

The Remnant Mission: To Reveal and Proclaim God's Glory

By Lester Merklin

The church has a prophetic obligation to reveal to the world the glory of God. This is the primary mission given to God's remnant people. The church's mission must not *primarily* be to increase the church's membership. The first work of mission is to bring salvation in Jesus to the world; church membership is a by-product. Yet, how easy it is to formulate our ministry plans by what seems to produce numbers. The purpose of this article is not to reduce quantitative results of our ministries; in fact, if ministry is done God's way, there will be better numbers in the end. Rather the purpose is to show God's desire for his remnant's ministry in the hope that the

church will produce the results God wants produced.

Seventh-day Adventists have often said that the three-angels' messages of Rev 14 is the mission statement of the remnant people of God. If that is true, and I believe it is, then the church must do ministry in keeping with that commission. In the three angels' messages (Rev 14:6-12), there are several content areas for the remnant's ministry. The first message is the calling of all nations to give glory to God and worship the Creator; the second is announcing that Babylon is fallen; and the third is teaching the undesirable consequences of having the "mark of the beast." Note, also, that these messages proclaim the characteristics of the remnant: they keep God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. The church's ministries must proclaim all of these truths.

Unfortunately, Adventists have often made verse 12 the central message of Rev 14—God's people will be keeping his commandments and following him. But is that really the core message? This would mean that the emphasis of the three angels' messages is on the remnant—on



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human beings. But isn't the loud cry calling people to true worship? Isn't the focus of the message on the One who deserves worship? What is the value of the remnant's commandment keeping and faithfulness other than to bring glory to God? "Babylon is fallen" is an important message, but only because it reveals that God's character has been vindicated. Only he deserves our worship. The third angel continues to emphasize the true worship of God, by reminding people that false worship of the beast is doomed to destruction. The

been God's plan that through his church shall be reflected to the world his fullness and his sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into his marvelous light, are to show forth his glory (1911:9).

This article will first interpret the concept of "God's glory." Then the biblical literature will be surveyed to discover the importance given to the mission of proclaiming God's glory. The application section will then tackle the practical questions of how to do ministry and mission that truly reflects the mission God

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messages of the second and third angel are in response to and in explanation of the first shout from the sky: "Give glory to God and worship him." The remnant are those who do that!

The ministry and mission of the remnant people of God, then, is primarily to "reveal the glory of God" by attracting people to truly worship their Creator. Actually, this has always been the mission of God's people—at least, it was supposed to have been! Ellen White comments:

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. From the beginning it has

has given his people, especially to his remnant, to "give glory to God."

The Basic Meaning of "Give Glory to God"

The Hebrew word which is translated "glory" in English Bibles is *kābōd*. It has the idea of "worth" or "honor." Therefore, "glory" is an attribute of God, as well as our recognition of his worthiness. Although the Greek word *doxa* in the secular world meant "reputation" or an "opinion," the New Testament writers used the word differently, taking their cue from the Septuagint's use of *doxa* as a translation of the Hebrew *kābōd*. Robert Cook explains:

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On those occasions when it is used in a visible sense it seems to mean "radiance" and is especially related to the light that radiates from God's presence. . . . From a theological standpoint it is the ethical usage that is most significant. The glory of God, conceived of as the revelation of his character, is the loftiest of truths. As Ramm [1963:18] points out so aptly: "The glory of God is not . . . a particularized attribute like the wisdom of God but an attribute of the total nature of God, virtually an attribute of the attributes" (1984:292).

God's glory is all the good characteristics that God reveals about himself. It is his love, his mercy, his justice, his wisdom, as well as his power. The story of God's revelation of himself to Moses on Mount Sinai shows this interpretation to be quite biblical. He tells Moses,

When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by (Exod 33:27 NIV).

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord [that is, Yahweh]. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (Exod 34:5-7 NIV).

When God's people reveal

God's glory, then, they help people to see what God is really like. Richard Strauss correctly states:

To glorify God simply means to bring his innate glory to light, to expose it, manifest it, reveal it, demonstrate it, make it known. It is to put God on display and show him off for who He is. . . . We make his attributes prominently known (1997).

Israel's Mission: To Proclaim God's Glory

The concept of a "remnant" is a theme which comes from the Old Testament. The remnant theme is especially prevalent in the books of the prophets. Although they warn of judgments that will surely come upon Israel because of their unfaithfulness to God, they also speak of a remnant. This remnant will return to Jerusalem and finally fulfill the mission God had for Israel. Referring to the remnant of Israel, Isaiah says,

He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory" (49:3 NASB).

Although many of the "servant passages" of Isaiah are understood to be referring to the Messiah, this passage specifically refers to Israel as God's servant (see Kaiser 2000:56). Just as Jesus was to reveal his Father in the incarnation, Israel was the "light to the Gentiles" and a channel for God's glory to be seen by the nations. Jeremiah reflects this same understanding:

Then this city will bring me joy,

glory, and honor before all the nations of the earth! The people of the world will see the good I do for my people and will tremble with awe! (33:9 NLT).

Some of the most beautiful expressions of Israel's mission for God are found in the congregational songs in the book of Psalms. Roger Hedlund (1985) lists 11 psalms that he would call "mission" psalms but only two will be considered here. God's mission is made clear in the first two verses of Psalm 67.

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations (NIV).

drives away, but a reverence and awe that comes from seeing God in his glory, which attracts the nations to also worship God. As the psalm explains:

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; For You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You (67:4, 5 NASB).

Psalm 96 not only indicates that the character of God will be revealed through his people, but calls upon the people of God to proclaim the good things about God among the nations.

Sing to the Lord, praise his name; *proclaim* his salvation day after day.

The mission of God then is to reveal his mercy and love in his people, with the result that others are drawn to him.

This is echoed again at the end of the song, verse 7:

God blesses us, That all the ends of the earth may fear him (NASB).

The mission of God then is to reveal his mercy and love in his people, with the result that others are drawn to him. Ellen White clearly saw this plan of God in the Old Testament when she wrote, "It was God's purpose that by the revelation of his character through Israel men should be drawn unto him (1917:19). The "fear" resulting from this witness in Psalm 67 is not a fear that

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. *Say among the nations*, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with

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equity (2-10 NIV, italics added).

It is hard to miss the fact that this psalm calls for Israel to not only worship and “ascribe” to God the glory that is “due him,” but to also “proclaim,” “declare,” and “say among the nations” these glorious attributes of their God.

The plan of God is clear, but Israel's witness of God's glory was weak. Ellen White explains:

They forgot God, and lost sight of their high privilege as his representatives. The blessings they had received brought no blessing to the world. All their advantages were appropriated for their own glorification (1900:292).

It was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn to Him. . . . But ancient Israel did not fulfill God's purpose. (1917:19).

The Church's Mission: To Proclaim God's Glory

Jesus, of course, was the perfect reflector of God's glory. The purpose of the incarnation was to have God's true character perfectly communicated to mankind. John 1:14 (NIV) says,

So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.

Jesus tells us that he had accomplished the Divine mission to bring glory to God. Jesus told his Father,

I have glorified You on the earth, I have finished the work which You have given me to do. . . . I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given me out of the world. . . . And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:4, 6, 26 NIV).

The New Testament is clear that the disciples and the church are commissioned to fulfill the mission that God had given Israel. “God's glory must be revealed.” Paul wrote of this mission to the church in Ephesus:

So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places . . . so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen (3:10, 17-21 NASB).

An interesting text in the second epistle to the Corinthians shows that not only was this the mission of those who follow Christ, but that it was being done! Paul says,

If anyone asks about Titus, say that he is my partner who works with me to help you. And these brothers

are representatives of the churches. They are splendid examples of those who bring glory to Christ (8:23 NLT).

Hopefully, it is now clear that the mission of the church is the mission to reveal and proclaim the glory of our God. After all, that is the Adventist understanding of the “Great Controversy.” An enemy has tarnished God’s name and proclaimed a false picture of his character. God’s desire is to return his glory to this earth, to draw men back to himself as they learn the truth about his character and his law, and to have a people who will join him in making his glory known. Ellen White wrote,

Practical Applications for Ministry, Evangelism, and Missions

If revealing and proclaiming the glory of God is the remnant’s commission, then the church needs to make sure that is what it is doing. In many ways, Adventists have shared God’s glory with the nations. God has even revealed his glory when the church did not do very well with their part of the plan! Just like he did through Israel. However, Adventists have not always made the glory of God a priority in ministry and evangelism. Since every context for mission is unique, a journal article cannot suggest

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At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of his glory, the light of his goodness, mercy, and truth. Those who wait for the Bridegroom’s coming are to say to the people, “Behold your God.” The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of his character of love. The children of God are to manifest his glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them (1900:415-416).

specific strategies for mission; the Holy Spirit will need to guide the church in doing that. But the next section will suggest some basic foundations from which to plan ministries to bring God glory.

Glorifying God Begins With a Church That Reflects God’s Glory

The church is not a perfect church composed of perfect people. Maybe it would be wrong to suggest that it must be. One of the most compelling facts concerning the character of God is that he loves sinners; all churches will continue to reveal that truth!

However, the remnant is called out to be "saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." This is what God needs, especially in these last days, in order to reveal the beauty of his character and his ways. The world, above all else, needs to see God's glory reflected in his people. God has always needed this; as he told Israel, "I, the LORD, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness. . . . And you will be a light to guide all nations to me" (Isa 42:6 NLT).

As a Fuller professor has correctly indicated: "The calling of the church is to glorify the Triune God (1) by faithfully witnessing to the reign of God, and (2) by living as a sign of that reign" (Shenk 2003:15). Ministry in the context of remnant theology demands that these two concepts be merged in order to correctly reveal God's glory. Adventists, though, have often done better at proclaiming what God wants his people to do as citizens of his kingdom than in showing what the King is like. James White worried about his church in this regard:

Our positions are fully sustained by an overwhelming amount of direct scriptural testimony. . . . But we, as a people, have evidently rested down upon a theory of truth, and have neglected to seek Bible humility, Bible patience, Bible self-denial, and Bible watchfulness, and sacrifice, Bible holiness, and the power and gifts of the Holy Ghost. . . . Hence it is said, "and knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17). What a condition! (White 1856:44).

Of course, Christians must experience what they want to share; but, even more basic, can something be shared which is not really held with some excitement? The Psalms exhorted God's people to proclaim the glory of God by singing and shouting praises to him. John Piper, the Presbyterian missional pastor, reminds us that "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him" (1993:26). Ellen White spoke of the same contagious witness:

We are to show to the world and to all the heavenly intelligences that we appreciate the wonderful love of God for fallen humanity and that we are expecting larger and yet larger blessings from his infinite fullness (1900:299).

Adventists have often heard Ellen White's statement that "the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in his people" (1900:69) as if it were a goal to be reached in order to fulfill God's expectations of a remnant people. They have quoted from memory her comment that "if we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tender-hearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one" (1909:190) as if it were another devise for successful church growth. They are right, of course, in both regards; however, the important message of both these passages is that God needs a people that reflect his glory so he can draw more people unto himself! This is what Ellen White said concerning

God's plan through Israel:

Their characters were to be progressively ennobled and elevated, and reflect more and more the attributes of God (SDABC 1977:27).

Revival is foundational to mission—Holy Spirit filled ministry leaders leading the church to “passionate spirituality”—one of the “eight characteristics of a healthy church” according to worldwide research done by Christian Schwarz (2001). Members are needed who are so in love with Jesus that they cannot help but live out his character of love and mercy and unselfishness. Disciples are needed who are praising God among the nations and living like Jesus.

by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God (Phil 1:11 NLT).

The Goal of Ministry and Mission Is Disciples Who Reflect God's Glory

If God needs disciples who can reveal his glory, then the obvious goal of ministry and mission must be to make more of the same. The organized church throughout the centuries has often felt comfortable with the “baptizing” and “teaching them all things” parts of the Great Commission (Matt 28). According to Jesus, though, these are only steps to making new “disciples.” That is his mission. The Adventist church should not copy Saddleback, but their “purpose

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If God's ultimate goal for all things is his own glory, and if he goes to great lengths to manifest his glory, then his children should also establish as their highest goal in life the demonstration of God's glory. The Apostle Paul said that very explicitly: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31 NIV). His prayer for God's people was:

May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—those good things that are produced in your life

statement” surely reflects what the mission of the remnant must include:

To bring people to Jesus and membership in his family, develop them to Christ-like maturity, and equip them for their ministry in the church and life mission in the world in order to magnify God's name (Warren 1996:5).

The job of mission is to develop ways and means to fulfill that mission statement! It is really the only *raison d'être* for the church.

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This is why the church must be careful not to equate numbers of baptisms with success. Success, if that is the right word for humanity's endeavors, is only found in God's kingdom as new believers become maturing disciples and disciplers—reaching out to a lost world in the glorious name of our God. James Engel and William Dyrness remind us that:

Numerical growth, if it occurs, is an outcome of a church that is pure and blameless, not a goal in and of itself. . . . Numerical growth, if it occurs at all, is an outcome of the church functioning as a winsome alternative to society under the lordship of Christ. It is not the primary goal (2000:72, 115).

Doing Church According to the "Glory of God" Model

I am indebted to the work of Pastor Kim Johnson for leading me to see the importance of doing church according to the "glory of God" model. This concept could change Adventist mission and ministry. Figure 1 shows that there are two possible ways of doing church. The traditional one in Adventism (and other churches, too) has been the Informational Model, which is based on the philosophy of giving information "to as many people as you can as fast as you can." The church has truth to share, and it has promoted many good ways to share those truths with the world. This is not bad, of

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The ministerial director of an Adventist mission in Southeast Asia said that their mission was beginning to "count" church growth as indicated by baptized new believers who have been incorporated into the ministry of the church one year after baptism. Any "success" is not the pastor's but God's, and therefore ribbons or gold medals are not deserved; but if the church is looking for indicators of a church making disciples to God's glory, then this mission is heading in the right direction!

course; but when this is the primary model, the church will fail to fulfill the mission of every disciple to give God glory. The illustration shows how this model results in an emphasis of evangelism centering on a few ("professionals") who have the gifts of evangelism, preaching, and teaching. These are good gifts, but they are only a few of the gifts listed in Scripture (Johnson 2001:6).

The result is that most members become spectators, cheering the evangelist from the sidelines. "Spectator" is not one of the definitions of a disciple!

The glory of God model, on the other hand emphasizes “building people who live God’s love.” The church working from this model will reach out to people in relationships. This requires the use of every spiritual gift since different people are attracted to God’s glory in different ways. Since no one has every gift, but every disciple has at least one of the gifts, everyone in the church is involved in “evangelism” (making relationships for God), which, of course, is the essence of discipleship. There can be no doubt that God’s glory is being revealed in this church more than in a church emphasizing programs for information distribution. SDA author Roy Naden states:

Probably the greatest fallacy that has crept into the church is that modern tools such as television and radio will accomplish the work while members sit back to watch and listen. But each Christian

must get involved. The preaching of the gospel is not the work of some abstract entity called church. It is the personal responsibility of each one who has become his disciple (1996:206-207).

The glory of God model of doing church does not exclude communicating information. If mission is to bring glory to God, it will find a need to communicate information about God, about his plan, about his ways. But showing God’s glory will be the motivation! Truth must be shared—if by truth, it is meant the truth about God and his revealed will—or a false story about God (Babylon) will be shared. This is not advocating a Baha’i type of manifesting God’s glory—a new age idea of being little gods manifesting the character of a greater god. Truth, however, about God can only be communicated if it actually reveals his glory. Information about God, given at the proper

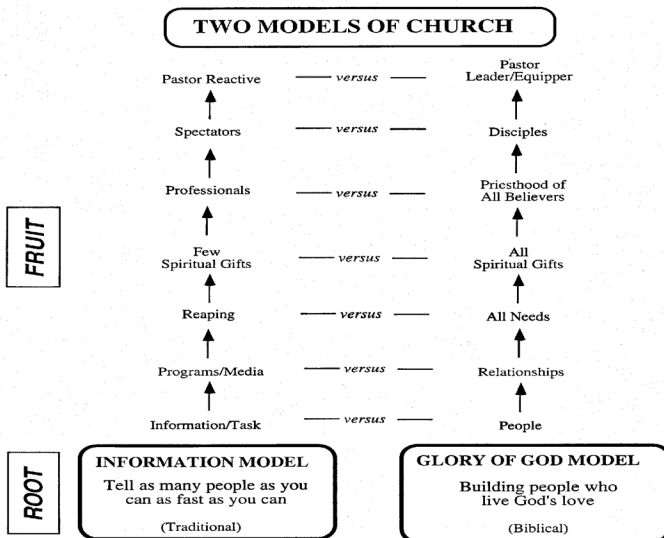


Figure 1. Two models of church.

time in a relationship, which results in a person being drawn to worship his/her creator, is the kind of information sharing that the glory of God model envisions.

The evangelical missiologist Gaylin Van Rheen writes,

Churches developed during the Modern era generally exist to dispense information. Unbelievers become Christians by receiving new information and grow in Christ to become leaders through enhanced understandings. The role of the preaching minister or pastor is that of teacher, dispensing information to the flock. Churches thus became cognitive groups ascribing to a set of teachings and meeting for a few

Ministry Strategies Will Be Formulated to Give God the Glory

It should be obvious by now that the so-called “standard solution” (one-size-fits-all) is not a possibility in a church whose motive is to glorify God rather than to just increase membership. The truth about God is eternal and unchanging, but the best way of “telling” that truth is as varied as relationships. A disciple in love with God will be motivated to share his Lord in the most favorable way possible, and this will take a Spirit-guided unique plan for each situation, for each prospective disciple and community.

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hours each week in a palace of bricks and mortar to receive additional teaching. God, however, expects more. He desires that his people not only know about him but that they also walk personally with him.

Envision churches full of people whose lives exist in relationship with God, where members passionately, whole-heartedly pursue full devotion to Christ. As Christians look toward the glory of God, they are “being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). Like the early Christian church, they devote “themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer” (Acts 2:42) (2004).

Sometimes spoken words might be appropriate! Many “strategies” of witness will be personal and contextual during the daily activities and relationships of the church members.

There, of course, will be opportunities for church-planned programs to meet a specific need or opportunity, or to help members discover and use their God-given gifts. There will even be circumstances when the public preaching of the word is the best way to tell of God’s glory. The glory of God model, however, should remind us that preaching would be only a small part of the witnessing

for God that happens in a church of committed disciples. Figure 2, adapted from Kim Johnson’s materials, graphically reveals the two reasons that any ministry and evangelism plans must be broad and varied. First, at least in North America, only 5% of the population is interested in taking Bible studies or hearing an evangelistic sermon—the rest (95%) need to know God, too. Second, using the 22 biblically listed spiritual gifts, only 3 or so would be utilized in a teaching/preaching ministry—the rest of the church needs to use their gifts, too.

Lesslie Newbigin (1995), a contemporary evangelical mission theologian, sees mission as being threefold: “Faith in Action,” “Love in Action,” and “Hope in Action.” If Christians are truly disciples reflecting God’s glory, their faith, love, and hope will show itself in action. They will reveal in their

lives that they are secure in God, they will show an unselfish love in all they do, and they will be involved in their communities giving people hope in their struggles. In a church of 200, evangelism will be happening in 200 ways, not just one. If a church is truly joining God in his mission to bring glory to his name, won’t the Holy Spirit guide them in how to do his work?

When church leaders are motivated to really lead the members to walk with God and reveal his glory, evangelism will truly happen. John Piper reminds us:

When the glory of God himself saturates our preaching and teaching and conversation and writings, and when he predominates above our talk of methods and strategies and psychological buzz words and cultural trends, then the people might begin to feel that the central reality of their lives and that the

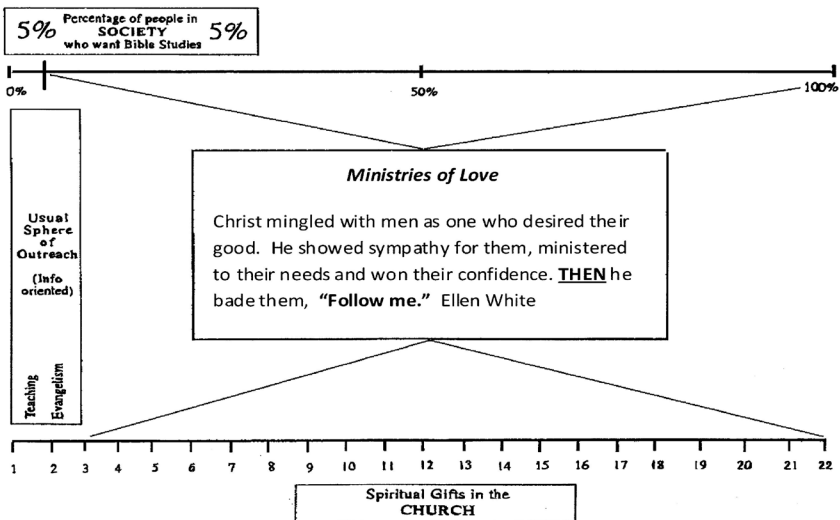


Figure 2. Ninety-five percent extended evangelism.

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spread of his glory is more important than all their possessions and all their plans (Piper 1993:38).

Could it be that the biggest job of leaders is not to produce good programs for the church, but to help the church look at what they are now doing and evaluate each aspect as to its place in the mission of the remnant church? Every department of the church, every institution, needs to evaluate what part it plays in the true mission of the church. The Adventist Church structure was God-directed in 1901 in order to help the church spread God's glory around the world; but is the church asking if the present organization is accomplishing

his mission to draw all people unto himself. The three angels' messages tell us that there is a special urgency to God's mission in these last days. The remnant must be the people who are faithful to Jesus, follow him completely, and reflect his character in and out of the church so that his name will be glorified. The goal is for people of all nations to worship him as their Creator and Redeemer. The challenge to every Adventist leader is to make sure that the programs of the church are assisting in this mission of glorifying God, and not hindering it.

And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your

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God's mission to bring him glory? Former Seventh-day Adventist General Conference President, Robert Folkenberg, wrote:

If any church organization, institution, committee, or structure is not contributing to the mission of the church, if it is stifling rather than advancing the gospel . . . , that organization, institution, committee, or structure needs to be changed or disposed of (1992:15).

Conclusions

The Adventist Church cannot claim to be God's remnant if it is not letting him use the church in

hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. May he be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. Amen (Eph 3:17-20 NLT).

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