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THE SAMARITAN EDUCATOR

**" A c e r t a i n m a n w e n t d o w n f r o m
J e r u s a l e m t o J e r i c h o . . . "**

(Luke 10:30, KJV).

BY JIM EPPERSON

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A young man was busy trying to make his way through life's hills and valleys. His journey took him through some treacherous territory . . . with danger on all sides. Violence, illicit sex, deception, and greed had become so commonplace that it was hard for him to identify them as dangers.

These hazards were not the only problems he had to overcome to reach his destination. Vicious thieves were poised to rob him of his dignity, eternal worth, and child-like innocence. Vandals lay waiting to attack, beating him senseless to spiritual insights and the destructive results of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. And, as if the road to Jericho was not wrought with enough hazards, there was one more obstacle that made the chance of success almost impossible—the timing of the journey. The internal elements in the young man's life were in constant conflict: physiological changes and emotional turmoil inhibited sound judgment and decision making.

Moreover, the young man had never traveled this road before. He was unfamiliar with the terrain, and, although informed of its many hazards and warned of the thieves and marauders that pervaded the pathway, his immaturity made him unable to grasp the impact of the dangers that lay ahead.

"And [he] fell among thieves . . ."

It was inevitable that the young man would fall prey to the thieves of the trail. And, indeed, they stripped him of all that was of value. He lay naked, bruised, and bleeding, totally exposed to the harsh elements of the world. His innocent beliefs in the goodness of humanity, abundant life, and justice were scarred; any hope of recovery from this tragedy to live a life of worth was gone. The stupidity of his actions overwhelmed him, pushing him to despair. He desperately needed help, someone to nurse the cuts, to stop the bleeding, to place balm on the deep bruises of his heart.

"And by chance there came down a certain priest that way."

An individual with great spiritual knowledge approached. This teacher of

the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy lived a life impeccable to the eye, gave beautiful sermons, spoke eloquent prayers, called sin by its right name, and enforced the rules and regulations of the school with consistency and firmness. Surely such a noble educator would stop and save this child of God. But, though he saw the suffering youth, “he passed by on the other side.”

Why didn't he stop? Was he too busy with his job as a leader to get involved in such a messy task? Maybe it was beneath his status. After all, he played an important part of the Lord's work, and had a critical role in the success of the school. He had appointments to keep and counsel to give. This type of activity really didn't fit his job description, anyway. Maybe he made a note to call the dean as soon as he got home to have him take care of the problem. Or, perhaps he was so preoccupied with the many problems that face school leaders today that he really didn't notice the severity of the young man's wounds.

“And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him.”

Next upon the scene was the scholar of the school faculty—the thinker who puts academics at the top of the list, the one constantly trying to protect the real reason for a school's existence: teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. He considers the task of preparing students to excel in college as one of the highest callings on earth. After all, the future doctors, scientists, and mathematical geniuses must gain a sound foundation today in order to succeed tomorrow. This soldier of academia is a consecrated, conscientious Christian, with strong convictions and a high calling.

But this man, too, passes by. “Curious to know what had happened, he stopped and looked at the sufferer. He was convicted of what he ought to do, but it was not an agreeable duty. He wished that he had not come that way, so that he need not have seen the wounded man. He persuaded himself that the case was no concern of his” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 499).

Perhaps he reasoned, “Wow, that young person needs help. I wish I had time to give him what he needs, but I'm swamped. I am teaching more classes

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than others now! How can I take on more? Besides, I really don't know this young man that well, so probably he wouldn't want my help. Maybe one of

those popular teachers will happen by; he would be much more receptive to them helping him anyway.”

The Desire of Ages indicates the real problem of the leader and scholar: “with all these lessons [‘Love ye therefore the stranger’] the priest and Levite were familiar, but they had not brought them into practical life” (ibid., p. 500). In other words, they had not internalized the truths and lessons of the Bible. They had lost focus of the calling of a Christian teacher. Possibly this teacher had been “trained . . . in the school of national bigotry, . . . [and] had become selfish, narrow, and exclusive” (ibid.).

But surely he wouldn't pass a young person by because of his nationality or skin color. That interpretation of bigotry is what makes us pass by this parable without applying it to ourselves. *Webster's Dictionary* defines a *bigot* as “one

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obstinately or intolerantly devoted to his own opinion and prejudices.”

Wait a minute . . . obstinately devoted to one's *own opinion*. Could that make us pass by a person who is hurting, one who is wounded? Could our preconceived opinion about right and wrong, who's at fault and who deserves what, make us blind to a person's needs—blind to our own prejudice?

A school administrator devoted to his own opinion could be committed, conscientious, prudent, and capable, but also blind to the needs of those around by being obstinately devoted to his own opinion. It is possible to be so “devoted” that we do not internalize the truths that we believe, much less practice the lessons that we teach.

Listen up, consecrated administrator. Listen up, devoted faculty member. The parable of the Good Samaritan could be talking to you.

With the end of the parable comes encouragement. Just as we are ready to give up hope, just as we fear that no one will come to the young person's aid—along comes the Good Samaritan.

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.”

He recognized the young person's need. He saw through the blood and bruises. He looked beyond the exterior signs of tragedy, beyond the disagreeable duty. Many times, young people who have been victimized, devastated, and hurt internally, retain an external look that is frightful to behold—just as repul-

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sive as the naked, bloody body of the young man on the side of the road. It may be a facade of rebellion and stubbornness. Sometimes it takes on the appearance of an expressionless and unresponsive face, an “I don't care about anything” attitude—partly as a protection and partly a result of the internal destruction that has occurred. But an educator who can look beyond that facade will see a wounded, frightened child desperate for a helping hand, desperate for someone to understand, longing for someone to nurse his hurts and disappointments.

“A certain Samaritan . . .” could be paraphrased to read, “A certain *teacher* had compassion on him.” Notice, it doesn't say, “a teacher with outstanding talent, great expertise, and impressive credentials,” although he or she could have possessed these qualities. More important was compassion: the one trait

that supremely qualifies a person to minister to youth, that goes beyond outstanding training or abilities. Compassion is synonymous with empathy, the ability to understand another person's feelings and hurts, and to perceive his real needs. This is perhaps the most important qualification for a Christian teacher.

“And [he] went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”

He addressed the exterior wounds first. He sacrificed, walking while the wounded rode. The overwhelming message that was shouted to the wounded young man was “I care. God cares. You are important. You are worth taking a chance for. You are worth the risk, time, and effort.” His actions spoke louder than words could scream, louder than a well-prepared lecture for Bible class, louder than the reading assignment in the best literature book or a video prepared by the best producers, louder than an outstanding chapel talk or the most eloquently phrased prayer. His actions spoke clearly of what teaching is all about and why Seventh-day Adventist schools exist.

The teacher didn't believe in a quick fix with no further obligations. He realized that healing doesn't happen overnight, that there were many days ahead when the youth would need nurturing. There would be relapses, when healing would have to start all over again. He realized that a wounded heart needs remodeling several times to accomplish “new heart” status.

Yes, the Samaritan was an educator with heavenly vision, divine intentions, and Christ-like actions, with an understanding of the most important redemptive task of a Christian teacher. His empathy and compassion saved a life, gave the young man another chance to grow, to heal, to make other journeys, and to reach Jericho.

“Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.” 

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