 6:15). This must have been an irrefutable signal for his accusers and a direct message from God to the leaders of Israel in the last moments that they had left as a people chosen by God.

Referring to the case of Moses, to whom God also gave the same signal, the Bible says that this happened to him "because he had been speaking with God" (Ex. 24:29). In other words, both Moses and Stephen were men of prayer. When God was defining the conditions for Israel to be His chosen people, He did the miracle in the face of Moses, delivered His Law and agreed with his people.

With Stephen, God was saying goodbye Israel. Their house was left deserted, as Jesus prophesied (Matthew 23:38). There was the fulfillment of the 490 years, 70 weeks, that God had given to his people as the last term to show his willingness to continue in the special plan established at Sinai. The leaders of the Sanhedrin thought they were judging a man when in fact they were the ones who were before the divine court. Their neglect of the Word of God and the lack of a prayer life placed them at the other end of where Stephen were. They occupied the most important position in Israel so they could have done a lot for the Plan of salvation to reach all corners of the earth, but there they were silencing one of the Lord's instruments.

Conclusion

Stephen's last moments show who controlled his life and what was the result of that control. The Bible tells us "full of the Holy Spirit", indicating who

was in charge of his life. "Placing his eyes in the sky He saw the glory of God, and Jesus who was at the right hand of God," demonstrating what was most important in his life and what held him always.

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," expresses his faith, that kept him fulfilling the mission, and his final request to God, "Lord, do not consider their sin," points out that the fruit of the Holy Spirit, love, permeated his entire life.

I invite you to ask yourselves, how far am I allowing the Spirit to control my life? If that control leads us to lose a business, family, go to an unwanted place or even lose our life, how would we react? Let's not try to have the fruits of Stephen's life if we are not willing to pray and work with God so that He can control our life as he did with him. May God may continue to help us so they can also say of you and me that we are guided by the Spirit of God.

Today the Holy Spirit has come to agree with everyone. He encourages the modern Stephen to remain humble and happy in their mission. To those that need to be drawn into a closer relationship with Him, He encourages them to make a covenant with Him today.



Thursday

Stephen: The Martyr

Pastor Marco Salas

As always, we have to give the opportunity to someone to thank God for the message that today He has given through His Word. Does anyone raising their hand say thank you Lord?

Today the Holy Spirit has come to agree with everyone. He encourages the modern Stephen to remain humble and happy in his mission. To those that need to be drawn into a closer relationship with Him, He encourages them to make a covenant with Him today.

There is a blessing in the air and whoever accepts it, receives it. Today God wants and can make us all go out from here like Stephen, "full of grace and of the Holy Spirit". Who wants to go out of this place with His blessing? Stand up and express your desire. Let's make a covenant and God will do his part. Let's pray.



Marcos Salas was born in Ciudad Bolivar, Bolivar State Venezuela. He worked in the Eastern Union of Venezuela as Evangelist, Departmental of Personal Field and Union Ministries; President of Field and Department of Communication and Ministerial Secretary. He now works for the North Caribbean Conference in District four in St Maarten. He pastors the New Bethany and coordinates the Obra Hispana. He has 31 years in ministry and is married to Franci Salas also from Venezuela. They have a son, Marcos Levi Salas Botia and a daughter Sidney Alejandra Salas Botia.





Friday

Paul: A Fearless Evangelist

Pastor Nick Vitalis

Scripture Reading: Acts 9: 17-23

In 1857, a very disturbing archaeological discovery was made that shed light on a very dark and unappreciative history of Christians who lived around the first three centuries. Scratched on a plaster in a room near Palestine was the image of a donkey headed figure crucified on a cross with a young man prostrated before it in worship. This finding which archeologists call, Alexamenos Graffito, has a Greek inscription on it which translated into English reads “Alexamenos worships his god.”

In the early part of the century both the cross and the donkey were seen as despised figures. Someone on a crucifix was perceived with the same shame and helplessness as a criminal sitting in an electric chair today and the reference to someone as a donkey was an insult. As such, many scholars agree that this drawing and inscription was meant to ridicule a young Christian named Alexamenos. This type of deliberate effort to shame early Christians for their faith has been confirmed by the writings of several historians as a norm back then, that made it very trying for one to become and openly declare Christianity.

Paul confirms these societal challenges that early Christians faced. By his own admission in 1 Corinthians 1: 23, he acknowledged that “...we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.” A “stumbling block” to the Jews because the belief in a crucified malefactor who claims to be the Son of the Jewish God, did not help the Jewish desire to be free from the Roman yoke but worsened their circumstance. And “foolishness” to the Greeks because compared to the Greek gods who were seen as mighty and re-

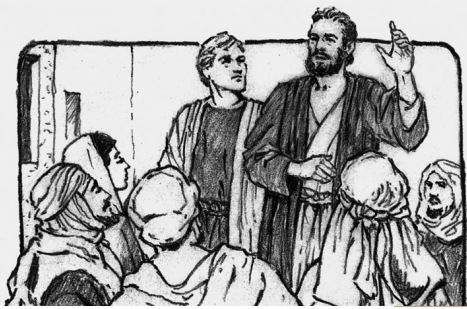
sponsible for the many powerful fits of nature like thunder, the amazing sun and the sea, the Christian ‘god’ was subjected to the most humiliating form of Roman power and thus the Christian deity was merely dismissed and ridiculed as utter nonsense. As a result, the Jews were violent towards Christians as they fought for national pride and the Romans disregarded the Christians as being weak and inferior.

It is in this hostile and uncomfortable environment that the apostle Paul ministered on a daily basis. Nonetheless, Paul stands out as one of Christianity’s most powerful early converts whose influence, in spite of these oppositions, successfully reached the humble abode of commoners as well as the prestigious courts of Governors and Kings from Jerusalem through to Asia Minor and Europe.

In today’s growing hostile environment that is constantly being fed by the concepts of atheism, humanism and secularism, how can we stand out like Paul and significantly impact God’s Kingdom? We may not be called to be an evangelist like Paul but we are all called to be witnesses and can pick up from the apostle Paul how to be fearless and effective for Christ in this troubled environment.

The question is, how was Paul able to fearlessly present the gospel in this harsh environment and be as successful as he was?

Upon closely examining the written records of this triumphant apostle’s life, there are at least three on-going factors that were constants throughout his Christian experience that led to his many exploits for the cause of God even in the face of the fiercest opposition.



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Let's explore them.

Paul possessed a Divine Animated BELIEF.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks a great deal about evangelism and highlights as part of his introduction a thought that sets the very foundation for the success of his ministry and life. In Romans 1: 16 Paul emphatically states, "... I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation..." Even though he lived in an environment designed to shame Christians, Paul makes it clear that he wasn't ashamed of the gospel. His lack of shame is attributed to a most important yet often forgotten fact; the gospel is the "POWER OF GOD" to salvation.

The Greek word that is here translated as 'power' is *dunamis* and refers to 'ability', 'strength' or 'potential'. It is the same word that is used to describe the experience of Jesus in Mark 5: 30, when the woman with the issue of blood was miraculously healed. Mark states, that Jesus knew "...in Himself that power had gone out of Him." Just as the woman was healed from God's 'power', the "Power of God" that Paul attributes to the gospel is therefore the ability, strength and potential of God which far surpasses human ability to save the worst of sinners.

However, Paul does not simply state a fact in that statement about the 'Power' of the gospel, he also personalizes it as one who is a product of the 'Power' when he says 'I am not ashamed.' Paul understands and views the gospel as being the most powerful life changing force available. His conviction of the 'power of God' in the gospel is founded primarily upon his own experience with that 'power'.

Paul's lack of shame in spite of the ridicule from both the Jewish and Roman sides of the aisle, is significant because his personal experience of the power of God far supersedes these outward barriers. This unexplained spiritual phenomenon has resulted in the almost unbelievable experiences of the worst of human beings who have believed in the gospel.

Illustration

For the better part of his youthful life Alleyne lived the bold, reckless and heartless life of a gangster, drug dealer and murderer. He was such a notorious character that persons walking the streets of St Lucia who knew him would veer away from him. After many successful gun battles and wide acclaim in the criminal world, he was eventually defeated by an associate who shot him so terribly that he lost a leg and was left with a stomach so riddled with bullets that doctors saw no hope of him surviving. Several uncertain surgeries later, he lived, but with the knowledge that surgical result could give way at any time making him a candidate for immediate death.

However, after leaving the hospital the gangster in him carried a thirst for vengeance and Alleyne was back to his old lifestyle; living with the knowledge that he could die at any time, whether by an enemy's gun or his own failing body. Understanding the unspoken rules of gang territory, Alleyne wouldn't venture on to his enemy's turf but he made it known that he would be avenged and sought every opportunity for it.

Pray for the Suriname Impact tonight. March 25 to
April 6 2019. 20 sites. 20 preachers.



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Alleyne mused on how he would brutally destroy his attacker. He went on to commit worse infractions after his near-death experience and it seems there was no stopping him. However, he never got the opportunity to satisfy his thirst for vengeance.

After much praying from his mother, the “Power of God” arrested Alleyne’s heart. He traded his guns for the Bible and also completely forgave the person who tried to kill him; a transformation that his community still marvels at several years later. Today, still fearless, he enters the very turf where he was once forbidden and there proclaims the good news of a risen Savior. The thirst for vengeance is now replaced with the overwhelming love of God for people that leads him to push almost beyond the levels of his disability and frailty.

Irrespective of what beliefs persons may have and how those beliefs may impact their lives, only the gospel can truly meet the innate needs that we all have. Only the gospel has proven to take man to his highest ideal, reaching deep down to the many layers of his life, to the very core of his being, engaging him in the most intimate ways and without any permission from man speaking to the most sensitive areas of his life rendering him absolutely naked. Only the gospel can do that.

The gospel is therefore part of God’s unchanging purpose for man. It is the reason for which Christ was born, suffered, died, resurrected, ascended and will come again. There is no greater focus from heaven and no greater mandate for God’s servants on earth. The ‘Power of Salvation’ that the gospel is, remains God’s responsibility to divinely work out and the proclamation of the gospel remains our responsibility to execute through God’s ‘power’. Being impacted by this ‘power’ has to be a priority

for every Christian, for without it, our very existence becomes futile.

Like Paul, we are not to simply preach the gospel but to live the gospel. We are not called to simply speak about the ‘Power of God’ but to live the ‘Power of God’. In Galatians 2: 20, Paul explains this change well when he testifies, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” When Christ lives in us as a result of the ‘Power of God’, Christ’s desires, His love, His likes, His dislikes become ours. Since the mandate to evangelize the world comes from Christ Himself, then possessing the ‘Divine Animated Belief’ is the cornerstone to truly accomplishing that mandate. Ellen G White asserts that “The Teacher of Christ’s truth must be near the cross himself, in order to bring sinners to it” {LP 126.3}.

Knowing the ‘Power of God’ personally is not an option; it is the only true and genuine reality of the Christian. We must therefore seek it with our entire being and not stop until it becomes for us, like Paul, our personal testimony to the point where we can testify from within and say, “I am not ashamed’ of the gospel for I am a product of its power.”

Paul was burning with a Godly Inspired BURDEN

Paul exuded a God given, God reflected burden for souls that burned into his heart. It is probably captured best in his expressed desire for Israel in Romans 9: 1-3 when he says, “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.”



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Paul describes his burden with the adjectives ‘great’ and ‘continual’ and caps it by stating that he prefers to embrace his own demise in exchange for the salvation of the Jews; who by the way despised Christianity and by extension Paul himself.

We also see Paul’s expressed Godly love for both Jews and Gentiles recorded in his farewell speech in Acts 20: 18-35 to the Elders in Asia. With his suspected death awaiting him, Paul does not moan about his possible departure from this life but instead pleads with the Elders to remain faithful to the Cause. Referencing his persecution and ongoing death threats, he reminded them in verse 24 that “...none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” Paul summarizes his troublesome time with them in verse 31 stating, “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” Knowing that he will never see them again, in Paul’s speech his heart is overtaken with desiring their faithfulness to the Cause of God as his concern for his own safety fades in the background. Whether in the palace or the prison, Paul’s unquenchable thirst for the lost remained unchanged.

This unnatural, self-sacrificing, divinely given desire for the lost belongs only to God and is seen fully in Christ’s mediatorial work on the cross, where while we were yet ‘enemies’ of God, ‘Christ died for the ungodly.’

How did Paul get to the point of having such a Godly burden? A close look at the rest of his expressed burden for the lost reveals that it is synonymous with his intercessory prayer life. In practically all of his letters, Paul opens by expressing his burden while highlighting his intercession on the Saints’ behalf as a result of the burden. Let’s examine a few examples. In Romans 1: 8-10 he prays unceasingly desiring to ‘come unto’ the Romans. In

1 Cor. 1: 4-9 he prays that the Corinthian Christians are ‘enriched in Christ.’ Having only heard about the Colossians’ faith, in Col. 1: 3-14 Paul records that he prays ongoingly that they “might be filled with the knowledge” of God’s will. And for the Philippian believers, according to Phil. 1: 3-6 he is praying always for their “fellowship in the gospel.” Paul’s burden for the lost cannot be separated from his intercession for them.

I experienced the burden for souls that grew immensely as a result of intercessory prayer and it has since significantly transformed my life and ministry.

Illustration

A few years ago, my wife took a loan to start a small business but soon came against a very unjust obstacle that threatened to cause her to lose the entire investment.

For no apparent reason, her then aged landlord began to behave irrationally and demanded that she vacate the property after she had spent thousands of dollars transforming it to meet the requirements of the government. This battle went on for quite a while and began to cost her, as her progress was halted until the situation could be resolved as advised by her lawyer. The situation worsened as the unreasonable landlord, filled with hatred towards us began attacking our religious faith with insults and public humiliation; a situation that we had done well to avoid for all of our Christian lives.

For me it escalated beyond tipping point when I saw my wife weeping unconsolably as a result of another unreasonable stance from the landlord after another attempt at trying to salvage the investment. Deeply hurt by seeing my wife’s tears, I decided that I was going to pray for the old man to die. Yes, you read right and I was determined to plead to God for justice in asking for his death.



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The following morning, I commenced my devotion in the quietness of the early hours. After meditating on a portion of scripture, I then proceeded to begin my intercession as per the norm; praying for my elders, couples that I was counselling, young people with whom I was working, the sick and so on. While in the midst of interceding, God brought the landlord to my memory and what happened next was just the sheer power of God. Instead of praying for his death as I intended the day before, my heart was moved with compassion for him and as I began to see him from God's perspective, I began to pray God's blessings on him. I pleaded with God to transform his heart and save him. The burden for him so overwhelmed me that I stayed quite a while praying for him with genuine care and concern.

He became a regular in my intercession time in the mornings and sure enough, as God enhanced in me a greater desire for his wellbeing, I felt propelled to engage him even though initially it was without success. While my interceding seemed to have been making no progress, without warning, he surprisingly became a 'human being' again and the rest of the relationship and business operation was history.

When you engage in the godly practice of intercession, you possess an extension of the purpose and heart of God; a burden for the lost. Persons who have experienced genuine intercession are aware that those two realities; intercession and a burden for souls, feed upon and grow each other. The more you genuinely pray for others, the more God fills your being with a desire for their salvation and the more that desire grows, the more divinely driven you are to pray for them. As the prayers are mingled with that genuine godly care, God intervenes on that person's behalf, moving you to seek their

well-being while He works behind the scenes to draw and save them. In other words, the person who has a genuine godly desire for souls will have a fruitful ministry.

In the upper room the disciples embarked on the same intercession as they were given that burden. In commenting on their time in prayer, Ellen White acknowledges that "...the disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised" {AA 37.2}.

In seeking that burden for the loss, we can take one important bit of counsel from Paul's own life and practice. He deliberately took upon himself servanthood for the lost. "I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more" (1 Cor. 9:19). Pray to be a servant to God. Pray to be a servant to others, and while you are at it, pray asking God for a godly burden for the lost.

Paul was driven by a Holy Zealous BOLDNESS

Paul's boldness seemed to operate beyond good human reasoning. In Acts Chapters 25 and 26 we see an amazing example of Holy boldness at play.

After spending two years in jail for preaching Christ, Paul had a hearing before Governor Festus, King Agrippa and Queen Bernice; the perfect opportunity to absolve himself but he disregards that and presents to them the gospel instead; the very reason for which he was incarcerated.



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Now according to the Jewish historian Josephus, it was widely believed that Bernice was having an incestuous relationship with her brother Agrippa and thus an interesting context presents itself for what Paul does. Whether or not the rumors were true, Paul deliberately personally addressed King Agrippa in verse 2, verse 7, verse 13, verse 19 and verse 27 which is evidence enough that Agrippa was his primary target. It is in this discourse that Agrippa famously admits in Acts 26:28 "...Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

We also see Paul take on the best of Greek minds with his 'foolishness' of the gospel on Mars Hill. After just having arrived in Athens to escape Jewish persecution in Berea, while waiting to be joined by Timothy and Silas, Acts 17: 16 records his general tenor of the Athenian lifestyle; "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols." Paul began to boldly declare Jesus to the Greek influenced Roman Philosophers on Mars hill. Having given them an overview of God as Creator, Paul takes the risk and speaks against the cultured, age-old practice of idol worship. In verse 29, he concludes by saying, "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising." Paul openly attacks a very core belief of the Athenians without hesitation.

You and I might cringe at the sensitive and thin line that Paul walked on in those two instances of boldness and probably wonder how we can fearlessly do the same. Paul helps us understand a very important fact of possessing this amazing quality. In 1 Thess. 2: 2, he states, "But even after we had suffered be-

fore and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict." Paul attributes the boldness to God.

God is therefore the source of holy boldness and if God is the source of holy boldness then holy boldness is God's intended will. It is the direct result of the character and design of God. It is needed in order for the Christian to accomplish his part in heaven's biggest rescue mission; the salvation of mankind. It is a necessary tool because there are a number of self-preservation factors such as fear, persecution and shame that are meant to deter us from sharing the gospel as evil perpetuates and the eternal destiny of many continue to hang loosely over the camp of damnation.

Illustration

It is reported that General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, once said that he greatly desired if possible, to dangle his evangelism trainees over hell for 24 hours. Then they would see and understand the harsh reality that awaits those who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. General Booth seem to be on par with Paul where the theme of 'man's eternal destiny' as a motivating factor for 'boldness' is concerned. One of the key aspects for Paul's boldness is his confidence and experience with the resurrected Jesus. The apostle to the Gentiles safely carries the title of Champion of the Resurrection as he gives an entire chapter over to the subject in 1 Corinthians 15. He nails it in verse 17 with the words "...if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." Paul interestingly attributes belief in the resurrection not only to head knowledge but also to a living faith relationship with God that frees us from our sins.



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That particular faith in the resurrection can be had only by the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8: 11, Paul makes probably one of the most important teaching points on the Doctrine of the resurrection; “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” Paul attributes the Power of the Resurrection of Jesus to the Holy Spirit and makes it clear that the only way we can be partakers of the resurrection is to have the Holy Spirit ‘dwelling’ in us just as it dwelt in Christ.

Whereas for General Booth he stopped only at the head knowledge, Paul takes the theme of ‘eternal destiny’ further and highlights that it can be had only in a relationship with Jesus via the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As such, Paul’s boldness leads him to desire everyone; King or commoner, to know Jesus personally. It is a given that one of the oldest and ongoing temptations of Christians is to be fearful and ashamed of their faith. But it is better to be bold for Christ and hated, than to relegate Christian duty and not give a lost soul an opportunity to be saved. It is refreshing to know that that boldness is available through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This holy boldness however, isn’t a possibility only for those who have been experienced in the declaration of the gospel. In our scripture reading, we see Paul, a brand-new convert begin to fearlessly preach the gospel knowing that he would be vehemently and violently opposed. Acts 9: 17,19 and 20 ties for us the connection; “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent

me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ ...Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” The Holy Spirit is what propelled Paul to fearlessly and boldly declare the gospel in spite of known oppositions. What we notice as Paul grows is that Paul’s growth takes place in his knowledge and exploits but the boldness and fearlessness remain the same.

Sister White counsels that what the church needs in these days of peril is an army of workers, who, like Paul, have educated themselves for usefulness, who have a deep experience in the things of God, and who are inspired with earnestness and zeal in his service.

She says also that cultivated, refined, sanctified, self-sacrificing men are needed; men who will not shun trial and responsibility, but who will lift the burdens wherever they may find them; men who are brave, who are true; men who have Christ formed within them, and who, with lips touched with holy fire, "will preach the word" amid the thousands who are preaching fables {LP 326.1}.

In a world where moral decay is quickly becoming the norm and governments and even churches are following suit there is a need for persons who are on the highway to hell to be shouted at and not simply be whispered to. Even in the midst of the noise of ridicule, shame and even persecution, the voice of boldness needs to rise above the deafening, deadly and deliberate efforts of the enemy to capture and keep lost souls. You may have reservations and may not think that you have it in you but there is good news.



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Paul: A Fearless Evangelist

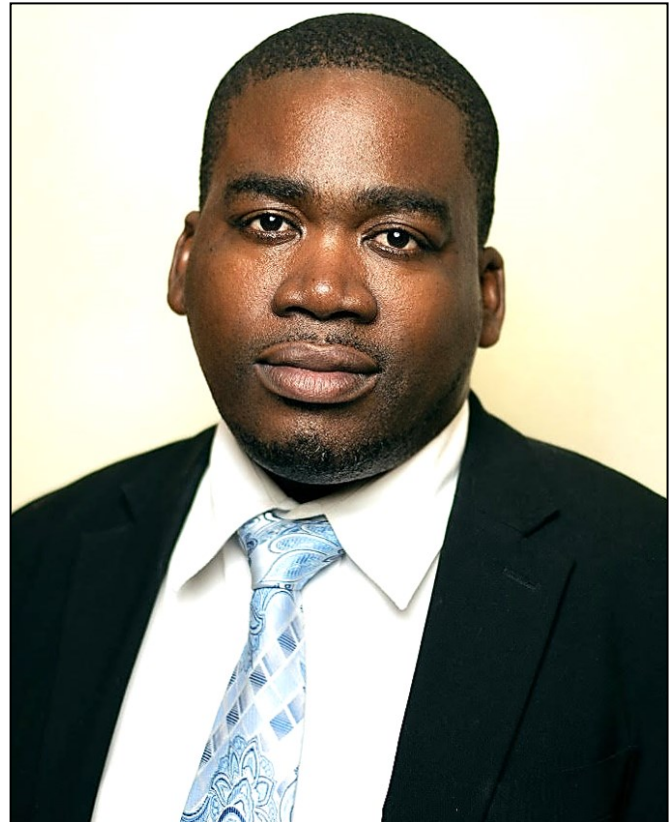
Pastor Nick Vitalis

Even though Paul is amongst those who championed this holy boldness it does not mean that he was not personally challenged to accomplish it. In Ephesians 6: 18, 19, he requested prayers from the saints so that he could be bold in declaring the gospel: *“Praying always... for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.”* Let’s therefore take a page from Paul and the early church and approach the acquisition of holy boldness by engaging in corporate prayer. Paul asked for prayer so that he can possess this boldness – let’s follow his example. It worked for them and as the God of Paul remains our God today, it can work for us.

CONCLUSION

In this age that grows tentacles of antagonism towards morality, spirituality and Christianity, only the fearless can effectively accomplish God’s design in the salvation of precious souls. But it is only through the power of God, that we can accomplish the works of God. The ‘power of the gospel’ is God’s to give, the ‘godly burden’ is God’s to inscribe in our hearts and the ‘holy boldness’ is God’s to implant within us.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit led Paul to immediately commence preaching. God used the Spirit to impart to him the Belief, the Burden and the Boldness. Today, as the Spirit of God continues to impart the same to believers everywhere, will you not open your heart and avail yourself to God for the same?



Pastor Nick Vitalis obtained a Bachelors in Divinity at the Newbold College in England. He is a St Lucian and works with the St Lucia Mission of SDA. He has served the Mission for some 9 years and is the district pastor for the Anse La Raye District. He serves the Vanard, La Croix, Maingot, Millet and Anse La Raye SDA Churches. His wife is Germaine and they have three girls, Tabitha, Phebe and Micaiah.



Last Sabbath

Christ: The Personification of a Spirit Filled Life

Pastor Wayne Sampson

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:22-23

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in His common life with us, gave believers of all time a genuine model for how to live the Christian life beyond the limitations of an average human life. It must be specifically noted that Jesus Christ's supernaturally oriented life on this earth resulted from His dependence on the Divine resources of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. Without an appreciation of the dependence upon the Father and Holy Spirit that Jesus exercised, it is difficult to understand how Jesus can be our genuine example or be deemed as 'The personification of the Spirit filled life'.

What is the Spirit-filled life?

In Ephesians 5:18, the contrast with wine shows that the obvious idea in "filled" is that of spiritual control by means of the Spirit who already indwells in believers. The analogy with a drunk person is designed by the apostle to make the issue crystal clear: to be drunk with wine means to be controlled, brought under the influence of wine. Visible behaviour characteristics begin to take place as a person comes under the influence of wine.

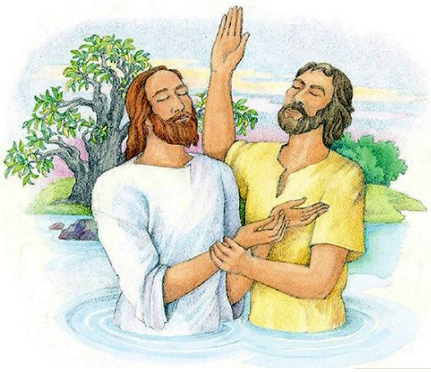
Comparatively, to be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit so the filled believer does things that are unnatural for him under the control of the Spirit even as the drunken individual does things that are unnatural for him under the control of the spirits.

The comparison is in the matter of control. A drunken person is controlled by the liquor which he

has consumed and because of this he thinks in ways normally unnatural to him. Similarly, the man who is Spirit-filled is controlled, and he too acts in ways that are unnatural to him. This is not to imply that these ways are erratic or abnormal, but they are not ways which belong to his old life. Thus, being filled with the Spirit is simply being controlled by the Spirit.

The issue is not getting the Spirit within, but of allowing the indwelling Spirit to take charge and move into every area of the believer's life.

Reduced to its simplest terms, to be filled with the Spirit means that, through voluntary surrender and in response to appropriating faith, the human personality is filled, mastered, controlled by the Holy Spirit. The very word 'filled' supports that meaning. The idea is not that of something being poured into a passive empty receptacle. "That which takes possession of the mind is said to fill it," says Thayer, the great lexicographer. That usage of the word is found in Luke 5:26 (KJV): "They were filled with fear," and in John 16:6: "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart." Their fear and sorrow possessed them to the exclusion of other emotions. They mastered and controlled them.



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Even though good works and faithful service are a result of being filled with the Spirit, they are not necessarily signs of it. Remember, we are talking about character, not what we do. It's easier to serve the Lord in some manner than to love the unlovable or be patient with difficult people, but when the Spirit is in charge of our lives, He does through us what we cannot do for ourselves.

How to be filled

Ephesians 5:18-20 says: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There is a contrast being made between being filled with alcohol and being filled with the Spirit. There is also a similarity which is the idea of influence. You might want to ask, “In what ways do you see these ideas as contrasting; in what ways are they similar?”

The metaphor of drinking can be a helpful one, in that it brings out the idea of influence. Under the influence of alcohol, people are emboldened to speak, express love, and become reflective. They also turn to alcohol for empowerment, comfort, courage, and companionship. These are helpful pictures of influence. Of course alcohol is the short-term counterfeit, while the reality is found in being filled with the Spirit.

So what causes a person to get drunk and to fall

more and more under the influence of alcohol? The reasons lead to more drinking. The difference with the Christian is not that he or she needs more of the Spirit, but influence increases when the Spirit has more of them. While there are many things that affect the Spirit's control of our life, let us consider four primary means by which the Spirit gains greater control, or influence, over our lives – where He consumes more of us.

Lordship

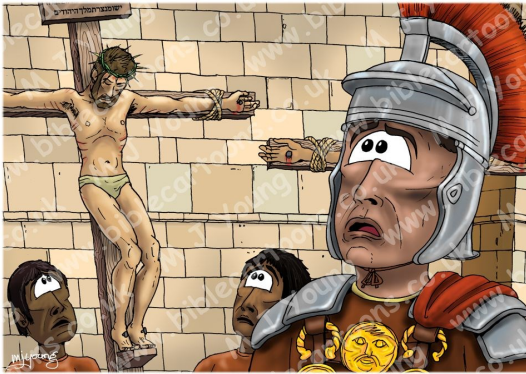
Romans 12:1(NIV) says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-this is your true and proper worship.”

You might want to ask the question, “What does it mean to be a living sacrifice?” The question you need to ask yourself is, “Does God have control of every area of your life?” This concept is often referred to as “lordship”.

Imagine your life as a floor plan drawn up for a house. Let the rooms in that drawing correspond to different areas in your life. Make the reading room what you watch or listen to. Let the bedroom symbolize your relationships, the recreation room, your social life. You get the picture.

You might ask, “What room would Jesus feel most at home in?” You might not want to end the question with a preposition like I just did. So you might ask, “Which room do I keep to myself?”

You want to emphasize that critical to being fully empowered by the Spirit is seeking to live each of these areas under the control or guidance of the Holy Spirit.



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Nothing will bring home this idea better than examples from your own life. So give some thought in advance to a few examples, and describe how you turned these areas of your life over to the Lord.

Confession

When we sin, we take control of our lives. By definition, then, the Holy Spirit is not in control. We are. The importance of confessing sin whenever we become aware of it is critical to keeping the Holy Spirit in control of our life. You might ask yourself how often you are confessing sin. When you become aware of sin do you immediately confess and give back control to God?

Dependence

The third concept is “dependence”, which is turning to God throughout the day for enablement and empowerment. An example one might point out (even though negative) is a cigarette smoker. Every time he senses a need, he “lights-up”. If he feels lonely, he “lights-up”. If he feels scared or nervous, he “lights-up”. If he needs confidence, he “lights-up”.

We can find ourselves doing the same thing with food, music, and TV. Did you ever eat when you weren’t hungry—only lonely? Throughout each day we sense the need for empowerment, comfort, enablement, wisdom, companionship. We often turn to substitutes like food, film, sleep, or even friends to meet these needs. God wants us to reflexively turn to Him throughout the day and ask for comfort, empowerment, wisdom and direction: This constant reliance on the Spirit keeps us intimately connected to the Lord throughout the day, and allows our thirsts to be met by His “living water”.

You might want to ask yourself in what ways you meet your thirst. You should be turning to the Lord

increasingly with your needs throughout the day. Just like a cigarette smoker takes puffs all day long, you should be turning to the Lord all day long. A life of abiding and dependence.

Abiding

The rest of our Ephesians passage says, “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” For lack of a better word, it is the picture of abiding, which means making ourselves at home with God. In John 15:5 it says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man abides in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Consider this illustration. Have you ever been to a party where the atmosphere is such that it inclines you are inclined to sin? The music, the lighting, how people are dressed, and the conversations, they all set a mood or an atmosphere that can cultivate our fleshly desires. Withholding rooms, areas of your life, will severely impact the influence the Holy Spirit has.

The passage mentions activities like singing spiritual songs, praising, and giving thanks. Engaging in activities such as these throughout the day sets an atmosphere in our hearts that cultivates the direction and influence of the Holy Spirit.

These are four main things (there are others) which are critical to living a life controlled by the Spirit: lordship, confession, reliance, and abiding. The Christian strives to maximize the control of the Spirit in his life through engaging in these activities and processes.



Last Sabbath

Christ: The Personification of a Spirit Filled Life

Pastor Wayne Sampson

NAMES AND TITLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The study of the name and titles of the Holy Spirit reveals the characteristics of the Spirit-filled life.

For example, He is the Spirit of:

LIFE - Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:6.

Thus, when He fills us He will fill us with His life.

HOLINESS - 1 Peter 1:2.

Thus, when He fills us He will fill us with His holiness.

GRACE - Hebrews 10:29.

Thus, when He fills us we shall be gracious.

TRUTH - John 14:13-17.

Thus, when He fills us we shall be true and truthful.

POWER - Zechariah 12:10.

Thus, when He fills us we shall be men and women of power.

JESUS THE PERSONIFICATION OF A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE.

The question persists, however: how could Jesus live the extraordinary life that He did if He did not avail Himself of His divine attributes? The answer is perhaps most clearly taught in the gospel of Luke, where Jesus is portrayed as the perfect Spirit-filled man who lived the perfect Spirit-filled life.

In Luke 1–2, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and named “Jesus,” which means God saves, “Christ,” which means anointed by the Holy Spirit,

and “Son of God”, which is a synonym for divinity. Together, these reveal that Jesus is the eternal God who was born and lived by the power of the Holy Spirit to save sinners.

In Luke 3:21–22, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at His baptism.

In Luke 4:1–2, Jesus was “full of the Spirit” and “led by the Spirit.”

In Luke 4:18, Jesus began His ministry reading from Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me.”

In Luke 4:14, Jesus “returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit” and the rest of His ministry is therefore by the power of the Holy Spirit, or Spirit-filled.

In Luke 4:31–32, people were amazed at the authority of Jesus’ teaching because it was Spirit-filled.

In Luke 4:33–37, Jesus cast a demon out of a tormented person because He was Spirit-filled.

In Luke 4:38–44, Jesus healed many people because He was Spirit-filled.

In Luke 10:21 “Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit...”

In Luke 11:13, Jesus said God the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

In Luke 12:12, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come.

In Luke 24, Jesus rose by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:11).

How to Walk by or Be Filled With the Spirit

The commands to be “filled with the Spirit” or “live by the Spirit” are commands for believers to get in proper alignment with the Holy Spirit through faith so they are brought under the control, enablement, and direction of the Spirit, who already indwells them. It is a spiritual state where the Holy Spirit is free to fulfil all that He came to do in the heart and life of believers.



Last Sabbath

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Reality Check! **1John 2:6** “the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

The Adam Clark’s Commentary gives a very insightful interpretation:

‘Abideth in him’ - He who not only professes to have known Christ, but also that he has communion with him, and abides in his favor, should prove the truth of his profession by walking as Christ walked; living a life of devotion and obedience to God, and of benevolence and beneficence to his neighbor. Thus Christ walked; and he has left us an example that we should follow his steps.

To be in Christ, 1 John 2:5, is to be converted to the Christian faith, and to have received the remission of sins. To abide in Christ, 1 John 2:6, is to continue in that state of salvation, growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ought himself also to walk even as he walked: as Christ walked, lived, and acted, so ought he; that is, to imitate him and follow him, as he has him for an example; not in his miraculous works in raising the dead, healing the sick, and walking upon the waters; which were wrought as proofs of his deity and of his Messiahship, and not intended for imitation; nor in his mediatorial performances, as in his propitiatory sacrifice and advocacy; but in the exer-

cise of grace, and duties of religion as a man, and in a private way; and may chiefly regard walking in love, as he walked, see Ephesians 5:2.

My little children - A soft and tender way of speaking, used by Christ to his disciples, and frequently by that affectionate and beloved disciple, John. It is expressive of the apostle's strong love and affection for them, and points out their tenderness in the faith, and that small degree of spiritual light and knowledge they had, as well as signifies that he had been, as he hoped, and in a judgment of charity believed, an instrument of their conversion, and was their spiritual parent: hence it follows.

Until Christ be formed in you: which is the same as to be created in Christ, to be made new creatures, or new men in him; or, in other words, to have the principle of grace wrought in the soul, which goes by the name of Christ formed in the heart; because it is from him, he is the author of it, and it bears a resemblance to him, and is that by which he lives, dwells, and reigns in the souls of his people.

To abide in Christ, 1 John 2:6, is to continue in that state of salvation, growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Last Sabbath

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Now though, as he hoped, this new man, new creature, or Christ, was formed in them before, when he first preached the Gospel to them; yet it was not a perfect man; particularly their knowledge of Christ, of his Gospel, and Gospel liberty, was far from being so, in which they went backwards instead of forwards; and therefore he was greatly concerned, laboured exceedingly, and vehemently endeavoured, which he calls travailing in birth again, to bring them to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

If we call ourselves Christians, our lives should be changed by the gospel. However, we cannot do good things on our own. We cannot even know the heart and will of God without His help. For all who have responded to the cross, we have been given the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and to assist us in our life-long pursuit of holiness. We must seek to know God through His Word and allow that to soak into every aspect of our lives. If we are in Christ, we never lose His Spirit. Yet if we are in Christ, we have an obligation to submit to his Spirit.

1 John 1:6-7 If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth. But if we walk in

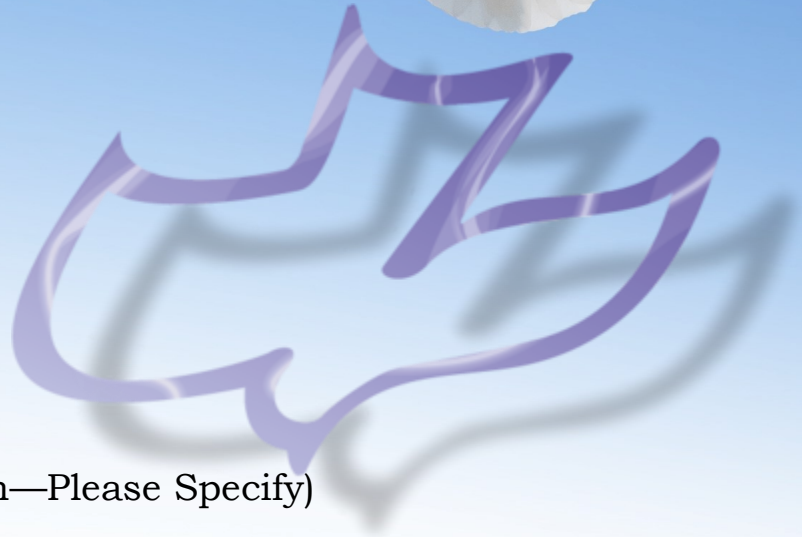
the light as He himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.



Pastor Wayne Sampson has served the SDA Church for over 32 years. He is a Trinidadian and works for the South Caribbean Conference as Men's Ministries and PARL Director. Along with his wife Eugenia they have three children, Avionne, Acquisha and Andel.



SUGGESTED Program



Singspiration

Prayer

Welcome

Special Music

Gem

Offering (Poor, Education—Please Specify)

Theme Song (Lord Transform me)

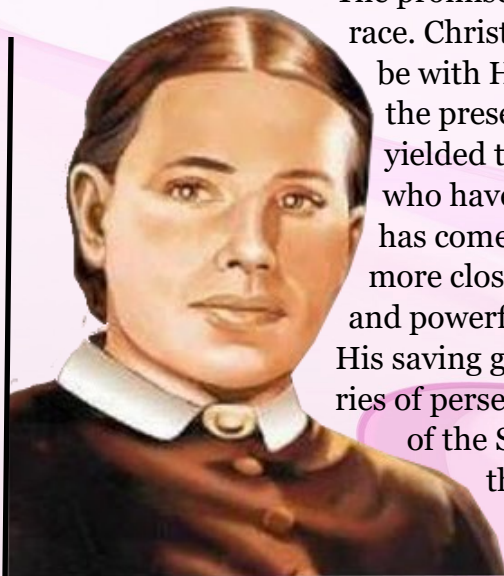
Sermon

Hymn

Congregational Prayer (In groups of two)

Closing Song

Benediction



The promise of the Holy Spirit is not limited to any age or to any race. Christ declared that the divine influence of His Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end. From the Day of Pentecost to the present time, the Comforter has been sent to all who have yielded themselves fully to the Lord and to His service. To all who have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, the Holy Spirit has come as a counselor, sanctifier, guide, and witness. The more closely believers have walked with God, the more clearly and powerfully have they testified of their Redeemer's love and of His saving grace. The men and women who through the long centuries of persecution and trial enjoyed a large measure of the presence of the Spirit in their lives, have stood as signs and wonders in the world. Before angels and men they have revealed the transforming power of redeeming love. AA pg. 5

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