



Just Go!

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The situation was serious! Under King Ben-hadad, Syria's army surrounded Samaria. In the ancient world, a seige generally meant starvation and destruction.

Ben-hadad's siege was leading to that end. A few adventurous Israelites sneaked outside Samaria's city gates at night in search of edible wild plants. After risking their lives for a few morsels, they were almost trampled by the city's masses, all hoping to get something to eat. Food prices were sky high. The head of a donkey sold for 80 pieces of silver and a portion of dove's dung sold for five pieces of silver.

The situation became so desperate that two women covenanted to eat their children (2 Kings 6). With thousands starving and hundreds dying, Israel was in deep distress.

Finally, one evening, four Israelite lepers concluded that they might as well cast themselves upon the Syrian's mercy. In the twilight they stumbled down a narrow path over the rocks and hills. A wonderful surprise awaited them. As a result of a miraculous act of God, the Syrians had retreated, leaving behind a camp full of food. There was more than enough to feed these hungry lepers and starving Israel too!

The lepers ran from tent to tent, gorging themselves. They rejoiced over their newly acquired riches of

silver and gold. They had everything their hearts desired. As they leapt for joy, a sober thought struck them. **2 Kings 7:9** records their words, **“Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king’s household.”**

These men sensed that the gifts they had received were gifts of God’s abundant grace. They had not earned them. In their poverty, God had made them rich. In their nakedness, He had clothed them. In their hunger, He had fed them. Now God’s overwhelming goodness and the knowledge of their countrymen’s desperate need motivated them to run to tell the good news.

Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church is in great danger. Like these four lepers we have been recipients of the abundant grace of our God. He has set a banquet table of Heavenly Truth before us! We have discovered “doctrinal treasures” in His Word. Through the grace of God we have been forgiven. Like the lepers, we have been delivered from the hand of the enemy and passed from death to life. The garment of Christ’s perfect righteousness has been provided for our spiritual nakedness. We have been fed with the Bread of Life! The riches of the Father’s House are ours! Yet the call of four lepers comes echoing down the corridors of time - to our time - to our day, **“This is a day of good tidings.....come that we may go.”**

God’s purpose in bringing us to Himself is to so fill us with His love and a knowledge of His Word that we naturally desire to share His goodness with others. Jesus clearly outlines His priority for His disciples in words too plain to be misunderstood. **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28: 19, 20)**

In this passage the word “Go” is not so much a command as it is instruction. It is not simply an order to go, it is a plan of action for those in the process of going. The good news of the gospel impels those who receive it to share their experience with others....The ‘go ye’ was placed automatically in the heart of New Testament converts. Conversion became their motivation.

One of Adventism’s greatest dangers today is to focus inward rather than outward, thus stifling the God-given desire to share His love with others. We can be in danger of allowing the institutional and organization demands of the church to become the ends in themselves. We need to re-establish saving the lost as the Ultimate high priority. Ellen White states it succinctly, **“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world.” (The Acts of the Apostles Pg. 9)**

Do we as individuals and as Brothers and Sisters of the most High God declare with unswerving confidence that Christ sends His redeemed people into the world as a living witness of the transforming life of the one who sends us? - who Himself went into the world. The Son of man went deep into the misery of this world and penetrated the stony hearts of rebellion. This calls for a similar deep and thorough penetration of the world by His children through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit!

When a church becomes ingrown, focusing its time and energies upon itself, it fails its highest calling. Rather than a “go” mentality the Jews developed a rigid “come” mentality - an exclusive isolationism, a

view that pictures the world as an evil to be escaped from as fast as possible. Of course we don't want to be partakers of any evil but somehow the idea is conveyed, "Come to the fortress. Within the walls believers of like persuasion worship God." This kind of thinking suggests "We and ours shall be saved. We must protect what we have. If someone else wants it, they must 'come' to the fortress." This thought in and of itself is not necessarily wrong because we do want to keep the oracles of God pure...the High standard should never be compromised! The problem comes when we are unwilling to leave the walls of our church to share the pure oracles of God - to share the High standard of our calling!

We must recognize that churches at times have experienced a built-in tendency to be self-centered and ingrown. They focus most of their time, money and energies inward. Hence the tragedy of the dying church. Do we serve a dead God! We serve a Risen Saviour! We members of the Risen Church! Tending the store must give way to vigorous outreach. It is imperative that we see unreached people and then pray, plan and program to win them to our Saviour!

Some food for thought. Church buildings can be one of the greatest single hindrances to community evangelism today - not because we have them but because we have failed to get out of them. If the Seventh-day Adventist Church is going to make an impact for Christ in our world, it must not only be a church that invites visitors to Sabbath School on Visitors' Day once a quarter but it also must be a dynamic church that invades the community for Christ! We can no longer expect people to come to the gospel, we must take the gospel to the people - just like Jesus!

The New Testament Church did not limit evangelistic proclamation to the formal church setting only. Believers witnessed on their jobs and in the marketplace. Each believer's home became a pulpit for the proclamation of the gospel. **Acts 5:42, "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."**

In Jesus' parable of the wedding garment, the Master urged His servants to **"Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage."** (Matthew 22:9). Luke's account is even plainer. **Luke 14:21** says the Master instructed them to **"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind."** And **verse 23, "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."** Another words, Just Go! What is stopping you!

Growing churches take this evangelistic mandate from our Lord seriously. Following the footsteps of our Lord, they place top priority on evangelism. The church serves in many different ways; however it must never forget its primary and irreplaceable privilege - bringing lost children back to the Father's house.

Jesus came on an evangelistic mission. The incarnation is an eloquent testimony of a God with a "Go" mentality. Jesus, the supreme soulwinner, left the fellowship of the Father, the companionship of Heavenly angels, and the worship of cherubim and seraphim in order to redeem us. Heaven's love is outgoing. Jesus entered this snakepit of a world with one goal. One longing filled His soul. One thought occupied His mind. **"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."** (Luke 19:10).

The term evangelism brings up a variety of mental images. To some it is anything the church engages in

with the community in mind. This broad view of evangelism might include a group of church youth painting an elderly couple's home, a Breathe Free Plan to Stop Smoking, distribution of food baskets to the needy, and a score of other "good neighbor" activities. Others define evangelism in a much more concentrated area. To them it is the public proclamation of the three angels' messages. They see evangelism in terms of the public crusade with a lively song service, enthusiastic preaching graphically illustrated with computer graphic power point presentations and strong appeals. Both areas are needed and have led many people to Christ!

However, Evangelism is proclaiming the gospel of Christ in private or public, clearly and persuasively so that men and women accept Him as Saviour and follow Him as Lord.

Evangelism is that particular task of the church to communicate the good news of God's love to persons so that they may understand the message, place their trust in Christ, become loyal members of His church, and fulfill His will as obedient disciples. Biblical evangelism, then, is concerned with initial conversion, the new convert's growth in the Word, obedience to the claims of Christ, and union with Christ's church.

Evangelism is not everything the church does. It is not merely a broad spectrum of community activities. These community programs may break down prejudices as they minister to the needs of men and women; nevertheless, unless they present the gospel of Christ they should not be considered evangelism. As important as preevangelism activities are, they are not evangelism. As Jesus stated in **Matthew 23:23** on a different subject, "**These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.**" The church can become immersed in so many other activities, good in themselves, that it fails to accomplish the very thing for which it was called into existence.

The one main function of the church is to explain to people the meaning of life. People are hungry....for food, for employment, for more adequate housing, for recreation, for financial security, for good health, for more stable marriages, for companionship, and for God. Churches can and do help meet all these needs to one extent or another. The one acute human need that churches and only churches can meet is the desire to relate to the ultimate, to know God personally. In plainer Biblical language, churches are places where people can be saved.

Any Adventist church that substitutes a variety of good neighbor programs for direct pastoral and membership involvement in the proclamation of the gospel is deceiving itself. The task of evangelism is definite: to communicate the love of God, enabling people to find a personal faith in Christ, union with His church, and growth in His will.

This work of evangelism is interested in whole persons. Different methods can and should be used to reach different people. As members discover their God-given gifts and minister to their communities, meeting the needs of men and women, hearts will be prepared to receive the gospel. Where do all the activities of the church ultimately lead men and women that we come in contact with? The response ought to be an encounter with Jesus Christ!

Churches that do not give evangelism a high priority experience a corresponding lack of morale. Members lose their enthusiasm. Over the years they become depressed. They develop an evangelistic "inferiority complex," believing that no one in their community is responsive.

Mark Finley shares a story regarding a church he once pastored. “I once pastored a church that met in a rented cemetery chapel. As I stood up to preach each Sabbath, the tombstones surrounding the church were clearly visible. Death came to its very doors!

The church had been losing members for almost 10 years. At that time, only eight people were still attending, and often they didn't even sit close together but scattered throughout that large sanctuary. Since our church was fighting for its own survival, it was very difficult to lead it into a positive growth attitude. Its members felt helpless and doomed. Too few people had to do too much work. Some of our leadership began to experience burnout. Others complacently accepted the status quo with a “we will endure whatever the consequences” attitude. Without the fresh ideas and new life that new converts to Christ bring, the church was on the verge of death.

In the midst of this crisis we found that the following practices helped significantly to direct the church members' attention off themselves and onto the task of evangelizing the community: First, at board meetings we discussed the mission of the church, its role in the community, and God's goal for our congregation. We affirmed that our church was an extension of Christ's body in our community. God had placed us there for a purpose. By His grace we would be faithful to the task He had given us. Second, we conducted Sabbath morning services as if the church was packed. If you think small, plan small, and act small, you will always be small. Ellen White put it well when she said, **“We are altogether too narrow in our plans. We need to be broader minded”** (Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, June 29, 1905, paragraph 25- Article Title: The Need of Home Religion (Concluded)).There must be a wider reaching forth to work for those who are far off.

And third, we planned outreach. Many churches say they want to grow. They declare that evangelism is their top priority, but they have no specific plan for growth. They do not set bold, challenging, faith goals. They talk about evangelism occasionally. They are about as likely to succeed as the smoker who desires to quit but has no plan and has not set a date. Desire is not a substitute for an evangelistic action plan. If you want your church to make an evangelistic impact on the community you must make evangelistic plans. It won't happen accidentally.

Each Sabbath we celebrated the goodness of God. We praised Him for what He was doing rather than decrying what He was not doing. We thought big, planned big, prayed big, and worked hard! We looked for the little evidences that God was at work and reported these to the congregation. Soon attitudes began to change. A sense of expectancy began to develop. Our little group of members believed something was going to happen, and it did. As the members began to feel good about themselves and their church, they felt comfortable enough to invite their friends. The renewed emphasis on mission created an evangelistic consciousness. Soon the congregation numbered 20, then 30, and then 50!” – (end Mark Finlay Quote)

Mark Finlay witnessed first hand the amazing transformation of a dying church to a vibrant, awakened church! What made the difference? Celebrating the goodness of God, focusing on the mission of the church, and seeking the power of the Spirit through intercessory prayer enabled God to work mightily. A negative, critical, divided church limits the power of God. A self-centered, ingrown, complacent church denies God the privilege of working miracles through it.

A rush into evangelism, motivated only by the desire to add numbers to our membership rolls or to solve

morale or budgeting problems is certainly doomed to failure. Evangelism must be done primarily for the glory of God! It is rooted in God's nature. It is because the very essence of His nature is Love: **"Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4).**

He desires the best for all of His creatures. It is His redemptive purpose that they inhabit eternity with Him forever. He has dedicated all the resources of Heaven to redeem mankind. The Holy Spirit convicts human beings of sin, impressing them to seek God. Through the changing circumstances of life, God takes the initiative in leading men and women to Himself. He appeals to them through the providences of life. All of the angels of heaven participate in this salvation endeavor. In the greatest initiative of all, God sent His own Son. The cross of Calvary and the triumphant Risen Lord speaks eloquently of His desire to save mankind.

Is it our deepest yearning and desire to participate with God in the redemptive process? We are interested in evangelism because God is. Without Jesus men and women are lost not only for time but for eternity. Has this awesome thought struck you yet? It has struck me to the core of my being! Without Jesus, men and women are not merely misguided, misdirected, misinformed, or mis - anything else - they are lost. They are destined to eternal oblivion.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10: 13, 14). The greatest motivation for evangelism is the desire to be in partnership with God in redeeming the lost!

The depth of human need motivates us to say with Paul, **"For the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).** Filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude toward Christ for redeeming us, we exclaim with Peter and John, **"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20).** The desire to share His love with those with whom we come in contact wells up within us. **Galatians 6:2** instructs us to **"Bear ye one another's burdens."** Will you bear Jesus' burden with Him? In a way we can never fully comprehend, He feels the pain of every cancer victim wasting away in a hospital. He experiences the sorrow of every woman whose husband has left her for someone else. He enters into the hurt of the 10 year old girl who has just been told that her parents have been killed in a head-on collision. He shares the grief of every mother whose baby is born dead. He experiences the suffering of the refugees of every war. **"In all their affliction he was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9).**

His priestly ministry in heaven's sanctuary costs Him something we but faintly comprehend. Sin brings Him pain. Shall I repeat that? Sin brings Him pain. It hurts. To bear His burden means to rush out to the lonely, the depressed, the hurting, the bruised, the empty people around us, to ease their pain - to tell them the wonderful story of His love - to see them saved in the Kingdom! It is heaven's first priority, is it yours? It is Jesus' chief concern, is it yours?

In the light of eternity, are you spending your time on the one thing that really matters - men and women redeemed for the Kingdom of God? Jesus is saying to His children - His brothers and sisters - Just Go! The End of all things is at hand. Just Go! I am coming quickly to gather my children home - Just Go! Do not tarry! The harvest is ripe! Just Go!

