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Agents of

Swede Ingmar Bergman told a story about a knight named Antonius Block who kneels in front of a confessional to confess his sins. He does not realize until later that he is talking to Death—a shadowy, robed character—rather than a priest. Block declares that he is seeking not faith, not suppositions, but knowledge.

“I want,” he says, “God to stretch out His hand toward me, reveal Himself, and speak to me.”

Death replies that perhaps there is no God, that there is only nothing.

“Then,” says Block, “life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death, knowing that all is nothingness.”

Today millions live in the face of such nothingness. They have no faith in God, no hope in anything past the world around them. No wonder,

As Christians, we are God’s agents to bring people hope, to show that there is a God who loves and cares for them.

then, that so many focus on the comforts of this life, seeking solace in pleasure and the various worldly distractions. The Christian faith—which calls upon us to “fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (*2 Cor. 4:18, NIV*)—is foreign to them.

As Christians, we are God’s agents to bring these people hope, to show that there is a God who loves and cares for them, to show that although life has many outrageous horrors, it is not ultimately an outrageous horror but that God will finally make all things right.

The Bible gives us many inspirational stories of God’s agents of hope. In this quarter’s lessons we will focus on some of these outstanding missionaries; on who they were and what they did in seeking to bring others to a saving knowledge of the Lord of salvation.

Hope

Ellen G. White tells the story of a man nearly chilled to death in deep snow. He was about to give up struggling for his life when he heard the moans from a fellow traveler nearby. His first impulse was to rescue the other man. When he found him, he rubbed the man's frozen limbs. He finally got him to his feet and carried him through the drifts to safety.

Then "the truth flashed home to him that in saving his neighbor he had saved himself also" by quickening "the blood which was freezing in his own veins."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 319.

The point? A healthy church is a church focused on mission to others. Sharing God's love with the community brings fresh life and energy into the church.

It would be a mistake this quarter to study these biblical agents as interesting historical figures and leave it at that. Rather, we need to catch the inspiration of their lives and focus on our mission to this dying world. There is nothing more refreshing, or more life-giving, than reaching out to others.

Our prayer is that this quarter's lessons on biblical agents of hope will lead us into a renewed commitment to share God's love with our neighbors and friends and in mission fields around the world. In so doing, we may just find that we have entered into a whole new dimension in our Christian lives.

Gary Krause, an Australian born to missionary parents in Fiji, is director of the Office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference. He is married to Bettina, and they have one daughter, Bethany Grace.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Practice, and Apply

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, practice, and apply. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Practice); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Practice: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Apply: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question: With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.