

Transcript of president Ted N.C. Wilson's sermon at the 2015 Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA on October 10, 2015.



Ted N.C. Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist church, speaks to attendees at the 2015 Annual Council about Total Member Involvement on Sabbath, October 10, 2015. [Photo ©2015 ANN. Photo by Brent Hardinge]

We are living in a time of unprecedented change. God has asked His remnant people, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to prepare the way of the Lord, to lean completely on Him and receive the power of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. It is time for the final, loud cry ... the proclamation of the first, second and especially the third angels' messages. Christ has called us to be sowers of His Word. He has called us to follow His example in service to others by proclaiming His truth and righteousness to the world and announcing the His second coming. Members in this worldwide church of almost 19 million are called to partner with the Heavenly Sower, Jesus Christ, in proclaiming His final message of love, righteousness, redemption, and last-day prophetic warning heralding Christ's soon return. Everyone a sower! Let's look at God's instructions ... practical evangelistic outreach based on the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy with plenty of references to both. This sermon will resemble more of a learning symposium for all of us regarding Total Member Involvement rather than a normal sermon per se.

Let's learn together ... Turn to Mark 4:3-9. In this passage, Jesus was speaking to thousands by the Sea of Galilee near the beautiful plain of Gennesaret. The listeners could see on that plain and on the hillsides beyond the sowers and reapers who were busily casting seed and harvesting the early grain. Jesus identified the truths of heaven using parables with simple references to what was happening.

He shared the following parable with those in that vast Sea of Galilee audience ... and with us today, October 10, 2015, in this comfortable General Conference auditorium or wherever you may be watching.

Mark 4:3-9 says, "'Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirty fold, some sixty, and some a hundred.' And He said to them, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"

What a privilege to hear the Word of God ... to listen to its instruction ... to understand its directives for living the victorious life through Christ's justifying and sanctifying power. The Word of God is being ignored more and more. It is becoming fashionable to misinterpret and misapply what is plainly indicated in Scripture. It is being reinterpreted by those who participate in the higher criticism or historical-critical approach to Scripture ... by those who place themselves above Scripture as they interpret according to their own standards and approaches. We are to faithfully follow and promote the historical-biblical method of interpreting Scripture allowing the Bible to interpret itself line upon line and precept upon precept. As Seventh-day Adventists, we should carefully adhere to the document voted on October 12, 1986, at the Annual Council held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This document, "Methods of Bible Study," carefully outlines how to study God's Holy Word. We are to follow the historicist view of prophecy and Biblical understanding. Pastors, teachers, administrators, church elders, leaders, members ... don't let anyone turn you from the historicist understanding and the historical-biblical interpretation of Scripture. Stand firm for God's Word.

Note the following instructions about accepting the Bible as it reads: Testimonies for the Church, Vol 5, page 171 – "God requires more of His followers than many realize. If we would not build our hopes of heaven upon a false foundation we must accept the Bible as it reads and believe that the Lord means what He says."

Evangelism, page 239 – "Many become decided transgressors of God's holy law as the result of union, concord, and cooperation with companions who are instruments of Satan. God sends them light to undeceive them, but they refuse to take the Word of God as it reads."

Counsels to Teachers, page 353--"He is seeking to teach them that the Lord's way is always to be closely followed, that His word is to be taken as it reads, and that men are not to devise and plan according to their own judgment, irrespective of His counsel."

Prophets and Kings, page 185 – "Many do not hesitate to sneer at the word of God. Those who believe that word just as it reads are held up to ridicule."

Let us have ears that hear the Word of God ... minds that will accept the Word of God in its plainest forms as it reads.

What did Jesus want the disciples and us to understand about everyone being a sower of this precious truth in the Word of God? He went on to explain the parable of the sower in Mark 4:14-20

as was read in our Scripture reading. Verse 14, “the sower sows the word.” – **Matthew 13:37** indicates that the Sower of good seed was the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. He came not as a king but as a sower pointing to a great harvest that would result after challenging difficulties. Jesus left His heavenly home to sow the Word of God on this earth. We are to partner with Him as sowers of the truth. Christ’s Object Lessons, pages 36-37, says “His servants in like manner must go forth to sow ... So those who are called to unite with Christ must leave all, in order to follow Him ... In toil and tears, in solitude, and through sacrifice, must the seed be sown.” **Everyone a sower! Total Member Involvement in the last great proclamation of this Advent message.**

Luke 8:11 says the seed to be sown is the Word of God. Seeds have germinating capability. There is life in God’s Word. Christ’s Object Lessons, page 38, indicates, “In every command and in every promise of the Word of God is the power, the very life of God, by which the command may be fulfilled and the promise realized.” On page 37 ... “Those who study the word of God with hearts open to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, will not remain in darkness as to the meaning of the word.” On page 39 ... “In the days of Christ the rabbis put a forced, mystical construction upon many portions of Scripture. Because the plain teaching of God’s word condemned their practices, they tried to destroy its force. The same thing is done today. The word of God is made to appear mysterious and obscure in order to excuse transgression of His law. Christ rebuked these practices in His day. He taught that the word of God was to be understood by all. He pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same.” Every pastor, every teacher, every member is to participate in helping all to become ardent students of the Word of God and then to share it.

Verse 15 – “And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.” The precious Word of God falls on inattentive hearers like a hard pathway that has no depth. People hear but don’t understand. Satan stands ready to snatch the truth from those who are not attentive and to neutralize the effects of God’s Word.

Verses 16-17 – “These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises from the word’s sake, immediately, they stumble.” This seed cannot find deep soil to grow. Selfishness in the heart takes control and the heart is not humbled under an understanding of guilt for sin. Self is trusted more than connection with Christ. Since the roots do not go deep into the soil of communion with Christ every day, persecution and temptation take their toll. Christ’s Object Lessons, pages 48-50, indicates “Many feel a sense of estrangement from God, a realization of their bondage to self and sin; they make efforts for reform; but they do not crucify self ... True holiness is wholeness in the service of God. This is the condition of true Christian living ... He who lives to himself is not a Christian. **Love must be the principle of action** ... And love will be revealed in sacrifice ... For His sake we shall covet pain and toil and sacrifice ... We shall feel the same tender craving for souls that He has felt. This is the religion of Christ ... **No mere theory of truth or profession of discipleship will save any soul. We do not belong to Christ unless we are His wholly.** It is by halfheartedness in the Christian life that men become feeble in purpose and changeable in desire. The effort to serve both self and Christ makes one a stony-ground hearer, and he will not endure when the test comes upon him.” Stay close to God and resist being a “stony-ground” hearer.

Verses 18-19 – “Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” This is why revival and reformation are so important in our lives. **If we are not preparing the soil for the reception of the seeds of truth, weeds and thorns can choke out the precious Word of God. The cares of this world can take such prominence in our lives that we scarcely comprehend God’s great messages to us.** Christ’s Object Lessons, page 50, says **“Grace can thrive only in the heart that is being constantly prepared for the precious seeds of truth. The thorns of sin will grow in any soil; they need no cultivation; but grace must be carefully cultivated.”** It is so important that we stay close to the Lord through Bible study, study of the Spirit of Prophecy and constant prayer. That is why “Believe His Prophets” is so important – reading a chapter a day in the Bible and reading portions of the Spirit of Prophecy as part of our daily growth. Be part of the worldwide initiative of “United in Prayer.” **Don’t allow the Word of God to be choked out with thorns.**

Verse 20 – “But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit; some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” What a privilege to allow the Word of God to penetrate our hearts and then to share it with others who in turn will grow and share it with others. Everyone a sower! Those who are represented by the good ground are those who have a believing heart and faith in the Word of God. Christ’s Object Lessons, pages 59 and 61, indicate “A knowledge of the truth depends not so much upon strength of intellect as upon pureness of purpose, the simplicity of an earnest, dependent faith. To those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance, angels of God draw near. The Holy Spirit is given to open to them the rich treasures of the truth. The good-ground hearers, having heard the word, keep it. Satan with all his agencies of evil is not able to catch it away... .Our part is to receive God’s word and to hold it fast, yielding ourselves fully to its control, and its purpose in us will be accomplished.”

God intends that all of us will be “good-ground hearers.” People who trust so implicitly in the righteousness of Christ to make us more and more like Him. He intends for us to be understudies to Him in being sowers of truth. **We are to be encouraged that there will be many who will listen as we sow and will receive the Word of God as “good-ground hearers.” This is our great privilege. We are all to be sowers of the Word ... everyone a sower ... Total Member Involvement in the last great proclamation of this message.**

This past 2015 General Conference Session theme, “Arise. Shine. Jesus Is Coming,” must be the foundation of all we do as we move forward into this new quinquennium that is filled with uncertainty. However, it is filled even more with God’s abiding presence and leading. God is calling the Seventh-day Adventist Church for a unique last-day purpose and mission as participants with the Heavenly Sower. This church was initiated by God Himself at the right time, in the right place and for the right reason – to fulfill Revelation 12:17 – a people “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

It is with quiet respect and humility that all are to be sowers for God as we lean completely on Him for His leading.

Let’s commit ourselves to following God’s instructions in His precious Word and His Spirit of Prophecy, to daily walking with Him in Bible study and prayer as we allow Him to work in us for revival and reformation. During this new quinquennium, under the direction of the Revival and

Reformation Committee, we will focus on a very personal approach to this vital subject shown throughout Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy – **“Revival and Reformation – You, Your Family, Your Church, Your Community!”** We are at the edge of eternity. God wants to work in and through us as sowers of His Word.

Take this call from God very personally and seriously. Revival and reformation is a constant foundation for all that the Lord wants to do through His remnant church in proclaiming the three angels’ messages and turning people back to the true worship of God.

In this context of “revival and reformation – -you, your family, your church, your community,” we will expand the vital outreach of Mission to the Cities accompanied by Comprehensive Health Ministry, massive publication and media outreach and so many other departmental and institutional initiatives. **Within the “Reach the World” strategic and evangelistic outreach of sowing God’s Word, let me expand the following three areas of focus shared at the General Conference Session:**

1.Christ and His Righteousness – Recognize the centrality of Christ’s grace and sacrifice for us – -His grace and righteousness that provides us with eternal life. Christ said in John 12:32, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” Let us commit ourselves at this end time setting to lift up Christ, His love, His Word, His righteousness, His sanctuary service, His saving power in the great controversy, His seventh-day Sabbath, His prophetic messages, His Spirit of Prophecy instruction, His three angels’ messages, His health message, His last-day mission to the world and His soon second coming.

Christ and His righteousness must permeate our lives and everything we do. We are totally dependent on our relationship with Him and His ability to provide eternal life. Seventh-day Adventists must be the greatest proclaimers of Christ, our righteousness.

2.Faithfulness to God – God is faithful to us, through His power, let’s respond in faithfulness to Him. **He calls us to be faithful in our personal relationship with Him, faithful to His Word, faithful in daily Bible study, faithful in the study of the Spirit of Prophecy and faithful in our constant prayer life.** In a world filled with ever-increasing violence, bombing, shootings and tragic death all over this globe, let us be faithful to God’s plan of restoration at His soon second coming. Revelation 2:10 tells us, “.....Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” **Let us be faithful in understanding our unique role in proclaiming the three angels’ messages and participating in the loud cry of the third angel, faithful in sharing the unique role given to the Advent movement, faithful in our family relationships according to Bible standards and truth, faithful in our Christian stewardship, faithful in Sabbath School and church attendance and faithful in sharing Christ with others.** The world is awash in existential behavior – -people think everything is relative. It is not! There are absolutes and they are found in the Word of God and our faithful adherence to the Word. Revelation 3:11 shares with us, **“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”** **Seventh-day Adventists, be faithful to God!**

3.Total Member Involvement in Witnessing and Evangelism – Matthew 9:37-38 challenges us with the truth that, “ ... The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” James 1:25 admonishes us to be “... a doer of the work ...” John 9:4 shares the urgency of what we are to do, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.”

Lay members, I challenge you to become involved in the daily mission of the church far more than you ever have before. **Everyone a sower!** The current Seventh-day Adventist strategic plan challenges us with the objective "To engage all church members, pastors, and leaders in full partnership." Pastors and lay members, young and old, are to work together in soul winning. We are counting on you! **God is counting on you! Evangelism is the lifeblood of the church. All of us are to be in involved in it** – either through personal witnessing, small group evangelism or public evangelism in its various forms even if you think it won't work in your area. Adapt your methods, but reach out. Do something for Jesus! Every effort, under God's guidance, to reach the hearts of people will bear fruit. Evangelism is not dead! It is alive more than ever before! God is in it! It's His plan. He will bless it!

Church leaders and church members are to work hand in hand for mission outreach. The following instruction is absolutely critical in everyone being a sower of God's Word. Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9, page 116 says, "The leaders in God's cause, as wise generals, are to lay plans for advance moves all along the line. In their planning they are to give special study to the work that can be done by the laity for their friends and neighbors. **The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those ministers and church officers.**"

Church members, let the Holy Spirit revolutionize your thinking. Take the church's mission of outreach into your hands on a daily basis working closely with church leaders and pastors. Let it be total participation ... **no one left out ... everyone a missionary... do something for Jesus and for others ... don't just look inward and criticize your local church and its activities ... reach out to others for Christ ... don't let anyone say you are not needed ... the Holy Spirit will empower you as heaven's messenger to your neighborhood ... work closely with your pastor, local church and conference ... revival and reformation will become something personal and real.**

That marvelous volume, Testimonies for the Church, Volume 9, tells about our special work in Total Member Involvement ... a few key thoughts from various pages: "The most solemn truths ever entrusted to mortals have been given us to proclaim to the world (p 19) ... Let us remember that a Christ-like life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity.....**Men will believe, not what the minister preaches, but what the church lives** (p 21) ... Christ's work is to be our example ... His life was one of unselfish service, and it is to be our lesson book (p 31)... **Wherever we see work waiting to be done we are to take it up and do it, constantly looking until Jesus ... If every church member were a living missionary, the gospel would speedily be proclaimed in all countries, to all peoples, nations, and tongues.** (p 32)... God's people are to be so earnest and faithful in their work for Him that all selfishness will be separated from their lives. His workers will then see eye to eye, and the arm of the Lord, the power of which was seen in the life of Christ, will be revealed. Confidence will be restored, and there will be unity in the churches throughout our ranks. (p 33).....**It is not learned, eloquent speakers that are needed now, but humble, Christ-like men and women,** who have learned from Jesus of Nazareth to be meek and lowly, and who trusting in His strength, will go forth into the highways and hedges to give the invitation: 'Come; for all things are now ready.' (p 36)... **Those who have the spiritual oversight of the church should devise ways and means by which an opportunity may be given to every member of the church to act some part in God's work** (p 116)." **Jesus is coming soon! Lift that banner high and share it in practical ways**

pointing those around you to the One who has given us salvation and who has promised to take us home soon!

We need a total empowerment of lay people and pastors carrying the burden of the church's evangelistic and mission outreach to the cities and to the rural areas. This is our work of sowing ... entrusted to us from heaven itself.....all of us working together in Total Member Involvement under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Testimonies, Vol 7, pages 9-10 – “The transforming power of Christ's grace molds the one who gives himself to God's service. Imbued with the Spirit of the Redeemer, he is ready to deny self, ready to take up the cross, ready to make any sacrifice for the Master... The Christian has no desire to live for self. He delights to consecrate all that he has and is to the Master's service. He is moved by an inexpressible desire to win souls to Christ. Those who have nothing of this desire might better be concerned for their own salvation. Let them pray for the spirit of service.” Total Member Involvement... Every member a missionary.

Let everyone get involved in soul winning. All can share personally and many including lay members can preach the Word of God in public meetings. It is time to challenge all of us to a renewed emphasis on evangelistic outreach telling pastors to go into new fields to evangelize and that lay people will take care the churches and assist the pastor in outreach.

Listen to God's instruction from Evangelism, page 381-383, “As I traveled through the South on my way to the conference, I saw city after city that was unworked. What is the matter? The ministers are hovering over churches which know the truth while thousands are perishing out of Christ.

“If the proper instruction were given, if the proper methods were followed, every church member would do his work as a member of the body. He would do Christian missionary work. But the churches are dying, and they want a minister to preach to them... Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: ‘Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church. We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to sustain the laborers in more needy and destitute fields’... Our ministers should plan wisely, as faithful stewards. They should feel that it is not their duty to hover over the churches already raised up, but that they should be doing aggressive evangelistic work, preaching the Word and doing house-to-house work in places that have not yet heard the truth.... Let the whole earth be filled with His glory... .The responsibility rests upon every individual. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”

Manuscript 61, September 17, 1909, Words of Instruction, “ ... The world is preparing for the closing work of the third angel's message. The truth is now to go forth with a power that it has not known for years. The message of present truth is to be proclaimed everywhere.”

7T 18-24 – “We have a message from the Lord to bear to the world, a message that is to be borne in the rich fullness of the Spirit's power ... The greatest help that can be given our people is to teach them to work for God, and to depend on Him, not on the ministers. Let them learn to work as Christ worked. Let them join His army of workers and do faithful service for Him.

“The Lord has presented before me the work that must be done in our cities. The believers in these cities can work for God in the neighborhood of their homes ... It is not the Lord’s purpose that ministers should be left to do the greatest part of the work of sowing the seeds of truth... Hundreds of men and women now idle could do acceptable service. By carrying the truth into the homes of their friends and neighbors, they could do a great work for the Master. God is no respecter of persons. He will use humble, devoted Christians, even if they have not received so thorough an education as some others. Let such ones engage in service for Him by doing house-to-house work. Sitting by the fireside, they can—if humble, discreet, and godly—do more to meet the real needs of families than could an ordained minister.

“The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err.... In humble dependence upon God, families are to settle in the waste places of His vineyard ... **Self-supporting missionaries are often very successful. Beginning in a small, humble way, their work enlarges as they move forward under the guidance of the Spirit of God... Nothing is so successful as success. Let this be secured by persevering effort, and the work will move forward. New fields will be opened. Many souls will be brought to a knowledge of the truth. What is needed is increased faith in God.**”

Christian Service, pages 22-23 – “The work which the disciples did, we also are to do. Every Christian is to be a missionary..... God’s faithful people have always been aggressive missionaries, consecrating their resources to the honor of His name, and wisely using their talents in His service. ... To every nation, kindred, tongue, and people the tidings of pardon through Christ are to be carried. Not with tame, lifeless utterances is the message to be given, but with clear, decided, stirring utterances. **Hundreds are waiting for the warning to escape for their lives. The world needs to see in Christians an evidence of the power of Christianity. Not merely in a few places, but throughout the world, messages of mercy are needed.**”

As we see the end of time approaching, let us renew our efforts to be involved in all that God intends for His remnant church – every member involved in lifting up and sharing Christ, His Word, His righteousness, His sanctuary service, His saving power in the great controversy, His three angels’ messages, His health message, His last-day mission to the world and His soon second coming. Soon, we will look up and see Jesus appearing in the clouds of heaven as He said he would. He will come to take us home. The culmination of His redemptive work using every willing follower to “Reach the World.” What a glorious result to His work of righteousness through us in participating with heaven to share this saving Advent message. **I appeal to each of us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be part of Total Member Involvement. The latter rain of the Holy Spirit is approaching and with it the great proclamation to every person on earth in anticipation of Christ’s soon return. By God’s grace, let’s be a part of it! If you wish to commitment to God’s last-day proclamation of the three angels’ messages using every possible means in Total Member Involvement, would you join me in standing?** Let’s be faithful to God’s great commission as we remain standing and listen quietly to this powerful musical appeal from our trio about God’s faithfulness to work through us to accomplish His task entrusted to His church to “Reach the World” – “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”

