

MINISTRY

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Celebrating 75 Years of
Ministry Magazine

START A SERMON RESOURCE GROUP:

*Unleash Your
Congregation's
Creativity*

SERMON

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THE MARCH *MINISTRY* WAS BY TURNS STIMULATING AND FRUSTRATING. STIMULATING BECAUSE OF AN OPENNESS TO NEW APPROACHES. FRUSTRATING BECAUSE OF CERTAIN ASSUMPTIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS.

I would like to commend you on the wonderful articles that the team from the Trans-European Division wrote for the March copy of *Ministry*. I am an Anglican minister in New Zealand and have been reading the March copy. What gained my attention was the fact that you were dealing with the same issue that my study leave this year is focusing on, and I will be in the United Kingdom in June looking at some English initiatives of thinking and working "outside the box."

I prayerfully wish you well in your endeavors for the Gospel of Christ.

—Richard Dyer, Richmond, Nelson, New Zealand.

The article entitled "Understanding Secular Minds: A Perspective on Life Development," written by Bertil Wiklander, touches my desire to awake my miserable condition of spiritual life development.

In some occasions in our Christian life, we fail to mold a special involvement in which as a church member, we need a solemn relational link to our Creator. I suppose this comes by our own personal heart devotion to our Lord. Then, by this power . . . we can tenderly offer our willing support, attention, and security to secular people who are diffident and have special needs. Though their spiritual growth may be slow, we can help their understanding through the tools of warmth and love,

thus by all means directing their hearts and minds away from merely temporal and intellectual ideologies.

—Estrella A. Jordan, Prilly, Switzerland.

The March *Ministry* was by turns stimulating and frustrating. Stimulating because of an openness to new approaches. Frustrating because of certain assumptions and their implications. Your editorial indicates an awareness of this.

It is obvious our church needs to change, I doubt this is an issue for any serious observer. The vital question concerns the nature and kind of change needed?

Any reading of history bears out the fact that though times change, human nature does not change. Postmodern man is no different from New Testament, Medieval, Renaissance, Reformation, and secular man. Mankind, however you label it, is sinful, alienated from God, unspiritual, hostile to God's law, and in need of redemption. Even a cursory reading of the New Testament makes this fact abundantly clear . . .

The Divine antidote to human sin comes from Jesus Himself. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto myself." In meeting human sin and human needs, the disciples accepted this reality—which is prepositional as well as revealed truth—and set before men and women Christ in all His beauty and

loveliness. Neither Jesus nor the disciples met sinful man on his terms. They did not accompany themselves to human need at the expense of truth, or the Gospel of salvation.

The Gospel is prepositional truth and contemporary denial of it neither moderates nor nullifies it. There is no alternative method or way of receiving or understanding the Gospel except in propositional terms. Apart from the revealed truth of Scripture, there is only darkness. Human wisdom has not and cannot originate the truth that leads to a knowledge of God and salvation. People need to hear the whole Gospel, not some part that is convenient. We cannot remove the cross from the sinner's path.

It was the *message*, not the *method*, that drove the New Testament mission. How can we imagine it could be otherwise with the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

The message is everything. Methods have usefulness only as they serve the message. To have it otherwise is to render the message impotent.

In the end times—accepting we are in them—we have to face the issue without flinching—is our agenda set by contemporary culture or by the express purposes of God laid out in the Great Commission and for Seventh-day Adventists reinforced by the inspired writings of Ellen White?

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If you're receiving *Ministry* bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 *Ministry* has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.

"Stay Sammy, and learn to preach!"

There's a telling story of the day John Wesley walked through London's fish market with a young fellow aspiring to be a minister. When Wesley's friend winced at the crass language of the market and plainly wanted to flee the place, Wesley said, "Stay Sammy, and learn to preach!"¹

Among many things, this little story raises a line of connected, challenging questions: Have ministers in general become so sanitized and effectively sequestered, that the resulting professional seclusion is a significant cause for the curse of mediocrity we wrestle to overcome in the pulpits of our churches?

On the positive side, is it any wonder that Jesus, all transcendence aside for a moment, was such a great preacher? He was consistently and unabashedly incarnate where the anger, the fear, the sorrow, the longing, the emptiness, and the loneliness was most desperate. And people sensed this when He walked with them, and they knew it when He preached.

He ventured outside the customary and the comfortable haunts of religiosity to the point that His staid counterparts (present in every generation) seriously suspected Him (Luke 15:1-3, etc.). But look at their preaching in contrast to His! The rank and file were "amazed" at how Jesus taught, and in open comparison with the conventional clerics of the day (Mark 1:22, NIV).

Was this only because people sensed the divine flashing through the human? Or was His authoritative preaching partly due to the inner knowledge He had of those He sought to reach (take a more far-reaching look at John 2:24, 25), and His ability to understand and identify with them so completely?

WILL EVA



What has our "churchliness" done to us and to our preaching? Are we, in this sense, too religiously sterilized, too sequestered from life's coarseness to actually know deeply what it feels like to live with incessant fear and despair? Is it really just in order to eschew sin that we clergy sometimes remain as aloof as we do? What does such detachment really say about our faith?

Effectiveness in the pulpit, and perhaps especially in evangelistic preaching, always toils up the Via Dolorosa of the most tangible realities of human need. Then it positions itself right where the vertical post of the cross, pointing upward to God, intersects the horizontal bar of human woe.

The truth is that all my life I've sincerely and intentionally studied to know the vertical but not nearly so much the horizontal; at least not in the way Jesus or John Wesley did. More than ever before, it seems to me that when our ministerial hands are nailed to each end of that horizontal beam; that is, when we actually allow ourselves to be fully exposed to the deep yearnings of the human heart, our own included, along with its cavernous longings, its immense capacity for sorrow and fear, and its sometimes soulful, sometimes ruinous

search for contentment. . . . Then we are learning to preach in ways we could never otherwise do it.

That's when some of the doors that have been closed to our preaching will open, at least a crack, and people will want to listen, and they'll also want to hear. Because almost everyone will go out of his or her way to engage with a person whom they sense loves and cares for them enough to understand them deeply, and who identifies with them despite their inadequacies.

Of course the vertical beam of the cross is primary. By design, and in the light of the physics of crosses, the vertical must hold up the horizontal. It's the vertical, the Godward, that charges preaching with a divine power to penetrate and recreate; a thing which nothing that is merely human can ever do.

But there's a dynamic synergy where the two bars meet. Like Jacob we ministers of the gospel wrestle not only with God, but with men. And this dual quality of wrestling produces a new name, a new blessing and a new power with both (Gen. 32:28, NIV). It's almost as though the wrestling must be with both, or the power will be with neither.

Thus, when I enter the cloister of sermon preparation, I must do it like Jacob, with my whole soul, and no holds barred. For there I am to focus not only upon the need to connect with God, but also upon my need to deeply connect with the people I've been summoned to speak with.

When I'm to preach, it's imperative, I'd say, that I start by thanking God first of all that at my core I am indeed like all other men, rather than that I'm not like them (Luke 18:11). Sermon preparation

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Start a sermon resource group: Unleash your congregation's creativity

Derek J. Morris



Derek J. Morris is senior pastor of the Calimesa Seventh-day Adventist Church in Calimesa, California.

Ever wonder about the effectiveness of your weekly sermon? Of course! Would you like some help? Try unleashing the creative energies of your congregation.

Here's an idea: use a sermon resource group.

I first learned of this strategy from John R.W. Stott, in his book *Between Two Worlds*.¹

Stott describes the pre-sermon dialogue as follows: "The discussion was invariably lively, and on a number of occasions I found myself sitting back and listening to the debate as it developed between different opinions. Eavesdropping in this way proved extremely stimulating and enlightening."² "I would tend to ask them questions because I knew, roughly speaking, how I was going to handle the topic. And I would then sit back and listen to them as they debated the answer."³

The diverse composition of these sermon resource groups added richness to Stott's preaching, as he prepared his series, *Issues Facing Britain*. When thrashing out the topic of work and unemployment, Stott notes that the members of the sermon resource group "helped me to feel what they felt—the shock, the rejection, the hurt, the humiliation, and the sense of helplessness, which are all caused by unemployment."⁴ He notes that "the whole experience was creative, as we struggled to relate biblical principles and contemporary contexts to one another."⁵

I recently experimented with this strategy for preparing relevant biblical sermons on Christianity in the Marketplace.⁶ The series consisted of four sermons: "Being Christian in the Classroom," "Being Christian in the Care-Giving Professions," "Being Christian in Business," and "Being Christian at Home." In preparation for each of these sermons, I met with a sermon resource group on the Tuesday evening prior to the preaching of the sermon.

Being Christian in the classroom

There were five individuals in the first resource group, discussing being Christian in the classroom: a university ethics professor, a public high school English teacher, an elementary school teacher, a university sophomore, and an academy sophomore.

We met for 75 minutes and the results were amazing. I had learned from Stott that my primary purpose in that session was to listen. It was immediately apparent that many members of the resource group had experienced times when teachers were not Christian in the classroom.

Nadine, the elementary school teacher, shared a troubling story about a traumatic event that she experienced in eighth grade. Her teacher would slam a wooden yardstick on his desk, just to watch the students jump. On one occasion, he marched into the classroom with a roll of tape with which he wrapped an unsuspecting student's hands and book to the student's desk. Next, he proceeded to wrap tape around the student's head. Then the teacher stood back and laughed.

As Nadine related this experience to the resource group, I noticed the expressions of shock on their faces. This was a dramatic example of not being Christian in the classroom.

I used this story in the sermon that week, asking Nadine to share it personally. The congregation was obviously engrossed as I walked over to Nadine with a roving microphone, and gave her the opportunity to share her experience.

Another powerful illustration came from the high school English teacher. Monte told the group of a letter from a student whose life was impacted by his teaching. This story was a powerful, positive example of being Christian in the classroom. Other resource group members asked him to bring the letter to church.

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Monte told his experience at the close of the sermon. The congregation was palpably moved as Monte read the letter from a public high school student whose life had been transformed by a teacher who was Christian in the classroom.

Sixty-one teachers came forward at the end of the sermon for a prayer of blessing. They responded to the challenge to be Christian in the classroom, to teach with passion and to treat their students with compassion. Before the church service was over, people were volunteering to serve on remaining sermon resource groups for the series.

A teacher, whose life had been profoundly impacted by the sermon, sent me an email, suggesting her husband's name for the sermon on "Being Christian in Business." I realized that this strategy was unleashing the creative energies of the congregation.

Being Christian in care giving

The second sermon resource group met the following Tuesday evening. They discussed on "Being Christian in the Care-Giving Professions." I could sense the energy in the group. The group consisted of a physician, three nurses, a school counselor, and the coordinator of spiritual care for nurses at a Christian hospital.

Again, my primary self-assignment was to listen. Time passed quickly as I heard stories of care-givers driving home in tears, overwhelmed by the tidal wave of human need that seemed to engulf them.

Someone in the group referred to Mark 6 where Jesus and His disciples were moved by the needs of people. In that story we found both a vivid description of the problem and a divinely inspired solution: Christian care-givers must allow Jesus to care for them if they are to have anything to offer to a needy world.

Next, they must open themselves to Christ, allowing Him to direct them regarding the when and how of caring for others. Then they can follow the way of Jesus and care unconditionally. The Christian care-givers in the congregation were challenged to care for others as Jesus cares for them.

Being Christian in business

By the third week, teachers and care-givers who had been out of town were asking for copies of "their" sermon. Something wonderful was taking place.

The third sermon resource group addressed the challenge of "Being Christian in Business." This group consisted of a businessman who operated a small family owned auto transmission shop, an entrepreneur with graduate training in business who operated four businesses, a computer consultant who had experience in several business settings, a dentist's wife who assisted in the management of her husband's practice, and finally, the owner/manager of a travel agency.

The group spent a lot of time discussing the challenges of being Christian in business. At the end of the 75-minute session, I felt rather bewildered. This experience reminded

me that the sermon resource group members don't write the sermon for you. The group serves only as a catalyst, raising the challenges and opportunities of the marketplace in which they are.

After a time of prayerful reflection on my session with this sermon resource group, I was led to the narrative in Luke 19, which records the encounter of Jesus with a self-serving secular capitalist named Zacchaeus. I discovered two significant changes that occurred in his life as a result of the encounter with Jesus.

Zacchaeus experienced a change of attitude and a change of ethics. His attitude changed toward his business. No longer was he obsessed with money, but rather with the opportunity to serve. Instead of taking advantage of his clients, he sought to treat them as he would like to be treated.

At the end of the service, it was a beautiful sight to watch a variety of business people respond to the invitation to honor Jesus Christ in their business.

Being Christian at home

The final sermon in the series on Christianity in the Marketplace dealt with "Being Christian at Home."

Seven individuals joined me on Tuesday evening to make up this sermon resource group. Their ages ranged from a young mother in her early thirties to a grandmother in her late sixties. As I listened to the group interact, it became apparent that being Christian at home was the greatest challenge of all.

Several group members shared painful stories of hypocrisy at home, where private behavior contradicted public profession. There were tears in one group member's eyes as she shared the story of being abused by her father, a professed Christian and church member. As I looked around, I noticed tears in the eyes of other members of the group. We realized that this was a story that needed to be told as part of the sermon.

As you may know, the word "hyp-

ocrite" comes from a word describing the ancient Greek plays. The actor who concealed his true identity behind a mask was called a *hypocrite*. One of the members of the sermon resource group purchased a masquerade mask and at various times during the sermon, when I spoke about hypocrisy, I covered my face with the mask.

I shared three steps for avoiding hypocrisy and manifesting a Christian spirit at home: Admit that you are a sinner in constant need of God's grace; extend forgiveness to others just as God has forgiven you; and recognize together the need to grow in grace.

The sermon concluded with a testimony by another member of the sermon resource group. Nancy shared her experience of becoming friends with a couple who were a wonderful example of being Christian at home.

When this couple had children, Nancy worked as their baby sitter. At one point, Nancy said to a family member, "If Len had a younger brother, I'd marry him!" Well, Nancy is now married to Len's younger brother Larry! The congregation laughed as Nancy shared the end of her story. The lesson was clear. While hypocrisy does serious damage at home, being Christian at home results in great blessings.

Using the sermon resource group

I found this experiment with a sermon resource group an exhilarating experience. The group could be utilized in a variety of ways.

Both my series, Christianity in the Marketplace and Stott's Issues Facing Britain, were topical in nature. A sermon resource group would also be helpful when preaching an expository series. In this setting, the composition of the group might not change each week, but rather group members might serve for the duration of a series.

Resource group members could be given the preaching passage to study

for the upcoming sermon. In the group meeting, they could then discuss questions that arise from a study of the text. What does the text mean? How does it apply to my life today? Personal experiences and stories might emerge that shed light on the biblical concept under discussion.

The use of a sermon resource group as a strategy for the preparation of relevant biblical sermons is not limited to large congregations. Stott says: "I am very reluctant to concede that even the small inner-city church and its hard-pressed pastor can manage nothing. If a carefully considered sermon on a current issue is impossible quarterly, is it really impossible annually? And if a congregation cannot produce from its own membership mature Christians who are specialists in their field, there must surely be some within reach who belong to other churches, but who would be willing to contribute their expertise to an occasional discussion group, and would even be surprised and gratified to be asked to do so."

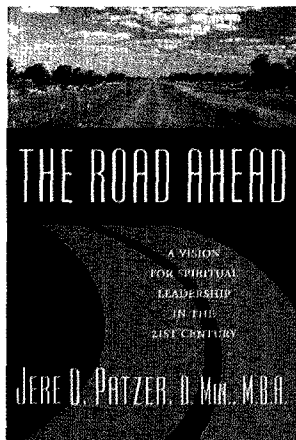
A sermon resource group is by no means a crutch for lazy or careless preachers. The group will not write the sermon for the pastor. This

process does not do away with the need for careful exegesis. However, I am convinced that the use of a sermon resource group will unleash the creative energies of your congregation, and it will help significantly in bringing a pastor's sermons to life.

According to Stott, "It is not just that the laity ask the questions and we answer them, since we too have to ask our questions for them to answer. It is rather that, by asking each other questions, we from the biblical perspective and they from the contemporary, we may together discern what answers should be given if the Word is to be contextualized in the world."⁷ ■

- 1 John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1982).
- 2 Stott, 199.
- 3 Interview with John R.W. Stott, August 12, 1996, by Derek J. Morris. Cited in *Listening to the Listener: Audience Feedback as a Resource for Relevant Biblical Preaching*. D.Min. thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1998, 111.
- 4 Stott, 199.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Sermon manuscripts and audio files are available on the Calimesa SDA Church Web site at <www.calimesasda.com>.
- 7 Stott, 200, 201.

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Salvation in Jesus: The experience

Seventh-day Adventist Statement

of Faith #10: "In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit, we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, as Substitute and Example. This faith which receives salvation comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (2 Cor. 5:17-21; John 3:16; Gal. 1:4; 4:4-7; Titus 3:3-7; John 16:8; Gal. 3:13, 14; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; Rom. 10:17; Luke 17:5; Mark 9:23, 24; Eph. 2:5-10; Rom. 3:21-26; Col. 1:13, 14; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:26; John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:23; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 8:7-12; Ezek. 36:25-27; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rom. 8:1-4; 5:6-10.)"

The salvation it is our joy to experience is made possible through relationship with Jesus Christ. The New Testament proclaims that by faith and baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3) believers come to be "in Christ." This formula, occurring over 160 times in Paul's writings, can lay claim to being the central theological datum in Paul's thought, with other key soteriological ideas finding their spiritual focus in the experience of being "in Christ."

Illustrative of this is Ephesians 1:1-14, where, in the short span of just 14 verses, the "in Christ" idea occurs a surprising 11 times as the pivotal realities of the salvation theme are being

IVAN T. BLAZEN



expressed. Paul's thought is introduced in verse 3 where he declares that God is worthy of praise because He "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing."

Following this, in one long sentence, Paul presents a Niagara flow of ideas, with blessing after blessing cascading downward in torrential power until the climactic deluge occurs in verse 14 with mention of the future inheritance of the saints which, like the preceding blessings, happens "to the glory of God" (verses 6, 12, 14).

What meaning does "in Christ" bear? An examination of all the uses of the phrase indicates that it refers to a personal connection with Christ and not just to something that is legally true. It is better exemplified in terms of a marriage relationship than of a legal status arising from the decision of a court, even God's court.

It is an experiential reality involving the most intimate union possible between the believer and the risen Christ. Because the believer is united with the living Lord through the indwelling of His Spirit (the New Testament contains many parallels between what we experience in Christ and in the Spirit), he or she is made a part of the saving events of Christ's death and resurrection and included in the body of Christ, the church.

As a result, the believer receives all

the blessings of salvation that flow from Christ and exist in the fellowship of believers.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, when anyone is in Christ, it is not merely that he or she personally becomes a new creation, but they become part of God's new creation. The individual is included in a reality larger than themselves. The new creation, expected by Jews only at the end of time, is an already existent reality in the here and now, though to be revealed fully at the return of Christ.

When entry into the new creation takes place through union with the risen Christ, everything old passes away, and all becomes new. In this experience we receive new lenses and begin to see others as those for whom Christ died and rose, instead of by the world's standards of judgment (verses 14-16).

Justification and righteousness

There are many terms for salvation. Drawn from various domains or experiences of human life, they present diverse nuances of the meaning of salvation as it is found in Christ. Among these are the very significant terms *justification* and *righteousness*. Though not always evident to English readers of the New Testament, these terms are intimately related.

They both begin with the same Greek root *dik*, which has the sense of "rightness." It would be better, therefore, to translate the Greek word behind *justification* with the same English root. I propose "rightification" to match the word *righteousness*. To be "rightified" (justified) is to possess the gift of righteousness.

The word *righteousness* has its domain in the covenant world of Israel. It is a term of relationship and contains within it the idea of faithfulness or fidelity

ty. The inner connection between righteousness and faithfulness is seen in Romans 3 when, in closely knit logic, God's faithfulness (verse 3) alternates with His righteousness (verse 5).

God is righteous in that He is faithful to His covenant promise to be with His people, to sustain them, and to protect them from enemies without and within. Humans are righteous when, in faithfulness to God, they conform to the norms and claims inherent in the covenant relationship with Him.

This is what Habakkuk 2:4 speaks of when it says that the righteous or just person (one in a covenant relationship with God) shall live by (as a result of) faith, meaning faithfulness (remaining loyal to God in times of adversity).

However, humans have sinned and broken the covenant. The question that arises then is whether human unfaithfulness cancels the faithfulness of God. Paul answers forcefully, "Certainly not!" and goes on to say that God will prove to be

true to His covenant word even when we have not been true to ours (Rom. 3:3-4).

This means that God's faithfulness entails grace. This accords with the picture Paul paints in Romans 1:18-3:26. He shows that the Gentile world is guilty of idolatry and immorality, and the Jewish world of self-righteous judgmentalism and hypocrisy. Why? Because there is no fear of God before their eyes (3:18).

There follows a judgment scene in which every mouth is stopped, all stand guilty before God, and there is no possibility of saving ourselves by works of law (3:19, 20). We, the human race, await the execution of God's just sentence.

Then suddenly the word "but" appears. If the rest of Romans, after the "but," was torn out, and all we had left, following the depiction of human sin and divine judgment, was the word "but," would we not realize anyway that help was on the way, and that the

reality of sin and judgment was going to be reversed? "But" turns things around to go in the opposite direction.

A personal illustration

Through personal experience I have learned the meaning of "but." My first wife, after mastectomies for breast cancer, had surgery to take out a patch from her pericardium because it kept filling with fluid. The patch would halt the fluid problem so that the tissue could be examined to see what was causing the fluid buildup.

I was in the hospital waiting room soberly awaiting the surgeon's report. Finally he came through the door and announced, "The surgery is over and, to our observation, the tissue looked good." A feeling of warmth and joy swept through my body. Then the surgeon said, "But—." He didn't have to say another word. I knew my wife was going to die. It only took two days when, in an act of "severe mercy," God

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let her cancer-ridden body rest in peace.

Though the human "but" often turns our hopes into despair, the divine "but" turns our despair into hope. As Paul continues his presentation in Romans 3:21-26, he announces that quite apart from the law there is a righteousness that comes from God and depends on faith rather than works of law. It is a righteousness which is centered in the cross of Christ where God, in His faithfulness to us, exhibits His saving grace by offering His Son, an extension of Himself, in sacrifice.

IT IS AN EXPERIENTIAL REALITY INVOLVING THE MOST INTIMATE UNION POSSIBLE BETWEEN THE BELIEVER AND THE RISEN CHRIST.

In Christ, God bears the pain of our sin and offers us the pardon.

Another way of saying this is that He justifies or "rightifies" us, as declared in Romans 3:24. Justification has a number of facets which can be quickly summarized from concepts in Romans. It means, in harmony with the covenant idea, to be placed in a new and right relationship to God, to have God's righteousness reckoned to us (4:6), to be acquitted instead of condemned by the divine Judge (5:18), to be forgiven by the heavenly Father, an event in which our sins are covered and not counted (4:7, 8; cf. 2 Cor. 5:19). It further includes the exchange of lordships from sin to Christ, which leads to sanctification (Rom. 6) and the present reception of eschatological life (4:17 and 5:18). Finally, justification means entrée into the community and unity of believers, where ethnic, social, and gender distinctions do not count (Gal. 3:28, the conclusion of the theme of justification in the entire chapter).

Reconciliation and adoption

In correlation with justification is reconciliation, which comes from the domain of war (Rom. 5:9 in parallel

with 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-21), and adoption, which derives from the area of family (Rom. 8:15, 16; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5).

The concept of reconciliation means that the warfare and alienation between us and God is over. We now have peace with God (Rom. 5:1, 10).

Years ago I read the story of a soldier left in the jungles of New Guinea who continued to prepare himself for battle every day because he did not know that World War II was over. He needed the good news of peace. In an ultimate

sense that is what we have in the gospel.

As to the term *adoption*, Ephesians 1:5 asserts that God adopted us "for himself." Incredibly, God wanted us to belong to Himself as His children. Consequently, believers can exclaim: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:11, RSV). Our exclamation corresponds to the exclamation of the Spirit that we are God's children (Gal. 5:6; Rom. 8:16). We have the right to be called this, for we were born not of the will of man but of God (John 1:12, 13).

Our adoption as God's children has a far horizon. It will be complete when, at the culmination of all things, our mortal bodies are redeemed (Rom. 8:23), our joint heirship with Christ is fulfilled (Rom. 8:17), and our likeness to Christ is realized (1 John 3:2).

Assurance of final salvation and eternal life

Will present justification, reconciliation, and adoption be sufficient to carry the person of faith all the way to and through the final judgment? A resounding "Yes" is warranted by Scripture. Believers may know that "he who

began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6, RSV).

Romans 5:1-11 develops a meaningful logic of assurance. Paul argues that we who have been justified may in the present have peace, constant access to grace, joy, and hope for future glorification (verses 1, 2). This hope will not let us down because it is grounded in the gift of God's love, which has flooded our hearts through the Holy Spirit (verse 5). Present realities guarantee future hopes.

And what is the content of this love which guarantees future glorification? It is that, in contrast to humans who *might* surrender their lives for a *good* person (verse 7), God has already given His Son's life for the morally weak and ungodly, for sinners, those at enmity with Him (verses 6, 8, 10).

The conclusion is that if God was willing to do what is hardest—give His Son to *die* for such as these, how much more, now that we are reconciled and friends of God, shall the risen Christ do what is easiest—*live* to save us from the ultimate wrath of God (9, 10)? He intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34) and assures us that nothing will be able to separate us from His love (8:37, 38).

Complementing Paul's message is John's of eternal life through believing. This life is an already present reality (John 20:30, 31; 3:36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40, 47-51, 57, 58; 10:27-30; 1 John 5:9-13). Furthermore, believers do not come into a judgment of condemnation, but have already passed from death to life (John 5:24). As recipients of eternal life, they are totally secure in the hand of Christ which is in the hand of the Father (John 10:29, 30). Finally, John writes to us that we may *know* that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Sanctification

The family of words associated with sanctification, including such terms as *sanctify*, *saint*, *holiness*, and *holy*, occurs literally hundreds of times in Scripture. Further, believers are called to be holy, as their Lord is holy (Lev. 19:2), and are admonished to pursue the "holiness without which no one will see the Lord"

(Heb. 12:14, RSV). Clearly, by virtue of frequency and content, sanctification is seen to be a primary rather than secondary biblical concept, not taking a back seat to other concepts such as justification. However, if sanctification referred only to human self-effort, was unrelated to relationship with God and disconnected from faith in Christ, it would be worse than secondary—it would be impossible. Such is not the case.

At its root sanctification refers to being set apart or separated; being different from the common. In Scripture it has two major aspects, the first relational, the second moral. As to the relational, God is holy within Himself and hence is called the "Holy One" (Isa. 10:17; Ps. 71:22, RSV). As such He is incomparable, unique, and transcendent. All else, whether people, times, places, objects, or institutions, are holy only in a derivative sense by virtue of appointment by Him and relation to Him.

In terms of humans, their sanctification is relational before it is moral. They are sanctified in that God has separated them from the world to belong to Him as His people.

The relational significance of sanctification, which is foundational to all moral development, can be seen in 1 Corinthians 1:2. Notwithstanding the many serious moral problems the Corinthians had, Paul addresses them as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (RSV).

The perfect tense in the Greek word for "sanctified" refers to completed action which has continuing results. Thus, in view of their relation to Christ, the Corinthians had already been sanctified, hence were already saints. Because the words *sanctification* and *saint* are built on the identical Greek root, it would be accurate to translate "santification" instead of "sanctification."

Understood relationally, in terms of becoming God's people, sanctification is the work of a moment rather than a lifetime. It is definitive, done, by God's action alone. This is corroborated by 1 Corinthians 6:11 which places washing, sanctification, and justification by

God in the past. And because sanctification is a relational word here, as is justification, Paul could appropriately place it before the word *justification*.

Sanctification as a definitive event of the past is illustrated by a number of other texts: Hebrews 10:10, 29; Ephesians 5:25, 26; Acts 20:32. In Acts 26:28, the past sanctification of the believer is said to be by faith. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 past sanctification by the Spirit and belief (faith) in the truth are coordinated. Accomplished sanctification is also found in 1 Peter 1:2 where it is the precondition for future obedience to Christ.

All this ties in with the second aspect of sanctification: its application to the moral realm. From the moment we are set apart for Christ to the time we come to fully reflect Christ (1 John 3:2), sanctification is a progressive process of moral change by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Out of the root of sanctification as belonging, emerges sanctification as becoming. The already of God's consecrating action leads to the present of God's conforming activity. God's will for believers is that they live every day in a way which conforms to and expresses sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3).

As a corollary of being baptized into union with Christ, the believer is enabled to walk in "newness of life" (Rom. 6:3, 4, RSV) and is transformed by degrees into the glorious image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). The sanctification of God's people is a continual movement forward, a journey without end. There is fulfillment, but not finality.

One may already be living to please God, exemplifying love itself, but is to do so more and more (1 Thess. 4:2, 9, 10, 12). One virtue is to succeed another as advancement is made into the future (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Christian love is at the heart of the moral reality of sanctification. In 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13, love for all is correlated with our hearts being established in holiness. And this love is to abound with knowledge and discernment so that the excellent may be approved, purity achieved, and a filling

with the fruits of righteousness realized (Phil. 1:9). This discernment is the product of the mind's transformation, which alone enables the believer to discover what the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God is (Rom. 12:2).

Thus, the sanctified life involves a continual quest to learn what pleases God in all the circumstances of life (Eph. 5:8, 9; 1 Thess. 4:1). This is sanctification's standard, and it calls us to ever deepening moral insight and fulfillment.

Consummation

Transformed life in the kingdom of heaven comes at the far end of salvation history when Jesus returns for His own (John 14:1-3).

As my wife, two days after her surgery, was emerging from her anesthetic and blurred consciousness, she asked her nurse, a Seventh-day Adventist, what day it was. The nurse responded, "It is the Sabbath." My wife's reply, her last words in this life, was, "Oh, Sabbaths will be nice in heaven."

Indeed! Until that time, and bearing upon the reality of our suffering and grief, we are called to wait patiently for the fulfillment of our hope (Rom. 8:25). A moving inscription I once saw on a gravestone embodies the spirit of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, that great passage on Jesus' return to gather the dead and the living to Himself: "Go home dear friends, dry your tears, we must wait here till Christ appears." In response to Jesus' message, "Surely I am coming soon," we may say with the revelator, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20, RSV).

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away'" (Rev. 21:3, 4). ■

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Preaching with a sense of direction

Peter Bath



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We are called, as preachers of the gospel, to redeem the time (Eph. 5:15-17). Not the past or the future but the present.

In seeking to accomplish this task, we need to consider the time in which we live. The following North American-based information appears in recent publications from Barna Research Group. It helps us to understand the challenges we face:

- ◆ Forty-one percent of the people in your church each week have yet to actually accept Christ as their Savior.
- ◆ Each year, one in every seven will change their customary place of worship.
- ◆ One in every six has a group of churches they attend on a rotating basis.
- ◆ After the terrorist attacks in America, attendance surged in churches. People went for comfort and hope but left within six months for lack of substance and conviction.
- ◆ Only 68 percent of North Americans believe in an all knowing, powerful, loving God.
- ◆ The most common source of principles upon which to base ethical behavior: feelings—25 percent; what parents taught—14 percent; the Bible—13 percent.
- ◆ Sixty-six percent of regular church attendees cannot explain what worship is about.
- ◆ Fifty percent of regular church attendees indicate that they have not experienced or

encountered God in worship in the last year.¹

Welcome to the postmodern world where truth in any objective absolute sense tends not to be accepted, rather questioned and dismissed. All is gray; all is relative, and for many there is no objective authority.

This is the time we are called to redeem. We are called to establish a direction, to chart a reliable, believable course.

True north

An exercise I have often used to illustrate the challenge of knowing and staying a worthy course is to ask my congregation, board, or committee to: (1) close their eyes, (2) raise their right arms, and (3) at the count of three, point in the direction of north.

Invariably there is great difference of opinion. Considering the many different versions of north I invite them to look around and consider the different perspectives. I then ask them if they would like to vote on which direction is north? Should we take an average opinion and then define north for ourselves, as a group, or should each one be content with his or her own view of which direction is north?

To help the process, I point to the north that is defined by the compass I have brought along for the sake of the illustration. This demonstrates that true north is not a matter to be debated but to be observed and incorporated into life. North is not determined by the sum of our opinions, nor is its direction open to debate, meaningful as it may be considered to be.

Magnetic north simply is. It is a fact that exists outside of our knowledge. That is, we didn't create it and it is the same all the time except of a few degrees variance yearly.

The point is, of course, that if you or I were sailing our churches on the North Sea, would it make any difference if we used the magnetic north as a reference point or the opinions of our energetic postmodern congregation?

Kierkegaard put it this way: "Either we conform the truth to our desires or we conform our desires to the truth."² You can't have it both ways.

It is therefore sensible to suggest that conforming to truth despite the protestations of some will result in a safe journey and arrival allowing a church to "sail" toward a worthwhile, predetermined port.

Conforming the truth to our desires allows us a voyage, but one either interminably long

because we travel lost, or tragically short, because of shipwreck!

The compass

The Bible itself is God's true North. It points the way and tells the story, from Genesis to Revelation, of God's saving history. It reveals the principles of His grace and will, and unfolds the plan He has for us and our world.

It speaks of peace that, for the disciple, transcends human understanding, which Paul says doesn't make sense to mere onlookers but is real nonetheless to those who embrace it (Phil. 4:7).

Here is the challenge, and it is not to be taken lightly or easily: "For the word of God is living and active . . . it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. *Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom WE must give account* (Heb. 4:12, 13, NIV, emphasis supplied).

God's will is clear regarding our role as ministers of His gospel: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead . . . they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Tim. 4:2-5, NIV).

Aren't we already at that point? Is not the challenge of this day people with itchy ears, preachers not sure of where north is, and lots of interesting, but questionable teaching and philosophy, bombarding our ears, and eager to take the place of God's Word?

As such, a significant part of establishing direction is centered in *faithfully preaching the Word of God*. "Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. Avoid godless, foolish discussions with those who oppose you with their so-called knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20, 21, NLT, emphasis supplied).

Preaching today

So how do we as ministers align

our preaching with the direction established by Scripture? How does our ministry conform to the direction, the call, and the good work we are to do?

Paul Scott Wilson highlights some disturbing trends in the alignment issue behind much of our preaching and the needs of today's missionary age:¹

1. Increasingly God is missing from many of our sermons.

2. Our preaching offers fewer illustrations or signs that God is active in the world today.

3. Our preaching tends to be passive, using passive verbs instead of action verbs.

4. Sermons are generally less joyful. The stress and strain of our preparation and work might be showing, but by and large there is less grace and hope being offered at a time when it is greatly needed.

5. There is a continued trend, which to Wilson appears to be increasing. Most sermons place the burden on the listener to change and resolve the issues using the Bible as illustration, not availing of the grace already revealed and freely offered.

6. The Good News isn't as clear as it needs to be in today's confusing world. The old models of preaching carried a message for a certain time and place. Our day needs the same message but a different "Emph-a-sis on the Syll-ab-le of Grace."

Wilson notes a tendency to take people to Golgotha in our sermons and leave them there. Perhaps we offer a glimpse of the empty tomb but we end up leaving our listeners with an overwhelming sense that the Cross is the memorial of the sinfulness of humanity, rather than the symbol of authentic freedom from sin.

Thoughtful self-reflection can be a little discouraging, but we must remember that the gospel is always bad news before it is Good News.

An evaluation of top sermons

Wilson did a study of what were considered to be the top sermons

selected from recent offerings he found in the eight-volume set, *The Library of Distinctive Sermons*, published in 1996. These sermons represented a wide array of denominations and a blend of presentations by well-known and unknown preachers.

Wilson took 20 sermons and looked for evidence of the gracious acts of God being discussed, or portrayed. Here is what he found:⁴

♦ Thirty percent of the sermons did not mention God acting on behalf of people. Instead they cast the listeners entirely on their own ability to change. Filled with "ought's," "should's," and "must's," they mentioned faith only in connection with human responsibility.

♦ Thirty-five percent had brief passing comments referring to God's actions, but they usually covered only a portion of a paragraph.

♦ Thirty-five percent used several paragraphs to highlight God's actions on behalf of His people, but the references made to these things still only amounted to ten percent of the total sermon.

♦ Five percent devoted over half of the sermon to God's gracious acts.

I don't know how I would stack up to a similar examination, but it has certainly set me thinking about my responsibility to my people not to add burdens but to lift them and do so responsibly with the good news of God's grace.

Each of us struggles with the direction of our preaching. Each of us seeks to be faithful to the call, yet perhaps the efforts of a "self-examination" would assist us in clarifying "North" and correcting our course as needed. ■

1 George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2001), 241.

2 Os Guinness, *Time for Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 110; George Barna, Monthly Reports <www.barna.com>.

3 Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 20.

4 Ibid., 159.

Becky and Nancy

Lynn A. Eastman



Lynn A. Eastman is executive director of the foster care division, Youth for Christ, in Flint, Michigan.

OK, I'll come to camp with you," Becky said. "I've never canoed before. I think it might be fun. Can my friend Nancy come, too?"

"I guess we have room," I said.

That was my introduction to Becky and Nancy. Becky had been referred by the Juvenile Court to go to a camp for girls in trouble. Becky had been involved in drugs and shoplifting, and came from a family that "had their own wing at the state prison."

I was the Director of Youth Guidance, which was a part of Youth for Christ. The program would take kids to camp who had been referred by the court system. In our case this was a ten-day wilderness canoe trip to Algonquin Park in Ontario, Canada. When the children returned from camp, they would be involved in weekly interest-centered clubs.

The girls and their environments

As part of Youth for Christ, we were hoping and praying that the kids would accept Christ and that the Holy Spirit would change their lives. The majority of these girls came from fatherless homes. The girls had been exposed to promiscuous sex (if not prostitution), drugs, and a generally antisocial lifestyle. They were lonely, unsupervised, and, like all adolescents, trying to discover who they were. They had no idea that what they had seen in their lives so far was not all there was to reality. As a

result, they were starting down their own destructive paths. Many were simply repeating what they had seen in their mothers.

Yet the Lord can take a life that is "crippled-broken-ruined" and turn it into "something beautiful." Many of us hear those words, but we have never really been "ruined" as these girls have been. Many of us have had hard times, but not like the times these girls had seen. Their surrounding communities had all but written them off as useless and hopeless. The courts, the school system, and their parents saw them that way. And worst of all that's the way they viewed themselves.

I believe that the gospel speaks to this hopelessness. Jesus came to "preach the Good News to the poor and to set the captives free." These children are certainly poor and enslaved. But they can be redeemed. They can be useful to God and to the world around them. Through a dedicated staff and the prayers of those supporting a program such as ours, God would take these young women and turn them into something useful.

Visiting Nancy's house

When I arrived at Nancy's house, she was there alone. Although she was only 13, being alone was normal for her. I described the camp, but she was reluctant to go off to the wilderness. I suggested that she call Becky and they decide together what they would do.

So far, Nancy had not been in trouble with the courts, but she was having problems in school. She was chronically truant. Her mother, a single parent, wasn't very helpful in this, and Nancy had chosen a negative group of friends. But after talking with Becky, she said, "OK, I'll go. When do we leave?"

"August first at 8:00 a.m. We'll be driving all day to get to the camp site. We camp the first night in the campgrounds and leave the next morning for the wilderness."

Arriving at the camp

And so we arrived at Algonquin Park and began our adventure.

One of the joys of this type of camping is the growth the kids experience in camping skills and teamwork. By the end of the trip, this team could do a mile portage through a swamp in less than an hour.

Each morning began with devotions, and the girls were given a thought about God to

think about during the day. At night there was a time around the campfire. The girls were given an opportunity to accept Christ and thus to commit to a new way of life. There was also counseling throughout each day. The last night at the campfire there was opportunity to make a commitment to Christ.

On the second night out, Becky began to hemorrhage. By morning the bleeding was so bad that the counselors sent a group to the ranger station, a five-hour canoe trip. The ranger called for the rescue plane and in an hour or so the Cessna 172 with pontoons landed near the camp site.

When Becky and Bev, a counselor, arrived at the hospital, I was called. The doctors were not sure what was wrong, but stated that surgery needed to be done immediately to stop the bleeding. The hospital received permission to operate from Becky's mother via telephone.

The next call I received from the hospital was good news and bad news. The surgery had been successful, but the cause of the problem was a tubular pregnancy. Becky would recover but it was doubtful if she would ever be able to have children. The doctor said that she might have died within a few hours, had she not been flown to the hospital.

A maze of confusion and tragedy

Three days later I arrived at the hospital to get Becky, and found that Nancy had also been admitted. There had been another airlift and another surgery! This time Nancy had been bleeding as a result of untreated scar tissue from an abortion she had had because of an unwanted pregnancy that had resulted from a relationship she had with her brother.

The story, it seems, is that both these 13-year-olds had been involved with Nancy's brother. He was 23, married, and a convicted felon who had slept with both his sister and his sister's friend (Becky). His wife was pregnant, and when she discovered

him in bed with Becky, she had tried to commit suicide, which had caused her, in turn, to lose her baby.

Nancy's abortion had never been treated by a physician, and the scar tissue which had developed had caused the problems she had encountered in the wilds of Canada.

I was amazed at the staggering complexity of these sordid revelations. Yet this is why Youth for Christ had Youth Guidance, and exactly why I was where I was. These children needed to hear that God loved them. Somehow, they had to experience what that love meant. They also needed to know that God could bring them into a completely different kind of life. This is the Good News, and in the case of these girls such news is dramatically good.

When I finally brought the girls home, their houses were dark. No one was there to greet them, even though their mothers knew what time they were to arrive.

The gospel in such lives

How does one relate the gospel to such children? What does the good news of Christ mean to them? How can they understand God's love when they have experienced such empti-

ness, neglect, chaos, and tragedy?

To begin with, we relate the age-old story of God's creation, humanity's fall, and our redemption through the love, life, and death of Jesus. It took the girls some time to begin to understand this kind of love. It was easier for them to grasp the significance of the fall; they both had experienced severe pain, both physical and emotional, as a result of the entry of sin.

Our counseling moved along two tracks. First, we tried to help them develop a relationship with Christ; second, we worked with helping them understand how that related to in the reality of their daily life; what life choices God was guiding them to make.

Nearly a happy ending

The story nearly has a happy ending. Becky joined a local church and got her mother to join the church with her. They both made commitments to Christ and have been faithful. Becky is a lovely Christian woman, wife, and mother. She has learned what redemption means.

Nancy was not able to make the connections she needed. She is in and out of jail, she is using drugs and working as a prostitute. ■

God's messengers are commissioned to take up the very work that Christ did while on this earth. They are to give themselves to every line of ministry that He carried on.

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Here come the baby boomers . . . again! Are you ready?

John Schachinger



John Schachinger is a Seventh-day Adventist pastor of the Morristown District, Morristown, New Jersey.

At one time it seemed that baby boomers were respectfully drifting out of the limelight, no longer in the crosshairs of desirable demographics. Little was heard about them unless it was a dire warning that boomers will bankrupt the Social Security system, overwhelm medical care, or introduce another line of loose-fitting jeans. Even in the church, boomer ministry had long been eclipsed by a vigorous Gen X and youth ministry. But all that is changing, drastically, and in ways undreamed.

Baby boomers, roughly 76 million strong in the United States, are aging. Born at about the time the armed forces were returning home after World War II, this largest demographic group in North America is about to enter its most significant stage of life. Sociologists call this an Age Wave, and just like a wave it's forming below the surface, gathering momentum. When it begins to crest it will overwhelm everything in its path.¹

Boomers will live longer, have more leisure time, more disposable income, more educational opportunity, and more mobility than any generation before. As we age (I'm a boomer!), we are rediscovering a commitment to personal and spiritual growth and will be making some significant contributions in that arena.

In the past, we have overwhelmed and transformed every stage of life we've encoun-

tered. From the cradle to young adulthood, entire industries have sprung up or been revolutionized to feed, clothe, entertain, and educate our societies.² Mega and Seeker Churches have arisen, in part anticipating the mass (yet to happen) return of baby boomers to the church.³

We revolutionized and transformed youth and young adulthood, and we'll also revolutionize retirement. Although we haven't put it together yet, boomer aging will bear little resemblance to the senior centers and retirement communities today. We'll face our mortality in our own way, and when we do we'll do it in such numbers that North America will actually shift from a youth to a senior culture.

Like many other institutions, churches will be overwhelmed and challenged by the demands and opportunities offered by aging baby boomers. However, our attitudes toward senior ministry and the absence of targeted evangelism to those over 55, could leave us ill-prepared to meet the transformation of aging about to overtake us.

According to accepted sociological age categorizations, the first boomer will turn 65 in 2011. This is the time to ready ourselves for the coming changes this generation will bring to our churches. This preparation requires two steps: an enlightened approach to aging, and an understanding of the forces defining boomer maturity.

Views of aging

Most of us would describe aging as a fairly predictable linear progression from childhood to adulthood and on into maturity. It is a series of stages, each preparing for the next along the way.

During adolescence and young adulthood we acquire the education and skills to pursue a career, accept responsibility, and start a family. We enter adulthood advancing our careers and raising our families.

Around age 55 or so our productivity begins to peak, we might experience a mid-life crisis, and then accept the fact that our best years are now behind us. What follows is a comprehensive, inevitable decline.

We then enter retirement and aging, and largely devote ourselves to recreation, leisure, and obsolescence. By now our major decisions and life course have been determined. We've progressed as far as we can and it's time

to move to the sidelines.

Although simplistic, this summary describes a linear view of aging born out of the industrial revolution. It has prevailed, more or less, for about 150 years.⁴ Although it may have worked, it has also produced most of the prejudice we have about our elderly in many cultures today.

Linear view of aging

The linear view of aging tends to cause us to define vital, growing churches, as those with younger families. Demographically speaking, we choose communities with younger families as being more favorable environments for church growth.

The linear view assumes someone over 65 is less likely to be converted. It narrowly defines senior ministry as consisting almost entirely of recreational projects and social gatherings. It tends to view the seniors in the congregation as a liability group that requires care-taking rather than care-giving. If seniors are involved in

church leadership it's assumed they are conservative, risk-averse, and change-blocking. It may even assume that the church will be better off when they step aside.

The linear view of aging, according to Fredric Hudson, "creates social prejudice against the old, and it keeps those in midlife and retirement reminiscing and looking backward, wanting younger bodies and dreams. . . . [thus robbing] thousands of people of enormous possibilities that they are capable of attaining as they get older."⁵

Such a linear view may hamper the outreach and spiritual growth of countless unchurched seniors.

The cyclical view of aging

In contrast, a *cyclical* definition of aging is not only more helpful for ministry, but provides a more accurate picture of the process.

Cyclical aging sees progress from childhood to maturity as a series of life chapters (adolescence, young

adulthood, maturity, retirement) marked by transitions from one chapter of life to the next. Each transition is a fascinating period of time when we reassess and reinvent ourselves in light of six core values: (1) a sense of self; (2) achievement; (3) intimacy; (4) creativity and play; (5) search for meaning; and (6) compassion and contribution.⁶

Adult life is described as a reoccurring cycle of these six core values. Adolescence, young adulthood, maturity, and retirement are all life chapters with their own transitions from one stage to the next. As we approach each chapter and its accompanying transition, we cycle through these six core values, re-evaluating, renewing, and reinventing ourselves.⁷

As we age we also define and emphasize these values differently. Young adults, for instance, are more outwardly directed when they define their values. They seek a sense of self, achievement, and intimacy. Values such as the search for meaning or compassion and caring are generally less developed at this stage, or put on hold in the face of the immediate need for a career and relationships.

Ministering to seniors

Seniors however, have already acquired a sense of self and achievement. This frees them to search for meaning and to express the sense of compassion and caring that had gone unexplored earlier in life.

The six core values come together to define the senior adult life cycle as a time for:

Spirituality—Seniors describe a deep appreciation for universal meaning and mystery.⁸ They're eager to experience a profound sense of otherness, or a sense of God.

Personal integrity—No longer driven by careers or advancement, seniors turn their attention to making a difference in their world. Social activism, altruism, and leaving a legacy mark this life cycle; what Bob Buford aptly calls moving from success to significance.⁹

God, Gödel, and Grace

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Mentoring—The quest to acquire and share knowledge and wisdom is very important to seniors and they will work to create an environment for that exchange to take place.

It is critical then for churches to understand that whether or not we're converted or churched, as we age we are hard wired to seek out some sort of significant, serving, spiritual life.

In addition, there are two factors that will define boomer aging: life expectancy and memory.

Life Expectancy—Boomers will retire on the heels of skyrocketing life expectancies. Age 65 is already considered questionable and even laughable as a retirement marker, as health professionals push life expectancy and more important, life *quality* well into the 70s and 80s and beyond.

The sociology of an entire generation actively living beyond 75 is not something we're used to, or have thought much about, and we can only speculate about how an entire generation will spend an extra 20 to 25 years of quality life. Furthermore, when such a generation numbers 76 million (in the United States), it means we're facing a dramatic social upheaval.

Memory—The events that ushered boomers into early adulthood have not left us. The late 1960s and early 1970s were not only traumatic, they were intensely, albeit naively, spiritual.

Regardless of the degree of participation, the lifestyle experiments and the activism of this period deeply imprinted every one of us. The advent of EST, Lifespring, Silva Mind Control, and the general rush of self-improvement plans of the late 1970s, were all manifestations of the boomer spiritual quest.

Churches should be acutely aware of the spiritual subtext that marked the late 1960s and early 1970s, and that earned boomers the title, *A Generation of Seekers*.¹⁰

Our spiritual memory will resurface dramatically as all these forces come together in a seeking generation turning 65 and 70. The church

that can be there to mentor us in this quest will be the church that finally ministers to what has largely been a lost generation.

Five initial steps in ministering to aging boomers

There are five steps that will begin a ministry to aging boomers:

Examine your own aging process. What are you learning about yourself and your core values? What transitions have you experienced? What does Jesus Christ mean to you now that you missed when you were younger? What about a maturing spirituality? How could you impact someone who is aging and rediscovering a spiritual quest?

Examine your church's attitude toward aging. Are your aging members considered an asset or liability? Are they a vital part of your church or are you waiting for them to move out of the way? *Does your church see them as care-givers, or care-takers?* If you knew an age wave was approaching how would your present attitude change?

Develop a ministry for the aging—now. Our present older members are the pioneers of this coming age wave and they can teach us a lot about aging. We need to spend time with churches in our communities who effectively minister to seniors; then read, research, and work with what we have.

We don't need to be revolutionary, but we need to get something going. In doing this, we will not only reach our senior members, but possibly also develop significant relationships with their boomer kids, whose biggest present stressor is caring for their own aging parents.

Make no mistake, they're watching how we treat their parents, and if they're unchurched, this kind of ministry can be critical.

Watch for trends. Boomers will not age quietly (they've never done anything quietly!). They'll write, publish, and network. Currently there are numerous boomer Web sites that come and go, and watching them can act as an effective trend indicator.

Rather than recommend any specific site I'd suggest entering "baby boomer," "baby boomer aging," "baby boomer spirituality," etc., into a search engine and choosing the sites you find most helpful.

Some sites are nostalgic, some are informational, but together they give insight into boomer attitudes toward aging.

Acquaint yourself with the literature. Several excellent books have been published during the past decade. Here's a brief list:

Age Wave (Bantam Books) and *Age Power* (Penguin Putnam) by Ken Dychtwald. These have great statistics, sociological insight, and a wake-up call for social change.

Half Time, by Bob Buford (Harper Collins/Zondervan) is one of the better Christian approaches to life after 50.

Prime of Your Life, by Woodrow Kroll and Don Hawkins (Fleming H. Revell) is one of the first Christian how-to manuals on aging.

The Adult Years, by Frederic M. Hudson (Jossey-Bass). Although a little new-agey at times, Dr. Hudson's book remains the seminal work on self-renewal and aging in the twenty-first century. The bibliography alone is worth the price of the book.

Catch the Age Wave, by Win Arn (Beacon Hill Press). Good first step for churches looking to begin a ministry to senior adults.

The Baby Boomerang, by Doug Murren (Regal Books). A valuable single-volume review on boomer ministry. Interestingly enough, this book was released the same year (1990) as Dychtwald's *Age Wave*. ■

1 Ken Dychtwald, *Age Wave* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 21.

2 *Ibid.*, 13-20.

3 George Barna, *The Barna Report 1994-95*, 49, 308.

4 Fredric M. Hudson, *The Adult Years. Mastering the Art of Self Renewal* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1999), 37, 38.

5 *Ibid.*, 33.

6 *Ibid.*, 134-136.

7 *Ibid.*, 128.

8 *Ibid.*, 181.

9 See Bob Buford, *Half Time* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994).

10 See Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970).

Ethics for twenty-first-century clergy

John B. Wong



John B. Wong, M.D., J.D., Ph.D., is adjunct professor of religion and ethics at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Pastoral ministry is demanding. It includes not only preaching, evangelism, nurture, administration, liturgy, and mission, but also counseling, social ministry, and fund raising, to name only some of the bases ministers are expected to cover. In all these functions, ethics and ethical issues are unavoidably interspersed with a clergy person's life and ministry.

Ministers are, of course, familiar with theology and its various definitions. In my view, theology basically includes the vertical dimension, which includes study of and reflection upon God, our picture of Him and all His interactions with the created order, particularly human beings. Intersecting with this theological vertical dimension, however, is a horizontal dimension we call Christian ethics. Ethics has to do with what kind of persons we are or should be, and what we ought to do in our relationships with God's creation, animate and inanimate, in any given situation.

It would not be inappropriate to depict the intersection of these two dimensions in terms of the image of the cross, with God and humanity locked in dynamic interface. This article centers on the horizontal bar of the cross; the ethical dimension, and some of its related issues.

From how to relate to the Down syndrome baby to what decisions may be made at the moment of our life's ending; from homosexu-

ality debates to ministerial professional confidentiality, ministers find themselves inevitably involved. From physician-assisted suicide to peace and war, from advising on the use of donated gambling proceeds to accepting tithe from a lottery win, ministers and clergy confront a bewildering array of ethical issues.

Today we find an increasingly sophisticated and educated laity. Church members, who in years past took for granted everything the pastor preached or advised, are now demanding a properly reasoned explanation.

Yet parishioners frequently rely on the minister's input and guidance in addressing their own personal ethical dilemmas. Should one discontinue Mom's feeding tube, when she has been in a coma for the last three months? What should parents do about a diagnosed intrauterine Down syndrome 12-week-old, when they already have a three-year-old with a similar diagnosis? Should an obstetrician-gynecologist, who is a member of your church, participate in an adoption by a gay couple?

May I propose a schematic model for clergy as they grapple with ethical questions such as these? This model is offered only as a help. One has to realize that many thorny ethical dilemmas defy any definitive solution this side of eternity. First a brief survey of what ethics is all about.

What is ethics?

Ethics is a study of goodness (decisions about good and evil), and the study of right action. It has to do with decisions about right and wrong.

Normative ethics is concerned with identifying norms and standards for good and right behavior, decision making, and outcome. The divisions of different branches of ethics are not distinct and the categorical descriptions are relative. The fundamental question in ethics, however, always returns to: *What ought one to be and to do in light of the truth as it is perceived?*

The term *teleological ethics* (from the Greek word, *telos*, meaning "end," and having to do with emphasizing one's orientation to final goals) is often attached to the study of goodness, which together with happiness (*eudaimonia*) represents to many the goal and highest attainment in one's life.

When the value aspect of the goodness is

stressed, such theory is known as axiological. But pursuing goodness can center itself in the egotistical. It can speak of perfectionism (virtue ethics propounded by Aristotle). Confucius, who preceded Aristotle by some 150 years also stressed that becoming a virtuous person is the goal of ethics and morality.

Further, ethical enquiry can also address the issue of consequentialism and *utilitarianism*—what line of thought or action results in the greatest happiness and utility for the greatest number of people, with the presumption of a knowledge as to what constitutes the greatest happiness.

Deontological ethics (Greek, *deont*: that which is binding and due) inquires what constitutes right action and stresses the principles of right and wrong that govern our ethical decision-making and moral choices. (See diagram below for a description of some of these principles.)

To illustrate, lying is against morality and ethics, not just because it leads to bad consequences in interpersonal relationships and to social mistrust (against the good for all concerned), but also because it is morally inexcusable in that it violates higher Christian ethical norms.

For Immanuel Kant, truth telling is a categorical imperative—a set of fundamental ideas in terms of which all other ideas can be expressed. This categorical imperative, or the ethical norm of universal application, is arrived at from the observation that if everyone lied constantly, there would be total disruption of the social fabric, and human social intercourse would grind to a stop.

The uniqueness of Christian ethics

Christian ethics is ethics with a Christian orientation and biblical perspective which addresses the whole person and his or her needs. It is grounded in norms that refer directly to the biblical perspective and particularly to the person of Jesus

Christ. It distinguishes itself by the recurrent all-encompassing themes of love, justice, concern for one's neighbor, the disadvantaged; grace and forgiveness (forgiving and even loving the enemy); the sinfulness of human nature; the powerlessness of an unaided human being to do the ethical task; the question of salvation and healing from, not just immoral and unethical choices, but ultimately from sin, evil, and death.

Christian ethics is also implicit in its affirmation of a Creator-God who is the source of morality, who sets the requirements for ethical compliance for His created beings, and who is also the Forgiver and Enabler in our human striving for obedient conformity to His commands.

In mystery and wonder beyond our comprehension, the moral God, who knows no sin, will gift the sinner with wholeness and perfect restoration in a resurrected body that knows no corruption but reflects only God's ultimate moral nature. This Christian assertion sets it apart from all the relativistic, secular, and other theological ethics, which assign no or little significance to the ultimate moral Being.

Christian-biblical ethics is distinctively and holistically unique in another important aspect. The one who embraces it, speaking ideally, is a Christian who has been or is in the process of being made whole and

who—in profound gratitude—realizes his or her ethical obligation and moral mandate. The realization is underscored by one's overpowering sense of having been the recipient of God's grace and forgiveness, which are undeserved and unmerited.

From this stance, the *Christian ethicist* desires to emulate Christ, the supreme ethical Being, who treats every human being with justice, dignity, and moral transparency. Out of an "ethical" heart, which has been made whole and which seeks to imitate the holistic ethical norm, naturally flows a *Christian's ethical conduct*.

Christian ethics is person-centered and character-based. It is not just a set of standards to follow, important as standards are; it is more than that. It is not simply deciding what is good or evil, or which is the right or wrong action—critical as such deliberation is for any ethical task. It is that, but it is even more.

It is a way of seeing, a way of reflecting basic beliefs and habits of the heart.

Mere moral knowledge is insufficient to meet the challenge set by the kind of *Christian ethical ideals* embodied in the life and teaching of Jesus, the personification of God's moral demands. To live ethically in the Christian sense, it takes an inner transformation of the person through

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a spiritual rebirth—a new creation as described by Paul (2 Cor. 5:17).

Defining Christian ethics

To sum up, when it comes to the *Christian ethical person*, it is critical that he or she be transformed by the power of God and made whole by His Spirit. This is central to the task of ethical decision making and living in the Christian ethical context. It is more than simply *doing or behaving* in a Christian ethical way; *it is being the Christian—a holistic, moral person by the grace of God*. This stance leads me to define Christian ethics as follows:

Christian ethics is a lifelong discipline in which one seeks not only to analyze and internalize the criteria of good and evil or right and wrong in the systematic study of reflective choices and attainable goals, but also, in the midst of such pursuits, learns *to be* and thus *to do* that which glorifies God.

To glorify God is to conform to His

revealed will and purpose as it is elaborated in Scripture, nature, history, one's own life, society, the community, and the church. More importantly, it is simply to reflect Christ's character. Reflecting Christ's character includes imitating His attributes of love and forgiveness, His truth and justice, His wisdom and purpose, His humility and obedience, His faith and hope, and His goodness; ethics and concern for the neighbor and the disadvantaged—and to do this in freedom, power, and creativity.

A schema for Christian ethics

On the basis of this, let me propose the following *analytical, holistic schema for ethical decisions* (see diagram below).

Thus again, Christian ethical being has to do with such realities as biblical commands, principles, and rules; along with love, justice, peace, joy, balance, wholeness, truth-telling, personal virtue, equality, fairness,

freedom, creativity, human value, care of and respect for the best interests of another person, *prima facie* duties, coherence, ecological and financial stewardship, professional oaths, eschatological vision, humility, wisdom, and discernment.

It also radically affects daily situational concerns such as those that come in the context of arenas such as the family, church, law, finance, employment, religious and cultural traditions, confidentiality, human experimentation, consent, emergency, and other contextual factors.

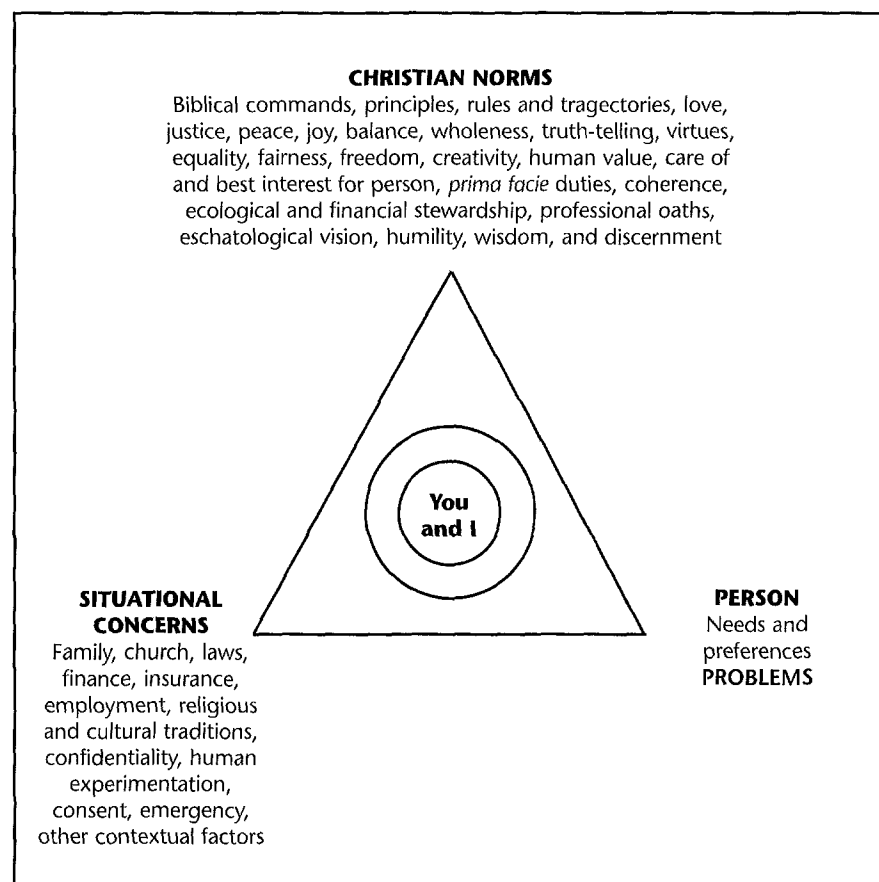
The "ethicist" (broadly defined as you or I or anyone called upon to make or facilitate ethical decisions)—and particularly the *Christian ethicist*—is called upon to discerningly use the principles and rules described above, and to *apply them to the person in need* or to the problems *related to the person*, against the backdrop, or in consideration of, an entire constellation of daily *situational concerns*.

The ethical-decision-facilitator in this schematic model is one who brings with him or her a particular set of presuppositions or perceptions, along with a belief-system and particular faith-loyalty. This person has been or is in the process of being made whole by God in the multiple dimensions of personhood, especially in the spiritual, moral, and ethical realms.

He or she comes to the ethical decision scene fully realizing his or her own brokenness and ethical limitation. Such humility tends to deliver one from the trap of ethical arrogance; that is, from believing that one's deliberative conclusion is beyond question, and as such is worthy of being used in an intrusively paternalizing manner when it comes to other people.

Applying the Christian ethical worldview

Let's apply this ethics schema to one of the problems mentioned earlier, even though the scope of discussion is necessarily limited here. Let's return to



the question of whether to continue or discontinue Mom's feeding tube.¹

Here, the ethicist must look to the biblical norms of valuing life and its sanctity, and the questions of comfort and dignity, and balance these against the futility of nutrition and hydration and what constitutes an ordinary life-sustaining measure versus the use of extraordinary means.

When it comes to the question of norms in this situation, there is the issue of wisdom and discernment, which includes the "slippery slope argument." In other words, the question needs to be faced as to what the long-term impact on society might be if we consistently begin to advocate the practice of withholding basic nutrition to the dying, thus allowing them to die when we could sustain a certain level of life.

Other concerns must also be considered such as, How would "Mom" wish to be attended to under the present circumstances, assuming there is neither an advance directive from Mom nor a definitive decision by a family surrogate? The "ethicist" applies all these and other norms to Mom as a person, who even in her comatose state, retains significance to her family and friends.

The Christian who has been admonished to feed the hungry and quench people's thirst is intuitively reluctant to "starve Mom." If we go back to the triangle, to the left of the base, there are many situational concerns (different from "situational ethics") that must be taken into consideration. Family wishes and the legal precedents² are just a few of the factors to be individualized.

Every case is different. About the only sure thing a minister wants to do is to let the person, or in this case Mom's immediate family (if available) make the decision. Using the Christian norms and other elements within the above ethical schema, ministers can explore options and counsel and pray with the grieving family. The minister may not make the final decision for the party con-

cerned, even though at times the pressure and temptations are strong. He or she can, however, be a highly helpful aid to the family in making such difficult decisions.

In summary, holistic ethics³ advances the practice of facilitating the transfer of wholeness from the "ethicist" to the person in the ethical quandary, against a whole panoply of situational factors that have bearing on the subject. The test for the success of such holistic ethics may be the peace and joy that comes to the person and family in need; the satisfactory resolution of their puzzling problem, along with a maturing ethical proficiency that will aid them in future decision making. ■

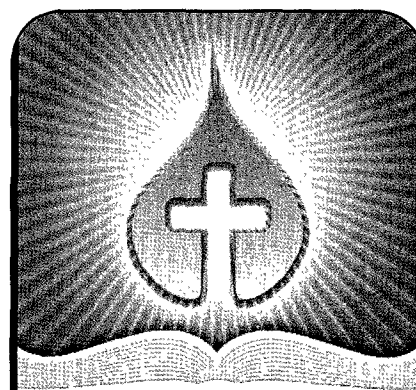
1 Here's a case study. How would you apply pastoral ethics to solve the dilemma? Mom Maureen is 79 years old. She has been comatose for six weeks following a stroke, leaving no advance directive as to nutritional care for her, and has been on tubes since the stroke. She has an estate valued at \$2 million. She has three children—Bob, Doug, and Fay. You are the pastor of her eldest son Bob, who is also an elder in your church. Bob wants to have the tube discontinued immediately and says the money could instead be better used for your church programs. Doug only comes to your church once in a while. He has never been close to Mom and is indecisive. He and his sister Fay are very close. Fay vehemently objects to discontinuing the feeding tube. She has a special bond with Mom, ever since Mom took care of her during her prolonged illness as a teenager. She wants to have everything done for Mom and could not stand to see her "starved to death." Fay, a Christian, is not a member of your church but is familiar with Christian beliefs. She says since Mom has \$2 million in assets, they could well afford an intermediate health facility after her discharge from the hospital. Expected cost would be at least \$6,000 a month, barring any complications. Doctors have said Mom could linger on for a long, long time since her heart, lungs, and kidneys are in good shape.

You have seen Mom Maureen three times now—her condition remains the same. The hospital bills are mounting even though she has Medicare. The family wants to have a conference with you, the pastor, so they can tell the doctor to continue or discontinue the feeding tube, without which Mom would die in a few days.

Based on the information given here and assuming that biblical rationale can be marshaled to support either continuance or discontinuance of the feeding tube, what would you do?

2 T. L. Beauchamp and J. F. Childress in *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 159, 160.

3 John B. Wong, *Christian Wholism: Theological and Ethical Implications in the Postmodern World* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2002), 145.



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Author, Terry Glaspey (*Homecoming*, Jan/Feb, 2003) says, "If you want prayer to flourish, get a better picture of who God is."

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Ministering to families of the terminally ill (part 2)

Larry Yeagley



Larry Yeagley is a retired pastor living in Charlotte, Michigan.

Ministering to families of the terminally ill ideally begins before the death occurs. Grief following loss has fewer complications if families have received adequate care prior to the death. The pastor can help them through anticipatory grief and build a trust level that makes the family receptive to bereavement support following the death. This also gives the pastor time to identify those who may be at high risk afterward.

Neglecting the family during illness may close the door on the pastor's chances to help the family. Such neglect can create resentment that hinders healthy grief.

Fortunate is the family that says, "Our pastor spent a lot of time with Dad. His visits brightened the last few months of his life." Unfortunate is the family that must say, "Our pastor promised to visit Dad, but he didn't show up until Dad had slipped into a coma."

Ministry to the ill person is also ministry to the family. They feel a load lifted when their loved one is receiving spiritual care. The family unit is the focus of care whether the visitor is a medical person or clergy.

Respite care

A family that cares for an ill person is often weary and sleep deprived, left with little energy for chores around the house and errands in town. Pastors can organize and train church

members to provide practical assistance.

Senior citizens often enjoy spending time with ill persons while the family catches a nap or runs errands. Pastors provide real ministry when they get involved in mowing lawns, shopping, and driving family members to appointments.

I can still see the smiles on one family's faces when I brought a big bag of apples and a sack of cookies. I always felt that this is the kind of ministry Jesus did.

My Amish neighbors demonstrate practical ministry to families facing the crises of illness. The bishop and members of the church community mow the lawn, clean the house, clean stables, fill the silo, and put up hay. They consider this their spiritual ministry. The bishop teaches by example.

Planning final arrangements

When the pastor practices trust and openness, patient and family may initiate conversations about funeral services. Days before writing this article a church member discussed with me her desire to end her dialysis. She tearfully told me what she wanted me to do at her funeral. This is a matter of relief for the family. It prevents last-minute stress for them.

They need to deny

I was involved in hospice development early in the history of hospice in America. Hospice staff people took the stages of grief given by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross as prescriptive rather than descriptive. They became overly concerned about leading patients and family from denial to acceptance, sometimes to the detriment of both.

Working with families has shown me that denial is visited periodically throughout the illness of a loved one. When illness is prolonged they may say, "He'll lick this cancer. Just look at all the hurdles he has jumped so far. He's a fighter." Denial can be a legitimate way of taking a little vacation from steady sorrow. It can put reality at a distance until a family has or perceives that they have support.

Families do not hold on to denial permanently. The wise pastor listens to them patiently and says to himself or herself, "This too shall pass." Such patience yields opportunities to help walk the patients through reality.

There are many reasons for denial: a desire to protect the sick from becoming hopeless, a need to protect self from pain, a fear that



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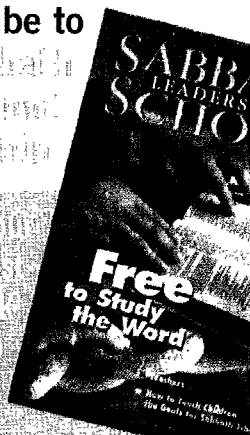
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admission of imminent death will hasten it, wanting to keep a happy face for the patient, and so on. Each reason serves a purpose and is time-limited.

Cooperate with other caregivers

When I was a hospice chaplain, I invited patients' pastors to attend staff review when their parishioners' case was being discussed. They received valuable information that helped them in their ministry to both patient and family. Our staff received insight into the family system. It was definitely a win-win situation. Hospices are delighted to have pastors volunteer their participation in patient-family care.

Recently an elder in my church lay dying in the intensive care unit of a hospital. The medical staff met with the family several times, but they knew that the family was not comprehending the seriousness of the elder's condition. The head nurse asked me to join a family meeting.

I was able to put some things into laypersons' terms and assure the family that the medical team was not being unreasonable. The family became more realistic in their expectations and the medical team's stress level dropped. The experience proved to me that medical professionals welcome clergy assistance when clergy persons stay within their reasonable area of expertise.

Don't forget the children

Children are sometimes neglected when adult family members require attention. It is easy to think the children are adjusting well because they only "visit" the loss for short periods of time and those visitations may be far apart.

One seven-year-old boy visited me after his father died. He would talk about his father for about five minutes, then he was off chattering about science fiction. But I stayed close to him for months anyway.

When he was a teenager, I moved

to another state. As the moving van was being loaded, he stopped to thank me for helping him get through his tough time. I was impressed with how a little attention can make a big difference.

Children usually adjust to loss in a way different from the way adults do, and their grief can last longer. This causes parents and others to be alarmed. If there is any question about a child's reaction to loss, a parent should not hesitate to consult a professional in children's mental health.

A pastor should become acquainted with grief in children. An excellent resource is the longitudinal study done in Boston by J. William Worden (*Grief and Children*, The Guilford Press, New York, 1996).

Little things count

Home visitation may not be as frequent as a pastor would like, but a short phone call to check on the family is always helpful. A fresh flower arrangement sent to the patient's bedside is a real pick-me-up. Cards and phone calls from church members bring encouragement. A video or tape recording of the church service is an excellent way of involving the patient and family in church life.

When my family and I went through a crisis of loss, a neighbor called and told us not to fix supper. They brought the food, table settings, tablecloth, and candles. They told us to turn off the kitchen light when we finished eating, as a signal for them to come over and clean up the kitchen. What a blessing!

There are other ways to help. Make a phone call just before your family goes grocery shopping. Ask if there is anything you can pick up for them. A loaf of homemade bread or an apple pie dropped off on your way to an appointment can cheer a heart that is weary with sorrow. If Jesus were doing His ministry now, I can see Him doing things like this.

Keep the funeral in mind

As the pastor mingles with the fam-

ily and the ill person, he or she should keep little tidbits of the relationship in mind. Engaging the sick one in a life review provides excellent material for a life sketch at the funeral.

I've been to funerals where the life sketch sounded like it was written by the department of vital statistics. Involvement with patient and family before the death should be a mine of precious memories that can be included in a tribute.

A young pastor told me that he spends a half day writing any life sketch to be given at the funeral. He feels that this is just as important as the homily. Families tell him how much the sketch meant to them.

The values and faith of the family and the ill person should be the basis of the funeral service. This can happen if the pastor is really present with the family.

The funeral is the time to bring comfort and hope to the family and friends. It is not the time to evangelize and call for people to give their hearts to the Lord. It is not the time to review all the doctrines of a particular denomination.

I helped a young pastor conduct a funeral. I read the Scriptures and presented the life sketch written by a family member. The pastor presented the "homily" in a voice loud enough to address thousands. The content was what I would expect from an evangelist attempting to convert people to his denomination.

I watched the audience squirm and the family drop their heads in embarrassment. I discovered later that the pastor had not experienced much training for ministry. His only experience was an apprenticeship with a traveling evangelist.

Allow questions and doubts

It is not unusual for family members of the dying to be angry with God. They see a loving and kind relative dying. They consider it unfair. They have prayed, but the prognosis has only worsened. Sometimes a whole church has fasted and prayed,

but death has simply drawn closer.

One family invited their entire church to the hospital to pray for their daughter who was on life support. They filled the family room and spilled into the hallways. The pastor insisted on burning candles in the intensive care unit, a request that was forbidden in an environment where oxygen was in use.

A day later the 18-year-old girl died. The family's faith was shaken and they left the hospital exhausted, emotionally depleted and spiritually disillusioned. This is not always the case, but when it happens pastors have their work cut out.

What are they to do?

Their first obligation to the family is to listen, listen, listen. Anger at God is a cry of desperation that does not beg for the pastor's answers. It calls for quiet restraint and acknowledgment of their pain and overwhelming sorrow.

For personal reasons, I know whereof I speak. I lay in the hospital with the diagnosis of lymphoma (which turned out to be negative) and I was filled with a strange mixture of anger and bewilderment. A hospital chaplain came to my room with words, words, words, but I felt misunderstood and miserable.

I asked the head nurse to call for a nun to visit me. She sat by the head of my bed, gently grasped my arm, and invited me to share anything on my heart. She didn't rebuke me for my feelings and she didn't preach. She quietly acknowledged my anger and my pain. That's what I needed.

I'll always remember the young woman who was diagnosed as having leukemia. She emphatically told me she did not have leukemia, yet she expressed anger and confusion at the same time. I told her that I would rejoice with her if the diagnosis proved wrong, but if not, I would be present to try and feel a little bit of her pain.

Two days later when I entered her room she said, "Chaplain, sit down on my bed. I want to hug your neck!"

She then told me she had leukemia and was waiting for me to come so she could unload.

Unload she did. There were tears and there was laughter. There was anger and there was a peaceful surrender to God's will. She had many questions and doubts, but she let me know that she didn't expect answers. She was grateful for my presence and my willingness to put up with her ranting and raving.

Her situation and her concept of God didn't mesh. She needed time to analyze her picture of God and to reshape it to harmonize with her run-away life. Her assumptive world was shattered. A different world had to be shaped before she could find peace. I listened as she did so.

After many tears she said, "Chaplain, Jesus went through more for me than I am going through for Him. I'm going to hold my head up high and take whatever comes because I think He's got something better planned for me than this old world."

She confirmed what I had learned from dozens of families facing the death of a loved one. Be quietly present in the midst of anger, doubt, fear, and confusion. Let the Spirit of God do the speaking. Let Him impress answers on the hearts of family members. Be His quiet under-shepherd.

Unlimited ministry

The one argument I have had with a few hospices has been regarding their policy to terminate family care one year after the death of a loved one. I have met families who have expressed the feeling that they were being dumped.

A pastor should not set limits on family care after a death. More than a year after a loss there are apt to be subsequent, temporary upsurges of grief. This is true because all the bits of memory connected to a person do not come up for review and grief within a year. When a familiar song, an event, a special place triggers memories yet unvisited, the pain of grief returns.

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Minstering with singles

Your most effective ministry for any group in your congregation is not what you do to them or for them, but rather what you do with them. This is especially true for singles.

As we noted in a previous article, many singles have opted out of active church attendance or participation because they believe they are neglected, ignored, or even not wanted. Others have been shunned at their most difficult times. A construction worker says, "When my wife and I divorced, the church virtually sent me packing. My whole life was in turmoil. Where do you go when the church turns you out?"

Some may say, "Well, they are missing the point, we don't shun them and we never declare them pariahs." Unfortunately, our actions often speak far more eloquently than our words. We may mouth correct phrases, but our failure to minister with singles clearly states our intent that they are unnecessary baggage hanging around the "real life" of the families in our churches.

When you want to improve your ministry with singles, consider:

Ministry is for everyone. Jesus doesn't call only married males to ministry. He, Himself, lived a single and exemplary life of ministry and some of those whom he commissioned as ministers were married. If the work of the pastor is to put the members to work, this means designing ministry functions to utilize every member and recruiting the best for leadership and the rest for service. Don't single out some effective ministers because of marital status.

Identify your groups. In her excellent article, "Standing Alone,"¹ Cristina Foor encourages pastors to begin by recognizing five different categories of singles, each with unique needs: never married, divorced, single parents, widowed, and separated. The spiritual and

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social needs of a young, never-married adult likely will be distinctly different than those of a mature person who just recently lost their spouse to death.

Don't settle for status quo. The reality that single adults often "fall through the cracks" does not excuse neglect by pastors and congregations. Both a ministry specific to their needs and ministry assignments that include singles in spiritual leadership are essential to prevent those who feel ignored or abandoned from quietly drifting away. Determine to utilize every resource available for effective ministry. Elect singles to leadership and encourage them to develop plans for reaching others.

Use, don't abuse. Avoid taking advantage of someone just because they are single. Select meaningful ministry activities that fit the interests and skills of a member rather than assigning a task that you assume they are free to do. One woman wrote, "My church thinks that just because I'm unmarried, I have lots of time to perform any task—especially those chores no one else wants. I'm often told, you have nothing going on, so you can clean the kitchen, babysit the kids, plan the luncheon. Why don't they ask me to pray, plan worship, or lead a study group? This attitude makes me feel devalued."

Single, not separate. Recognize various types of singles, but don't separate them away from the rest of the congre-

gation as if they were so unique that they could not fit in. Make certain to build family within the church for those whom you may not readily identify as "families." Virginia McInerney, author of *Single Not Separate*,² urges churches to include singles in their planning and implementation of ministry and to sensitively and intentionally signal inclusiveness in every aspect of church.

Feature options. Some of your singles who expect to marry may not know where to meet other sincere believers. The smaller or more isolated your church, the greater the challenge. While you urge members to marry only believers, also help link them with others who share the same faith. Since 1974, Adventist Contact³ has successfully and effectively provided just such a specialized introduction/dating ministry for Seventh-day Adventists.

Foster friendships. Not every single is seeking romance. Every individual, however, needs friends to pray and study together, to play and fellowship together, to share interests or hobbies, to engage in mission projects, and to support each other through the inevitable traumas of loss as well as in times of joy. Kit Watts, Communication Director for the Southeastern California Conference, says that in extending friendship we enter a sacred adventure. A simple invitation, "Let's get together," can open opportunities to grow intellectually, spiritually, socially, and to widen our circle of influence. "Our initiative may be rebuffed or our trust betrayed. But when friendship happens, it can change our lives."⁴

1 Cristina Foor, "Standing Alone," in *Ministries Today*, May-June, 2003, 42-49. www.ministriestoday.com

2 Virginia McInerney, *Single Not Separate: How to Make the Church a Family* (Charisma House, 2003).

3 Adventist Contact, P.O. Box 5419, Takoma Park, MD, 20913, USA.

4 Kit Watts in *Adventist Review*, February 11, 1988, 5.

Ministering to families

continued from page 27

When a family experiences this, they need to know that their pastor is ready to minister to them. If a family seldom or never sees the pastor after the funeral, the pastor should not be surprised if they do not frequent church services. Neither should the pastor be shocked when that family moves to another church.

With today's strong emphasis on church growth, hurting families can be overlooked. Pastors need to consider that church growth is about more than numbers. It is about the spiritual and emotional growth of people already in the church. ■

Learn to preach!

continued from page 4

time is the time for me to cease recoiling in denial from the sorrow, selfishness, and woe of my own soul, and the souls about me.

When I preach, I must take the heavy horizontal bar of my cross, lift it, and nail it firmly to the vertical.

I have to admit that thinking this way, rouses my enthusiasm to preach. It's like discovering a bright, new star in the solar system of the preaching experience.

So let's get practical. Derek Morris' cover article is an outstanding example of how the horizontal bar of the cross can be hewn out and lifted up. Don't miss it. Aside from what is on the surface of the article, it exposes all kinds of broader possibilities. It has the potential for introducing insights and intuitions not only into our preaching but also into our ministry as a whole, that will enrich it in ways we may never have contemplated. ■

Letters *continued from page 3*

Is it correct to state that Seventh-day Adventists see themselves and their role in God's will through their understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation? It has been observed that in the prophecies of these books "... the Adventist people have found their *times*, their *identity*, and their *task*." If this is so. Are our times the end times? Is our identity? Those who are obedient to God's law and exercise saving faith in Jesus? Is our task? The proclamation of the Three Angels' messages of Revelation 14? Apart from Dwight Nelson's reference to the *Three Angels' Messages*, they are conspicuously unemphasized in the March issue of *Ministry*. Method, not message, dominates.

Our message, if it has any meaning, is not only a message of salvation but also a loving but clear invitation to further truth. It appears to this reader that these differences are being played down in the Seventh-day Adventist Church...

Dr. Wiklander rightly emphasizes the need to maintain and protect the identity of Seventh-day Adventists but surely this cannot be done at the expense of downplaying our message?

The March *Ministry* was indeed refreshing in the openness it showed to new and fresh approaches. Those who adopt this openness are to be commended, but the path is not unambigu-

ous and raises issues and implications that merit serious examination.

—Patrick J. Boyle, Watford, Hertfordshire, England.

Editor's response: I stand in strong agreement with the thrust of this letter (which has been shortened for reasons of space). As pointed out in the letter, there is clearly no justifiable reason to adjust the content of the Christian message, or the more distinctive message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to accommodate everyone or anyone. At the same time there is every good reason to deeply understand and identify with those we are trying to reach, and thus to alter *our approach* in the light of their particular world view/s. One simply cannot downplay the need for dealing in depth with this concern.

This is what we do with anyone with whom we are attempting to communicate, be they child or businessman, pauper or millionaire, Bushman or secular postmodern. One simply cannot speak effectively to one person in the same way one does to another. It is this kind of adjustment and communication that the March issue of *Ministry* sought to address.

In the wisdom of the Spirit, we are to consistently balance 1 Corinthians 1:20-25 with 9:19-23. And whatever we do along this line is to be done "for the sake of the gospel" (9:23). I must say that I see every evidence of the most astute application of this balance in the article by Dr. Wiklander. ■

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1 See Charles Bradford, *Ministry*, January 1997, p 5.

BOOK REVIEW

God, Godel, and Grace, by Clifford Goldstein (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2003). 111 pages.

In this short book, Clifford Goldstein takes us at full gallop through intellectual territory seldom explored by Adventist writers. With 17 books now to his credit, Goldstein is one of the most prolific and best-known Adventist writers. Presently he serves as editor of the Adult Sabbath School Study Guides used worldwide in Seventh-day Adventist churches (see ad on page 18).

But *God, Godel, and Grace* represents a clear departure from vintage Goldstein. Some will see little in common with his works for popular readership, such as his best-selling *Day of the Dragon*. Coming from a profoundly Christ-centered perspective, he now tackles the foundational questions underlying how we humans think, which of course guides what we do. This book is unique, demanding careful reading, but the rewards for giving carefully attention are rich. As a literary work, the language itself, with its incisive turns of expression, is refreshing.

Goldstein brings to us a breathtaking panorama of literary citations, mathematical analogies, and observations about human nature and the thinking process. But this is no mere cataloging, for he engages his sources in a dialog, returning to his central theme, which is how resolution of humanity's questions is to be found only in the intercession of the Son of God at the cross.

But along the way, Goldstein samples an array of ideas, slipping into things that always have lain behind what we deal with in biblical studies,

but have seldom explored. Adding this new dimension to Christian studies is an achievement not to be overlooked by anyone interested in the Bible.

In this book we come from an unfamiliar direction in the search for the biblical God. In language sometimes pungent, picturesque, on occasion florid but never pedestrian, the author dips into the thought of numerous of the world's seminal thinkers asking the underlying question of the book: Can a satisfying explanation for the human condition be constructed simply on human reason, or is more required?

This book addresses an array of troubling issues. For example, at a superficial level, we are surrounded by those who appear to be good moral people but have no personal faith. How does this relate to human fallenness and the prospect of salvation (84-86)?

Goldstein's book is both the product of the contemporary world, yet it is alien to its functional main core. We come to the enigma that the book's greatest merit is at one moment its greatest handicap. Given the shallowness of our media-driven age, the wide-ranging richness of citations to sources and deep thoughts that pepper the book's pages is such that superficial readers will be tempted to abandon the effort. If they do so, they are indeed the losers.

Every minister would find this little book a powerful source of great thinking that would enrich the mind. I would encourage everyone to undertake the challenge of the book's intellectual depth, and revel in the benefits. In a world infested with "how to" books that often have little to offer, this book searches for answers to the question "Why?" Ultimately, the answer to that penetrating question commands central place in the mind of every human.

—George Reid, Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, Maryland.

SHOP TALK

Have you found yourself being robbed of a daily quiet time with the Lord? I have decided that every morning, I will not go into the church office but straight into the sanctuary—where I read and pray without interruptions. My congregation supports me and my decision to seek God's wisdom for our church and community. Give it a chance—it may revolutionize your life and your ministry!

—James E. Filbeck, pastor, Rochester Assembly of God, Rochester, Minnesota.


As a lay pastor, perhaps I am discovering what my learned colleagues have known for years. Our power comes from prayer. Every morning, I go over every Bible-study contact, talking to the Lord about their needs and lives, asking for the Holy Spirit's power in their worship, and praying that God would grant us opportunities to befriend them and study His Word together. My effectiveness in daily ministry is proportionate to the time I spend in prayer and personal Bible study. ■

—Wolfgang Jenke, lay pastor, Isa Seventh-day Adventist Church, Mt. Isa, Queensland, Australia.

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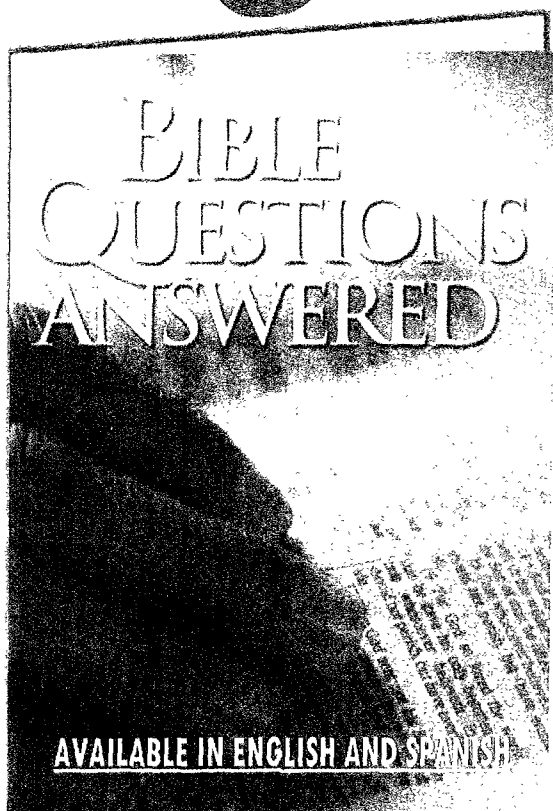
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