

September 19, 2015 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
What We Might Forget: The Best Part by Andy McDonald

A couple of weeks ago Jeff began this series, “What We Might Forget” with the story of Manasseh who was an example of forgetting who we are. Left to our own we are all susceptible to Manasseh’s thinking. We can begin to put ourselves and our choices in place of God and forget that we aren’t God. This is really important in our culture today where we have reverted to act like people in the days of the Judges of Israel, where every person did what was right in their own eyes. Today again we are in a culture where the individual is the highest moral authority. We must not forget who we are—we are creature and God is creator. We are those in need of being redeemed and God is the redeemer.

Last week Edwin helped us to face the risk of forgetting why we are here. He used God’s love for children, that children are the apple of God’s eye as the illustration that we are here to serve those who are in need, and children are our most vulnerable population and if they are important for God to serve they must be important for us to serve. The whole heart of service is critical to not forgetting our purpose to serve.

Today we conclude our series, What We Might Forget: with, The Best Part. Let’s Pray. Father, Son and Holy Spirit we don’t want to forget the best part. We don’t want to be caught in the mistakes many have made over the years and miss the best part. So open our minds and open our hearts and teach us now as we open your word, In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen

It feels so good to be special. There is almost a narcotic like high that comes with the mental construct of being special. It is that feeling when everyone else is stopped at the rope but you are waved on through. There is something about having that inside track, being in the know, getting that back stage pass.

I think part of the drive of social media today is our insatiable hunger to be “in the know.” To have the inside track.

People magazine has done well creating the illusion that its readers have the scoop. People even imagine they know the celebrities in that magazine because they know a lot about them. They have the scoop.

I can imagine that there’s hardly a higher high for a reporter than getting some big exclusive story. Whether some big happening or Hollywood scoop there’s this inexplicable value in running the exclusive story. Of course the funny thing is that as soon as it hits the news that exclusiveness is extremely fleeting as other reporters rush to report the same story. The joy slips to being the first to break the story.

Maybe this hunger for the inside track is rooted in our fallen human nature’s DNA. It was the angle that serpent used in the Garden of Eden. He told our primal parents, God’s being exclusive with you. If you want to be in the know the secret’s in this fruit. Just a bite will make you like God, you can have your own exclusive. You’ll be in the know! You’ll be special.

Whether it’s embedded in our fallen nature or not there’s a huge pull to be exclusive rather than inclusive.

From the first day of school we become aware of the cliques, those tight circles of exclusivity. And we can all remember circles into which we were not invited and the emotional pain of being excluded.

What is amazing is that the Christian church, the Body of Christ, into which everyone everywhere is to be invited, into which the only entry requirement is that you are unworthy to enter, every human’s only hope is to be saved by the sheer undeserved favor of God, what is amazing is the ease with which almost every division of that body has struggled with exclusiveness.

We are not an exception in the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination. In our origins there was good discursive study of theology. And as our pioneers hammered out the doctrines, the teachings: as they rediscovered some of the neglected Biblical truths it wasn't surprising that there developed more and more of an us and them thinking.

There's this language that developed about "having the truth"! The more and more that was written to clarify, especially the unique doctrines or unique slants on doctrines, there arose a greater exclusive mindset that unlike those outside our community of faith, we had the truth. In recent years this exclusive bent has arisen again as some have spoken out that to protect ourselves from deception about our teachings, that we avoid studying material that aren't part of our denomination.

It is more than a little embarrassing but it isn't a new problem and for some reason it seems maybe even a little bit more of problem around spiritual things. It seems that when people get connected with God they want to patent it. God and a relationship with God is so special so amazing that there's this illusion that we must put a fence around it and protect it and have that practice of faith be our's exclusively.

There's this piece of history in Numbers 11. Now as a whole for me the book of Numbers isn't the most compelling and most interesting of the books of the Bible. But there's this little obscure peek into a protectionist exclusive bent.

It says in vs. 24 that Moses went out and reported the Lord's words to the people. He gathered the seventy leaders and stationed them around the Tabernacle. And the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses. He took some of the Spirit that was upon Moses and put it upon the seventy leaders. They prophesied as the Spirit rested upon them.

Now when this happened there were these two men, Eldad and Medad, who were still in the camp. They were listed among the

leaders but had not gone out to the tabernacle but the spirit came on them and they prophesied there in the camp. A young man ran and reported this to Moses that these two were prophesying in the camp and not out around the Tabernacle.

When Joshua, Moses personal assistant heard this he protested, “Moses make them stop!” Joshua was saying, “Hey we’ve got exclusive rights to this prophesying thing.” They are using this gift without our permission, we have an exclusive, a patent and they have no right!”

But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them all!”

Moses understood God’s blessing couldn’t be confined. Later in Dueteronmy 7 Moses says to the people

The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

8 But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Sometimes we will see Christians wanting to exclude other Christians. This draw to want to be special, unique, in the know, on the inside track is so strong we easily want to make the God story of scripture all about just us, just we are special.

It was to this that God spoke to Israel through the prophet Amos recorded in Amos 9:7. I want you to hear this verse but I want you to think about it in the context of the whole Old Testament story.

Creation, Flood, Abraham, Israel and the 12 tribes the sojourn in Egypt, the Exodus, the establishment of the nation, and kings, and prophets and obedience and blessing and disobedience and captivity. Two of their bitterest enemies were the Philistines and the Arameans.

So now in that context hear this shocking very non-exclusive word from God.

“Do you Israelites think you are more important to me than the Ethiopians?” asks the Lord. “I brought you out of Egypt but have I not done as much for other nations, too? I brought the Philistines from Crete, and led the Arameans out of Kir.”

To these chosen people these words must have hurt their head. God is saying you are my special people because I have a special task for you to accomplish. But you aren't the exclusive recipients of my love or my favor or my deliverance.

There's a tendency to want to pull out just the first half of 1 Peter 2: 9 where it says, “For you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession.” We even like where it says in that same verse, “He has called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Talk about inside track. Talk about sounding rather exclusive.

Chosen people. Kingdom of priests. God's holy nation. God's very own possession.

But while all of that is true what is the purpose? Is it so we can enjoy some exclusive position and status for ourselves. NO, NO, NO! The verse also says this Here's the purpose of being called selected chosen by God. “This is so you can show others the goodness of God.”

We are not brought into God's family only for our personal exclusive privilege. We are brought into God's family to become part of the family business of showing others the goodness of God. To join the business of loving people into a lifelong friendship with God. We are not called to consume we are not saved to sit we are saved to serve.

The pull to making even following Jesus into an exclusive club was a temptation to Jesus' original 12 disciples even to John, the beloved disciple, the one with whom Jesus had a special connection.

In Mark 9:38-40 we have this insight into a disciples' desire for exclusive rights to Jesus.

“John said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, we saw a man using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he isn't one of our group.’”

John and some others were acting like the copyright police. They were putting a cease and desist order on this unapproved use of the Jesus franchise. If you want to cast out demons in some other name no problem but don't be using Jesus' name you haven't been sanctioned, you haven't paid the franchise fees, you aren't approved for freeing people from demon possession in the name of Jesus.

What was Jesus' reaction? Good job John. Way to protect the brand! Nope. Jesus was really clear. “Don't stop him! Jesus said. “No one who performs miracles in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us.”

Jesus may well have been the originator of an open source way of doing business, but his followers have forever been seeking an exclusive.

There may be no more familiar imagery of Jesus than him as the good shepherd. We memorize Psalm 23 and think of Jesus, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

Artists have created pictures of Jesus herding sheep holding a little lamb in his arms. Because of Jesus' story of the shepherd who leaves the 99 safe in the fold and goes out to search for, and find, and carry back home the lost sheep we see Jesus portrayed as that good shepherd carrying home the lost sheep.

Listen to Jesus own words recorded in John 10: 14-16

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep." Here it is. Don't miss it. "I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd."

Don't forget the best part. Each of us may be attracted to friendship with God from a host of different angles. There are parts of God's character they appeal to some of you and other parts that appeal to a different personality.

But the best part is that friendship with God isn't an exclusive.

John writes of Jesus, "The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was going to come into the world." John 1:9

John the Baptist saw Jesus and said to the crowd, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world.!" John 1:29

The most famous of all bible texts, John 3:16 tells us it is for "everyone who believes."

Paul writes to the Colossians "For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ and by him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth...and this includes you." Colossians 1:19-21

William Barclay writes: “One of the hardest things in the world to unlearn is exclusiveness.”

The best part is that we are just part. Just a piece of his family—not the exclusive whole. And the very best part is that when we join the family we take up the family business of adopting more kids, of loving people into a lifelong friendship with God as we wait for his return.

TAKE away →

How does the world squeeze you into the mold of thinking you are the highest moral authority for your life?

What do you think about our purpose being to serve?

To what “exclusive” groups or organizations have you belonged ?

Why does having “exclusive privileges” feel so good?

How, if ever, have you made or thought about your faith as being exclusive?

How did the Jewish nation not see they were chosen to serve?

What blurs your understanding of being saved to serve?

Who do you think are the “sheep” that were not yet in the sheepfold Jesus talked about in John 10?

How have you or do you plan to step up to the family business since you were adopted into Christianity?

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