

Sabbath Recorder



RESTORED

for a Purpose

Virtual Conference 2021!

September 2021

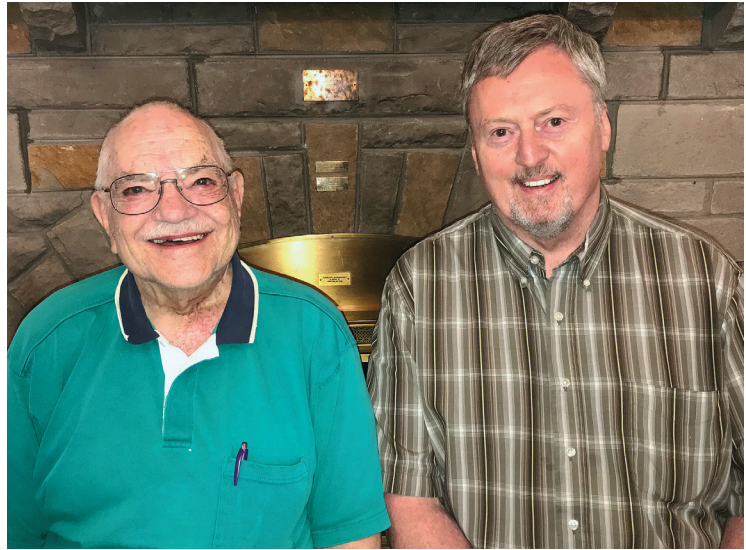
A Seventh Day Baptist Publication

That's a (virtual) Wrap!

Conference 2021 in review

by

President Kevin Butler



Dr. Stephen Thorngate with Kevin Butler

If someone were to ask me, “What are the perks of being Conference president?”—I would not be able to produce a very long list.

One benefit did emerge during our virtual Conference week experience. It was almost time for Tuesday evening worship and I saw Janet collecting the trash from the cans in each of our rooms. I asked, “What are you doing? You know that’s my usual job.”

“Honey,” she explained, “we can’t have the Conference president be bothered with the garbage!”

So I got the week off from picking up the trash! I love my wife. But why did she flash me an ironic smile and roll her eyes?...

As I join the long line of former SDB Conference presidents, I appreciate the legacy that so many left behind. I pray that many lives and families have been touched by focusing each year on a certain Conference theme or Bible passage, and that God received the glory due to Him.

Of course, these last two years have been totally different with only online experiences. Attending worship at our home church is not something we usually do during Conference week. There were a number of the virtual participants in attendance: Pastor Nate Crandall who led our daily Bible studies; Executive Director Carl Greene preaching the Sabbath sermon on the big video screen (and sitting in the pew); and the ladies who presented the “9 Arts of Spiritual Conversation” seminars—Linda Lyke, Melissa Lade, and Shanny Snyder. Many, many thanks to you all for sharing your gifts!

After the service, I talked to someone who was not featured on the virtual Conference program this year. Dr. Stephen Thorngate is again able to attend services in Milton after being locked down for many months at his assisted living home.

I knew that Dr. Steve (who just turned 95) was

Conference president in the past, but he mentioned something that I had not realized.

“I served at the 300th anniversary of the Newport church.”

“What?” I said, doing some quick math. “You were president in ‘71?”

“That’s right.” He paused, gave me that great mustachioed smile, then asked, “Do you think we’ll make it for the 400th?” We laughed.

He wasn’t done.

“I went to Conference by myself in 1942. I was 16, so I was allowed to attend without having a sponsor. And do you know what happened the next year? They cancelled Conference! It was all my fault!! I go one year and they cancel it!”

Another wonderful smile. (And the cancellation might have had to do with WWII...)

Heartfelt thanks go out to the General Council for their oversight; the Council and Agency directors (John Pethtel, Jeremiah Owen, Nick Kersten, Andy Samuels and Jenni Wangsness) for all of their hard work; our evening speakers—Keith Ashley, Steve James, Matt Berg, Andy Samuels, and JR Shick; those who served as virtual “tour guides” of the Newport SDB Church for its 350th anniversary; and Janet Thorngate who led the historical panel discussion.

And thanks to all those who signed up and participated in another not-so-ordinary Conference gathering. Lord willing, next year, we can laugh and hug and share our lives together face to face.

Please be in prayer for our 2022 president Charlotte Chroniger. It looks like a great theme and lineup of events planned so far.

Oh, and husband Don, give her a break on garbage night. SR

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Sabbath Recorder

A monthly journey into the mind and heart.

September 2021

Patricia Cruzan, Editor

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WHO ARE SEVENTH DAY BAPTISTS?

If you've never read *The Sabbath Recorder* before, you might be wondering who Seventh Day Baptists are. Like other Baptists, we believe in:

- salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.
- the Bible as the inspired Word of God. The Bible is our authority for our faith and daily conduct.
- baptism of believers, by immersion, witnessing to our acceptance of Christ as Savior and Lord.
- freedom of thought under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- the congregational form of church government. Every church member has the right to participate in the decision-making process of the church.

THE SEVENTH DAY

God commanded that the seventh day (Saturday) be kept holy. Jesus agreed by keeping it as a day of worship. We observe the seventh day of the week (Saturday) as God's Holy Day as an act of loving obedience—not as a means of salvation. Salvation is the free gift of God through Jesus our Lord. It is the joy of the Sabbath that makes SDBs a people with a difference.

CONTACT US

The Seventh Day Baptist Center
3120 Kennedy Road
PO Box 1678, Janesville, WI 53547-1678.
Phone: (608) 752-5055; FAX: (608) 752-7711
E-mail: contact@seventhdaybaptist.org
SDB Website: www.seventhdaybaptist.org

Director of Communications: Jeremiah Owen
jowen@seventhdaybaptist.org
cell: (818) 468-9077

Editor of the *Sabbath Recorder*: Patricia Cruzan
sdbsr@seventhdaybaptist.org



“This Is NOT a Drill!”

Alia Wong got a phone call from her younger brother who was living in Hawaii. His voice was trembling.

He’d just received an “Emergency Alert Warning” on his phone that a ballistic missile was heading for the islands. The alert read in all caps: “THIS IS **NOT** A DRILL!”

Alia’s brother had no idea what to do or where to go.

And he was not alone. People across the state started to take cover in mall bathrooms, bathtubs, drug stores, even a storm drain. There were reports of people speeding down the highways and running red lights to reunite with family members. Many called one another to say “I love you” one last time.

This alert in January 2018 turned out to be false. One huge “mistake.”

A state employee accidentally triggered the Emergency Alert System message during what should have been a routine *internal* test.

But here’s the tough part. It took officials *38 minutes* to announce their mistake — “OOPs!” — and to confirm that the warning was just a false alarm!

Alia Wong wrote that those 38 minutes were the 38 *worst* minutes of many Hawaii residents’ lives. And for those living outside of the state, as Alia was, they felt helpless as they contended with the prospect of never seeing their loved ones again.

Matthew LoPresti, a state representative whose district is very close to Pearl Harbor (a likely target if a bomb did come), recalled putting his two daughters, ages 4 and 8, in the bathtub — attempting to explain what was happening, and telling them to pray.

LoPresti said, “As I sat there with my kids, I was going between ‘This doesn’t really feel real’ and ‘This is actually what it *would* feel like.’”

Residents of Hawaii are used to preparing for hurricanes or tsunamis, but a fast-arriving nuclear warhead?

How would you have handled that situation?

Do you think that Hawaiians — and all people — need to be prepared for a 38-minute countdown toward their destiny?

Do you think that Hawaiians — and all people — need to know this “God of all grace”?

Do you think they need to know that this God of all grace has called them to His eternal glory in Christ?

Continued on next page...

We can also expect warnings and tough times!

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The whole letter of 1st Peter is like an “Early Warning System.” Believers scattered in Asia were under heavy persecution. They needed these warnings because their suffering was very real. It was not a “DRILL.”

As followers of Christ today, we can also expect warnings and tough times. What do we do when the alarm goes off?

So often, we want to jump to: “Hey, this isn’t fair! I don’t deserve this!”

The good news is that it’s “Only going to last a little while.”

God’s greater plan for us includes greater things, like redemption and restoration, being **Restored** — **for a Purpose**.

And He is a God of such hope! The Lord promises to wipe away every tear; that death will be no more; that there will be no more mourning, or crying or pain. Does that sound like hope?

Again, this is a letter to those who are suffering, and Peter acknowledges that their suffering is real. “But,” he says, “do you know what else is real? Or, *Who* else is real?”

The God of all grace — Who will help you.

God “called you to His *Eternal Glory* in Christ Jesus.”

To *this* we were called. For what? For future hope and glory. There’s a day on the Lord’s calendar when He is going to make everything right. He has a plan, and we need to trust Him in that plan.

“*In Christ Jesus*.” Everything about God’s plan, everything about our eternal glory, is possible because it is *IN* Christ Jesus.

So, how would you have handled that situation in Hawaii?

Do you think that you would have done things differently?

I hope so, because we have been called to be different!

Do you ever feel “odd” in the eyes of the world?

A.W. Tozer summed it up this way: “A *real* Christian is an ‘odd number.’ He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen. Talks every day to Someone he cannot see. He expects to go to heaven on the virtue of another, empties himself in order that he might be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, and goes down in order to get up.

“He is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest, and is happiest when he feels worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, and gives away so he can keep.

“He sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passes knowledge.”

When we’ve received word of an “incoming missile”— maybe a medical diagnosis, or really bad news on the other end of the phone — we can maintain our faith and focus when we realize that God is working out His plan for our life.

And His plan is to make us more and more like Jesus.

How does God promise that we’re going to make it all the way to the end?

Check out these words of promise and assurance from 1 Peter 5:10:

— He will restore us.

— He will make us strong, firm and steadfast.

God’s restoration of His people includes mending what has been broken, and making us complete.

As He makes us strong:

— He increases our resolve and our determination to keep the faith.

As He makes us firm:

— He is confirming us in the faith, and making us able to endure.

As He makes us steadfast:

— we grow deeper and deeper in what we believe.

Through all of our suffering and struggle, the Lord God is at work to restore and strengthen, making us (His children) firm and steadfast.

Every tear, every trial— even *death* itself— is swallowed up in His victory!

Didn’t the cross look like a defeat for God’s purposes? But then it became the plan through which salvation was offered.

Nothing can stop His divine plan.

The aim of our suffering and one of the purposes of our restoration is to give the glory to God.

Hasn’t the Gospel created new longings, new desires in you?

Hasn’t the Good News of Christ and His gift of grace changed you?

Aren’t you a bit “different” from most of your neighbors?

Back to that 38-minute panic. Some Hawaiians said that the event was a different kind of wake-up call.

Wong wrote that the alert gave many a new appreciation for their loved ones and for the island’s simple pleasures: the white-sand beaches, the gentle trade winds, the January sunshine. It also brought people together in a way that they hadn’t before — even in a place where the “Aloha Spirit” is a fact of life.

Chris Lee, a state representative on the east side of

*The suffering of today strips away the “veneer” of our lives,
and reminds us of what is truly valuable and worthy.*

Oahu, recalled going to the mall after the fiasco and described a sort of surreal atmosphere where everybody was calm and friendly.

“It was like Christmas morning and everybody got a car! There was an amazing sense of camaraderie.” He noticed myriad strangers greeting one another, exchanging stories about their morning, and offering each other their spot in line. “The little things that people worry about in day-to-day life and get frustrated with, completely evaporated.”

For us, our suffering gives us a similar reminder. The suffering we undergo right now only makes us long for heaven all the more.

The suffering of today strips away the “veneer” of our lives, and reminds us of what is truly valuable and worthy.

Where are you today on your journey? Do you feel that you are suffering, or in a season of peace? Or is God preparing you or your church for something in the near future?

Friends, do not despair. We have seen that God uses our suffering for our good, and for His glory.

“And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.” SR



2021 Conference
Pastors and Spouses Forum:

Life Together as Ministry Couples



Toni Kim

John Pethel, SDB Director of Church Development and Pastoral Services, welcomed pastors and spouses at the virtual forum held on Tuesday, July 13. Toni Kim shared about “Life Together as Ministry Couples.” Toni introduced the idea of *marriage as mission* through her experience as a spiritual mentor and speaker who has been serving for over 25 years alongside her husband Walter, who is President of the National Association of Evangelicals. We also soaked in Toni’s reflections about *marriage as sanctification* and *marriage as service*, where service to our spouse includes finding the balance between sharing truthfully yet graciously. Toni brought these subjects to life through sharing examples of serving on the pastoral staff at Park Street Church in downtown Boston for 17 years. She also brought the concept of *marriage as mystery* to life through her reflections as a wife and mom of two teenagers.

Pastor Ericessen and Crystal Cooper, New York City SDB Church, shared a powerful testimony of how God has been at work in their lives, keeping them healthy as a ministry couple through the challenging COVID season. SDB President, Kevin Butler, prayed over pastors and spouses and provided gracious reflections for those attending. Carl and Cindy Greene served as emcees of our time together. It was certainly a blessing to see one another! John Pethel provided an encouraging conclusion by announcing the in-person Pastors Conference scheduled for November 5-7, 2021. More details will be coming!

To all of our pastors, spouses, and families: thank you for who you are and all that you do. You are a blessing! May you increasingly know God’s presence, encouragement, and gift of life together across the days ahead. SR



Conference Message on Thursday, July 29

By Andrew Samuels, Chief Executive Director, SDB Missionary Society



Restored for a Purpose

And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

— 1 Peter 5:10

According to one count, there are 8,810 promises within the 66 books of the Bible. My job today is to exegete for you, each one of them. No, no, no. I'm just kidding. Don't turn me off or tune me out just yet. My job is really to help us to focus on only one of those 8,810 promises of the Lord, contained in His Word.

The promise we are talking about is found in 1 Peter 5:10. The promise is somewhat in the middle of the verse. In order to get the best and most complete understanding of the promise, it is important to observe what is said immediately prior to the promise, and then to break down how the Apostle Peter elaborates on the promise, and gives us a perspective of it that is hopeful, positive, encouraging, and inspiring.

The verse begins by identifying who is making the promise and who will fulfill the promise. It is *"The God of all grace."* That is significant. It is the God who creates by grace, who provides by grace, who sustains by grace, who delivers by grace, who saves by grace. God's grace makes room for us all. It is that God who makes and delivers on the promise. And He is further qualified as, *"the God who called you to His eternal glory in Christ."* I love that. There is a calling upon us by Him. It is eternal. It is to His glory. And it is in Christ. What is there not to love about that?

But, what is the promise? It is *"That God: the God of all grace WILL Himself restore you."* He will not outsource the job. He Himself will restore you. What gives us a clue that it is a promise is the presence of the word "WILL." It is written in the future tense.

But, I must quickly also draw your attention to what is stated between the naming of the Promise-Giver and the stating of the promise. Between those two "bookends," so to speak, we find the words, *"After you have suffered a little while."* Oh how we wish those words were not there. Why did Peter have to spoil such a great and uplifting verse, with those dreaded words, *"After you have suffered*

a little while?" We don't like to suffer—not for a long while, not for a little while, not ever. Not only do we not like those words, but we also will almost automatically find ourselves asking the question, "How long is a little while?"

Maybe some of us can identify with the three turtles who decided to go on a picnic. They were the best of friends. Before long it started to rain, and they decided that one of them should go back and get some umbrellas. One turtle agreed to go, but only if the other two promised not to begin eating until he returned. They promised. He headed out. They waited a day, then a week, then a month, and finally a whole year. Still, their friend had not returned with the umbrellas. Finally, one said, "Look, he's not coming back, let's go ahead and eat." Just then, the turtle who was supposed to be bringing the umbrellas, stuck his head out from behind a rock and said, "If you do, I won't go!"

Are you asking, "Lord, how long is a little while? How long will it take for you to bring restoration? How long will it take for you to make us strong, firm, and steadfast?" Are you thinking, "Lord, it's taking too long!"? This is the "WHEN" question. All of us have asked it at one time or another in our lives. "When, Lord, when?" When will my breakthrough come? When will the turnaround take place? When will the deliverance be a reality? When will my family break this cycle? When will my church see revival? When will our Conference have renewal?

I feel led today to invite and challenge Seventh Day Baptists to believe 1 Peter 5:10, to claim 1 Peter 5:10, to live out 1 Peter 5:10, to share 1 Peter 5:10. I feel led to declare today that not only has God promised 1 Peter 5:10, but for the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference of the United States and Canada, He has already fulfilled 1 Peter 5:10 and He is right now continuing to fulfill 1 Peter 5:10 for us. We are living in the days of HIS RESTORATION. He is making us strong, firm and steadfast. And you don't want to miss out on that enormous blessing from the Lord.

I am grateful to my brothers who have spoken on particular aspects of 1 Peter 5:10 earlier this week, and who have made my job so much easier. I get to help us to celebrate God's restoration of us and among us.

So, I am proposing four Realities of our Restoration: Longevity, Identity, Prosperity, Spirituality!

LONGEVITY — The first SDB Church in America started 350 years ago. That particular local church no longer functions as such, but its descendants exist in most of the states in America, and also into Canada, encompassing North America. The number of churches has grown over the decades and centuries; and of course, so has the number of people, who self-identify as Seventh Day Baptists. The General Conference, which was organized in 1802, almost 220 years ago, is strong and vibrant, has visionary and effective leadership, and is continuing to pursue its mission of producing healthy churches led by healthy leaders. We have existed for so long, and continue to exist, because of God's restoration. Over the years we have suffered from threats such as sin, apathy, laziness, lack of vision, egocentric decision-making, timid leadership, parochialism, prejudices, and unfaithful stewardship. But God has allowed us to survive those threats and overcome those threats so that we are able to repent and be renewed for another generation, for another season, for another opportunity. And that does not mean that we are now perfect. It does not mean that there is no more need for repentance. No, we are still being worked on. We have areas where repentance yet needs to take place. God is not finished with us yet. In fact, that is precisely why He has preserved us and sustained us and restored us: because He wants to do more work in and through us. And although we may not be able to boast of large numbers for our congregations, we hold our heads high in the realm of God's economy, and we are well respected in the evangelical community. We weigh more than we count.

IDENTITY — We have a unique identity in the world. We are children of God first, then we are Baptists, then we are Sabbath-keeping Baptists. We are privileged to be part of the family of God. There is no denominational exclusivity in that. In other words, it is not only Seventh Day Baptists who are part of God's family or kingdom; thank the Lord. We embrace all our other brothers and sisters to whom we are eternally related through Jesus Christ and His shed blood. And as Sabbath-keeping Baptists, I believe we have much to celebrate as God has allowed us to practice the priesthood of all believers, He has allowed us to practice the autonomy of the local church, He has allowed us to practice baptism by immersion, and He has allowed us to practice Biblical Sabbath-keeping. Those are all strengths that we enjoy. They are strengths not to be taken for granted. They are strengths not to be trampled upon.

When it comes to the Sabbath-keeping aspect of our identity, I believe that, as Seventh Day Baptists, we have a mandate to help the world to understand God's intent for us in passing down the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. On the

matter of the Sabbath, my experience has been that among Christians most of them are at one end of the legal spectrum or at the other end. On the one hand, most Christians have a licentious or lawless approach to the Sabbath. They say there is no relevant law that applies to New Testament believers and beyond. On the other hand, most Sabbath-keeping Christians have a tendency to be legalistic in their approach to the Sabbath. And that, I believe, is one of the reasons that so many people have largely rejected any attempt to introduce them to the gift of the Sabbath. The proper balance between license or lawlessness and legalism is another "L" word: the word "Liberty." The Lord Jesus Christ releases us from the clutches of Satan and frees us so that we are able to be obedient to His loving laws, including the Sabbath. We as Seventh Day Baptists have the tremendous privilege of sharing this liberating message with the world. We provide the balance—the proper relationship between grace and truth. Our unique identity causes us to help the world to understand that when it comes to the application of the Sabbath law and principle, Jesus taught us that it is more relational than ritualistic; it is more of an enjoyment than an endurance; it is based on authenticity rather than appearance; it needs to be more complimentary than condemnatory; it is to be more of a help than a hindrance; and it brings us into liberty, not license or legalism. What an exceptional privilege and responsibility!

So, we don't need to compare ourselves with other churches, other groups, and other denominations. We don't need to try to imitate any of them. We certainly can learn from others, but let's keep pursuing our unique mission and our unique calling, because God has given us a unique identity. People are looking for us. They are searching the internet. They are looking at our websites. They are viewing YouTube. They want to know where we are. Are we making ourselves visible? Are we making ourselves available? Are we making ourselves accessible for people to find us and identify with us? We have something to offer the world. It is the gift of salvation, by the grace of Jesus Christ. And it is the gift of the Sabbath—to be restored to a world which has largely abandoned it.

PROSPERITY — Please do not tune me out as I begin to talk about prosperity. Don't change the channel. Don't touch that dial. Leave the remote alone. Instant disclaimer — I assure you that I am not advocating the prosperity Gospel. Some of you may be wondering how is it that "Seventh Day Baptists" and "prosperity" are spoken of in the same sentence. Well, it is because I am convinced that by the grace and provision of the Lord, we are indeed a prosperous people.

Because of the restoration of the Lord, today we have more churches in urban areas than we have ever had in our 350-year history. That helps to make us stronger. For the first time ever, we have a Church Planting Coordinator as an employee of our Conference, and a Church Planting Task Force. That signals the intention that we are serious about planting new churches.

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Restored for a Purpose

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Today, our churches are more diverse in many ways than they have ever been. We have people from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds who are finding a place of belonging among us. We have Hispanic churches being started, more African Americans joining our ranks, and then there are those Jamaicans, who are just surfacing all over the place. The Lord is enlarging our territory. He is broadening our horizon. He is extending the reach of our tent. All of that makes us more prosperous, and stronger. That means we must continue to be intentional about welcoming others who may be a little different, about being inclusive of variety in ages and gender and ethnicities, and socio-economic status, and formal educational achievements, and political persuasion. We must joyfully embrace the diversity that God is facilitating among us.

Today, our Memorial Fund Trustees manage more money than ever before in our history. It means that there are more funds that are being made available for ministries in and through our local churches. Although there is a concern about the level of our current giving, and we would like to see us improve on our stewardship responsibilities and expectations, the truth is that our longevity and our identity have been serving us well over the course of our history, and we want to continue to be faithful to what God has entrusted to us. He has made us prosperous.

SPIRITUALITY – My conviction is that the most reliable and compelling indication to a human being of another person's spirituality is their manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, as identified to us in Galatians 5:22-23. Nothing else is a better indicator of that measure — not the demonstration of the gifts of the Spirit; not the works of service performed; not the public worship engaged in; not the Scripture verses memorized; not the open Bible in the house or in the car; not the use of the Lord's name after every four or five words when speaking; not the carrying of the large print edition of the King James version of the Bible; not the large amounts of money given to the church. None of that.

The truest model of spirituality is the presence in a person's life of the Spiritual fruit of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I have seen and heard of expressions of these elements of the fruit of the Spirit in Seventh Day Baptist churches all around our Conference, and I give thanks to the Lord for that. And wherever they are lacking, let us go to the Lord and beseech Him to rid us of the works of the flesh, and empower us to be fruit-bearing saints of His. I encourage you that when and where you see these components of the fruit of the Spirit in your church, give a thumbs up and a commendation. When it's missing, let us exhort and admonish each other so that we are provoked to good fruit-bearing. I urge us to practice the over 50 "one anothers" laid out in the New Testament for us.

There is no better time than in this pandemic season for us to demonstrate to those within our relational spheres the

love of Jesus, the joy of Jesus, the peace of Jesus, the forbearance of Jesus, the kindness of Jesus, the goodness of Jesus, the faithfulness of Jesus, the gentleness of Jesus, the self-control of Jesus. Coming out of this present pandemic we are assured to be stronger, firmer, and more spiritually established — all because of God's gracious restoration.

Let me throw this in for you to think about. If you are not living in restoration, seeing restoration, being made strong, being made firm, and being established, maybe it is because you have not suffered enough — your "little while" has not yet expired.

Please also know that your personal salvation is secure in the hands of the Lord. The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Philippians, *"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus"*. (Philippians 1:6) Our salvation AND sanctification was begun by God. Paul and Peter based their firm conviction that God would carry it out; He would finish it. It would not be begun and then abandoned. This "good work" would be "performed" or "finished" only by keeping them from falling from grace, and from salvation, and by their ultimate entire perfection, and sanctification. You can count on the Lord for that.

My friends, the heat of trials and suffering feels like it will never end, but your trial WILL pass. One of my favorite passages is Psalms 30:5, *"For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning."* The life of a Christian is filled with interchanges of sickness and health, weakness and strength, want and wealth, disgrace and honor, crosses and comforts, miseries and mercies, pleasures and sorrows, success and failure, and joy and mourning.

A life of all roses would weaken us; and a life of all thorns would crush us. It takes both to keep us healthy in our perspective and walk with God. Thomas Brooks, England's nonconformist preacher, said, *"It is best and most for the health of the soul that the south wind of mercy, and the north wind of adversity, do both blow upon it; and though every wind that blows shall blow good to the saints, yet certainly their sins die most, and their graces thrive best, when they are under the drying, nipping north wind of calamity, as well as under the warm, cherishing south wind of mercy and prosperity"*. — Thomas Brooks. 457 verses in the Bible say, *"it came to pass."* Jesus said something recorded in three of the four Gospels, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."* If heaven and earth will pass, your circumstances will certainly pass. Be encouraged, your trial WILL PASS; your suffering WILL PASS; this COVID-19 virus WILL PASS. This pandemic WILL PASS. Weeping may last for a night, but JOY WILL COME IN THE MORNING. I declare today that for Seventh Day Baptists, morning has broken. Hallelujah! SR



Conference Message on Friday, July 30
By JR Shick, Pastor at White Cloud, MI, SDB Church



Restored For an Ultimate Purpose: Serving the Kingdom

Matthew 14:16

By now we are all familiar with our Conference theme “Restored for a Purpose” taken from 1 Peter 5:10: ***“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”***

Restore...make us strong...firm...and steadfast. Stronger?! For what?! What is the purpose?! Many of us struggle with the suffering part of this statement and the suffering tends to get in the way. I get it. I have suffered with pain in my life. I mean real pain. Pain that is hard to even think of anything else. However, there are other things that get in the way. Really?!? What?!?

Remember the Looney Tunes character Elmer Fudd?! You know the hunter that is always “hunting wabbits.” Well, we, as God’s chosen people, need to go hunting from time to time! Not wabbits, but the “Yeah, buts” we attach to our thinking! Many of you are asking what is a “Yeah, but”....? The simple answer to this question would be...EXCUSES!!! Justification for why we cannot function or serve to advance HIS Kingdom. We need to hunt those excuses out and get rid of them.

An example of this can be found in Exodus Chapters 3 & 4. For those familiar with their Bible stories, it is about Moses and the burning bush. Moses uses the “Yeah, but...” excuse on why he should not go to Egypt multiple times. As with everything, it is easier to “go hunting” with the faults of others; however, we need to take a look and go hunting as a way for us to learn and grow! In Exodus chapter 3 verse 11, we see our first excuse as Moses says to God, “Who am I?” To be honest with ourselves, many of us have said similar words, right? We tell ourselves that “I am a nobody.”

In verse 13, Moses makes another “Yeah, but...” when he says, “What if people start asking me questions?” Let us look at Chapter 4 verse 1: “What if they do not believe or listen to me?” Look at 4:10: (my interpretation has Moses saying) “Yeah, but....I don’t speak too good!” Finally, Moses uses his last excuse of: “Just send someone else.”

Just like Moses, we can find ourselves using similar statements and often we talk ourselves out of doing anything at all! Come on, be honest, we do! We make statements like, “Why start a Bible study? No one will come anyway.” So, what is the excuse you are using or have used to not take a step in faith and SERVE?!!

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*We need to hunt
those excuses out
and get rid of them.*

However the command is still there: “You give them something to eat!”

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The next scripture I would like for you to look at is Matthew 14:13. Before you turn there, I would like to give you a back story about Jesus. From the end of chapter twelve through early chapter fourteen, we see situations that would cause many of us to give excuses to move forward in any ministry ever again. Jesus gets hit with one after another. In chapter twelve, Jesus heals a demon-possessed man that was blind and mute. Many of the people who witnessed this event were amazed; however, there were others who mocked Him. At the end of chapter thirteen, we read that Jesus visited His home town and, doing like Jesus always did, He taught! Some of the people that Jesus grew up with took offense with Him. Ouch! Then to top it all off, Jesus gets news that His cousin John has been killed! Now, I don't know about you but this would be a tough one for me! The loss of a family member can cause many of us to use a wide range of “Yeah, but...” in order for us to grieve and process our loss. So if anyone could use or had a reason to give an excuse to not move forward, it would be Jesus! However, let us see what Jesus did.

“When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Matthew 14:13

Jesus still had compassion for others above Himself! Even with all that was going on in His life, He still found a sense of compassion for others?!? And strength to deal with people as well as to heal the sick?!? Remember, this was not just a few people, this was a “large crowd.” This would have taken considerable time and would have been emotionally draining. However, the work was not done for Jesus.

Let's continue by looking at verse 15: ***As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it's getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”***

Many of us would consider this a reasonable request from the disciples as they were focused on the needs of the crowd. Picture all the people that had been cured: blind people now telling others the things they can now see, the lame walking, jumping and even dancing! However, Jesus, in all His glory, continued to have compassion for the people. This time His compassion was feeding all of them!!!

Verse 16: ***Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”***

Now after a long day of watching Jesus healing and observing all that had happened with the people doing what they once could not, you would think the disciples would have reflected before saying something like, “Yeah, but...” However, they responded, verse 17: ***“We have only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.*** Sounds like a “Yeah, but...” to me! However, Jesus has the disciples request everyone to sit down and Jesus feeds all that were there until they had their fill. Jesus' mindset was one that did not include the words, “Yeah, but...” Were you able to catch Jesus' statement in verse 16? Even after witnessing all that Jesus had done throughout the day, the disciples had no understanding of how to make Jesus' request happen using the limited knowledge they had. You don't know what you don't know, until you know it. However the command is still there: ***“You give them something to eat!”***

Yeah, but...what if we fail?! We tend to use the words “Yeah, but...” because we are afraid of failure! I think failure has gotten a bad rap! There is something to be learned from failure. Making mistakes and learning from them is how we learn and progress! Sometimes we will fail big time...and that's okay. There are some of us who have become skilled at certain things; however, in order to become great, there was a lot of “failure” in the process. Personally, I have messed up at times as a husband, a father, a pastor, and as a child of GOD! This does not mean I should not continue to try. Not trying, giving up, or not doing anything at all is contradictory to Jesus' command of, ***“GO and make disciples”!!***

We can follow Jesus' example from Matthew 20:28 ***“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”***

Our Vision and Mission Statement in White Cloud, MI is: **Encounter Jesus, Serve God, By Serving HIS People!** Sitting back and doing nothing is a sin! Doing something and failing is being obedient! We are called to Customer Service for eternity, serve HIS people, not to serve ourselves! SR

This is a condensed version of the sermon done for Conference on Friday, July 30, 2021. The sermon was also done in White Cloud on May 29, 2021, and can be seen on our website. Scripture is from NIV 1984

JR has been serving as Pastor in White Cloud for 7 years with his wife Sarah, daughter Kashya and son Keith III.



Conference Message on Sabbath, July 31

By Carl Greene, Executive Director, SDB General Conference of USA & Canada



Forthwith

I want to make sure that we have a feel of the urgency surrounding 1 Peter 4.
I want you to go back a few years with me to a warm day in early May to grasp Peter's setting...

It was the sort of warm day where you knew a thunderstorm was going to roll in. I was finishing afternoon chores at the barn with my parents and my friend Dan. We were drawn to the windows as a storm was coming in and the sky began taking on a distinct, ominous green color. And from that point on, my memory became sort of like blurred snapshots and little sound clips.

I remember the rush of wind. I remember seeing small calves blowing up the road head over tails while my dad was telling us to get down. I can picture the frantic cows running around as there was the sound of a jet engine taking off. I remember the sound of tearing metal and crushing wood. I remember the roof lifting off the barn, filling it with leaves and debris and utter chaos.

And then I remember silence. The eerie silence that takes place after a tornado. The only sound that broke the silence was crinkling metal. The metal roofing off of the barns had gone up in the air and was now raining down and crushing into the fields around the barns. It was at this point that the sense of urgency began. I remember urgently searching with my dad to find my mom after the storm. After we found her, I remember my parents urgently making a list of whom to call for help and then going out and herding the cows back together from the surrounding countryside. I remember the urgency of getting ready for milking the next day. The urgency of day upon day of piling debris, the urgency of week after week of rebuilding.

Never before had I sensed that kind of urgency, nor had I experienced the togetherness or the partnership required to get the job done. That is the flavor that Peter is giving us here in 1 Peter 4—a flavor of urgency that we cannot miss.

The end of all things is at hand. (1 Peter 4:7a) That sounds urgent, doesn't it? We can get into all sorts of theological nuances of what is he talking about with "the end is at hand." What is clear is to act now. There is urgency that flavors all of this text and it also informs how you and I should respond to this text. It's easy to get distracted, even amidst urgency. The answer to that distraction is partnering with God and partnering with one another. Partnering with God in prayer and partnering with one another in love. Let's take a look at the text.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. (1 Peter 4:7) We partner with God in prayer because at "the end of all things" times are urgent, events are taking place so rapidly, there's such a big job to do that we desperately need God's leading.

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Partnering
with God
in prayer and
partnering with
one another
in love.

Above all other things, make sure you love one another.

Forthwith

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Do not miss the word used here, “therefore.” “Therefore” has a nice ring to it and has significant meaning: as a result of or in consequence of. In this case we should hear therefore clearly: because things are urgent, pray.

But Peter gives a couple of qualifiers of what our prayer should be like: self-controlled and sober-minded. Sober-minded kind of catches my attention; so don’t be drunk when you pray. Thank you, Peter. But think about this a little bit more. There is a call to be alert, to be clear in our communication with God. I can’t help but wonder if Peter is remembering back a little bit in terms of prayer—like praying in the garden when Jesus asked him to pray with a few other disciples and they could not stay awake, sober-minded. Peter undoubtedly remembers the words of Jesus, “So could you not watch with me one hour?” I can’t help but think that Peter is remembering that here and reminding us to be sober-minded. Be alert, be ready to pray.

Not only sober-minded, but be self-controlled. That’s an interesting qualifier to prayer: be self-controlled. Don’t freak out. Again. Think about Peter in the garden...with his blade. Eary, Eary; choppy, choppy. Yes. Peter freaked out. He didn’t know the plan and he went ahead and he cut off somebody’s ear. There was not self-control. The reminder here is that life is going to be urgent. Our mission is urgent, but we need to be clear in our prayer with God and we need to stay connected with Him. Our partnership with God is in prayer and we’re also called to partnership with one another. We turn to that now in the next part of this passage.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8) Did you catch that our partnership with one another is in love? The setup to the partnership is the phrase “above all.” Above all other things, make sure you love one another. This is not optional, this is not extra credit. This is necessary, and the qualifier is to keep loving one another, earnestly or deeply. The image that this portrays is like a runner, fully engaged. Picture the Gospel Feet 5K race in which there are runners fully engaged, approaching the finish line. As they get close to the end they pour on everything that they have. Every last ounce of energy; their muscles are rippling; their focus is precise; the sweat is dripping because they are so intent. That is the type of love that’s being spoken of here. Intense, earnest, deep.

And it covers a multitude of sins. It overlooks the sins of those around us. We are so focused on God’s urgent mission that we are not petty. We know what petty is, right? Where we get overly focused on trivial matters.

Be honest. Do you have “that person” in your mind who always gets focused on little trivial things and is always complaining? Yeah. Yeah. Got them. Set them aside and look at ourselves. Peter is asking for introspection here. Where do we get focused on the trivial? If we are truly loving deeply, earnestly, then we are overlooking the faults of those around us. Peter knows that this is hard and he provides two components of this to help us understand, to grasp this love: radical hospitality and stewardship. Let’s listen for radical hospitality first.

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

(1 Peter 4:9) Radical hospitality—why is that a critical component of love? First, hospitality was necessary in Peter’s day. When sending out missionaries, there were not safe hotels to stay in. They needed to stay with other believers for their mission work. Even the church itself needed hospitality. Since there were not church buildings to meet in, they needed homes to be opened up so people could gather. As people were becoming Christians, they needed open homes to come to.

That defines the need for ***hospitality***—now we look at ***radical hospitality***. I recently heard Nick Kersten preach a sermon using “radical hospitality,” and I thought it sounded good. He also has good reason for the phrase. Hospitality is explicitly mentioned five times in the New Testament. It’s implied nine times—it’s a big deal. And in this passage, the radical aspect becomes evident with the phrase “***without grumbling.***”

Without. Grumbling. Ungrudgingly. That means not quietly complaining; not whispering our negative thoughts to people closest to us. Think about a family in Peter’s day whispering to each other in the corner of the room, “can you believe how much that little man Paul eats?” They are happy to do the right thing and host Paul, but still feel the need to complain about it. Awkward.

Think about how our “little comments” can come across. I think ungrudgingly or radical hospitality without grumbling is especially hard among risk-takers. Remember, this hospitality is being offered to people who are being sent out on missional purpose. These people are taking risks and it’s likely that there’s not going to be a lot of fruit visible from their labors. It is very possible that they are going to say something a little bit off. There is potential that there’s going to be stumbling of some sort. There is the definite possibility that there will be times where things are not going to look great. Yet, the call is to provide hospitality without grumbling.

Now, this doesn't mean that we should turn a blind eye if things go off the rails theologically or conflicts with scriptural truth. There's a lot of evidence of what to do then. Yet, we are to extend grace among missional work in which there is risk being taken. This is a big deal for us as Seventh Day Baptists, as we lean into church planting—and as we lean into radical hospitality.

It is critical that we are ungrudgingly Seventh Day Baptist in which we support with prayer, we support financially, we support with encouraging words, and we avoid saying those little barbs surrounding church planting. "I guess that didn't work out." "I don't know if she really works hard enough." "I thought we'd see more fruit." What little barbs can we throw that derail us from radical hospitality? After talking about radical hospitality, there is a second aspect of love, characterized by stewardship.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (1 Peter 4:10) As believers who love, we are called to be good stewards. Stewardship is taking care of something precious—right? Let's consider this: Say our kids made a wonderful house replica with interlocking bricks (Legos) when they were little. It was so wonderful that my wife and I took away all the Legos and we put them on a shelf so they didn't mess it up again. They no longer played with their toy because what they made was so good.

Wait. That is far, far from stewardship. Safe-keeping of something that is precious is one thing, but it becomes hoarding when it is no longer being used. It would be more than a little bit wonky for me to say, "Hey, kids, great job with the Legos. Now, you're not going to play with them for the next 15 years because it's this treasure that we have and you're not allowed to mess with them, even though the intent of the gift is for you to use it."

Notice the clear dividing line between hoarding and stewardship in the verse: *as each has received a gift*. This is from God. This is not something that we own, that we generate, that we make all the decisions about—it is from God. We need to recognize who is the master and who is the steward. And then the next way to elevate stewardship over hoarding: *use it to serve one another*. We are not given a pass of inaction. We are called to acknowledge God Himself as the owner. He is also telling us to use the gift, to advance His kingdom by applying the gifts He gave us. That is stewardship—including two specific gifts mentioned in verse 11.

Stewardship is taking care of something precious—right?

Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.

(1 Peter 4:11a) The two gifts include whoever speaks and whoever serves. *Whoever speaks* is not just talking, it is oracles of God, it is preaching, it is teaching, it is sharing our gospel story. It is sharing our testimony. It is sharing truths about God. It is a gift we have to share. *Whoever serves*. There are a host of ways to serve: administration, care ministry, financial giving, and many more. The key is to steward the gift of service with action.

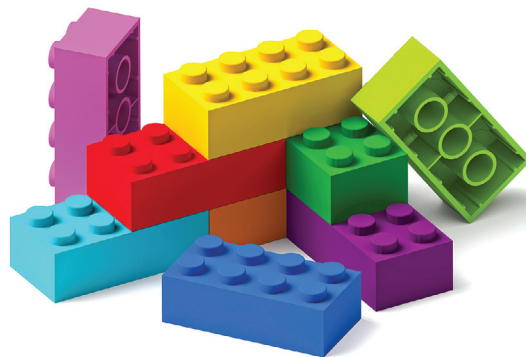
Now, think about these two gifts together: speaking and service. Is anyone left out here? I think everyone has been given a gift through God's *varied grace*. We are all told that there are varied gifts out there—now we are to apply them and use them to advance His kingdom.

The phrase *good stewards* stands out to me. Did you notice that in verse 10? Can there be a bad steward? If you do a bad job as a steward, are you really a steward? A little bit confused on that, but let's think about what it takes to be a good steward with two key things:

1. **We avoid trying to become the master.** We know our place, which I think is fairly easy for us. We at least know enough to try to cover it up if we're trying to act like a master. When we know that God is the One who is in charge the next piece is still difficult.
2. **We cannot bury our gifts.** We are no longer a good steward if our gifts are left unused. We can have tremendous gifts, we can have all sorts of things given to us to be used for advancing God's kingdom, but if they are not applied, the good stewardship label is not there.

I want to extend this a little bit, going back to the ungrudgingly idea. A good steward acts ungrudgingly because we know our master's call: we don't grumble when He calls us to action; we don't grumble when we are called to love deeply. We act with passion. The rest of verse 11 provides a roadmap to living out our restored purpose without grumbling.

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Forthwith

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In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11b) So we've been building throughout this passage to this point. We started with urgency, a need to join God in His work in which we're called to partner with God in prayer, partner with one another in love; and we do that with radical hospitality and with stewardship in which we exercise the gifts of speaking and serving. The purpose of all of this is to bring glory to God.

I want to give us a little bit of a historical perspective on this by turning to a church record chronicling the Newport Seventh Day Baptist Church Covenant, December 23, 1671. (I remember that day so well.) Here is the clear purpose:

...So as might be for Gods glory.¹

The forming of our first Seventh Day Baptist Church here in America was to be for God's glory. Pretty good connection with this passage, isn't it? There's more. Listen for the partnership here—and I love this wording, the spelling is even better.

...gave up our Selves to god and one another to walk together...

I love that picture of walking together. That's a call that the Newport Church heard distinctly, and that is a call for us to hear distinctly today—to be ungrudgingly Seventh Day Baptist in which we speak and we serve. As individuals, we need to ask, am I fully extended, is my love so deep, so earnest that I'm extending everything as I approach that finish line?

Does ungrudging passion define how I pour it on in the work in my church? We need to honestly ask ourselves that “ungrudgingly” question as a General Conference. We have been focused throughout this week on the theme of “Restored for a Purpose.” This “restored for a purpose” reminds us that we have an urgency in our partnership with God and with one another. Are we ungrudgingly partnered with each other?

As we reflect on that question, I want to pause and take you to the good old days of VHS tapes. You remember these if you are my age and older (for those younger, use your phone to find the meaning.) Oh, they were great. Remember how you actually had to rewind VHS tapes? You put them into a device and waited for it to rewind the whole way. You could eat popcorn while you were waiting to watch a movie. OK, we're going into rewind mode.

I want to go back a little bit because there might be a little bit of confusion. This sermon has been based on chapter 4, verses 7 through 11, and some of you are thinking that poor Greene guy, what's with him? Did he get the wrong passage? Did he not get the memo that the focus this week is on chapter 5, verse 10, restored for a purpose? Did he not read the email he got from President Kevin Butler? I'm glad that you asked those questions. I did.

Chapter 5, verse 10 lays out for us what we have heard throughout this week, the idea of restored for a purpose. But now take in chapter 5 verse 11. Here is our restored for a purpose.

To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:11) Now here's the connection: chapter 5, verse 11, is the condensed version of chapter 4, verse 11 (the sermon text). When we want someone to remember something, we repeat it a few times, we repeat it a few times, we repeat it a few times. Oh, is that clever? This is happening in 1 Peter chapters 4 and 5—the focus is on God's glory. But more than that.

President Butler challenged me to think about what that purpose looks like for us, and he mentioned the phrase glory spreader. I love that phrase. The more and more I interact with that phrase, the more I am drawn to it. This idea, that we are called to point people to the glory of God, that we are called to honor and glorify His name by spreading His glory, by spreading His name. Chapter 4 lays out how we do that.

We are glory spreaders through radical hospitality and stewardship of gifts. I want to apply this to today. As a General Conference, I believe that we have an urgent call to radical hospitality and stewardship.

1. Called to the radical hospitality of church planting: providing a church home for people who are just becoming Christians, offering a spiritual home for people who are not yet Christians.

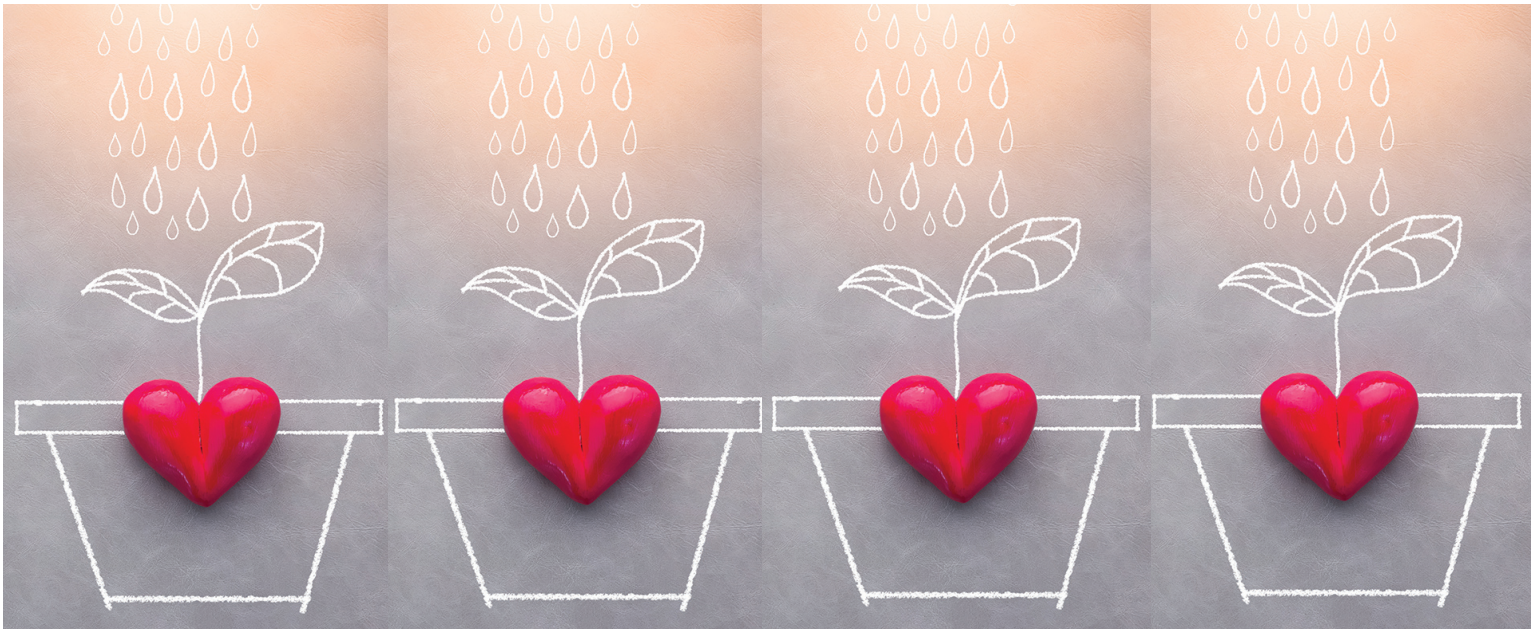
In order to link the idea of radical hospitality and church planting we will go back in history to the Newport church era. Leading up to the American Revolution, the percentage of the population in the American colonies who were church members was only 10 to 12 percent.² That is it, an

¹ Thorngate, Janet, ed. 2017. *Baptists in Early North America: Newport, Rhode Island, Seventh Day Baptists*. Volume III of Baptists in Early North America Series. William H. Brackney, General Editor. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press and The Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society. 25.

² Stark, Rodney and Roger Fink. 1988. “American Religion in 1776: A Statistical Portrait.” *Sociological Analysis* 49 (1): 39-51. 42, 45.

Go forth, ungrudgingly to plant churches and develop leaders.

Go with, in partnership with God in prayer, with one another in earnest love.



incredibly small number. No wonder the Newport Church had an urgency to plant churches as her people were moving. They also wanted to make sure that there was a place of gospel witness for those who were not church members in other places.

The Newport Church had a passion and an urgency of radical hospitality during the westward migration, helping to form our Conference with the purpose of planting churches. Today, as the rate of church membership drops rapidly in North America, maybe we are entering a time similar to that of the Newport church. A time in which there is a desperate need for churches of gospel witness, places that need a Seventh Day Baptist church. Are we ready to partner together? Are we prepared to ungrudgingly, urgently, plant churches? I believe we are called to urgent partnership as Conference churches. Now is the time to act fully extended, earnestly in love.

2. Called to the stewardship of leadership

development: we are planting churches that increasingly call for more ministry leaders and we need leaders to serve in member churches that are searching for pastoral leadership.

The training of our SDB leaders can come through Seventh Day Baptist University, through internships, training within local churches, and a number of other processes that we need to lean into all the more. We need more than process though. We need to ask ourselves, are we as individuals earnestly, passionately serving our local church? Are we giving all that we have to earnestly love with speaking and serving? As churches, are we passionately partnering together to further God's kingdom with all that we have?

We are called to an ungrudgingly evident partnership as individuals and as churches. I want to close by thinking about the sermon title, "Forthwith." What a great word; it has that element of urgency to it, but even more, it contains the two separate pieces of forth and with.

Go forth, ungrudgingly to plant churches and develop leaders.

Go with, in partnership with God in prayer, with one another in earnest love.

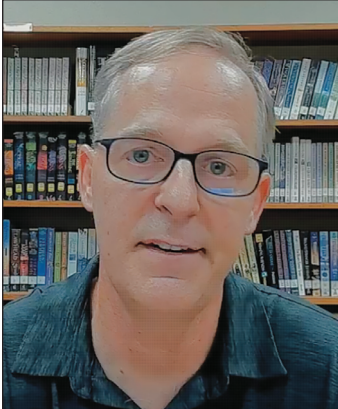
Forthwith. We have an urgent call.

Now is our time to respond. SR



Conference Bible Study on Monday, July 26

By Nathan Crandall, Spiritual Coach
Milton Seventh Day Baptist "The Connecting Church"



Restored—for a Purpose

"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

—1 Peter 5:10, NIV

Observation and Explanation

What does it say? What does it mean?

"And the God of all grace"

Let's start by asking, "What is grace?" If you've done any study on grace before, you may have heard that grace is God's "unmerited favor." One familiar definition is an acronym—God's Riches At Christ's Expense. In my study I came across this definition that I really like: "That which causes joy for a kindness granted with nothing expected in return."

So God grants His kindness to us without expecting anything from us in return. This is the true nature of grace. And the history of God's people in Scripture highlights this so well. While God has been constant in His lovingkindness, His people have not responded in like manner. Here's what the Lord says about it in Romans 10:21, **"But of Israel [God] says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'"**

Lest we be tempted to think that we as God's people now are different than God's people Israel, just a quick look through the New Testament at the number of times that grace is mentioned should help correct that misunderstanding. We are constantly in need of the Lord's kindness to us which we do not deserve.

Therefore, it's a good thing that God is the God of **all** grace. We should think about this little word "all" as far as grace is concerned in two ways. First, God is the source of grace. Grace is His possession. And as it is His possession, we should also understand that He doesn't run out of it. There are no supply chain problems with God showing us His kindness. There is no time or place where God's blessing to us suffers from drought or lack.

His grace is always present and always full—in spite of the fact that there are times we doubt that reality. When we face suffering, for instance, we may be tempted to think

that the Lord turned off the faucet where His grace pours out. As we will see later this week when we look at suffering, nothing could be further from the truth.

The second way we should think about the word **all** is in the variety of ways that God shows us His grace. The reality is that everything the Lord does toward us is because of His grace. If we are able to grasp this truth, it will really cause the way we look at the world and life from a radically different perspective. Instead of thinking that God's dealings with human beings are random and capricious, we would see that He is intentional in everything that He does—even in allowing bad things to happen. All of it leads back to the truth that Psalm 145:9 states, **"The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made."**

For the sake of time I will only highlight a few of the many ways that God's kindness and blessing show up in our lives. And I will start with the greatest expression of His grace in our salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."**

As I mentioned earlier, grace is God's favor that is not dependent on anything that we have done to merit it. This is so clearly shown in these verses from Paul's letter. The forgiveness of our sins and our redemption as God's children is not from our own doing. It is not the result of any kind of work that we have done. If it were, then we would have a right to boast about it. We would have the right to say that God's grace was not the source. We would be able to say that it was not a gift but something that we earned.

Incredibly, the vast majority in our world believe that their lives are in fact good enough for God. But this is only because of the lack of understanding about God's holy and righteous nature. That's the impact of sin. As Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 4:4, **"The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."**

*The truth is that we have nothing to offer God.
Our sin has destroyed every hope of knowing and being with God, and nothing
we can do will change that.*

You have to be completely in the dark about God's awesome glory if you think that you have anything to offer Him. And yet, when people are asked about their own level of goodness, they consistently believe that they will merit God's favor based on how they have lived their lives. This is true for a high percentage of those who claim to be Christian as well as for those who don't or who aren't sure what they claim to be. But when God, by His grace, opens our hearts and our minds to the truth, we are then ready to receive His grace by faith.

The truth is that we have nothing to offer God. Our sin has destroyed every hope of knowing and being with God, and nothing we can do will change that. But God through Christ in His death and resurrection has made it possible. In the words of John 3:16, **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."**

This is God's grace to us—life with Him that begins the moment that we respond to His gift of salvation by faith and stretches into eternity. For those of you who have trusted Christ, you know what His grace is like. You have felt the power of the forgiveness of your sins. You have known the joy of being loved by your heavenly Father. You understand what it means to have ultimate purpose for your life. Growing in your understanding of this grace is something that you will experience for as long as you live on earth.

But that is only a taste of the grace that we will experience, for the Lord has reserved His best for last. Peter talks about the grace to come in 1 Peter 1:13. **"Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."** In other words, yes, you have experienced the unmerited favor of God. You have received this incredible gift of salvation through the blood of Christ. But this is not the end. It is only the beginning. The grace that you will receive when Christ returns will blow you away. Don't set your sights too low. Remember that this life is only temporary. The best is yet to come. As the Scripture says, **"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."** (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Application

What is God saying to me?

As we look into what it means that God is the God of all grace, it should cause us to respond with joy and gratitude and praise. The source of all kindness and goodness and grace is our God. He is not a God that needs His arm twisted in order to be kind. Kindness was His idea. He invented it. Not only did He invent it, He is the one who keeps it going.

We live in a broken world, and we ourselves are both impacted by it and contributors to it. But the God of all grace is reaching out to us to restore us to the person which He intended us to be. It all begins with Him and His grace.

Let me ask you a few questions to help with applying these truths to our lives today.

When you think about the Lord, does the idea that He is kind and loving to you come to your mind first before anything else? Or instead do you think about God being angry at you or disappointed with you? If God's grace doesn't come to mind right away then perhaps you don't really know that God is the God of all grace. If grace doesn't apply to everyone then it really isn't all grace, it's just some grace. The Lord wants you to know His kindness and love and grace to you. I want to encourage you to spend some time asking the Lord why you don't feel His grace toward you, and then ask Him to help you to know His grace as the Bible talks about it.

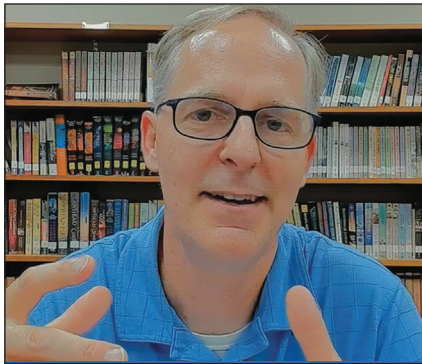
If you were to give praise to God and thank Him for His grace every day, how would you go about doing it? For some people, praising God every day for His grace might seem like mindless repetition, but since there are an endless number of ways that God shows His grace to us, every day we could praise Him for a different aspect of His grace and never run out of things to say. I want to encourage you to make giving God praise for His grace in your life something that is a part of your everyday way of life. God is certainly worthy of praise each and every day, and giving Him praise for His amazing and endless grace is always worth doing. SR

*This is God's grace to us—life with Him that begins
the moment that we respond to His gift of salvation by faith...*



Conference Bible Study on Tuesday, July 27

By Nathan Crandall, Spiritual Coach
Milton Seventh Day Baptist "The Connecting Church"



Restored—for a Purpose

"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

—1 Peter 5:10, NIV

Observation and Explanation

What does it say? What does it mean?

"Who called you to his eternal glory in Christ"

The God of all grace has sent out a call. This call is a personal invitation to receive His grace. Specifically, it is to receive His grace in salvation.

Here are a few examples of God's call in salvation. The apostle Paul referenced Timothy's calling with these words, ***"Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*** (1 Timothy 6:12) Who is the one doing the calling? It is the Lord who calls people to eternal life. Paul makes this specific in his words to the church of Corinth, ***"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*** (1 Corinthians 1:9)

Being called to eternal life is in many ways difficult to get our arms around. We have glimpses of what life in eternity will be like, but we just don't know a whole lot. Being called into fellowship with Jesus starts to get us thinking more specifically about what this calling is all about. Even more clear is when Peter tells us that God ***"called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."*** (1 Peter 2:9)

As I talked about yesterday, the result of sin on humanity is that it blinds us to the glory of God. Instead of seeing God for who He really is, the sinful nature grabs and holds on to ideas about God that don't match up with His reality. It's like sin makes us believe the tabloid version of God. There's enough truth to vaguely resemble Him, but not enough to give us the real picture of His awesome glory and majesty.

So, as Peter says, sinful humanity is in the dark about God until He calls them to come out of the dark and into the light. The nature of God's call is that it is powerful. Do you remember that old line from the commercial? *"When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen."* Well, when God calls, people come out of spiritual darkness and into the light of salvation and eternal life.

If the nature of God's call is to wake up people who are in the dark and asleep to the glory of God, the effect of God's call is the working out of His plan of redemption. The apostle Paul walks us through the steps of God's call in Romans 8:29-30. ***"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."***

So God has a plan. His plan is to rescue people, whom He loves, from the darkness of sin and make them part of His family. This requires a change so radical that the impact of it is nothing less than conformity to the image of Jesus Christ—something that only God Himself can do.

First He calls out to those in spiritual darkness. If we've heard His call, we responded by placing our faith in Christ Jesus as our Savior and Lord. In response to our faith the Lord justified us, making it possible for us to draw near to His holy and righteous self. ***"Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (Romans 5:1)

To be justified by faith is a work of God's grace. As I talked about yesterday, the grace of God in salvation is only grace if there is nothing that we have done to deserve it. However, justification by faith was not freely given by God to us in this sense. Jesus by His death bought our justification. So grace was not earned by us, but in fact was given, through Christ, as a gift to all who believe.

We are justified so long as we are ***"in Christ."*** Being in Christ is the means by which we enter into peace with God. What is the gift that we are graced with? It is Christ alone. It is not some artificial certificate that we flash at the gates of heaven in order to gain entrance to our heavenly home. We enter through the blood and body of Christ. Jesus Himself is the gift of grace that we receive.

*So God has a plan.
His plan is to rescue people, whom he loves,
from the darkness of sin and make them part of his family.*

Justification is not the end of God's redemptive plan. The final step is glorification. This is the phase of God's plan where those whom He has called are truly changed to be like Jesus. You see, the Lord didn't call us out of the dark and into a semi-light phase of existence. He has called us into the fullness of His light. He has called us to His **"eternal glory."**

The word "glory" comes from a verb which means "to think or to recognize." So then God's glory means the "true apprehension or understanding of God." Let me help us understand it this way. In heaven, God has always been recognized for who He is. His nature has always been understood to be exactly what it is in truth. Not so on earth. The exact nature of God was misunderstood very early on by humanity because of the impact of the sinful nature.

To be called into God's eternal glory is to be invited to see God for all that He truly is. It is to be invited to see all of God's beauty, to understand all of God's power, to experience all of God's purity, to know all of God's thoughts—or perhaps I should say, to be invited to spend the rest of eternity on the adventure of discovering moment by moment the never ending glory of God.

For now, in this life on earth, we have been given a glimpse of glorious God's nature through the Word of God and illuminated by the Spirit of God who leads us into all understanding of truth. The apostle John spoke of this in the first chapter of His gospel. **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."** (John 1:14)

What qualities did John highlight in response to seeing the glory of God in Christ Jesus? He specified two: grace and truth. The glory of God is His true nature, and that nature is full of grace and full of truth. If you've trusted in Christ, you have also seen the glory of God's nature of grace and truth.

We must understand that this is a gift of God. It is God's grace to show His true self to human beings. Not everyone recognizes the glory of God. John said that Jesus, **"was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."** (John 1:10-11)

We live in a world that does not know or recognize God for who He truly is. Some see God as a tyrant. Some see God as unconcerned about human life. Some see God as angry and mean. Some see God as playing favorites. And so God came to earth in order to show who He really was. Then He called people to himself in order that they could see Him for who He really was. But not only that, He called people to himself so that, knowing God's glory, they could show other people who God is also. He didn't call just for people to tell others about Himself, but for them to show them His character and nature through their own transformed lives in Christ.

Application

What is God saying to me?

God calls us to know and to reflect His glory. It's impossible to show something you don't know anything about. But the Lord has a destination in mind for us which is to be transformed into the glory of Christ who is the image of God. All of this is the work of God. As He works in us to show us more and more of what He is truly like, we are changed to be more like His true nature and less like our old nature ruled by sin.

So God has called you. Let me ask a few questions to help you in responding to His call.

Were you aware that God's call on your life is to reflect His glory? To reflect His glory is to be full of grace and truth. Are you more full of grace than truth? Are you more full of truth than grace? Are you not full of either? I encourage you to ask the Lord in regards to grace and truth how He wants you to grow in reflecting His glory. SR

*To be called into God's eternal glory is to be invited
to spend the rest of eternity on the adventure of discovering
moment by moment the never ending glory of God.*



The Book of Revelation: Letters to the Seven Churches

Study Lesson 7 by Dennis Coleman, Seventh Day Baptist Church of Shiloh, NJ

The first chapter of Revelation establishes that God Himself is directing the visions which John describes. All of this is given to reveal the glory of the Lord and to tell of things to come. God wants us to read, teach, and keep what is revealed in these prophecies, promising to bless those who do so (Revelation 1:3). Now that God has John's attention (and hopefully ours as well) He wants John to deliver a message to the seven churches in Asia which are first mentioned in Revelation 1:4 and 1:11.

Prayer Time

Before we read what God says to each of these churches let us pray for understanding that we might hear what God wants to say to us and to our churches today.

The Seven Churches in Asia

Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

These seven churches were all located in Asia Minor (in modern day Turkey). Each was a real group of believers and each existed around the time that John was on Patmos. With Patmos being within 37 miles of Asia Minor in the Aegean sea (off of the west coast of Turkey), these seven churches were relatively close. Also, as mentioned in our first lesson (John of Patmos), there is evidence that John lived in Ephesus before being exiled to Patmos. In all likelihood John was familiar with these churches and may have ministered to each during his lifetime.

There is some debate over the meaning of these seven churches. Were they simply chosen because of John's familiarity with each or do they represent different periods in church history? Do the messages only apply to these churches or can they be applied to other churches in other time periods?

The website *Biblestudytools.com* covers the concept of each church representing a different period in church history (“What is the Significance of the Seven Churches in Revelation” on *Biblestudytools.com*). As they point out, it is difficult in some cases to reconcile this idea with what has happened in the church on a worldwide scale. In their explanation they point out that this idea is written only from a western perspective. As a result, what is seen in the history of the Orthodox church in churches in Africa, Asia, or South America may not line up with the timeline presented by those who believe that each of the seven churches represents a different time period.

I believe that these churches were chosen because of their relative location to Patmos and because of John’s familiarity with each. I also believe that while each letter was specific to that church, there is plenty we can learn by studying what is said to these churches, allowing the Spirit to show us if and how they apply to our churches today.

Before I get into the letters themselves, I would like to point out something interesting that I noticed about different versions of the Bible. Some versions put subheadings in chapters two and three showing the name of the church addressed in each group of verses. Some versions of the Bible leave these out. The New King James version’s subheadings give a description of each church (The Loveless Church, The Persecuted Church, etc.). I looked through some of the online versions of the Bible and the NKJV is the only one I have found that uses these descriptive subheadings. I believe this is true for the print versions of the Bible as well.

The Structure of Each Letter

Each of the seven letters shares certain characteristics. First is the fact that each is considered to be a letter that was dictated to John by the Lord Jesus, which is why the words tend to appear in red in versions of the Bible that designate the words of Jesus in this fashion. Second, each is written to the angel of that particular church (more on that in a little bit). Each describes the condition of the church as seen through the eyes of Jesus and in each Jesus says, “I know...” showing that the situation at hand is not hidden from Him. Each ends with a promise to those who hear Jesus’ call and who choose to remain faithful in enduring until the end.

In all but one case Jesus points out a major problem with each church. These are identified in the subheadings used

in the NKJV: The Loveless church (Ephesus), The Persecuted Church (Smyrna), The Compromising Church (Pergamos), The Corrupt Church (Thyatira), The Dead Church (Sardis), The Faithful Church (Philadelphia) and the Lukewarm Church (Laodicea). There is a warning that something must be done about the problems, with at least one case where Jesus says that He will personally come and take care of the problem. And so in each case it seems that these letters are written to open the believers’ eyes to the problems at hand while giving a view of what could be. I believe that in structuring the letters in this fashion, Jesus reveals His desire for each church and for each individual believer, even those of us reading today. If this is the case, then what we are reading is the revealed desire of the heart of Jesus.

The Angels of the Churches

Each letter is written to the angel of that particular church. The word used in each is the word “aggelos,” which means messenger. Over the years scholars have debated whether these are heavenly messengers (what we normally think of when we hear the word angels) or human messengers such as the pastors of the churches. As pointed out by Alexander MacLaren (MacLaren Exposition of Holy Scripture) and many other scholars, the word “aggelos” or “angel” has more to do with function than it does with the nature of the one being called angel. Thus when we talk about the archangel Michael, we are talking about his... well... job as messenger. This is not to say that angels, such as Michael, are not powerful or do not exist. I believe they do exist and that they are quite powerful but when we see “aggelos” in the Bible we must remember that this applies to a messenger of any kind.

Based on the commentaries I’ve read in preparing for these studies, the angels mentioned could very well be the pastors of the churches at the time the letters were written. This would also mean that the seven stars that we saw in the hand of Jesus back in chapter one (which I also talked about last month in “Experiencing the Presence of God”) could be these pastors, serving as messengers under the protection of Jesus.

This then brings us to a very important question. Do you think of the pastor of your church as a messenger of God, a human carrying out the task that comes with being an “aggelos” (angel) sent to your church by the Lord? SR

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-the-significance-of-the-seven-churches-in-revelation.html>

BAPTISM DÉJÀ VU—ENCORE!

It has happened again! Shortly before the Pandemic shut-down, God moved a witness at a baptismal service to request re-baptism in the Shiloh, NJ, SDB Church. (Ref. April 2020 *Sabbath Recorder*). This event was the second time Shiloh had witnessed a surprise baptism in the memory of this writer. (Ref. June 1981 *Sabbath Recorder*). Thus *déjà* (already seen) *encore* (again) is not redundant because history was re-peated twice.

Early in the July 17, 2021, worship service, Pastor Don Chroniger invited anyone who was thinking about being baptized to “go home and get some dry clothes to change into.” We then proceeded with our “new normal” post-COVID order of worship.

At the appointed time, Liam Probasco came forth stating that his testimony “wasn’t long” but he was glad for that. (How many of us have similar testimonies, thanking God that He saved us before we ran into serious problems?) Liam was then “dunked” and escorted downstairs to a changing room.

Pastor Don again invited anyone who was contemplating baptism to come forward. He was assured twice that “there is someone, but he is not in the room right now.” Then it happened: Pastor Don turned his head toward the steps leading into the baptismal pool and *voilà!* There stood his own son-in-law, AJ Veale! *Quelle surprise!* AJ stated that he had accepted Christ at the age of 8 but had never taken the next step. Now he wanted to follow Christ’s example in front of his wife Jessica (who, I am told, was equally surprised) and his small children.

God surely works in mysterious ways! At the June church business meeting, Pastor Don was granted family medical leave as he needed to care for his father (under COVID restrictions) during Dad’s final illness. Thus Don had not been in church for several weeks. Just six days prior to this service, PopPop Pratt (“Jim”) Chroniger was united with his Lord and his beloved Rose, wife of 70 years. How cool is that? SR

—Donna Bond

AND ANOTHER SHILOH BAPTISM!

On July 4th, 2021, in the Lloyd’s Creek, Maryland, Terry Uhland and Dave Mattus decided it was time to take their next public step in their walk with Christ. Imagine Lloyd’s Creek as being a place where you pull your boat up on a sandbar and people are partying all around you. Going public with their next step was awesome to see in the middle of the chaos. Dave went first and shared why being baptized was important to him. He said, “I want everyone to know that I love the Lord and He is the Savior of my life.” He went on to express his love for God. Terry was next and after reminiscing about wanting to be baptized in 2020 (COVID LOCKDOWN), he too expressed this was an important next step. Pastor Tyler Chroniger, with the assistance of Joshua Richie, baptized them in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. God has some big plans for Terry and Dave. SR

—Pastor Tyler Chroniger



EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT AT JERSEY OAKS CAMP

It was October of my son’s second grade year. His friend was going to a Cub Scout meeting and asked if Liam wanted to go, too. So it began. His friend would last four weeks. Other friends would come and go. But Liam would remain steadfast. Through ten years: Cub Scouts; Webelos; Boy Scouts; canoe trips; knot tying; camping in the rain; wreath sales; merit badge classes; camping in

the rain; trash pickup; camping in the rain; learning to play the bugle; did I mention camping in the rain?

But Liam kept at it. Finally, the time came for his Eagle Scout project. He always wanted it to be something for the church, something for church camp. What he was led to do was no small feat.


If you’ve ever been to Jersey Oaks Camp, you’ll know that when you drive into camp, there’s a large field to the left. Don’t recall it? I’m not surprised. We never use it. It’s just too hard to get to. It’s part of the camp property but separated from “everything” because there’s a muddy ravine between it and the main lodge and picnic area. Liam decided he was going to build a walkway across that ravine.

With the help of his grandfather, Delbert Blair, Liam designed a 40-foot walkway at the start of the pandemic. He made use of his time and reached out for donations. His church family and friends gave generously. He prayed for help from businesses. They gave him discounts. The decking boards that normally cost \$80 a piece—he got donated from “the overstock pile out back”—and he needed 30 boards!



The Scouts came and helped. Liam took charge of the project, like all hopeful Eagle Scouts are told to do. They removed scrub brush and sticker bushes. Holes were dug for footers. Concrete pilings were poured. Liam and his grandfather cut the decking boards. They installed the walkway frame. They screwed in all of the boards and bolted the hand railings. Liam put in railroad ties and laid mulch.

Finally, on July 17th, following his baptism at the Shiloh church we gathered at Jersey Oaks Camp for the official dedication. With assistance from Pastor Don Chroniger, Liam cut the red ribbon to open the walkway, dedicated to all the faithful workers who have served at Jersey Oaks Camp and in honor of his grandfathers: Delbert R. Blair and Owen H. Probasco.

It didn't take long for the youth to set up some proper games of Frisbee football by day and Capture the Flag by night with this new addition to the grounds. The camp now has an entirely new field to access and there is growing excitement on how to use it in the future! 

—Bill Probasco



PART-TIME PASTOR WANTED

Who are we?

The Good News Seventh Day Baptist Church is a church plant in Apex, NC. We are passionate about God, people, and the Sabbath. Our mission is to engage our community by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and meeting the needs of the people. The Good News SDB Church is currently made up of a small core group of committed disciple-makers with the vision of raising up leaders to transform our community one life at a time. We are proudly a part of our Seventh Day Baptist Denomination.

Who are you?

We are looking for a passionate, relational leader who is called by God to plant churches for Him. Do you have a love for the Word of God? Are you Christ-centered and seeking opportunities to point others toward Him? Have you completed formal theological training? Are you relational and community oriented? A servant shepherd?

What's Expected?

In this role you will be expected to lead in our efforts toward reaching our community and creating disciples. This is a part-time position of 20 hours per week. We will expect you to spend time each week:

1. In prayer for the church and the community
2. In the community building relationships outside the church
3. Preparing a sermon and preaching
4. In visitation/member care
5. Being discipled and discipling

If you are interested in this role, please email goodnewssdbchurch@gmail.com with your resume and cover letter. We are excited to meet you!

DEATH NOTICES

PHILLIPS—Rolleesa Phillips went to be with our Lord on May 6, 2021. She was born on August 31, 1930, in Fouke, Arkansas. She was a founding member of the Philadelphia SDB Church, a loving wife, and mother to her children and stepchildren. A memorial service was held on June 7, 2021.

WARNER—Mayola W. Warner, age 91, passed away early Monday morning June 28, 2021, in the Oneida Healthcare Center Extended Care Facility after a brief stay. Mayola was born May 4, 1930, and was a life-long member of the Verona Seventh Day Baptist Church, NY. She was a gifted musician and, with husband Garth, founded and led "The Power Company"—a Christian music group for teenagers. Services were held on July 2.

NEW MEMBERS

REMEMBRANCE SDB CHURCH

Fort Worth, TX

Rev. Stephan Saunders, Pastor

William Wells

Debra Wells



Conference Seminars: **Journey of 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations**

By Linda Lyke, Shanny Snyder, Melissa Lade, Milton, WI



Melissa, Shanny, and I started on the “9 Arts” journey in 2017. Our training through Q Place (qplace.com) equipped us to provide a safe, non-judgmental environment for pre-believers to discuss life, God, and the Bible. God blessed this journey as we relied on and witnessed Him change lives.

We had the honor of presenting “*The 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations*” during Conference, which reflects how Jesus drew people to himself. Here is a short summary of the three Arts:

Listening, Welcoming, and Sharing

By Linda Lyke

The Art of Listening: This Art challenged me because now I can be a better listener! Jesus demonstrated love by taking the time to listen. Do we live out the opportunity for pre-believers to consider the gospel message through the quality of our listening?

The Art of Welcoming: We often think of welcoming as inviting someone to dinner—but it’s so much more. Jesus spent time with people, showing them His power and authority and inviting them into His kingdom. Do we reflect Jesus’ welcoming through our attitudes, words, and actions?

The Art of Sharing: God chose and transformed us from children of darkness to children of light. I challenge you to pray for opportunities and courage to share how God changed your life. Jesus dwelt with people in their difficulties and wept with Mary and Martha in their grief. Are you willing to live like Jesus and share Him as our only eternal hope?

With the conference theme of “Restored For A Purpose,” God commands us to participate in advancing His kingdom. Our hope and prayer is that you will follow Jesus’ example and apply these simple Arts with those He places in your everyday lives.

Noticing, Facilitating, and Asking Questions.

By Shanny Snyder

Noticing—that’s where it starts...A precursor of knowing someone is noticing them. As Doug Pollock writes in his book *God Space*, noticing is a “prerequisite to caring about others and serving them in tangible ways that smuggle the gospel into their hearts.” What a strong image! Noticing things about the people you already know and care about is a powerful way to show you love them. You can do the same for people to whom you are ministering—yes, even strangers!

Facilitating—If you’re like me, you love to teach people about the things you’re excited about or interested in. You could go into great detail about

things that other people don’t mind skipping over. That is one of the hardest obstacles I’ve had to overcome while practicing the art of facilitating. In this *art*, your job is simply to guide conversation and nudge it on its way. Recall the acronym K.I.S.S.—keep it simple, silly.

Asking Questions doesn’t have to be a task that is deep and emotional. It can be lighthearted and friendly. As Christians who desire to engage in authentic spiritual conversations, if we can intentionally tap into this God-given bent to be curious, we may have the key to discovering excellent questions, questions that communicate to someone how much we really care.

The Arts of Prayer, Loving, and Serving Together

By Melissa Lade

Imagine your everyday life having eternal significance! Or waking up in the morning knowing God wants to partner with you to advance His kingdom and, through it all, your relationship with Him deepens. What could give more satisfaction or purpose than that? *The 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations* gives us simple tools, like prayer, loving and serving together, so we can live like Jesus and fulfill the command He gives every single one of us: to make disciples of all nations.

Jesus prayed to His Father all the time. He was totally dependent on Him and so are we. We have the privilege of having a God who wants a relationship with us and through prayer, we can make sharing about God effective so not-yet-believers can know Him too! We also have a God who loves us unconditionally. When we receive His love, we are able to intentionally and sacrificially love others, even those we consider our enemies. Aren't you thankful God loved you when you were still His enemy? Jesus came here not to be served, but to serve and He calls us to do the same. Engaging in serving experiences with spiritual seekers provides the opportunity to show God's love to them, grow our own faith, build greater trust, and deepen our relationships, all of which people are craving.

Are you willing to step out in prayer, love, and serving together as simple ways to live like Jesus, fulfill the commandment to make disciples of all nations, deepen your personal relationship with God, and give your life eternal meaning and purpose? If not, what's holding you back? If so, get ready for an exciting adventure with God! SR



Linda Lyke

God called my family to the Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church twenty years ago. I grew up Catholic, so hearing the full gospel preached for the first time was life changing. Our children were young and participated in Awana, youth group, and Camp Wakonda programs. Jim and I have been married for 35 years. A few of my roles are Outreach Coordinator at church and Activities Assistant at a senior living community. My interests are healthy eating, flower gardening, hiking and traveling with my family.



Shanny Snyder

I enjoy playing guitar and piano. You can find me hanging with family or hiking the local trails on a weekend. One thing I love to do most is spend quality time with people and share what God is doing in our lives, to spur each other on in our faith walks.



Melissa Lade

My heart's desire is for myself and others to know, love, and trust Jesus. I'm married to my high school sweetheart, Jeremy. We have two dogs, Chopper and Larry. I enjoy spending time with my friends and family and especially my nephews. I work as a medical social worker, my favorite color is pink, and I like ice cream!

Periodicals postage paid
at Janesville, WI
and additional offices

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
His greatness no one can fathom.

Psalm 145:3



Conference 2022