

TO MY FUTURE COLLEAGUES IN MINISTRY

Key Guidelines to Remember in Your Spiritual and Professional Journey

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1. Immerse yourself daily in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy.

Nothing is more important than this. Without this daily refreshment and counsel from the Lord, no aspect of your life or ministry will succeed. If you think you're "too busy" now to study the inspired writings in depth, don't delude yourself into believing once you get settled in marriage and ministry, you'll have more time. Because you won't. You have to prioritize now.

While it isn't wrong to read other literature, either from inside or outside Adventism, only if our minds and hearts are saturated with the inspired worldview are we safe from the subtleties and emotional appeals of contemporary deception.

2. Seek the Lord daily for a new heart and a right spirit.

There is never an excuse for men or women of God losing their cool. Truth, no matter how truthful, must ever be spoken in love (Eph. 4:15). Recounting Moses' angry words before striking the rock at Kadesh, Ellen White observes:

Moses had spoken from irritated feeling; his words were an expression of human passion rather than of holy indignation because God had been dishonored. "Here now, ye rebels," he said. This accusation was true, but even truth is not to be spoken in passion or impatience (PP 417).

The following Ellen White statement is one of the clearest on this point:

You may be true to principle, you may be just, honest, and religious; but with it all you must cultivate true tenderness of heart, kindness, and courtesy. If a person is in error, be the more kind to him; if you are not courteous, you may drive him away from Christ. Let every word you speak, even the tones of your voice, express your interest in, and sympathy for, the souls that are in peril. If you are harsh, denunciatory, and impatient with them, you are doing the work of the enemy. You are opening a door of temptation to them, and Satan will represent you to them as one who knows not the Lord Jesus (TM 150).

The Bible declares, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee" (Isa. 26:3). In His parting words to His disciples before His death, our Lord declared, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you" (John 14:27). Ellen White, commenting on this verse, makes the following observation:

The peace of Christ is not to banish division, but it is to remain amid strife and division (RH Jan. 16, 1900).

The late Arthur Schlesinger Jr. speaks of the remarkable calmness experienced by President Kennedy while in crisis (See Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965), pp. 283-285,612). I have long marveled at, and wished for myself, the cool detachment with which the late President confronted challenges, including the threat of nuclear war. Those facing the crisis of the ages possess a resource vastly superior. Daily, hourly communion with God must characterize the experience of all—especially the young—who must contend with the church’s internal foes.

3. Never allow the struggles of your own spiritual life to dissuade you from your duty to God’s church.

Young people especially have a low tolerance for hypocrisy, even (and sometimes especially) in themselves. All Christians have personal struggles with sin, but the young Christian often feels them most acutely.

The devil often reserves his severest attacks for those fighting the battles of the Lord. It is painfully common, when standing for truth in present denominational controversies, to hear the enemy whisper in one’s ear, “You have your hands full dealing with your own spiritual problems. You have no time to spend on anyone else’s.” Logical as this may sound on the surface, it will soon be seen for the diabolical suggestion it is once the facts of spiritual life are considered.

If we wait till we consider ourselves perfect before addressing the spiritual problems of others, no godly Christian would ever be found reproving evil, since God alone knows the heart (I Kings 8:39) and for this reason forbids Christians to declare themselves sinless (I John 1:8). This doesn’t mean, of course, that sinless obedience is unattainable while on earth, as some mistakenly believe. But it does mean that God alone knows when such victory is achieved in the Christian’s life. Only He is qualified to declare, “Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). In the meantime, the Biblical command to “cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isa. 58:1), applies to every struggling believer.

If parents refrained from correcting their children because of unresolved struggles in their own (the parents’) spiritual lives, none but self-righteous parents would ever correct or discipline their children. It is a dreadful mistake to assume that because the struggles of our own walk with God may thus far be less than victorious, that we must therefore refrain from addressing problems in the larger church. The present writer has seen faithful young people (and others not so young) fall victim to such rationalizing, with devastating consequences for campuses and congregations—and in the end, for their own spiritual lives.

4. Keep in mind that a quiet, unobtrusive Christian example is not enough.

First World Adventism is generally characterized by a sedate, middle-class culture where getting along by going along is a way of life. Controversy and division, rather than error and compromise, are viewed in this culture as the great enemies. In such settings it is easy for the faithful, especially the young, to shun visible leadership roles and to think that subtle, behind-the-scenes influence is the best way to confront apostasy in the church and promote revival and reformation.

But such persons, if they remain faithful, soon learn the truth of Ellen White's statement that "light and darkness cannot harmonize. Between truth and error there is an irrepressible conflict. To uphold and defend the one is to attack and overthrow the other" (GC 133). Inevitably, in a church or school, the contrast between fidelity to God's written counsel and the myriad compromises now flourishing about us will be noted. In the face of such contrast, people choose sides. Division and controversy are the sure results.

In another statement, Ellen White depicts the dilemma which God's servants have faced through the ages:

In every generation God has sent His servants to rebuke sin, both in the world and in the church. But the people desire smooth things spoken to them, and the pure, unvarnished truth is not acceptable. Many reformers, in entering upon their work, determined to exercise great prudence in attacking the sins of the church and the nation. They hoped, by the example of a pure Christian life, to lead the people back to the doctrines of the Bible. But the Spirit of God came upon them as it came upon Elijah, moving him to rebuke the sins of a wicked king and apostate people; they could not refrain from preaching the plain utterances of the Bible—doctrines which they had been reluctant to present. They were impelled to zealously declare the truth and the danger which threatened souls. The words which the Lord gave them they uttered, fearless of consequences, and the people were compelled to hear the warning.

Thus the message of the third angel will be proclaimed (GC 606).

We often speak of the two l's—life and lip—and their need to match in the experience of the true Christian. The sacred record is clear that while it is possible to have "lip" without "life" (faithful words without corresponding faithful deeds, what we commonly call hypocrisy), it is never possible to have "life" without "lip." If one's Christian life is consistent, there will be corresponding words of clarity and truth. Without such words, a consistent Christian life does not exist.

5. Politics is not a four-letter word.

I don't want to be misunderstood here. When speaking of "politics" I am not referring to dishonesty, prevarication, exaggerated promises, or the compromise of truth in order to either advance one's career or to please as many and offend as few as possible. Unfortunately, however, many faithful ministers (and laypeople also) seem to cherish the notion that any

proactive involvement on their part in church government—constituency meetings, nominating committees, the choosing and replacing of leaders at any level—means taking part in that noxious game some like to call “church politics.”

What cynics like to call church politics, I call the rightful stewardship of God’s work, which belongs to us all. If those with an agenda to change our doctrines and standards into conformity with popular Christianity and popular culture are willing to sacrifice time and energy to participate in church affairs and the selection of leaders, those holding to present truth as defined by Inspiration have absolutely no excuse for not getting involved.

Indifference of this sort can wear a pious face. It is incredible how many, even among conservative Adventists, have been influenced by the popular heresy among us that “God will do everything” to make things right in the church—an offspring of the larger falsehood which teaches that proactive effort in pursuit of one’s own salvation is necessarily the same as legalism.

I urge you, from the depth of my being, not to fall for this trap. Let’s not forget what Ellen White says about Joshua’s battle with the Amorites, when the sun stood still:

Joshua had received the promise that God would surely overthrow these enemies of Israel, yet he put forth as earnest effort as though success depended upon the armies of Israel alone. He did all that human energy could do, and then he cried in faith for divine aid. The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort (PP 509).

When you have the chance to serve in a higher station in God’s work than the one you presently occupy, it is not necessarily a manifestation of selfish pride to accept such a task. Indeed, running from a higher duty may in fact be a truer demonstration of spiritual pride, much like Jonah’s running off to Tarshish when God sent him to Nineveh. Bible humility consists no more of an unwillingness to accept or seek high office in God’s church than it means a beautiful woman should consider herself ugly or an intelligent man should consider himself stupid. True humility is a recognition that all our gifts, whatever they may be, belong to God and must be used for His glory. The same holds true for service at any level within the body of Christ.