

# *The Transitional Path*

## How to Minister to Transitioning Seventh-day Adventists

By Dale Ratzlaff

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**Introduction:** In the following pages I have emphasized certain words which have been put in italics. These are my emphases.

**I. Understand the mindset of Adventism:** We must seek first to understand before we can expect to be understood. Adventists believe they have “the truth” and ALL other churches are in error. The following quotation is taken from the *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Jan. Feb. Mar., 2009 on the topic of “The Prophetic Gift”. It gives the mindset of Adventism that is often left out of their public relations, yet it reveals the core of Adventist self-understanding which must be understood to effectively minister to them.

“From our study this far, we understand that in Revelation 12:17 “the rest of her offspring” (NKJV) refers to God’s visible remnant church that can be recognized by two specific characteristics: (1) they “keep the commandments of God” as God has given them on Mount Sinai, including the Sabbath commandment, and (2) they “have the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which is the Spirit of prophecy, or the prophetic gift.

“The Sabbath-keeping Adventist movement, from even before its organization in 1863, always has claimed these identifying signs for itself. As Adventists we proclaim the Ten Commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath; and we believe that as a church we have the testimony of Jesus; that is, that God manifested Himself in the life and work of Ellen G. White.

“Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not just one church among many. It is a church prophetically foreseen. God has called this church into existence for a very specific purpose—to proclaim the three angels’ messages to a dying world.” p. 50.

By the term, “the three angles’ messages, Adventists mean (1) the investigative judgment starting on October 22, 1844, (2) the seventh-day Sabbath as the seal of God, and (3) Sunday as the mark of the beast.

Because Adventists believe they are the one and only true, remnant church and have the “truth”, for Transitioning Adventists (TAs) to leave Adventism means that they must face many fears. They wonder how someone can leave the “truth” without going into “error”.

**A. Fear of leaving the Sabbath:** “Then I was shown a company who were howling in agony. On their garments was written in large characters, ‘Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting.’ I asked who this company were. The angel said, ‘These are they who have once kept the Sabbath and have given it up.’” Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 37.

**B. Fear of receiving the mark of the beast:** “The sign, or seal, of God is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Lord’s memorial of creation...The mark of the beast is the opposite of this—the observance of the first day of the week. This mark distinguishes those who acknowledge the supremacy of the papal authority from those who acknowledge the authority of God.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 118.

**C. Fear of rejecting Ellen White:** “It is Satan’s plan to weaken the faith of God’s people in the *Testimonies*. Next follows skepticism in regard to the vital points of our faith, the pillars of our position, then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition.

When the *Testimonies*, which were once believed are doubted and given up, Satan knows the deceived ones will not stop at this; and he redoubles his efforts till he launches them into open rebellion, which becomes incurable and ends in destruction.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 211.

“In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days He speaks to them by the Testimonies of His Spirit... [writings of Ellen White] The Lord has seen fit to give me a view of the need and errors of His people.” *Testimonies of the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 66; see also Vol. 4, p. 147-148. (**Compare Heb. 1:1-3, Note that Ellen White takes out Christ as God’s final word and inserts her writings as God’s means for communicating His will today.**)

- D. Fear of leaving the Adventist church:** “...We believe that being Seventh-day Adventists has a direct bearing on our salvation; that while a believer can be saved as a Catholic, *I would risk my whole spiritual life and salvation* were I to leave what I am now and join *any* other community.” President Jan Paulson, “The Theological Landscape” No. 4, “The Idea of Remnant” printed in the *Adventist Review*, (Review and Herald, 2002). [Jan Paulson is current (2009) president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist—the highest office in Adventism.]
- E. Fear of leaving the early historical teachings of Adventism:** “When the power of God testifies as to what is truth [what God has shown Ellen White] that truth is to stand forever as truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained.” Ellen G. White, *Loma Linda Manuscript*, No. 150.
- F. Fear of being deceived by studying with former Adventists, especially former Adventist pastors:** It is our understanding that many Adventist leaders are now telling their members not to study with those who leave Adventism. They reason, if a person leaves “the truth” they must be going into error and be deceived by Satan. So why should a person study with someone whom they believe to be deceived by Satan? They convey the idea that if an Adventist studies with a former Adventist they, too, are likely to be deceived by the devil. One leader said, “We may have to close our eyes and ears to those who disagree with us.” On our recent ministry trip (2009) we found that the Adventist churches were notified of our meetings, told to hold conflicting meetings in Adventist churches and warn their members not to attend our presentations. CDs were mailed out to many churches full of untruths about us and our ministry implying that we left Adventism because we wanted to live in sin and did not believe in obedience to God. We find that Adventist leaders do not want to study with former Adventist pastors. I have tried repeatedly to make an appointment with the Arizona Adventist Conference president all to no avail.
- G. Fear of leaving friends and family in a close-knit community.** Many who leave Adventism are cut off from family and friends. Often former Adventists (Formers) are forbidden to even talk about religion with their SDA family members. We have experienced this ourselves and as we meet with Formers around the country we hear this over and over again.
- H. Fear of compromising SDA standards.** Some—not all—TAs may have hidden fears of attending churches that use coffee, tea, alcoholic beverages and eat meat. Some TAs would be totally scandalized if the church they attended served pork at a potluck or real wine in the communion service.

**I. Fear of the coming judgment and the time of trouble.** “In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God *without an intercessor*. The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. The power attending the last warning has enraged them, and their anger is kindled against all who have received the message. The people of God are then plunged into those scenes of affliction and distress described by the prophet as the time of Jacob’s trouble...It is often the case that trouble is greater in anticipation than reality; but this is not true of the crisis before us. *The most vivid presentation cannot reach the magnitude of the ordeal.*” Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 432f. See also *The Great Controversy*, p. 425, 614.

I have personally counseled with a number of Formers or TAs who have had to have professional therapy to rid themselves of the fear of the Adventist time of trouble. When a person reads the description of this event in Ellen White’s *The Great Controversy*, they will have frightening imaginations of this terrible ordeal. Then when they read: “*The most vivid presentation cannot reach the magnitude of the ordeal*” and the mental fears start to snowball and they can grow into a fearful, psychotic syndrome.

**II. Understand the role of conscience.** I highly recommend you read two articles on this topic in the Jan/Feb & Mar/Apr 2002 *Proclamation!* [www.lifeassuranceministries.org/proclamation20\\_02.html](http://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/proclamation20_02.html) and study 1 Corinthians 8 and 10:23–33.

- A. Conscience = voice of God + education.
- B. Conscience may be misinformed.
- C. We should *never* go against our conscience.
- D. We sin when we cause a weaker brother to go against his conscience.
- E. Our job is not to change behavior but to re-educate the conscience by the Word of God. Don’t urge transitioning Adventists to break the Sabbath, eat unclean foods or do anything they feel is wrong until they are convinced by the Word of God that they are free to do so.
- F. It takes time to do this.

**III. Involve the Adventist in group discovery Bible studies as soon as possible.**

- A. Most Adventists feel they are superior in Bible knowledge. Do not confront this attitude. Rather, let them experience good, discovery group Bible studies with other Christians.
- B. Adventists have two sources of “truth”—the Bible *and* the writings of Ellen White.
  - 1. Many Adventists have read more of Ellen White’s writings than the Bible and in time these two often blend into one.
  - 2. Transitioning Adventists will sooner or later come out with an “Ellen Whitem” —quoting Ellen White when they think they are quoting Scripture.
  - 3. It is best if the TA discovers this rather than being confronted by others.
  - 4. Be patient, but direct TAs to the Bible as the only source of truth.
- C. Teach correct principles of hermeneutics. Following are some important highlights, pastors should add to these:

1. Adventism was founded on the proof-text method of Bible interpretation. Show how this is not a safe way to study. (See *Cultic Doctrine* p. 56-79 for a number of illustrations of proof-texting running wild.)
2. Teach contextual Bible study.
3. Teach inductive Bible study—study to discover not to prove.
4. Let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament.
5. Understand the difference between the old and new covenants and know the signs of each covenant. *Sabbath in Christ* will be an excellent reference for this.
6. Doctrine should come primarily from the Gospels interpreted by the Epistles.
7. Doctrine should seldom, if ever, come from the apocalyptic passages of Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation.
  - a) Where the Bible is clear we can and should be certain.
  - b) Where the Bible is unclear we must be tentative.
8. Doctrine should never be based on an isolated text.
9. Description is not prescription.

#### **IV. Follow the right subject order**

- A. Start with the gospel. Some have been effective in starting at other places such as showing the errors of Ellen White, having the TAs read Galatians through in one sitting every day for 30 days, or having them read *Cultic Doctrine*—if they are willing to do that. But we generally feel it is best to start with the simple gospel. Do not, however, start with the topic of the Sabbath. For many Adventists the Sabbath is the most cherished and important doctrine. It is at the very core of their theological paradigm. For many TAs it is unthinkable that Adventists could be wrong on the importance of Seventh-day Sabbath observance.
  1. The gospel is often misunderstood in Adventism and the writings of Ellen White are confusing and self-contradictory on the gospel. There are six “gospels” being promoted in Adventism. (See *Cultic Doctrine*, p. 316-322 for an explanation of each of the following.)
    - a. The gospel of example.
    - b. The gospel of the feast keepers.
    - c. The great controversy gospel (See also *Cultic Doctrine*, p. 235).
    - d. The 1888 gospel.
    - e. The gospel of progressive pluralism.
    - f. The Pauline gospel of justification by faith alone—without renouncing Adventist errors which, in turn, undermine the gospel.
  2. The gospel is the most important of all subjects.
  3. Adventists are hungry for the true gospel.
  4. The gospel itself will undermine the errors of Adventism.
  5. The Holy Spirit works when the gospel is proclaimed.
  6. Once a person is truly born again, the Holy Spirit will guide into all truth.

7. How to determine if Adventists understand the gospel:
  - a. Ask them to give you their testimony. Remind them that God has no grandchildren. Adventists often speak of “conversion” usually meaning conversion to the “truths of Adventism”. They seldom speak of the new birth or being born again by the Spirit.
  - b. What must one do to be saved?
  - c. What must one do to remain saved?
  - d. What must one do to be ready for Christ to come? If they are “good Adventists” they will have additions to the gospel in order to be ready for Christ to come.
  - e. Ask the TA “Will you be lost if you leave the Sabbath, leave the SDA church, or eat unclean meat?”
  - f. If in doubt, stay with the gospel.
8. Good gospel passages are:
  - a. Luke 15.
    - 1) God searches for and accepts sinners who just wander away.
    - 2) God searches for and accepts sinners who get lost because of the carelessness of others.
    - 3) God accepts sinners who rebel against the Father’s love the minute they turn toward home.
  - b. John 3, 4, 8
    - 1) Even theologians need to be born again. Drive home the truth of the necessity of the new birth. We must be born again by the Spirit of God.
    - 2) Like the woman at Jacob’s well, God can save those who have a sinful lifestyle and an incomplete understanding of theology if they accept Christ as their Savior. Once she received “the living water”—she left her water pot at the well—she became a successful evangelist in pointing others to Christ as the Savior of the world.
    - 3) The gospel is good news for those who have been caught in the act.
  - c. Luke 23:39–43. The gospel is good news for a dying sinner.
  - d. Romans 3–6. Many excellent gospel passages here!
  - e. Gospel articles in *Proclamation!* (Search by topic)
  - f. Every book written by Dale Ratzlaff has a chapter or section dealing with the simple gospel.
- B. Settle the issue of authority once and for all. The Bible must be the only source of truth, not Ellen White or SDA church doctrine.
  1. The witness of Scripture: 2 Tim. 3:15, 16; Lk. 24:25–27; Jn. 10:35; 1 Jn. 5:13; Jn. 20:31; Rom. 10:17.
  2. Point out the confusion in the writings of Ellen White on this topic:
    - a. “And while the Scriptures are God’s Word, and are to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar from the foundation that God has sustained

these fifty years, is a great mistake.” Ellen White, *Notebook Leaflets from the Elmshaven Library*, 1094, p. 157. Review the quote found under “E” on Page 2 of this outline.

The above quotes show that the early experience and teachings of Adventism are the plumb line for Adventist Bible interpretation.

- b. “But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord” in its support.” Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

The above quote states that doctrine must come from the Bible alone.

Adventists reconcile these two conflicting statements by insuring that the Bible is to be interpreted in harmony with Adventist experience and the teachings of Ellen White.

“...The historic sanctuary message, based upon Scripture and supported by the writings of Ellen White, continues to be held to unequivocally. And the inspired authorities on which these and other doctrines are based, namely the Bible supported by the writings of Ellen White, continue to be the hermeneutical foundation on which we as a church place all matters of faith and conduct. Let no one think that there has been a change of position in regard to this. (See [www.Adventistreview.org/2002-154/story3.html](http://www.Adventistreview.org/2002-154/story3.html))

3. Point out the confusion in SDA church doctrine. (See *Cultic Doctrine*, p. 274, 275).

In the 1970s it became well known among informed Adventists that the 1844 Sanctuary doctrine could not be supported by the Bible. Rather than admit error, the church changed their doctrinal statements regarding “The Holy Scriptures” and “The Gift of Prophecy”. Following are the subtle but major changes that were made:

- a. The pre-1980 statement said that the Scriptures are “all sufficient” and are the “only” unerring rule of faith and practice.
  - b. The post-1980 (current, 2009) statement on “The Holy Scriptures” leaves out “all sufficient” and “only”.
  - c. The pre-1980 statement on “The Gift of Prophecy” states that Ellen White manifested the gift of prophecy, but does not say that her writings are a “*source* of truth.”
  - d. The post-1980 (current, 2009) statement for “The Gift of Prophecy” states that the writings of Ellen G. White “...are a continuing and authoritative *source* of truth...”
  - e. Now the Adventist church is left with the impossible task of trying to explain how the hundreds of foolish, erroneous and contradictory statements made by Ellen White could possibly be a “source of truth”.
4. Confirm that the Bible is the only source of truth for your study.
  5. Agree that Ellen White cannot be used for doctrinal authority.
  6. As long as transitioning Adventists continue to read Ellen White or *The Clear Word* “bible” they will not be able to clearly understand Scripture. This will be very hard for a “good Adventist” to accept. To help them understand this:

- a. Illustrate with Mormons. A Mormon is unlikely to leave Mormonism if he/she reads Joseph Smith every day.
  - b. Illustrate with Jehovah's Witnesses. A J.W. is unlikely to leave if they read the Watchtower every day.
7. You may find Adventists who say the SDA church does not put Ellen White on the same level with Scripture. There are many statements in some of their books and periodicals that confirm that her writings are not used for doctrine or placed on the same level as Scripture. However, please refer to *Cultic Doctrine*, Appendix 4 for quotes from a number of SDAs leaders which prove that many SDA put Ellen White on the same level with the apostle Paul.
- C. Show that the SDA's 1844 Sanctuary Doctrine is without biblical support and that it undermines the gospel. *Cultic Doctrine* is the best book to deal with this subject.
- 1. *Cultic Doctrine* evaluates the SDA's 1844 investigative judgment sanctuary theology five different ways.
  - 2. *Cultic Doctrine* shows that the SDA church was built on massive error and deception.
  - 3. *Cultic Doctrine* exposes many of the errors and heretical statements made by Ellen White.
  - 4. *Cultic Doctrine* lists the 15 characteristics of a cult and shows how the SDA church meets most of them.
- D. Study the Sabbath. This will be thoroughly discussed in the presentation entitled, "What about the Fourth Commandment?" I strongly recommend that you get *Sabbath in Christ* as it will answer every question a transitioning Adventist will ask. It has helped many thousands make a successful transition and remains our best seller. However, Adventists should read *Truth Led Me Out* or *My Cup Overflows* **before** reading *Sabbath in Christ*.
- 1. The topic of the Sabbath MUST be thoroughly understood:
    - a. If you are going to have a ministry to transitioning Adventists.
    - b. If you are going to keep your members from being caught in the enticing net of Adventist evangelism.
  - 2. We have found that many, if not most, evangelicals, including evangelical pastors, are not well prepared to adequately answer all the questions an Adventist will ask on the topic of the Sabbath.

**V. What the Evangelical pastor can expect in ministry to transitioning Adventists:**

- A. TAs will have a plethora of questions.
- B. You may find that TAs have a different understanding of evangelical terms. Ask probing questions for clarification.
- C. TAs may study the Bible with you and then without telling you, they may go back and study with an SDA pastor or friend and become confused. You may have to study the same topic several times. Be patient with them. It is not easy to change one's whole paradigm of truth.
- D. Once TAs have made the transition to your church, they may prove to be your most dynamic church members on fire for the gospel. We hear this time and again from evangelical pastors.

## VI. Conclusion and summary:

- A. Transitioning Adventists will have to face a number of other embedded errors. Once TAs understand the gospel, attend a gospel-believing, Bible-teaching church, these will be discovered and dealt with in God's own time.
- B. Do not force the details of last-day events on TAs. Every view of eschatology is built on at least several assumptions. Our responsibility is to stay close to Christ, His word and His church. God will be with us no matter which view turns out to be right.
- C. Use the resources of Life Assurance Ministries:
  1. Life Assurance Ministries, Inc., publishes *Proclamation!* a 24 page, full-color journal mailed bi-monthly free to about 30,000 homes.
    - a. We do appreciate and depend on donations so we can continue this ministry.
    - b. All back issues may be downloaded from: [www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org](http://www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org).
    - c. Has news of Former Adventist Weekends and ministry trips.
  2. LAM Publications, LLC website is: [www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.com](http://www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.com) and:
    - a. Publishes and sells books and CDs specifically designed to help transitioning Adventists.
    - b. Has a number of important articles that may be downloaded free.
    - c. Has news of ministry appointments and presentations.
  3. Direct transitioning Adventists to the Former Adventist Forum at: [www.FormerAdventist.com](http://www.FormerAdventist.com)
    - a. Transitioning Adventists have a real need to "talk through" the issues in leaving the SDA church.
    - b. They can join the forum under a pseudonym if they wish.
    - c. Many Adventists, including Adventist pastors, "lurk" on this site reading the postings and responses before they start their transition.
  4. On these websites you will find a number of links to other former Adventist sites. There is a wealth of material on the internet dealing with the errors of Adventism.
- D. Understand the need for this ministry.
  1. Approximately 300,000 Adventist members leave the SDA church every year.
  2. Adventists are "programmed" by Ellen White and church doctrine to become agnostics when they leave Adventism. Review the fears listed at the beginning of this outline.
  3. If SDAs visit a church that worships on Sunday, they do so with many fears. A Saturday night service often proves to be helpful to TAs.
  4. If the pastor and members do not know how to answer their questions, and meet their unique set of needs, they may just give up on Christianity.

Note: We have been contacted by many who grew up in historic Adventist homes and became so discouraged because they felt they could never be good enough to get to heaven. Therefore, they gave up on Christianity, as they understood it. They concluded that if they were not going to heaven anyway, and there is no hell, then they might as well enjoy the

pleasers of this world to the fullest as that would be all they could expect. In one way or another, however, God got their attention again. Some tell of how they just happened to see a *Proclamation!* or one of our books and started reading. Some heard the gospel for the first time in some other venue. After discovering the simple gospel, God's grace drew them back into fellowship with Himself.

5. At Adventist prophecy lectures (they use many different names and seldom advertise that they sponsored by Adventists) SDAs often baptize many evangelicals, even pastors.
- E. Last but most important, pray for transitioning Adventists that they will fully understand and accept the simple gospel and be delivered from the false guilt and fears of Adventism.

—Your Questions Welcome—