

# *Seventh-day Adventist Christian: Do You Know Who You Are?*

**A Curiously Hard Question  
at a Most Critical Time**

**Max Hammonds, MD, MPH, MHA**



**TEACH Services, Inc.**

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# Contents

Foreword.....	5
Chapter 1.....	7
<i>Introduction: Do You Know Who You Are?</i>	
Chapter 2 .....	11
<i>Do You Know You Are a Greatly Beloved Saint?</i>	
Chapter 3.....	17
<i>Do You Know You Are a Christian?</i>	
Chapter 4.....	27
<i>Do You Know You Are to Live in a Relationship With God?</i>	
Chapter 5 .....	42
<i>Do You Know You Live by the Gospel of RGB?</i>	
Chapter 6.....	50
<i>Do You Know You Are to Walk With God?</i>	
Chapter 7 .....	64
<i>Do You Know You Are to Keep the Commandments?</i>	
Chapter 8.....	73
<i>Do You Know You Are a Ministering Priest?</i>	
Chapter 9.....	84
<i>Do You Know You Are Called to be a Faithful Steward?</i>	
Chapter 10.....	91
<i>Do You Know You Are a Seventh-day Adventist Christian?</i>	
Chapter 11.....	103
<i>Do You Know You Are Part of the Remnant?</i>	
Chapter 12.....	112
<i>Do You Know You Are to Restore the Long-lost Teachings of the Bible?</i>	
Chapter 13.....	126
<i>Do You Know You Are to Live in the Sanctuary Message?</i>	
Chapter 14.....	137
<i>Do You Know You Have the Last Message to be Given to the World?</i>	
Chapter 15.....	146
<i>Do You Know You Have a Mission—To Make Disciples?</i>	

Chapter 16.....	155
<i>Do You Know You Are to be a Witness?</i>	
Chapter 17.....	164
<i>Do You Know You Are One of the Sheep?</i>	
Chapter 18.....	174
<i>Do You Know You Are to Build an Ark—a Refuge of Safety?</i>	
Epilogue .....	185
Appendix: Discussion Questions.....	189
<i>A Note to Teachers, Instructors, and Seminar Leaders</i>	
Bibliography.....	244

## Foreword

I have never prayed so much and so hard over any written work—or sermon, for that matter—as I have this book. The chapters of this manuscript began as sermons, most of them preached at the St. Petersburg Seventh-day Adventist Church when I was the head elder and, for a time, the unofficial lay pastor of that congregation. But the book began many years ago as a series of questions I had concerning this unusual Protestant denomination that I had joined and grown to love. The book was mostly centered around one question: Did they know who they were? Did they realize how much they knew, that other folk did not know?

Over the years, the ideas, the questions, and some of the answers became clearer as I fast forwarded through bookshelves of material that I assumed my fellow Seventh-day Adventists had read in their formative years in the denomination's school system, years that I had missed out on. The revelations of these books were astounding—the quality of the writing of Ellen White and others was awesome. *Do these people know what they have?*

To my utter dismay and sadness of heart, I began to realize that most did not know. In fact,

most had no idea how far ahead their denomination was in organizational structure, financial soundness, unity of purpose and fellowship, solidness of doctrinal thought, spot-on historical referencing.

And so my writing outline began to grow. Do you know you are the Remnant? Do you know you are a Priest? The topics came and the sermons were written until the final result is the book you hold in your hands.

Ask you, the reader, a very personal question: Do you know who you are? Therefore, the writing style is up close and personal, a conversation and a dialog. I tried to avoid sounding preachy (which meant extensively rewriting the sermons), and I strictly avoided the scholarly style of footnotes and references.

As you read, you will notice that I purposefully capitalized such words as Remnant, People of God, Time of the End, Priest, Steward, etc. because I want to emphasize them as unique words that are not just any remnant or people of God or time of the end. My hope is that by capitalizing these words it will cause you to take note

of our important mission and calling as a people. It is so easy to see ourselves as just any remnant, just any priesthood, just any stewardship. But it's deeper than that, which you will discover in this book.

And I expect you to participate as fully in the conversation as I do, as you ponder your answer to this very personal question: Do you know who you are?

If you are a Seventh-day Adventist, you will immediately notice that I have not inserted any Ellen G. White quotations to bolster my assertions. If you knew me personally (which I hope we can do sometime), you would know that I am an avid reader of Mrs. White's writings. Much of my understanding and many of the foundational ideas in this book will be familiar to those who also are her avid readers. But I take her at her word, which you will find quoted in only one place in this book—Chapter 12. "I exalt the precious Word before you today," she wrote. "Lay Sister White to one side. Do not repeat what I have said, saying, 'Sister White said this,' and 'Sister White said that.' Do not quote my words again as long as you live until you can obey the Bible. Find out what the Lord God of Israel says, and then do what He commands."

I believe that one of the problems in our Seventh-day Adventist culture is that we read only one prophet. We forget that the Holy Spirit worked through many different prophets, not just Isaiah or Joel or Ellen White. So I have taken her words to heart and have asked that you, the reader, learn what the Word has to say about who you are before you try to find out what the Spirit has said through the prophet of the Time of the End—Ellen G. White.

As I said at the beginning, this book is the Spirit's doing. I tried to listen and follow His lead. But I am not unique. God talks to everyone, but sadly, much of the time people don't listen. But I'll

let you read Chapter 4–6 for the rest of the conversation on this topic.

Again, I must thank two extremely dedicated and warmly loved people who contributed much to this book: my friend, Steve Dickerson, who read each chapter hot from my e-mail files and dutifully corrected, edited, and questioned my words and my motives, and my wife, Carolyn, who suffered through yet another set of excuses as to why I had to spend my time writing instead of being with her.

In addition, I must thank Penny Estes Wheeler for doing the major editing and Scripture checking for the manuscript, a two-month task made more difficult by my hurried errors and faulty memory, and my daughter, Jacque Hammonds, for her artful illustrations and beautiful cover. And I want to thank the dedicated people at TEACH Services, Inc. for helping a struggling author (with no agent) through the arduous process of getting his book published.

However I was inspired and assisted, my writing, good or bad, is my own, and I take full responsibility for what I have written. Knowing full well that in the future, I will wish I could have expressed an idea more clearly or stated a concept differently, I leave it to you, the reader, and the Holy Spirit to interpret correctly what I wished to say.

This book is dedicated to my mother, Helen Louise Hammonds Rothston, and my wife, Carolyn Jo Wells Hammonds—the two lovingly stable influences in my convoluted life.

With prayers for the Holy Spirit to lead and bless you,

Max Hammonds, MD (retired)

Hendersonville, NC

July 16, 2013

## Chapter 1

# *Introduction: Do You Know Who You Are?*

*“And I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord;  
and they will be My people, and I will be their God,  
for they will return to Me with their whole heart.” Jeremiah 24:7*

**H**ello. Come sit down next to me—right here—or in that chair across from me, if that’s more comfortable. And welcome.

Or, more realistically, perhaps you’re on a backpack trip and are sitting by a campfire—or on a commuter train going to work—or on an airplane at 30,000 feet on a trip to see your relatives in Idaho.

Actually, I don’t know where you might be sitting. But I would like to talk with you up close and personal—as if we *were* sitting across from one another in a mountain retreat, before a fireplace, or at an early morning breakfast table. I would like to pretend that you are not reading a book—but that, in fact, we are having a very personal, face-to-face conversation.

I’m sorry. Please excuse me for being so blunt and forward since we’ve just met, but I really would like to talk with you about what is probably the most curiously hard question you’ll ever have in regard to your life as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. Our conversation will require deep personal discussion on my part and some close personal searching on your part.

Because, yes, this question pertains to *you*. Do you remember the famous quote from Socrates? (Yes, the philosopher from Athens, Greece, who was forced to drink hemlock poison.) The quote says: “Know thyself.” This is the gist of the question I pose to you. *Do you know who you are?*

I’m not asking this question about your ethnic background, your sexual preference, your

socio-economic status, or your career path. I'm asking this question as a fellow Seventh-day Adventist Christian. It's a question I've been pondering in one form or another for the last twenty or more years—about myself and about my Seventh-day Adventist friends.

I've heard that the three most important questions for most people are: where did you come from, why are you here, and where are you going? But I would like to suggest to you that my question encompasses and supersedes the other three: *Do you know who you are?*

Let me tell you a story about how I first became aware of this question. In the 1970s some friends and I established the Walla Walla Health Education Center at Walla Walla General Hospital. For those of you who work at the General now, you will not remember these efforts as they took place in the old hospital building on Bonsella Street in Walla Walla, Washington.

We set up our fledgling operation in the basement as there was no room anywhere else in the hospital. Our health classes were held in the basement; our board meetings were held in the basement; our special functions were held in the basement. Since that time the Walla Walla General Hospital has moved to a wonderful campus on South 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue with a large auditorium and meeting rooms and enough parking to host large audiences. But at that time there was hardly room to turn around—in the basement.

Our governing board, which met every three months, included several prominent individuals from the community. At one particular meeting, about one year into our existence, we were discussing the name of the organization and whether it reflected the character and scope of the mission we had imagined for ourselves. One of the community leaders suggested that we include the moniker "Seventh-day Adventist" in our name to reflect the kinds of programs people could expect. Those of us who were Seventh-day Adven-

tists immediately and vigorously objected, then self-consciously tried to explain. We were concerned that the name would put people off, make them think we had a religious "hook" in what we were doing, and even raise up "prejudice" against the health center.

Then the community board member said something I'll never forget: "Don't you know who you are? We all know who you are. You've been in the community for decades, and we've come to expect a certain high level of performance in association with that name. Don't be ashamed of your name. We know who you are. Don't you know who you are?"

To this day the shock of that statement has never lost its punch. *Do you know who you are?*

After working—as physician, missionary, lay pastor, Sabbath School teacher, head elder, Pathfinder leader, writer, administrator—in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination for forty years, I'm still not sure that we, as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, know for certain how to answer that question. I'm not sure we collectively know who we are.

When asked to define who we are, too many of us stutter through a learned litany of unclear responses that include the Sabbath, the three angels, and certain health and social prohibitions. I suspect that the average member in the church can't answer with clarity and conviction the question: Do you know who you are?

Can you?

I'm not asking you this question in order to cleverly slip in a discussion of church doctrines, as vital as they are. I'm not asking it to compare you, favorably or unfavorably, with one of your fellow church members or to find fault with the church at large. I'm not about to bring up some esoteric and isolated fine point of doctrine or spring some radical new understanding on you. In fact, I think that the answer to my question has been with us



for more than a century, actually, more like six millennia—ever since the Garden of Eden.

**W**e live in momentous times in the history of this world and at a critical juncture in the history of our church. It is of paramount importance that we—as a people, as a church, and as individuals—know for ourselves who we are, why God has called us into existence as a church, and what our mission is in this world. Without a clear answer to this question, we will be unclear in our planning, unfocused in our mission, and uncommitted in our organizations.

I believe that the world needs to hear the messages that we have been directed by God to give. But it is only as we know *who we are* and *why we are here* that we can grasp the significance of the end time events to which we are witnesses and in which we will participate. And certainly the world will be confused and will not be interested in hearing *anything* that we have to share, of whatever value, if they sense that we don't know who we are.

In these little chats, these conversations, I want to suggest several biblical answers for my question. Please consider the answers, and their implications for your life. Pray about them. Let them roll around in your brain and bump into all the other ideas you have about God and church and what you're doing and why you're here—and who you are.

It's my prayer that these thoughts and ideas will spark thoughts and ideas in you. I also pray that, with our renewed sense of who we are, we—you and I, as well as our beloved church—will awaken to the urgings of the Holy Spirit. By His guidance and conviction, I pray that we will understand the significance of the times we live in and the role God has assigned the Seventh-day Adventist Church to play in them. I pray fervently that we will recapture the urgent passion for wit-

ness that marked the efforts of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist movement.

Do you sense my passion and my urgency to discuss these things with you? I hope you do.

**S**o as we begin, let me suggest a couple of ground rules.

First, because the Bible uses such widely differing metaphors in describing the Gospel, the Christian life, and God's People, I've given considerable thought as to how to arrange the topics for our little chats. In my own mind and very informally, I've organized the material into three general divisions:

- 1) the Seventh-day Adventist Christian and his/her relationship to God and how it's similar to what is generally understood and appreciated by all Christians,
- 2) scriptural metaphors for a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who has accepted a more serious, intensive, and intimate connection with God, and
- 3) last day events scenarios that describe the final mission of a Seventh-day Adventist Christian.

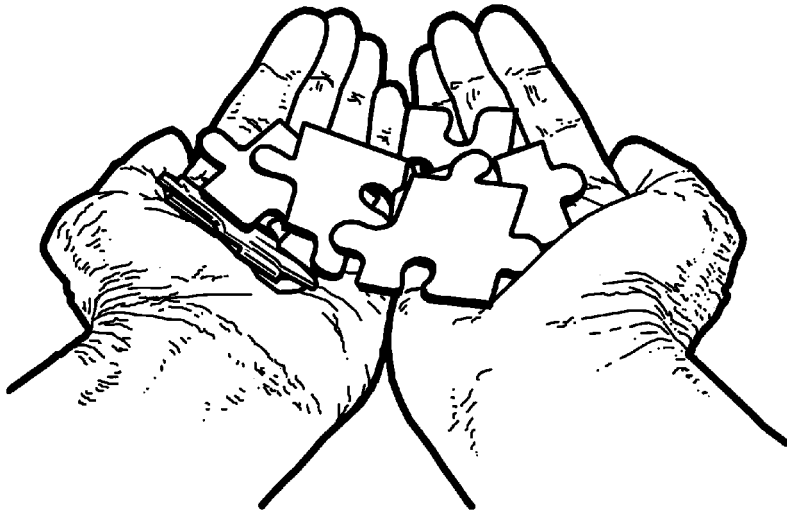
You may or may not want to think in such an organized way as we work through our discussions. Because the flow from one division to the next and from one topic to the next seems, I think, to be a natural transition, the divisions may exist in my mind only to guide my own thinking and may not be of any use to you. If thinking in terms of these divisions helps in your own understanding, so much the better. If they don't help, you can ignore them.

Second, as you read these chapters and pretend with me that we are having a very private and personal conversation (as we are doing now seated here across from one another), I desire that you will think long and hard about the questions and issues inherent in the question I'm placing before you. And it's my prayer that our discussion will cause you to raise questions of your own, and that, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you will seek their answers in the Scriptures.

Third, let me set up one more ground rule—actually, it's a request. Please go get your Bible, right now. Yes, go get it. I'll wait right here until you get back. (See how up close and personal we are?) Are you back yet? Good for you, and thank you.

You see, all of our discussions (the chapters of this book) contain multiple Scripture references for the simple reason that my thoughts mean nothing if they are not *based on* the Word. And your understanding will mean nothing if you have not received these ideas and *processed them through* the Word. I will be “reading” these scriptures “aloud” to you. But I want you to read them for yourself. I want you to process them for yourself. I know this will be hard (especially if you're really on that backpack trip), but the blessing of your personal understanding will be worth it. So keep your Bible open and handy as we explore the various answers to what I think is the most basic, curiously hard question at this critical time in our church's history:

Seventh-day Adventist Christian, do you know who you are?



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