



BRING YOUR SABBATH SCHOOL TO LIFE!

**How to make your adult Sabbath School attractive
to the people who aren't there yet
... or who stopped coming long ago**

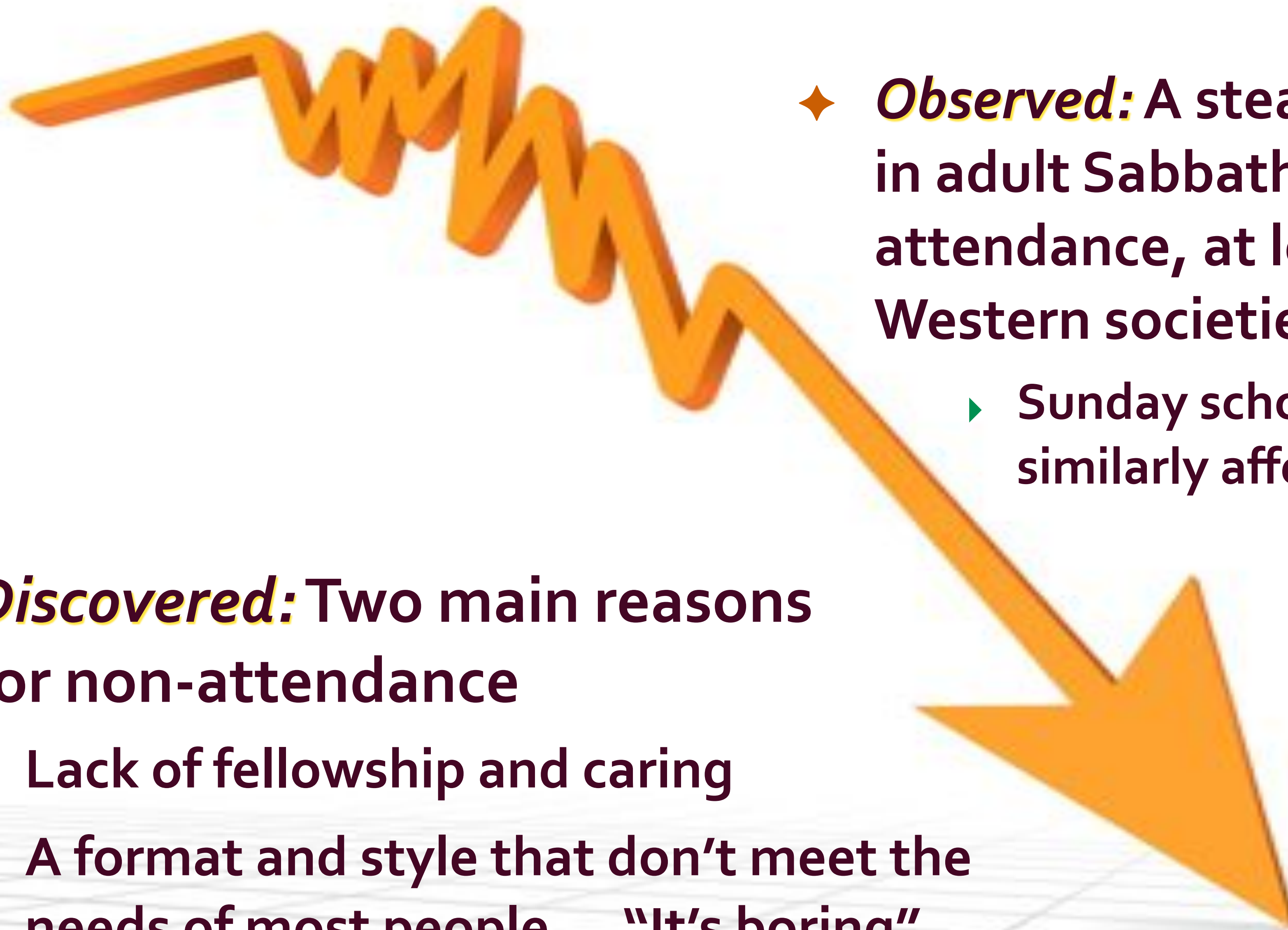
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- 1) CRISIS IN SABBATH SCHOOL
- 2) LET'S BEGIN AGAIN!
- 3) HOW TO USE THE TIME?
- 4) THE MOST IMPORTANT JOB
- 5) UNDERSTAND YOUR GROUP
- 6) BRING THE BIBLE TO LIFE
- 7) HOW TO CREATE DIALOGUE
- 8) MISSION & OUTREACH
- 9) THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE



1) CRISIS IN SABBATH SCHOOL





- ◆ **Observed:** A steady drop in adult Sabbath School attendance, at least in Western societies
 - ▶ Sunday schools similarly affected

- ◆ **Discovered:** Two main reasons for non-attendance
 - ▶ Lack of fellowship and caring
 - ▶ A format and style that don't meet the needs of most people ... "It's boring"

Look who's mostly missing...

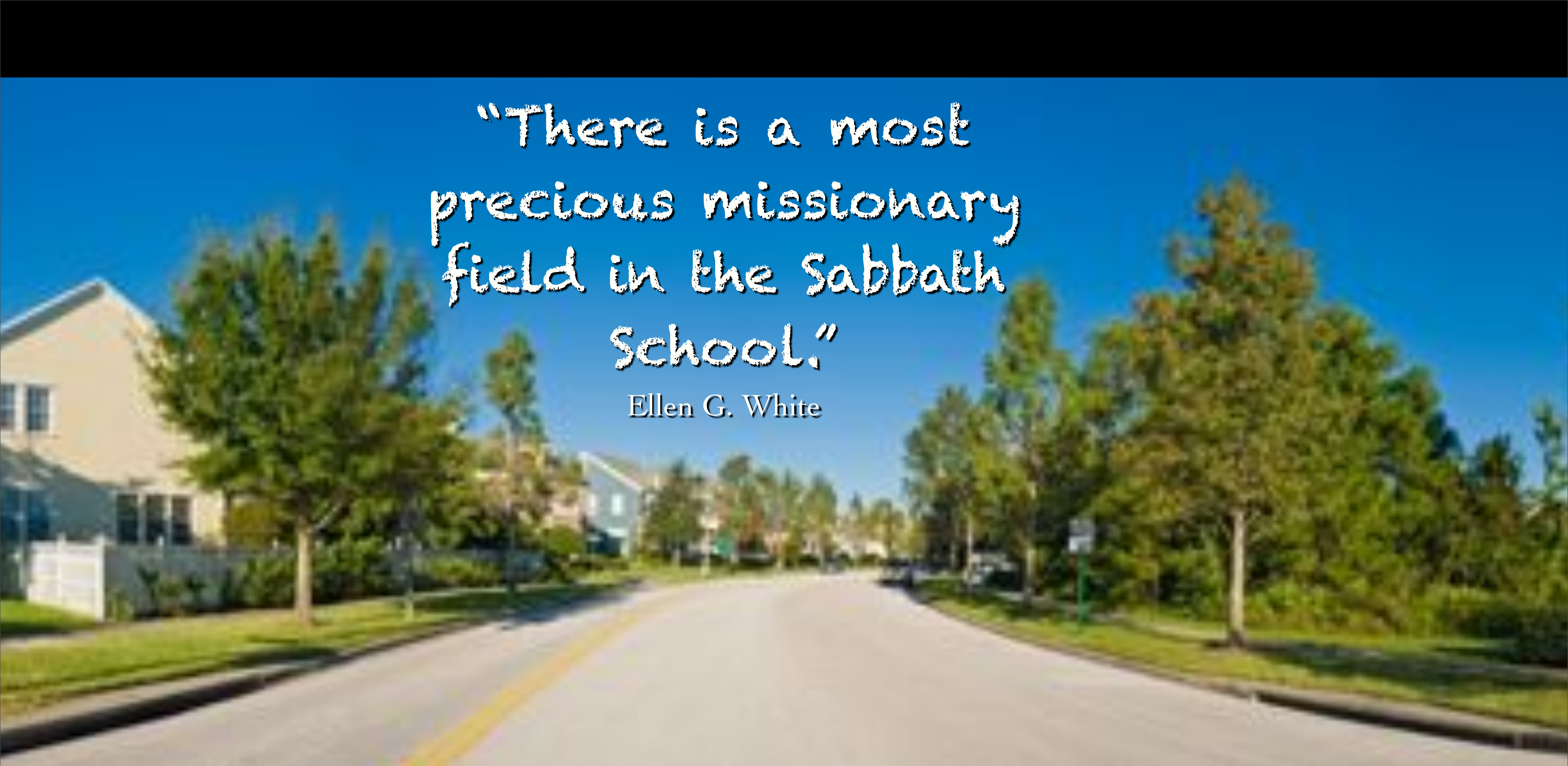
- ◆ Most noticeably: People in their 20s and 30s
- ◆ Also: People in their 40s



Look who's also missing...

- ◆ People from the neighbourhood!
- ◆ People looking for friendship
- ◆ People who hear that God can be found at something called "Sabbath School"



A photograph of a residential street with houses and trees under a clear blue sky. The street is paved and has a yellow double line down the center. The houses are two-story buildings with light-colored siding and dark shutters. The trees are green and leafy. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

"There is a most
precious missionary
field in the Sabbath
School."


Ellen G. White



Cute car ... but would you choose this to drive your family from Cape Reinga to Bluff? ... 2000 km



✓ A 1949 Ford Anglia.
✓ It's called the "Oldsmobile" effect—after becoming the oldest surviving American nameplate and selling more than 35 million cars, the company was dissolved in 2004—it failed to adapt to the younger market.

A person wearing a white, textured robe is shown from the chest down, working on a wooden block. They are holding a hammer in their right hand and a chisel in their left hand, positioned as if about to strike the wood. The background is a soft, light blue gradient.

If Jesus showed up at your Sabbath School, and you asked him to take the lead ...

- What might he focus on?
- What atmosphere would he create?
- What style and approach would he choose?

◆ **Who are we here for? _____**

◆ **How are people motivated?**

◆ **Is a 1940s–60s model effective today? _____**

◆ **What will most attract and hold people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s from the community around us?**



Recapture the purpose...

◆ Original emphasis

... James White, Uriah Smith

- ▶ Bible study
- ▶ Fellowship
- ▶ Missions ... outreach

◆ What Sabbath School became

- ▶ Monologue
- ▶ Heavy discussion
- ▶ Another church service

- The intentions were good! Leaders love God and want to serve him. Their efforts are appreciated, and people have been blessed.
- But now we must face a reality, and respond with grace.

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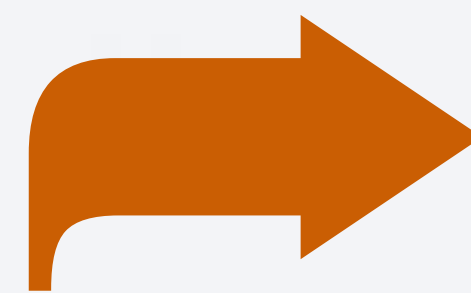


Counsel from long ago...

- ◆ “Less should be said to the scholars ... and much more should be said in regard to the **salvation of souls.**”
- ◆ “The prevailing monotony ... needs to be disturbed. . . . The **Holy Spirit’s power** will move upon hearts when this dead, lifeless monotony is broken up.”
- ◆ “Many ... make long, dry speeches in the Sabbath School. . . . They do not **adapt** their instruction to the **real wants.** . . . They do not realise that by their long, tedious talks they are killing interest in, and love for, the school.”



2) LET'S BEGIN AGAIN!



Back to our roots!



- ◆ Fellowship > loving
- ◆ Bible study > learning
- ◆ Mission-outreach > blessing



The unique role of Sabbath School

◆ Spiritual development!

- ▶ Attracting, training, and nurturing disciples
- ▶ Most attendees say they come looking for spiritual growth
- ▶ Fellowship ... Bible study ... mission–outreach = key elements in spiritual growth



Church Service / Sabbath School

◆ Church service

- ▶ Worship
- ▶ Attentiveness
- ▶ Celebration
- ▶ Proclamation

◆ Sabbath School

- ▶ Learning
- ▶ Interaction
- ▶ Nurture
- ▶ Discovery

- Church service and Sabbath School are not the same!
- Yes, there's some crossover, but each of these has a distinctive character and goal. Let's not confuse them!

Which did Jesus do
more of ... church,
or Sabbath School?

stories

healing

dialogue

interaction

acts of blessing

practical teaching

☉ questions & answers

Sounds like: _____



3) HOW TO
USE THE
TIMER?



Review the essential elements



- ◆ Fellowship > loving
- ◆ Bible study > learning
- ◆ Mission-outreach > blessing

How much time
is needed to
meet these goals?





Experts agree ...
60-75 minutes is
required, at
minimum, to
realise these goals

So ... how shall we
allocate the **precious
slice of time** given to
us for Sabbath School?

A recommended format

- 1. Fellowship time + *prayer* ... 10–20 minutes**
 - ▶ Greeting, a song or two, blessings and challenges from the past week
- 2. Bible study time + *prayer* ... 35–45 minutes**
 - ▶ Interactive, Word-based, application-focused—prayerful study and discussion
- 3. Outreach time + *prayer* ... 15–20 minutes**
 - ▶ Plans for practical ministry between now and next time

Our roots = our format!



- ◆ Fellowship > loving
- ◆ Bible study > learning
- ◆ Mission–outreach > blessing



How might each of these look?

- 1. Fellowship time + *prayer* ... 10–20 minutes**
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Q1 ... Why so much prayer?

Prayer is the way in which we include Jesus in our conversation!

You wouldn't want to leave him out, would you?!?

Thanksgiving or request ... prayer transforms ... it makes an application ... it heals ... it opens hearts ... Sabbath School is natural as a place of prayer!



Q2 ... Could we
use the whole
time for study?

You could ...
realising you are
largely giving up
time for fellowship,
outreach, and
prayer.



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✓ This approach could work in some settings. It's a matter of deciding what's best, guided by the Spirit. In the new paradigm, the Sabbath School class becomes a small group. As a small group, it has the opportunity to realise the goals of small group ministry. If the entire time is spent in study, some key aspects will be missing.

Q3 ... What about "preliminaries"?

If they're only
"preliminary", and
you have so little
precious time to
accomplish so much
— why have them???



✓ [Sermonview extended license purchased for this illustration—OK for print; cannot be captured or transferred by other person or entity.]
✓ The "preliminaries" have become so enshrined in some of our Sabbath Schools, that it is difficult to conceive of not having them. But observation in many places shows that when this precious time slot is replaced with something more fulfilling, more useful, there are few if any regrets or complaints. Leaders in the past have acted faithfully with the preliminaries, but Adventist Sabbath Schools in many places around the world have realised the benefits of making a change.
✓ The short answer to "Why drop preliminaries?" is TIME. So little time is available on Sabbath mornings for fulfilling the three original purposes for Sabbath School. The only way those three purposes can be properly met is to use all the time available.

Q4 ... ALL together or in groups?

- ◆ Large Sabbath School > we recommend small groups for all three elements
- ◆ Medium Sabbath School > we recommend small groups at least for the study time, preferably the other times too
- ◆ Small Sabbath School > might be good to stay together for all three elements

Ideal group size for the Sabbath School elements of fellowship, study, and outreach = 6 to 15



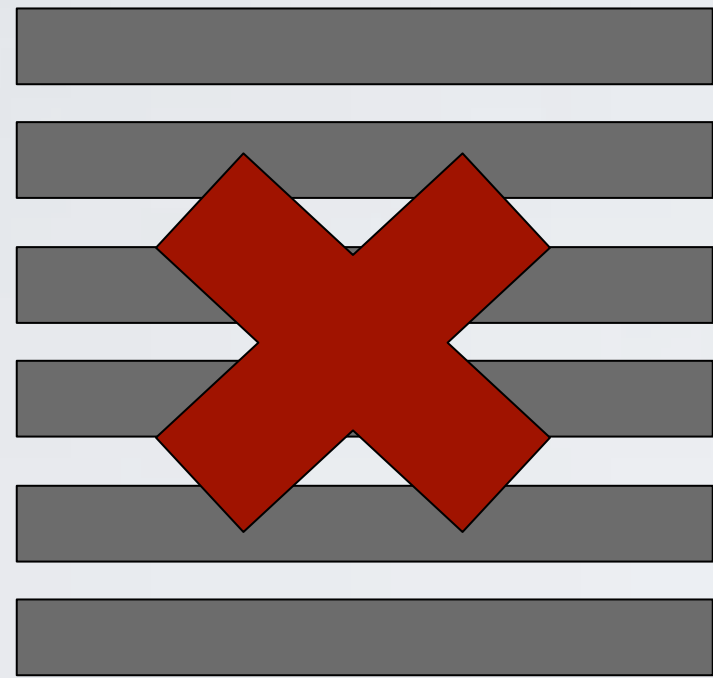
QS ... How to choose a group leader?

- ◆ Understands the purpose of Sabbath School
- ◆ Gracious, prayerful, humble
- ◆ Leadership skill or potential
- ◆ In love with the Word of God
- ◆ Christ-centred
- ◆ Reliable



Consider a training course ... For each group,
assign an understudy/backup/co-leader

Q6 ... What shape for a group?



- ◆ **Do whatever it takes to create face-to-face space!**
 - ▶ Pews in rows are never desirable for a successful group in contemporary times
 - ▶ Reconfigure pews ... replace some pews with chairs ... build classrooms ... move ... do something!

Q7 ... What about a mission DVD?

- ◆ It's good to find out what's happening in far-away places from time to time
- ◆ Consider getting the whole Sabbath School together monthly or quarterly, to enjoy a video mission report or a live testimony
- ◆ Be adaptable! Follow the Spirit's leading for your circumstances.



Q8 ... What about the superintendent?

- ◆ **Has less stress, more joy!**

- ▶ No big programme to prepare

- ◆ **Has a new job description**

- ▶ Spiritual support, prayer
- ▶ Co-ordination

- ▶ **Accountability**

- ◆ **Has new responsibilities**

- ▶ **Oversee leaders & hosts**
- ▶ **Lead by “walking around”**
- ▶ **Identify needs, issues**
- ▶ **Assist with unexpected challenges**



4) THE
MOST
IMPORTANT
JOB



The Sabbath School hosts

- ◆ Could be more important than group leaders!
- ◆ More than “greeters”—“hosts” ... what do you think is the difference?
- ◆ Carefully selected ... knowledgeable ... kind-hearted ... on hand 20 minutes prior, and throughout the Sabbath School ... working with an assistant, trainee, or backup
- ◆ Lead guests to an appropriate group, and introduce them



Group Leaders are hosts, too!

- ◆ Always pause briefly to welcome and introduce a new or late arriver
- ◆ Never comment on someone arriving late
- ◆ Inform ... let the late arriver know what stage you're at right now
- ◆ Chat with any guest as soon as the group comes to a close
- ◆ Remember, it's about relationships!



5) UNDERSTAND YOUR GROUP



Who's there??? ... potentially

◆ The thinker

- ▶ Great value ... might need to be drawn into discussion

◆ The talker

- ▶ Good to get things started ... keep within boundaries

◆ The debater

- ▶ Good for getting others to join in ... direction needed

◆ The controller

- ▶ Little value added ... can be a threat

◆ The judge

- ▶ Negative attitude usually outweighs contributions

◆ The jokester (jester)

- ▶ Great for comic relief ... typically a good presence

Who's there??? ... potentially

◆ The patient

- ▶ Emotionally unsettled or dysfunctional person ... can provide for a few moments of learning and ministry ... then best to follow up after

◆ The emergency

- ▶ Immediate critical need ... stop, adjust, and minister

◆ The contributor

- ▶ Every facilitator's dream ... spiritual, practical ... makes good, short comments ... understands the focus ... includes some humour ... listens well ... affirms others ... ready to challenge, with a smile ... not afraid to be vulnerable, to self disclose

How to deal with distractions, threats?

- 1) **Pray** ahead of time for wisdom and courage
- 2) **Acknowledge and affirm** the person—do not condemn, criticise, or belittle
- 3) **Recognise** if the problem is in you ... e.g. you don't like it when your views are questioned
- 4) **Be gently assertive** ... direct the discussion back on track ... do interrupt a person who's going on too long
- 5) **Use some gentle, non-threatening humour** ... if you are good at this dynamic ... self-deprecation usually works ... avoid sarcasm
- 6) **Remain calm** and do not debate ... win by example, not by argument
- 7) **Invite** the person to follow up personally after the group time



√ Example—going off on a tangent: “It’s a worthwhile comment, Frank, a bit outside the scope of what we’re attempting this morning. So, let’s come back to our original question. . . .”
√ Example—distracting question or comment: “Suzanne, you have a wonderful way of asking questions that would take a mind like mine at least a week to answer!”
√ Example—interrupting someone going on too long: “I appreciate your thoughts on this, Jim, but I do want to hear from some who haven’t been able to share their thinking yet. Maria, what’s swirling around in your mind on this question?”
√ Example—a threatening or inappropriate attitude: “Roger, let’s make a deal. You and I will have a chat about this later. Right after our group time, let’s set up a time when we can talk.”

How people learn ...

- ◆ By hearing ... **auditory**
- ◆ By seeing ... **visual**
- ◆ By touching ... **tactile**
- ◆ By thinking ... **cognitive**
- ◆ By feeling ... **emotive**
- ◆ By doing ... **experiential**



Exodus 3:1–6

- Use a variety of learning approaches. Especially, allow participants to experience (feel and do) something of value during the study time.

6) BRING THE BIBLE TO LIFE



10 great ways to ruin the study time

1. Use a lecture style
2. Don't prepare—wing it
3. Push a narrow view
4. Stay completely theoretical
5. Let the discussion drift—or totally control it if you find this easier
6. Don't use the Bible much (the quarterly says it all)
7. Spend a bunch of time on minor points
8. Have everyone sit in pews
9. Don't worry about lighting, fresh air, or temperature
10. Keep prayer out of it, humour too

Which of these is your favourite?

10 great ways to revive the study time

1. Use a facilitative style
2. Come prepared & prayerful
3. Value the wisdom of the group
4. Relate to everyday life
5. Keep the group on track
6. Draw extensively from God's Word
7. Stay centred in Christ and the Gospel
8. Have best possible seating
9. Care for details of the group's physical setting
10. *Experience* ... integrate prayer ... welcome the Spirit

Which is your favourite?

Study time experiences ... examples

- ▶ Seize moments that prompt a **prayer**
- ▶ Invite or plan ahead for a *brief* personal **testimony** related to the subject
- ▶ Use a **visual** or practical aid
- ▶ “Tell your **neighbour** ...”
- ▶ Sing a **song** on the subject
- ▶ Read a portion of the Bible **aloud**—with passion!
- ▶ Tell a **story** that moves the heart or brings a laugh



What the study time is not

- ◆ Not a lecture
- ◆ Not a sermon
- ◆ Not an indoctrination session
- ◆ Not a training session
- ◆ Not even teaching, truly speaking



Listen to
ME!

None of these is "bad". They have their place. There might be a little bit of some of them in the approach. But none of them expresses the true nature of the study time.

What the study time is ...

**“Facilitation
through
dialogue
and
experience”**



So, what does a facilitator do?

- ◆ **Makes a process easy** ... literal meaning
- ◆ **Provides** a good setting in which learning can take place
- ◆ **Draws out** knowledge, insights, and experience from the group, for the benefit of all
- ◆ **Guides** the group toward a defined spiritual and practical goal
- ◆ **Protects** the group from distractions and threats



- ◆ **As the facilitator, you are not there to be wisdom for the group**
- ◆ **You are there to draw out wisdom from the group ... informed and inspired by the Word of God**



10 steps for preparing the study

1. Study and pray over the key Scripture text
2. Briefly review supporting material
3. Select one point of focus
4. Back on your knees with the Bible!
5. Write a short statement of your goal or outcome
6. Prepare an introduction and a leading question
7. Prepare one, two, or three more leading questions
8. Think of one, two, or three meaningful experiences
9. Prepare a powerful close ... usually a story or a quote
10. Pray ... pray ... pray!

Which of these is new for you?

Study time experiences ... review

- ▶ Seize moments that prompt a **prayer**
- ▶ Invite or plan ahead for a *brief* personal **testimony** related to the subject
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The fine art of the leading question

- ◆ > A question that leads the group into energetic, focused discussion
 - ▶ It tantalises!
 - ▶ It creates some tension
 - ▶ It calls for thought
 - ▶ It allows for a variety of responses
 - ▶ It helps drive the group toward one key point of focus, previously chosen by the facilitator



- ◆ **Is this a leading question?**
 - ▶ “Everyone, would you please look up John 5:24?”
 - ▶ *No! But it gets us started. . . .*

- ◆ **Is this a leading question?**
 - ▶ “Jesus’ teaching here was in the context of a stunning miracle. What was that miracle?”
 - ▶ *No! But it’s bringing us a step closer. . . .*



◆ Is this a leading question?

- ▶ “Can somebody see an equation here. Like, $A + B = C$?”
- ▶ *Nearly there!*

◆ Is this a leading question?

- ▶ “ $A + B = C$! ... Really? Is this all it takes to receive complete life, forever in God? Have you experienced it just like that? Or, are you inclined to adjust Jesus' words a little?”
- ▶ *There! Now the stage is set for a discussion toward the goal.*

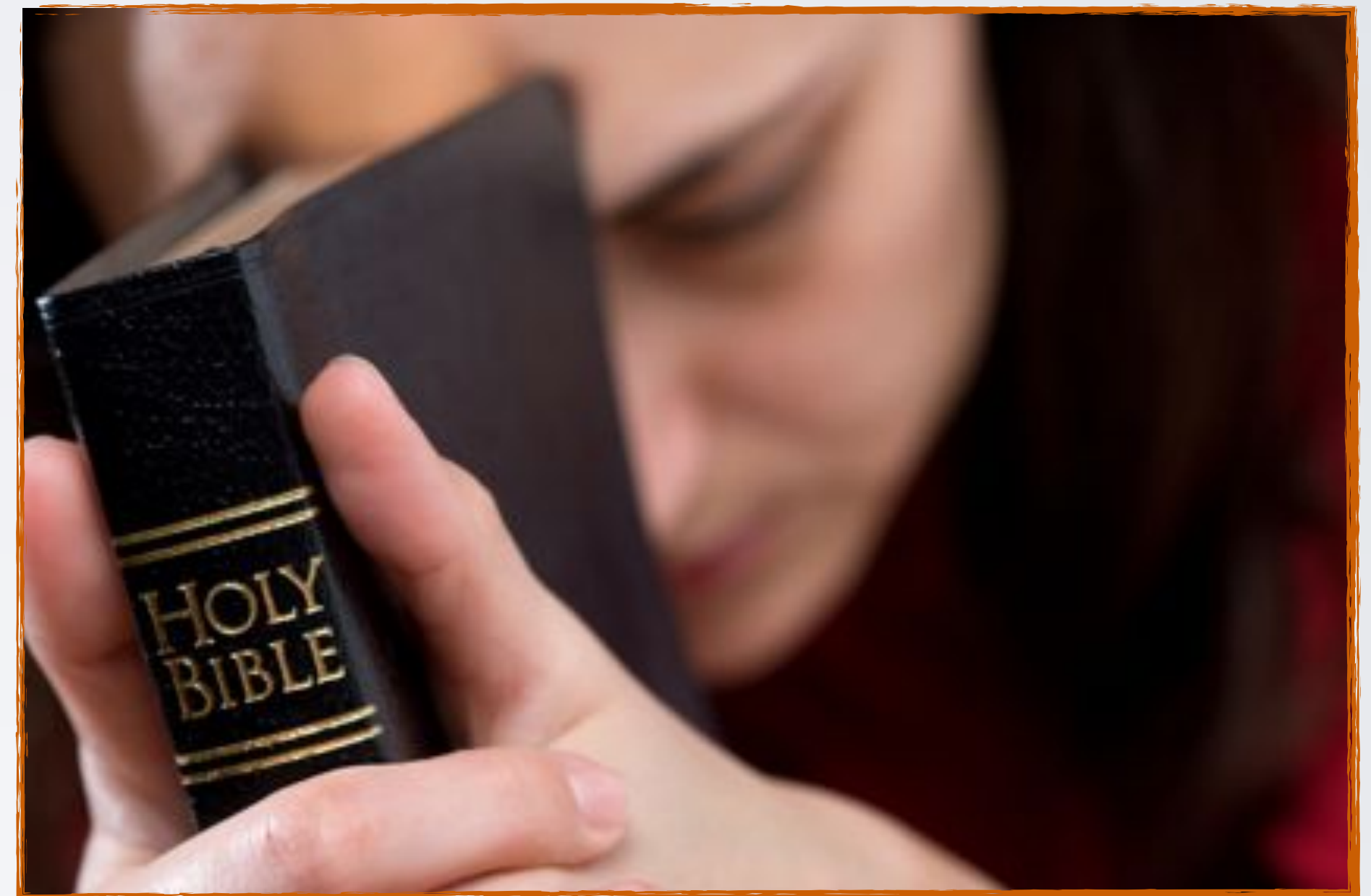


- ◆ ***Suggested: A follow-up leading question to advance the discussion toward the goal. . . .***
 - ▶ ***“I like what I’m hearing so far. But wait a moment. I haven’t yet heard anyone connect the teaching in John 5:24 to the miracle that took place shortly before. Matt, I’m going to pick on you! Can you describe any connection between the man healed dramatically by the pool, and what Jesus said afterward in John 5:24?”***



Counsel from some who have done it well ...

- ◆ Focus on **one point** per lesson. Jim Ayars
- ◆ Use the **Bible** as the one major resource. Ben Carson
- ◆ Make everything **relevant** to people's personal lives. Ben Carson

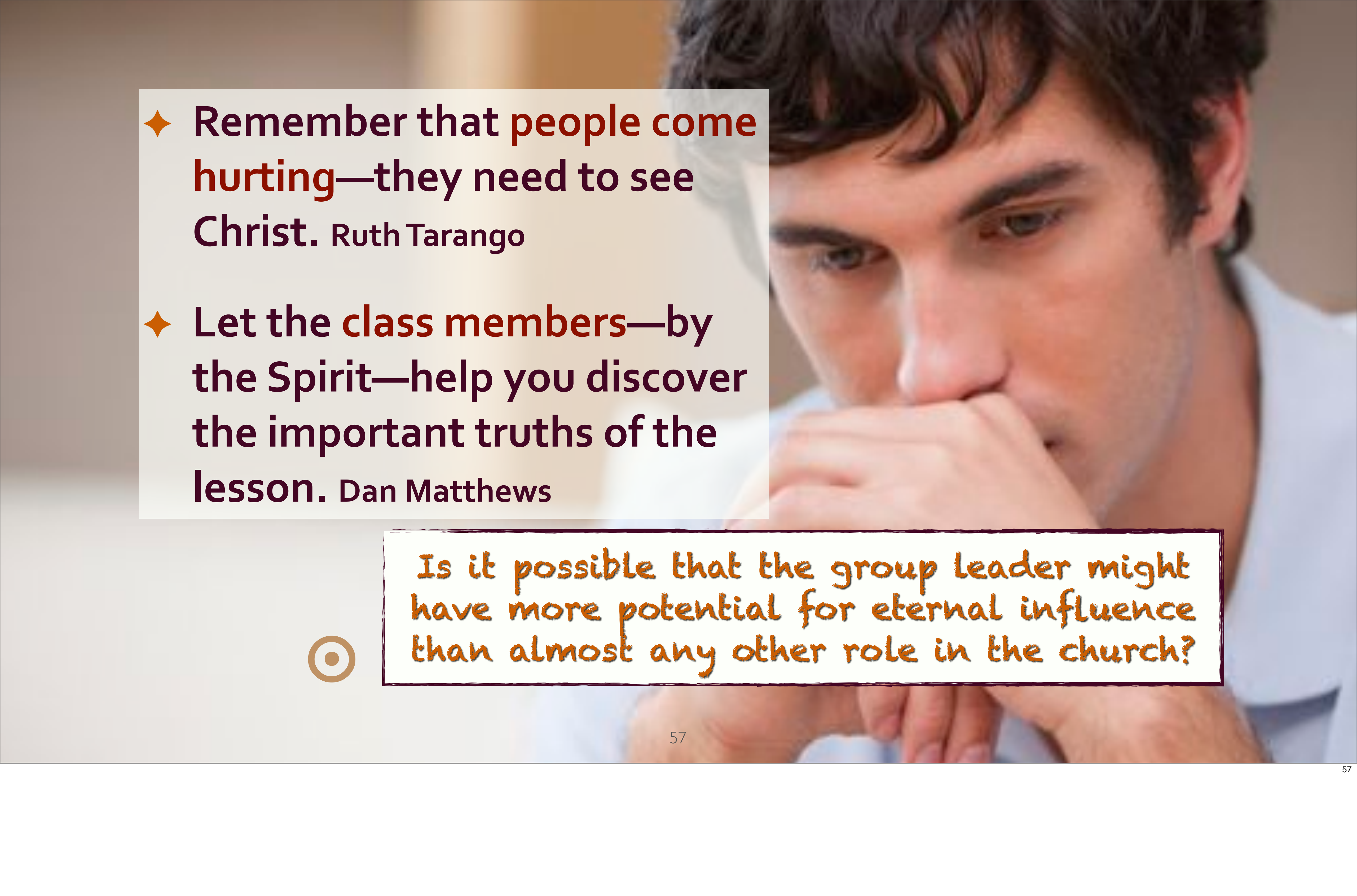


- ◆ Practice the art of **“structured flexibility”**. Ruth Tarango
- ◆ Develop **“a fluid collection of things that point to the focus”**. Jim Ayars
- ◆ Keep in mind that the lesson study **is not a time for preaching**.
Ruth Tarango
- ◆ Develop **open-ended questions**.
Jim Ayars



- ◆ **Let Jesus be the focus.** Jim Ayars
- ◆ **Let the Holy Spirit do what the Holy Spirit wants to do.** Jim Ayars
- ◆ **Be non-judgemental.** Ben Carson
- ◆ **Leave results with God—the Holy Spirit can use even a “down” study.** Ruth Tarango



- 
- ◆ Remember that **people come hurting**—they need to see **Christ**. Ruth Tarango
 - ◆ Let the **class members**—by the Spirit—help you discover the important truths of the **lesson**. Dan Matthews



Is it possible that the group leader might have more potential for eternal influence than almost any other role in the church?

7) HOW TO CREATE DIALOGUE



What the study time is ...

**“Facilitation
through
dialogue
and
experience”**



"Dialogue"

- ▶ Conversation ... discussion
- ▶ Exchange of ideas
- ▶ Interplay ... exploration
- ▶ Cf **music** ... "dialogue" and "antiphony"



Conductor's job: Make sure it's a symphony, not a cacophany!

The 4-A rule of engagement

- ❖ **Ask ...**
- ❖ **Acknowledge ...**
- ❖ **Affirm ...**
- ❖ **Apply ...**

Luke 10:25-37



It will work every time ... guaranteed!

√ For a great illustration from the Bible, see Luke 10:25-37 (using The Message here).
- To the religion scholar: "What's written in God's law? How do you interpret it?" ... ASK
- Upon reply from the scholar: "Good answer! Do it and you'll live." ... ACKNOWLEDGE & AFFIRM
- Upon further questioning from the scholar: The story of the good Samaritan, followed by a fantastic leading question—"What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?" ... APPLY
√ Acknowledge and affirm are close in meaning—the first is simple, the second more advanced. Acknowledge: "Thank you, Ruth." Affirm: "I especially appreciate what Ruth has said here about. . . ." The quickest way to discourage people from contributing is to slide on to the next thing you want to say, or someone else wants to say, without a word of acknowledgment for the one who has just spoken ... as if the person never said anything, or as if you did not hear it. Never fail to acknowledge a contribution. It takes three seconds.

Simple steps for a successful study

1. **Introduce** the subject—briefly
2. Set up and **ask** your first leading question
3. Take the **leap!** ... let the Spirit work
4. **Acknowledge** ... **affirm** ... **apply** ... **pray**
5. Move to additional clarifying and leading **questions**
6. Include one or two group **experiences**
7. Present the powerful **close** ... a story, testimony, or quote



8) MISSION & OUTREACH

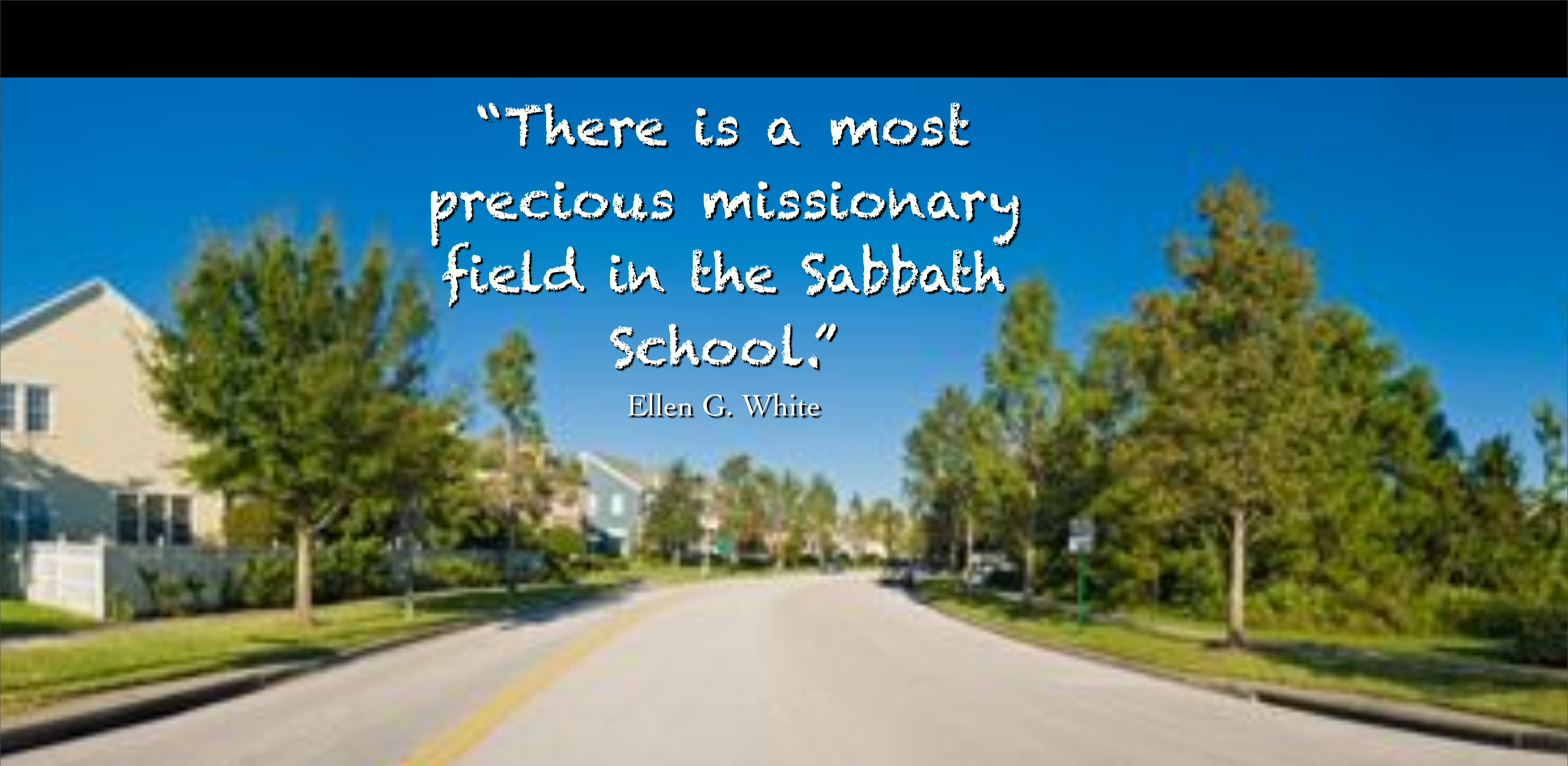


Back to our roots!



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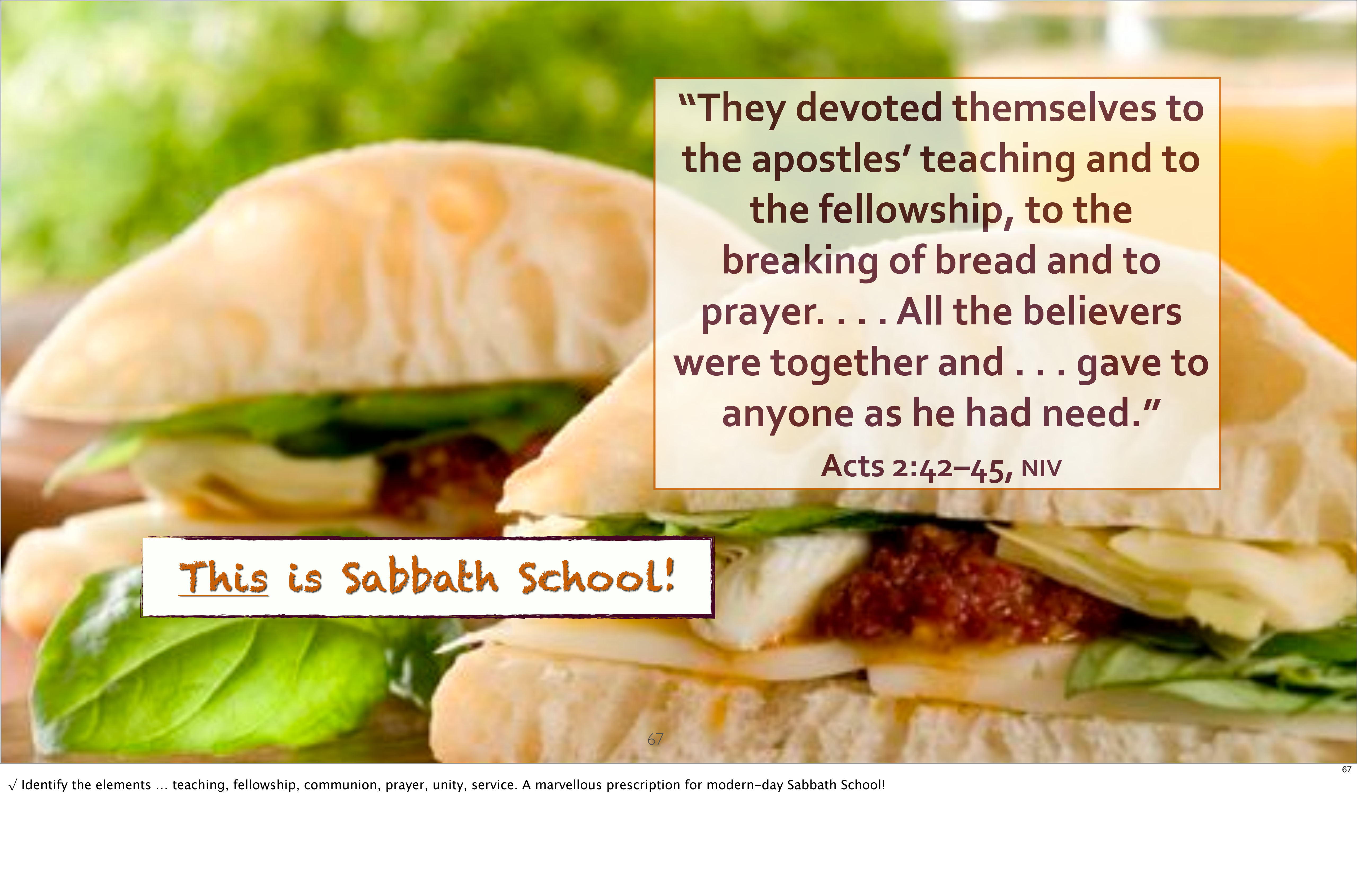
A church must have some **service units** for identifying and responding to *immediate needs* among its members and community. This will not normally take place in the worship service.



If it does not take place in the **Sabbath School**—and if there are few if any other small groups operating in this way—then **where will it take place?**

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✓ Even if a church has a number of active small groups apart from Sabbath School, Sabbath School is still an ideal service point for action in Jesus' name ... and it includes many who do not participate in any other small groups.



“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . . All the believers were together and . . . gave to anyone as he had need.”

Acts 2:42–45, NIV

This is Sabbath School!

Suggestions to start ...

1. Ask about any immediate **challenges or opportunities** ... and give a prayer, right then
2. If indicated, plan for **follow-up** to a challenge or opportunity
3. **Examples** of follow up: a phone call ... a visit ... a gift ... an email ... a helping hand
4. As a group, consider **partnering** with a local agency, or a mission in another city or country

Great resources for mission-outreach

1. **Center for Creative Ministry ...** 
creativeministry.org

2. **Adventist Mission ...** adventistmission.org

3. **AdventSource ...** adventsource.org
... enter "Sabbath School" in the Search field

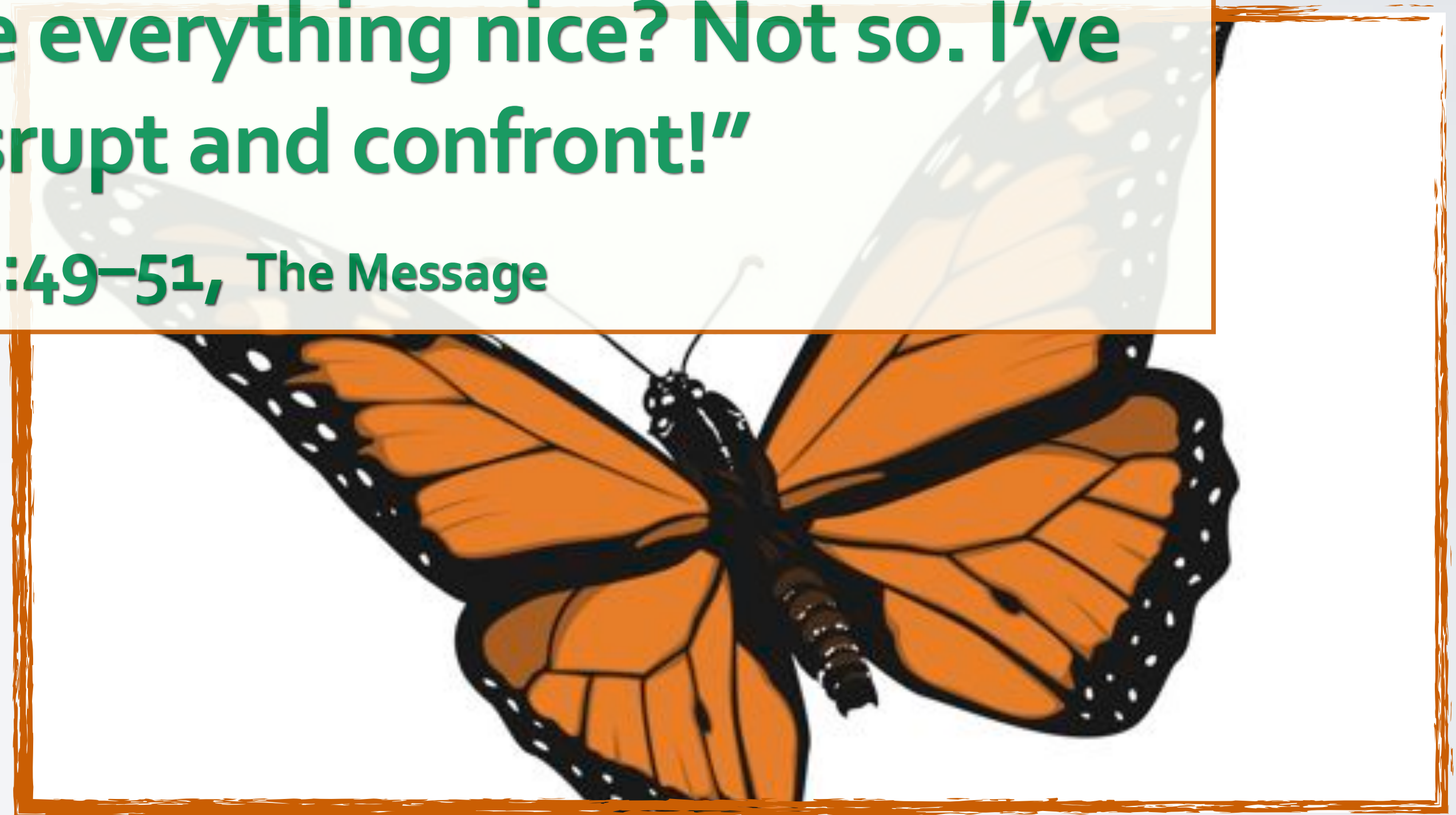
9) THE CHALLENGE OF



✓ Monarch butterfly ... a North American species that has been found in New Zealand and Australia since the 19th century. "The monarch is famous for its southward migration and northward return in summer from Canada to Mexico and Baja California which spans the life of three to four generations of the butterfly. . . . no single individual makes the entire round trip. Female monarchs deposit eggs for the next generation during these migrations. . . . Monarch butterflies are one of the few insects capable of making trans-Atlantic crossings." Their life cycle is amazing—from eggs, to larvae or caterpillars, to the pupa or chrysalis stage, then to the mature butterfly. Talk about change!

“I’ve come to start a fire on this earth—how I wish it were blazing right now! I’ve come to change everything, turn everything rightside up—how I long for it to be finished! Do you think I came to smooth things over and make everything nice? Not so. I’ve come to disrupt and confront!”

Luke 12:49–51, The Message

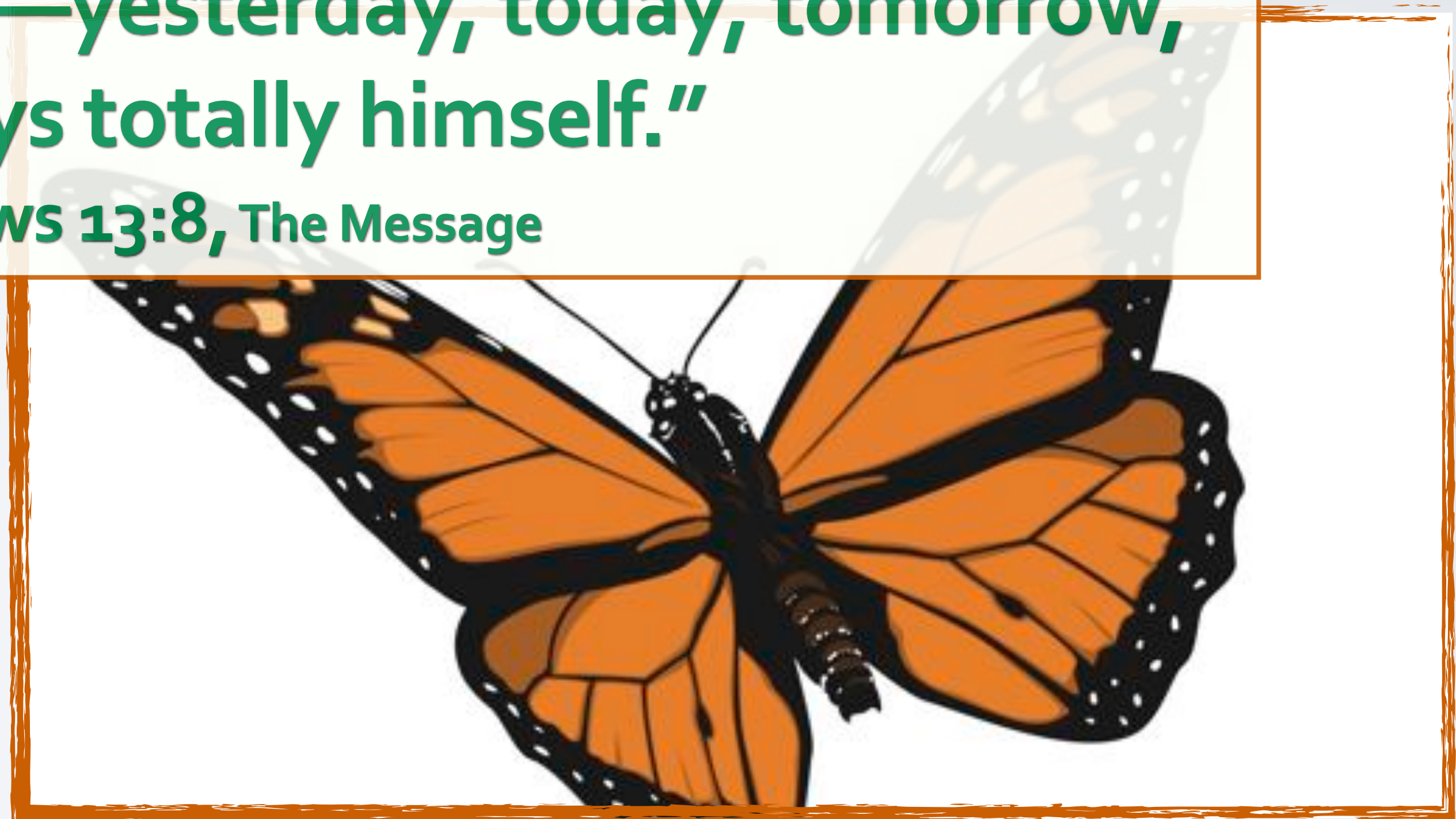


“A great many people from the Gerasene countryside got together and asked Jesus to leave—too much change, too fast, and they were scared.”

Luke 8:37, The Message

“Jesus doesn’t change—yesterday, today, tomorrow, he’s always totally himself.”

Hebrews 13:8, The Message



Fearful people desire only to make it to the grave safely. Day by day, they suffer through a perpetual “near-life” experience.

—Chris Blake



How to make changes

◆ Prayerfully!

- ▶ Not impulsively, proudly, or irresponsibly

◆ Co-operatively!

- ▶ “Would you give us permission to try?” “If we bring this up as a possibility, how would you relate to it?”

◆ Philosophically!

- ▶ Explain the background, the reasons ... admit concerns

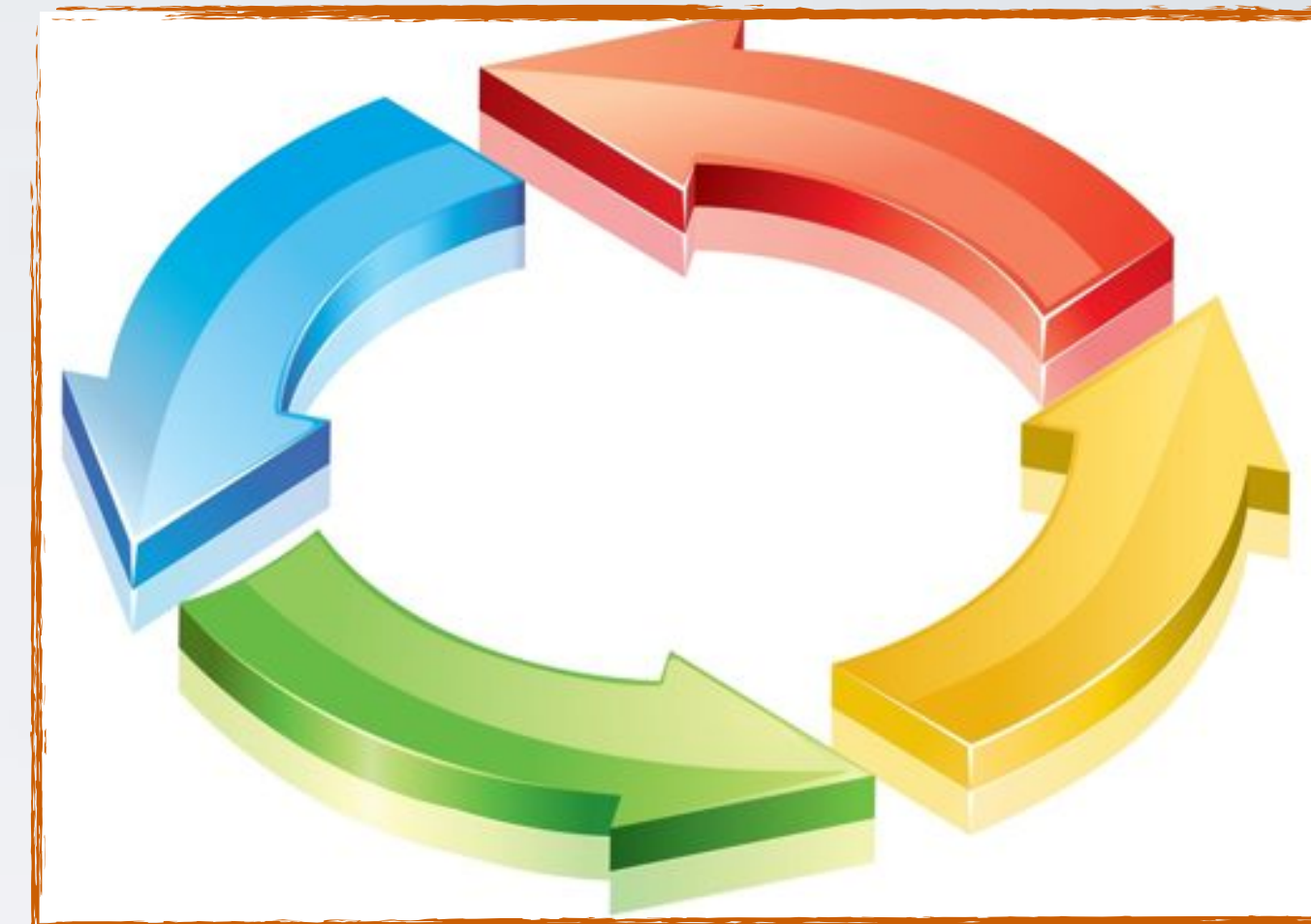


◆ **Incrementally!**

- ▶ In most cases, plan small steps from “here” to “there ... but sometimes, one big step is the best way to go

◆ **Patiently!**

- ▶ Get feedback ... make mid-course corrections ... plan on 6–12 months for the change to work and be properly evaluated



◆ **With local ownership!**

- ▶ Work for buy-in and ownership from key people who are respected

√ Story ... A lady named Barb, a Sabbath School superintendent in a fairly conservative church, a senior person, who just couldn't wait! She made the change virtually overnight, as a trial run. The impact was immediate. Over a few months, attendance at the adult Sabbath School came up from about 50 per cent of the worship service attendance, to about 80 per cent of the worship service attendance. She adopted the simple 1-2-3 format of fellowship, Bible study, and mission-outreach. All the leaders found it easier, more enjoyable, and much more productive. Several years later, this format is still going strong in that congregation.

√ Perhaps the worst method for change in a local congregation is to say, “OK, people, the Conference wants us to make this change!” ... This approach spells disaster from the start. All genuine, lasting change must be generated from within the local setting, driven by prayer and adapted for the local context.

8 characteristics of a healthy church

1. *Empowering leadership*
2. *Gift-oriented ministry*
3. *Passionate spirituality*
4. *Dynamic structures*
5. *Inspiring worship service*
6. *Whole-life (holistic) small group ministry*
7. *Need-oriented evangelism*
8. *Loving relationships*



Which of these is helped by a dynamic Sabbath School?



Bring Your Sabbath School to Life!

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Healthy Adventist Churches

North NZ Conference of SDA

www.nnzc.org.nz/HAC-Resources

2nd edition, completely revised: March 2013

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