

NAD Health Sabbath Sermon September 16, 2023

HEALTH EVERLASTING

Written by: Roy Ice, *Speaker/Director of Faith For Today*

INTRODUCTION:

Happy Sabbath my friends! Today we celebrate the North American Division's Health Sabbath. I know. When the preacher starts talking about health, it gets quieter in here than the church is on Monday. But hang on! I promise you; we're going to have fun and we will be inspired by God's Word and His blessing that He has for us today. God has given this group of people a very special gift, and that gift is called *HEALTH EVERLASTING*. I'm here with you today to make sure that you don't miss out on the benefits this gift brings specifically to you and to your church community.

First, I think we should start by diving into God's Word and to let that be the guide of our message together.

SCRIPTURE:

Our Scripture reading today comes from **Exodus 15:22-26 (NKJV)**:

22 So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ***23*** Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. ***24*** And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ***25*** So he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast *it* into the waters, the waters were made sweet.

There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them, ***26*** and said, "**If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I *am* the Lord who heals you.**"

HEALING WATERS OF MARAH

Have you ever experienced the worst of times right on the heels of the best day of your life? Isn't that how it typically happens? You get some really great news...and then bad news seems to come quickly right after? It seems to be life's formula. That truly seems to be the formula for the Children of Israel here right after they have been freed from their slavery in Egypt.

They were cynical. Life seems to try to make all of us cynical. The good is announced, but bad takes the stage.

Roy Ice, the new Speaker and Director of *Faith For Today*, our denomination's first television ministry tells the following story:

"I'll never forget one of the first experiences that threatened to make a cynic out of me. I was 9 years old, and we got the most exciting letter in the mailbox. "YOU HAVE WON," it said in big fat letters. Inside the envelope, our blessings were spelled out in even more dazzling details. "You

are guaranteed to be the winner of one of the following prizes: 1) A Boat; 2) A Brand New Cadillac; and 3) A Big Screen TV!"

My 9-year-old face couldn't stop smiling. Surely, God was blessing my family for our faithful devotions...for going to church every Sabbath...or for being faithful with our tithes and offerings. He obviously was blessing us for doing all three! This would go down in my childhood memories as one of the happiest days of my life. We had never won anything in my lifetime. We were broke. We barely had what we needed, but never any more. Had life just taken a turn to the better for my family?

We loaded up our old station wagon and drove 45 minutes up the road to the address listed to pick up our boat, or Cadillac, or big screen TV. Upon arriving, I immediately scanned the parking lot to see if our boat or Cadillac were still there, but I couldn't see either of them. Perhaps we had won the big screen TV? How were we ever going to get that TV into our car? Those things back then were as massive as a China cabinet. Maybe Dad would have to strap it to the roof of the car!

Our whole family walked into the bustling office and were immediately ushered to a side room when we waved our winning letter at the receptionist. The funny thing is that I remember the man who spoke in that room with my parents for 30 minutes never once talked about our Boat, or Cadillac, or big screen TV. He just kept going on and on about what a great deal it would be for my parents to buy a membership to their campground franchise. When my parents said "no" for about the 127th time, the man finally gave up with a huff and began to leave the room.

My folks held the letter out to him and said, "What about our prize? It says right here that we won one of these prizes."

"That's true," he said gruffly. "Let me go get it for you."

We waited several minutes for him to come back, but he never did. So, we left the little room to go see if he had forgotten about us. As we reemerged into the large office filled with dozens of desks, I spotted the man at the other end of the office, walking toward us. In his hands he held a package wrapped in plastic. Could it be the paperwork and the keys to our new Cadillac? It definitely did not seem to have anything to do with the TV, as far as I could figure. But then I saw it. Four bold black letters ran across a thick piece of paper pressed up against the clear plastic packaging, a color photo took up most of the space underneath. The letters spelled B-O-A-T. According to the word at the top, we had won a boat. But according to the picture, and the contents inside of the clear plastic bag, we had just won a one-person rubber raft.

When we protested and exclaimed, "This isn't a boat!" The man smiled and said, "Sure it is! It says so right here. It's a boat!"

It was a long, quiet ride back home that day. I'll never forget holding that light package in my lap and mumbling, "This was not what they promised. This...is not...a boat."

Have you ever experienced a time when all your hopes and dreams were coming true, but then everything seemed to dry up like they always have in the past? This is the emotional experience of the Children of Israel in Exodus chapter 15. They just couldn't seem to catch a break. The scorching sun had beat down upon the vast desert, casting its relentless heat upon the exhausted Israelites who journeyed through the wilderness. The weary wanderers of Israel trod through the arid sands, their spirits as parched as their cracked lips. Just three days ago, they had escaped the clutches of Pharaoh and his oppressive rule. They had crossed the Red Sea and had witnessed a deliverance that only God could have brought, but now they faced a new trial - the harsh conditions of the desert. As the days stretched on, their water supply began to dwindle, leaving dry throats and aching bodies in its wake. Each step seemed heavier than the last, and as the days continued, their water supply dwindled, leaving behind a desperate thirst that gnawed at their very souls.

The journey at last led them to Marah, an oasis that promised the relief they were longing for. Their spirits lifted at the sight of water, but their hopes were soon dashed as they realized the water was bitter - undrinkable and foul. Murmurs of discontent spread through the camp, and desperation settled upon them like a heavy cloud.

Perhaps today we can relate to the experience of these exhausted and frustrated children of God more than we wish we could. Possibly you are frustrated because we've just come out of a couple of years of the pandemic lockdown and you had high hopes for things to get better—your finances to improve; your relationships to flourish; your job to get back to normal; your health to get stronger—But instead of refreshing improvement, you are experiencing a bitter reality. What do you do when all your sweet hopes are dashed by the bitter waters of reality? Where does your mind go first? Frustration? Resentment? Hopelessness? Or Despair? Do you get very quiet, or do you have outbursts of anger? Unfortunately for Moses, the Children of Israel verbally let him have it!

Moses knelt on the sandy ground; his heart burdened with the cries of his people. He lifted his eyes to the heavens and sent a fervent prayer to the God who had guided them thus far. The Israelites gathered around him, their faces etched with frustration and exhaustion. They mirrored Moses' anguish with their downcast faces and whispered fears.

"O Lord," Moses' voice rang out, raw with emotion, "You who have delivered us from Egypt's chains, do not let us perish in this wilderness. We are thirsty, Lord, our throats parched and our spirits faint. Pour out Your mercy upon us, we implore You."

As the last echoes of Moses' prayer faded away, a miracle unfolded before their very eyes. A soft whisper of wind swept through the desert, and the waters of Marah began to stir. God spoke to Moses by showing him something that didn't seem to fit the problem. The problem was the water, but God showed Moses a tree. Has that ever happened to you? You have a problem, and you ask God for a solution, but He shows you a tree? He shows you a solution that doesn't seem to fit the problem. There are many people in our communities who are thirsting for an answer

to their heart's longings, and when God shows them the solution, it is not going to make sense to them. Do you want to know why? Well, it's because God is going to show them...YOU! You are the representative of God and His presence in this world that is so dry, and harsh, and bitter.

Roy Ice, from Faith For Today, also shares this very inspiring story that shows how each of us Seventh-day Adventists can share the secret solutions to the problems of our community:

He says, "Now, I have a really fascinating job. I get to interview celebrities and notable people to help the world know that the Adventist church cares about them, and that we want everyone to live their healthiest lives. One day in the TV studios, I had just finished interviewing one of the world's top voiceover actors. I would share his name, but I don't have his permission to share this private conversation. But nevertheless, I can share this: While we were shaking hands before he left, I thanked him for all of the laughs he had brought me, especially during my first two years of work right out of college. I told him of my 14-hour workdays, seven days a week. I shared how when I arrived home late at night that I would be deeply stressed by listening to all of the problems of the people that I had heard during my pastoral visitations. The one thing that really helped to snap me out of the weight of it all was to switch on the TV when I got home late at night and to watch the half-hour cartoon show that he helped to bring to life with his hilarious voices. I couldn't help but laugh all of my stress away. After that, I could have my evening devotions with a smile on my face and then drift off to a solid, peaceful night's sleep.

A huge smile curved his face and he exclaimed, "Wow! Thanks for sharing that. It feels really good to have made that difference for you! When did you graduate from college?"

I told him, "1993."

"1993?! How old are you?" he asked, obviously confused.

"I'm over 50," I said.

"What? I thought you were 35!"

"Yeah," I reassured him. "That's because I'm a member of the Blue Zone. I'm going to live 10 to 14 years longer than you."

"The Blue what?" He was really intrigued.

Of course, right then our next celebrity guest had entered the studio and it was time for us to begin filming the next episode of Lifestyle, so I said to him, "It's called the Blue Zones, and the people of these communities outlive their neighbors. There are 8 common practices that can bring longevity into your life as well. I've got nothing to push, but if you'd like to hear more, here is my personal cell phone number. Give me a call and I'll tell you all about it."

What a natural way that God opened up for me to talk with this man about our community of faith. People truly are curious about our God-given blessing of longevity. I'm not sure if all of you who are present have heard of the Blue Zones before, but I guarantee you're going to love what you're about to hear. In 2004, *New York Times* best-seller Dan Buettner teamed up with National Geographic and the world's best longevity researchers to identify pockets around the world where people live measurably longer, healthier, and happier. They called them "Blue Zones." In 2016, Roy Ice interviewed Dr. Buettner and Dr. Michel Poulain, two of the three Founders of the blue zones areas. In these blue zone areas, they found that people reach age 100 at rates 10 times greater than the average person in the United States. Do you want to know why they call them the Blue Zones? Well, Roy asked them, and they said that while they were charting the longevity data on a large map, they began to circle these zones with a marker that was within their reach. That marker just so happened to be a blue one! Had it been a red or green marker...voila! The name would be a different color! And now you know the rest of the story!

Perhaps you already know all about the Blue Zones. Maybe you've watched the new documentary on Netflix, and you've seen how the Seventh-day Adventist church is the only Blue Zone out of the five that is not geographically specific. The other four are in [Okinawa, Japan](#); [Ikaria, Greece](#); [Sardinia, Italy](#); and [Nicoya, Costa Rica](#). Some people have mistakenly said that Loma Linda, California is our Blue Zone, but that is not accurate. Loma Linda is merely the area of highest concentration of Seventh-day Adventists. The Adventist Blue Zone is actually the Seventh-day Adventist Church of North America. Everywhere there is an Adventist in the United States and Canada, they are part of the Blue Zones. And each of our churches are Blue Zone centers, because that is where we congregate.

God has gifted us with an extra decade of health, and I want to explain to you why you have received this gift, and how you can share it. But once again, it is probably best if we let our story in Exodus 15 continue to guide us here.

God had a blessing of health for the Children of Israel—one that would change their health status as well. Moses grabs an axe and begins chopping down a tree. The Israelites give sideways glances to one another. Surely their leader has gone mad. Perhaps he has succumbed to heat stroke? Maybe it was all the stress?

The trunk groans as the last fibers give way and the tree crashes into the water, sending a mist high into the scorching air. Moses, trembling with anticipation, drops to his knees once again and dips his hands into the waters, bringing it to his lips. The taste, oh, the taste! It was as if the very essence of grace was trickling down his throat, soothing the weariness of his journey and filling his heart with wonder. He couldn't help but smile. It was as if the bitterness that had plagued their journey had been transformed into a reminder of God's sweet faithfulness and provision.

A most wondrous transformation had occurred—the once-bitter waters turned sweet and pure. The Israelites watched in awe as the water sparkled like a precious gem, inviting them to

partake of its newfound sweetness. The transformation was as miraculous as it was beautiful, an echo of the Creator's touch that turns the bitter to sweet.

Word spread rapidly through the camp, and soon the entire community rushed to the shores of Marah. Laughter and joy replaced the earlier discontent as men, women, and children quenched their thirst from the miraculously healed waters. Laughter bubbled forth, and songs of praise flowed from lips that had only recently murmured discontent. They all cupped their hands to drink from this miracle, their faces radiant with gratitude. They marveled at the undeniable power of their God, who had turned their hardship into a testimony of His love.

Moses stood before them, his eyes shining with thankfulness. God moved upon Moses again, and God spoke this promise, as recorded in **Exodus 15:26: "If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you."**

Did you catch that? God has a promise for his people. He wants to bless you with protection from diseases and to be the God who heals you. Longevity researchers around the world are trying to figure out how it is that you are living a decade longer than your neighbors, and the Bible tells us all right here the reason why. You are diligently heeding God's voice and doing what is right in His sight. Many people may question why you do or do not do certain things, especially when it comes to your health.

THE BLESSINGS OF GOD ON THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST BLUE ZONE:

According to the longevity researchers, Adventists tend to follow 8 common practices which have been scientifically found to help you completely defy our national statistics.

I'll put the **8 Practices** right here on the screen:

- 1. Move Naturally -**
- 2. Purpose**
- 3. Down Shift**
- 4. 80% Rule**
- 5. Plant Slant**
- 6. Right Tribe**
- 7. Loved Ones First**
- 8. Belong**

Here is how they bring you Health Everlasting:

- **Move Naturally:**** The Adventists understand the importance of staying active, integrating movement into their daily lives. We walk, garden, and find joy in physical tasks. This simple practice can add a remarkable 3 to 4 years to your lives!
- **Purpose:**** A strong sense of purpose drives the Adventist community. Our faith fuels our desire to contribute and make a difference. Having a purpose has been linked to 2 to 3 additional years of life. It's like having bonus time to fulfill your dreams!

3. ****Downshift:**** Stress is a silent killer, but it should not be for us Adventists. We are called to practice relaxation by embracing prayer, and we engage in meaningful conversations, which adds a peaceful 2 to 3 years to their journey. I'm going to pause on this Blue Zone practice for a moment, because this is the one that threatens our Blue Zone status the most at this time. All of the Blue Zones are teetering on the edge of losing their status for their own reasons—The Okinawa, Japan Blue Zone is in danger today because of furniture. That's right, FURNITURE! The young people are purchasing furniture and sitting on it. The older generations sat on the floor, and would get up and down as many as 100 times a day. That really helps to build and keep their core strength. But furniture is making the younger generation less fit. And because of that, they may lose their status within this generation.

For the Adventist Blue Zone, we have a different enemy: Never ending stress. The reality is that every single one of us needs to figure out how to manage our ongoing stress. In ancient times, when our ancestors like Abraham, Moses, and David lived more nomadically, stress to them was not ongoing. It was always in short bursts of stress. A lion or a tiger was close by, and they had to run away. In our modern times, you undoubtedly face multiple demands each day, such as taking on a huge workload, paying bills with limited funds, and taking care of your family. Your body treats these so-called minor hassles as threats. As a result you may feel as if you're constantly under attack.

Research from the Mayo Clinic has revealed what happens in this ongoing stressful condition. They say that your hypothalamus, a tiny region at your brain's base, sets off an alarm system in your body. Through a combination of nerve and hormonal signals, this system prompts your adrenal glands, located atop your kidneys, to release a surge of hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol.

Adrenaline increases your heart rate, elevates your blood pressure and boosts energy supplies. Cortisol, the primary stress hormone, increases sugars (glucose) in the bloodstream, enhances your brain's use of glucose and increases the availability of substances that repair tissues. Sounds like good things, doesn't it? Well it's not. And here's why:

Cortisol also curbs functions that would be nonessential or detrimental in a fight-or-flight situation. It alters your immune system responses and suppresses your digestive system, the reproductive system and growth processes. This complex natural alarm system also communicates with the brain regions that control mood, motivation and fear.

The long-term activation of the stress-response system and the overexposure to cortisol and other stress hormones that follows can disrupt almost all your body's processes. This puts you at increased risk of many health problems, including:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Digestive problems
- Headaches
- Heart disease
- Sleep problems
- Weight gain
- Memory and concentration impairment

That's why it's so important to learn healthy ways to cope with your life stressors. So take a moment and seriously make a plan for what you are going to start doing right now to implement Down Shifting into your daily routine. Our system? We pray. You serve a God who cares just as much or even more than you do about all the things that are causing you stress. Jesus says in **Matthew 11:29-30**, **“²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.**

It's true. You don't have to carry around your stress. Give it all to God in prayer and find rest for your soul.

4. ****80% Rule:**** The Adventists follow an age-old adage of eating mindfully and stopping at 80% full. This practice not only nourishes our bodies but also adds a delectable 2 to 3 years to our lifespan.
5. ****Plant Slant:**** Our diet is predominantly plant-based, rich in nutrients and antioxidants. This choice grants us an impressive 4 to 5 years of added vitality. What you put on your plate can truly determine the years in your calendar!
6. ****Belong:**** Community, faith, and connections are paramount for us. Did you know that the act of going to a religious service 4 times a month can add between 7 to 14 years to a person's life? That's right! Inviting your friends and neighbors to church is one of the best things you can do for their longevity. Talk about a great sales pitch! “You want to enjoy seeing your great grandkids? Come with me to church!”
7. ****Loved Ones First:**** Putting family and relationships first is non-negotiable for the Adventists. This practice has blessed us with an astonishing 4 to 6 more years of cherished time with our loved ones.
8. ****Right Tribe:**** Surrounding yourself with positive, like-minded individuals is a cornerstone of Adventist living. This circle of influence gifts us an awe-inspiring 3 to 5 years of shared growth and mutual empowerment.

These are things that many of you do naturally, without even thinking about it, because it has become a way of life for you. But I have some exciting good news for each and every one of you today. God wants to share this blessing of health everlasting with those who live around us as well.

A few months ago on *Faith For Today's* TV show, *LIFESTYLE with Roy Ice*, he interviewed the television actor, William Shatner. Many people recognize him from his early work as Star Trek's captain of the Enterprise, James T. Kirk. He had just turned 92 years old the week before Roy

interviewed him, and just over a year before he had broken the age record by being the oldest man to ever travel to space.

He told Roy Ice that the toughest thing about going on that rocket ride was the stairs. That's right, they made him walk up 11 flights of stairs to get up to the crew capsule. Some of you are saying, "11 flights of stairs? That's nothing! I could do 12!" And I applaud you, because you are a true representation of our Blue Zone. But let me share with you something that will excite you even more: The blessing of health everlasting that God has given to us for following His prescribed paths is something that can bless others as well with their longevity. Just like the blessing that God gave to Abraham, our blessing is that we would BE a blessing to the nations around us.

Here's how: Several towns have plugged our practices into their communities and have had shocking results. In **Albert Lea, MN**, it worked: after just one year, participants added an estimated 2.9 years to their average lifespan while healthcare claims for city workers dropped 49 percent. Walter Willett from Harvard called the results "stunning." In **Beach Cities, CA**, childhood obesity declined by 50%, smoking declined by 17%, and stress went down by 8%. **Fort Worth, TX** transformed itself from one of the unhealthiest cities in the nation—it used to rank way down at the bottom, as 185th out of 190, but this city's well-being rank rocketed up to 58th in a very short amount of time.

God has not only gifted us more time, He has given us the gift of GIVING OTHERS more time as well. What a gift we have to share! May we all share this gift of health everlasting with everyone we meet, until Jesus comes and takes us home to be with him forever and ever!