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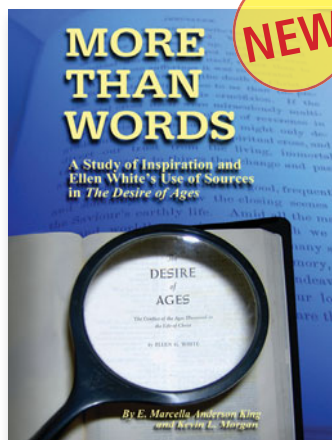
Making Space for God

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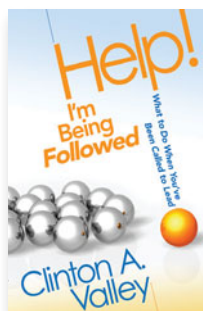
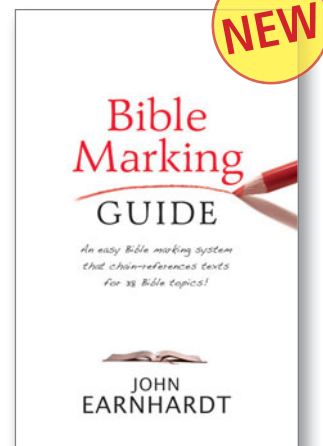


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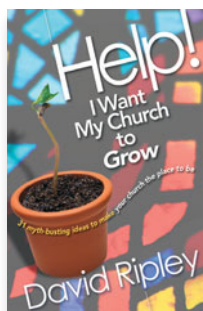
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OUR READERS RESPOND...

Pastors' kids

A big thanks to Martin Weber for his article ("Keeping PKs in the Church"—April 2009). This article needs to be in the hands of every church member!

My life as a worker's spouse for 42 years had many adventures for our family. While much of it was rewarding for Mom and Dad, not all was comfortable for our sons and daughter.

Their father's life was cut short by cancer. Before he died he spoke with each of our children, apologizing for being so busy taking care of other youth and neglecting his own. Mothers are important, and a father's guidance is also needed.

It is a good thing that God is our Judge. He will never forsake our PKs. What they need from us are love, acceptance, and our constant prayers.

—E. J. Fleming, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States

Reaching out to Muslims

Thank you for "An Adventist Approach to Islam" (June 2009). The author is correct when he says that the spiritual affinity between Adventists and Muslims "can be the basis of a beautiful friendship which . . . can open the door to witness."

A little over a decade ago, I served for two years in a Muslim country with an Islamic fundamentalist government. During that time, it was my privilege to develop close friendships with many Muslims, both in and out of government. It did not take long for me to realize that there is much common ground between Muslims and Adventists.

This realization began the day I was invited to share a meal with a transportation contractor, a well-to-do Muslim. As we waited for dinner to be served, my host informed me, "You know, we Muslims are expecting Jesus to come soon!" To say that I was amazed is a gross understatement; but

as I made inquiries other Muslims confirmed that they do, indeed, believe that Jesus will come again and that the event is imminent.

I saw further evidence of common ground as the result of an invitation from the Ministries of Health and Social Welfare to a Christmas banquet. When I accepted the invitation, I thought it had been extended to the directors of all the Western nongovernmental organizations, but when I reached the meeting point, I discovered that the meal was part of a river cruise being held in honor of the special relationship between our organization and these ministries. The speeches and accolades were a testimony to the high regard in which we were held.

Six months later, when a new commissioner for humanitarian aid was installed, it quickly became clear that he held our organization in high regard. When he expressed interest in seeing one of our projects located some distance from the city, we invited him to accompany us on our next visit to the project. On the return journey, after affirming his admiration for the project, he shared with me the reason for placing our organization on a pedestal. He told me that upon traveling to the United Kingdom for advanced studies after completing a medical degree at a local university, a fellow Muslim had informed him that among the Christians in the UK, the Seventh-day Adventists were most like them in beliefs and values.

On another occasion, a government officer was traveling with me to a food distribution center. Since it was my lunch time, I bowed my head to thank God for His blessings before opening my sack lunch. As I began eating my sandwich, the officer said, "You are like us. You pray at different times during the day." As I chatted with him, it became apparent that there were many other points, as

well, on which our beliefs converged. These similarities included not only avoidance of alcohol and pork, but also beliefs regarding systematic benevolence and the importance of the final judgment.

As a result of these and other experiences, I am fully convinced that the "strong correlation [that] exists between the core values of Islam and of Seventh-day Adventism" provides us with both a tremendous opportunity and a grave responsibility to share the love of Jesus with our Muslim friends.

—Harold Peters, email

Preaching through a storm

In reflecting upon Charles Tapp's article, "Preaching Through a Storm," (April 2009), I am reminded that when God brings somebody into deep waters, His intention is not to drown the person, but to cleanse the person. Thanks be to God that we can smile at the storms because Jesus is in the boat.

—Adu-Acheampong Gabriel, Accra, Ghana

Charles Tapp's article is one that every minister of the gospel who is going through the storms of life and ministry should read. It makes one aware that as a minister of the gospel, you are not a superman, and everything that happens to your members to whom you preach can also happen to you.

—Lord Nkrumah Amponsah, Kumasi, Ghana

The life experience of Pastor Charles A. Tapp and his family is so challenging, I was moved to tears when I read, "As for my wife, . . . she will have this battle for the rest of her life." Thank God for His eternal promises at such a time as this. Our solace rests in the Word of God, because, as Jesus said, "In this world you will

Continued on page 22 ►



Running on empty

One hot summer afternoon in Texas, I was not interested in walking home from church although I lived only a mile away. So, a friend and fellow 18-year-old offered to drive me home. A quarter mile away from my house, his car sputtered to a stop—his vehicle’s fuel tank empty.

Anyone whose car has ever run out of fuel knows how frustrating and time consuming that can be. I’ve never run out of fuel while driving, but I’ve come close on more occasions than I care to mention. Trying to squeeze in those extra errands—often driving past several fuel stations in order to do so—my attitude has often been, “I can get fuel later.”

Watch the fuel gauge

The same occurs in ministry. So often we have sermons to prepare, members to visit, committees to attend, and workshops to present. And we don’t take the time to refuel our spiritual tanks.

As a low fuel tank creates mental stress, so also does the soul that is low on spiritual fuel. We believe we can make it to our destination (one more sermon written and preached, one more counseling session with a spiritually distressed member), and we convince ourselves that we can refuel with Bible study and prayer. Later. But another item on the to-do list demands our attention, and we summon enough energy to run another ministerial errand—all the while failing to realize that we are slowly damaging ourselves. We need to watch the fuel gauge and realize that the tank will soon be empty.

Danger signs

There are many threats to our spiritual and ministerial well-being.

We need to be aware of the danger signs pointing to this possibility. Burnout—that state of mental exhaustion—is one of them.

But there are other warning signs that point to potential threats we sometimes tend to overlook. In the chapter titled, “Come Rest Awhile,” Ellen G. White wrote, “As the disciples had seen the success of their labors, they were in danger of taking credit to themselves, in danger of cherishing spiritual pride, and thus falling under Satan’s temptations.”¹ She later added, “It is not wise to be always under the strain of work and excitement, even in ministering to men’s spiritual needs; for in this way personal piety is neglected, and the powers of mind and soul and body are overtaxed.”²

To ourselves and others, we may appear successful. But our depleted “fuel tanks” threaten to leave us stranded on the roadside of our spiritual journey. As a car can still look good, although the fuel tank is empty, so also can we as ministers still look good to others when our souls are empty. But we are spiritually ineffective.

It’s time to refuel

Mark records a story that instructs ministers who are preoccupied with the gospel call, often to their own potential detriment (cf. Mark 6:30–32). The disciples of Christ were busy fulfilling the commission given to them and excited about the successes they were experiencing. They wanted to tell Jesus about all they had done and taught; but even in the process of doing that, they realized that there were more people awaiting their ministry.

Jesus, realizing that they hadn’t even taken time to eat, said to them, “ ‘Come with me by yourselves to

a quiet place and get some rest’ ” (v. 31, NIV). He recognized that His followers would be most effective if they intentionally took time to come aside from their crucial labors to first take care of themselves. More than that, they would be spiritually refueled so they, themselves, could enjoy the abundant life He came to bring to them.

Coming aside and spending time with Christ is the key to ministerial power. E. M. Bounds wrote, “The life-giving preacher is a man of God, whose soul is continually following after God. His eye looks only to God, and in him, by the power of God’s Spirit, the flesh and the world have been crucified.”³

In our lead article, Bobby Moore addresses our need to place first things first.

Before we minister to others, we must allow God to minister to us. Moore spent many years pastoring multichurch districts, as have most of our authors in this issue. (As always, we dedicate our August issue to multichurch district pastors and express our appreciation to them.)

But, we, as ministers in general and pastors in particular, all face the temptations, well-intended though they be, of trying to care for our church members, chair committees, and (yes, even) meet publishing deadlines before we “come by ourselves to a quiet place.”

May Christ bless us to heed His counsel and example as we, as it were, take the time to refuel our spiritual fuel tanks. **M**

1 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1940), 360.

2 *Ibid.*, 362.

3 E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 17.

Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

Bobby Moore, DMin, is pastor of the Highline Seventh-day Adventist Church, Burien, Washington, United States.



Making space for God:

Contemplation as praxis

Oftentimes pastors become so busy and enthralled in keeping their church or churches functional they seldom have or take time to commune with the Lord of the church. To spend time contemplating the Divine when things more measurable need to be done and should be done may seem inappropriate or an anachronism. In the light of the pastor's busyness, they view contemplation of God as an extravagance that can be postponed for a more convenient season.

Men and women, in antiquity and the twentieth century, of deep Christian renown have been Christians who made space for God a priority.¹ From Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to Madame Guyon, George Müller, David Brainerd, and Ellen G. White, these men and women had a communion with the Divine that was enviable and equally attainable. But how might a pastor in the twenty-first century, with a multiplicity of responsibilities, make time to develop a vital, functional, and subsistent spirituality? In other words, how can they be contemplative?

Consider this question: between handling the various functions of the church, as well as school board, church board, Bible studies, prayer meetings, counseling, preparation for sermons and worship services; then add to that a family consisting of piano recitals, parent-teacher meetings, Pathfinders, children's events, and other activities, *when are pastors to develop a spirituality that transcends the mundane normative*

(nominal) Christian experiences often found within their congregations?

One might think that Sabbath would afford opportunities for the pastor to slow down and drink in the presence of God like an emaciated and parched camel that has struggled across the desert to an oasis. However, once arriving at church, whether early or late, almost immediately some well-intended person wants to lay another burden on the proverbial camel's back. And this appears as an omen of what will come from weary saints throughout the congregation who have not had the good fortune of speaking with the pastor all week.

If pastors do not, with some forthright intentionality, make a concerted effort to nurture their own spirituality, sooner or later they will discover that the emptiness of their spiritual life is mirrored in the lives of the congregation and they no longer have a passion for ministry. Nor are they equipped to have an effective ministry.

One of the telltale signs of this unenviable posture is insatiability—a lack of real happiness—exemplified by attempts to gain pleasure through extremes or overstimulating thrills. This may include worship practices, addiction to technological gadgets, or even complacency with minor sins in their lives that they thought to be inconsequential.²

Empty bucket and thirsty souls

A well-known fact: one cannot give out of an empty bucket. Like

the camels with Abraham's servant (Gen. 24:46), our parishioners kneel down near the well and wait for a drink to quench their thirst. Dare we bring the bucket up empty or approach the well without it? What would happen if we saw ourselves as empty vessels going daily before a full fountain and removing any hindrance that might prevent us from gaining access to the refreshing Water of Life? Jesus gives us a hint in John chapter four when he says, "[B]ut the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14, KJV).

When we make time to come to the Well, some amazing things happen. It was at a well that Eliezer got his prayer answered. It was at a well that Jacob discovered the love of his life. It was at a well that Moses procured for himself a helpmeet in ministry. It was at Jacob's well that the Samaritan woman who previously had five husbands finally met the Man who could not only quench her thirst but make her a well of water.

When we make it a habit of going to the Well as an empty vessel and coming away filled, we, too, will be satisfied with the results. And, by doing so, our ministry will be enhanced. But, that recognizable question flares up again: *How can I find time to get to the well to develop a vital, functional, and subsistent spirituality?*

With Eliezer, Jacob, Moses, and the Samaritan woman, they came to the well in the midst of their daily

activities. As a pastor, I, too, have discovered that I can come to the well, commune with God, and find strength and subsistence for the hours ahead even in the midst of my daily activities.

Seeking a spiritual rhythm

At all times our spiritual lives are either being formed or deformed. Because of the fallenness of humankind, we naturally gravitate toward degeneracy. Hence, pastors find it essential to have a plan of action that nourishes the soul toward wholeness and Christlikeness. Benedict of Nursia would call this plan a "Rule."³ This *rule* allows for a spiritual rhythm that assists one in practicing the presence of God through various spiritual practices. For example, the practice of *solitude* allows for a balance of *fellowship* and affords more time for meditation and prayer.

This *rule* also allows one to be very intentional about the day, week, month, and even the year. A

carefully orchestrated *rule* will allow one to incorporate various spiritual disciplines into his or her life of daily routine as compared to a thread in a Persian tapestry.

Dallas Willard, in his book, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, asserts, "We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father."⁴

The operative words in Willard's cogent statement are "by arranging our whole lives." The objective of a spiritual *rule* is to assist us in arranging our lives by making space for the creative activity of the Holy Spirit by placing ourselves in the path He travels. We can learn this path by observing the disciplines that Christ practiced and taught in the Gospels.

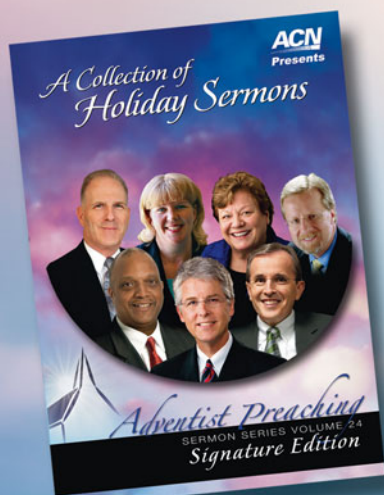
In *Walden*, Thoreau says, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately. . . . I wanted to live deep."⁵ In the woods, he was able to

WE BECOME TOO BUSY DOING THE WORK OF GOD THAT WE HAVE LITTLE TIME FOR THE GOD OF THE WORK.

focus his attention upon the things before him without time restraints and other considerations. Usually, pastors are not afforded the luxury of a two-year sabbatical. But we can live deliberately and deep. The objective should not be to get caught up in the swift current of multitasking, hurry, and busyness; I believe this trinity was concocted in the devil's laboratory. Each causes us to adjust our devotedness and energy and thereby "limit the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 78:41, KJV).

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To extricate one's self from this insidious grip, first, annihilate the urge to multitask and seek to give one's self to the moment. This is the beginning of contemplativeness that leads to space for God. According to Kees Waaijman, "Contemplation, accordingly, is the act of entering into an observational space in which, with full attention, to observe the movements of the divine."⁶ Hence, be fully involved with and devoted to whatever activity or inactivity is being done. Do it with an undivided heart and pray as the psalmist prayed, "Give me an undivided heart" (Ps. 86:11, NIV). *Whatever* we do, it ought to be done with the devotedness of our full attention. As a result, I believe we will see God moving in all of our affairs in ways we have never noticed.

Second, work to eliminate hurry by deliberately slowing down. Get in the longer line at the post office. When at the grocery store, let the person behind you go ahead of you. Refuse to race with the clock. Drive

slower, speak slower, walk slower, and you will be amazed at how this will aid your growth in patience and a contemplative lifestyle.

Third, busyness becomes a scourge to the interior spiritual life. "Thomas Merton once said that the biggest spiritual problem of our time is efficiency, work, pragmatism; by the time we keep the plant running there is little time and energy for anything else."⁷ He was right. In the busyness of keeping up with all personal responsibilities, technology, family, work, world events, continuing education, and the list goes on and on, we push God to the periphery. Thus, our spiritual lives become very shallow. Sermon preparation becomes our Bible study. Prayer at church, and with others, takes the place of personal prayer.

We become too busy doing the work of God that we have little time for the God of the work. "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God," says Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "God will be constantly

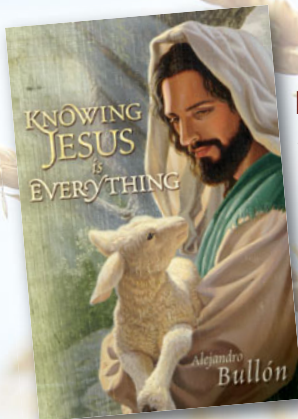
crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions . . . we do not assume that our schedule is our own to manage, but allow it to be arranged by God."⁸

Contemplation as praxis

Living contemplatively is anti-theoretical to contemporary Western culture. Those who have become contemplative have done so because it was intentional. Difficult decisions had to be made not to embrace the prevailing norms that have a tendency to inundate one's life. Such a decision shifts the paradigm radically with a countercultural endeavor that has eternal benefits. It is radical, because it flies in the face of conventional wisdom.

Living contemplatively means to trust God in all things, ignoring the tyranny of the urgent, living in rhythm with nature, noticing the not-so-noticeable, observing and listening with compassion and an appreciative eye. It can be called a planned

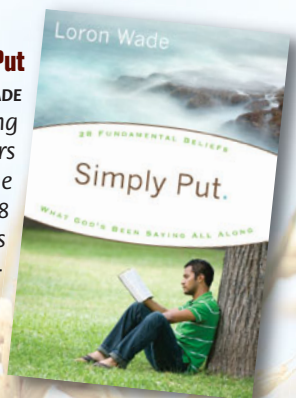
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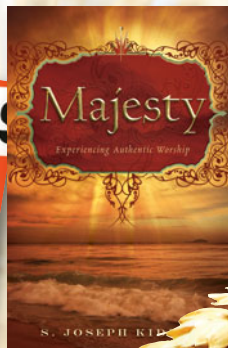
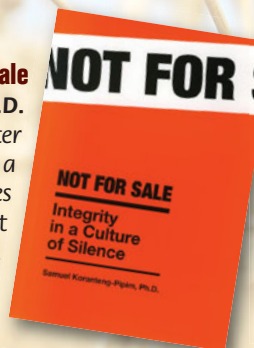
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journey, equivalent to traveling across the country with plans to stop at as many historical sites as possible and occasionally going out of one's way to revel in some attraction or monument. The contemplative person's schedule is planned with the idea that God may want to break in and alter a few things. Though planned, the schedule allows for flexibility. The contemplative is not opposed to intrusions; they are seen as challenges and opportunities; occasions in life from which one may get a glimpse of the Divine. These moments are embraced and like a piggybank turned upside down and shaken to get everything valuable out of it. Ellen White encourages us in *Steps to Christ*:

Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, "Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee." This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.⁹

A few suggestions

Start with your evening, because a good night makes for a good day. Seek to retire as early as possible. Working or playing with electronics late into the evening can be an impediment to family time and a devotional life. Set a definite time when all electronics are off—preferably a couple of hours before bedtime. Before retiring, read a psalm and take a few moments of soul cleansing by asking yourself some questions: When did I best represent Christ today? When and/or where did I least represent Him? How was I with my family today?

Have I been negligent today? Is there some minor sin or un-Christlike habit that I continue to practice? Be compassionate with yourself as you review your day in blocks of time (6:00 – 10:00 A.M.; 10:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.; 2:00 – 6:00 P.M.; and 6:00 – 10:00 P.M.). Talking with God during this process of review and owning up to your weaknesses can be very cathartic.

Start the day with devotional time. Devotional books such as *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants* by Rueben Job or *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers, may prove to be an excellent choice. Twenty to thirty minutes each morning in uninterrupted communion is ideal. Spend at least three to five minutes of that time in silence (mental as well as physical), just sitting before the Lord.

Plan to meet God again for a few minutes of prayer in the middle of your day. If needed, set your alarm clock as a reminder. (I have gotten in the habit of carrying five small smooth polished colorful stones to remind me to pray. As I pray, I remove one stone from my right pocket and rub it in my fingers. When I have finished praying, I place it in my left pocket.)

Throughout the day, look for opportunities to be Jesus in the flesh through service. Space your appointments so that you have some downtime in between. Plan to listen more than you talk, get in the longer lines when waiting for service and enjoy the wait, park farther from the door and have a good walk—exercising and praising God as you go—eat lighter meals, and drink plenty of water. Plan one or two early evenings for study of the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy.

When engaged with the family, devote your full attention to each event and/or experience. By giving yourself wholly to the experience, you will begin to see, hear, and experience God more forcefully in the voice, touch, smile, advice, and

laugh of your loved ones. God often moves in the midst of common things; surely, He moves in the family circle that He has ordained. Additionally, set regular times for family worship (a song or two, a spiritual reading, it does not have to be the Scriptures, but a few moments for sharing and prayer).

To free more time for your renewed, unhurried pace, develop the art of delegation. Trust others to do what you might think only you must do; exterminate any messianic complex you might have. Be a pray-er, not a fix-er. See your role in the fuller context as the one who should pray for the people so that God's grace will operate in their lives to the extent that Jesus is continually glorified. At the same time, look and be aware of the presence of Christ in each person you encounter.

Finally, seek God's face for companionship. "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek" (Ps. 27:8, KJV). Go to the Well and draw Living Water each day so that you can live deliberately and intimately with your God. Develop a contemplative lifestyle with times for meditation as you trust God and, as a result, live in rhythm with Him. As you arrange your life to include space for Him, your passion for an effective ministry will increase—resulting in Christlikeness for yourself, your family, and your parishioners. ☒

- 1 James Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1911).
- 2 Archibald D. Hart, *Thrilled to Death: How the Endless Pursuit of Pleasure Is Leaving Us Numb* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), xi–xiii.
- 3 Timothy Fry, Timothy Horner, and Imogene Baker, eds., *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981).
- 4 Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), ix.
- 5 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: Or Life in the Woods* (New York: New American Library, 1960), 72.
- 6 Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, trans. John Vriend (Paris: Peeters, 2002), 343.
- 7 Quoted in Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 32.
- 8 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 99.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), 70.

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Doing evangelism when no one seems to care

Editor's note: The church needs to know the attitude of people toward religion and church in order to fulfill its mission. The author focuses on sobering trends in one part of the world, although readers need to realize that these are not isolated trends. The author recognizes the challenges but also points out the relevance of evangelism based on the biblical message.

Most people involved in direct evangelistic activity today know that people are not easily reached with the gospel. Those involved in evangelism full time find it harder every year to attract people to evangelistic meetings. And when people do come to Bible meetings, many choose not to make life-transforming decisions. America is fast becoming a post-Christian nation, while the need for a Savior fades in the minds of many.

According to Barry Kosmin, coresearcher for the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), this secularizing trend is not because people are secularized, per se. "They are not thinking about religion and rejecting it; they are not thinking about it at all," he says.¹ How do you, then, reach those who are not interested?

The growth of "no religion"

Since the United States Census does not ask about religion, the ARIS became the comprehensive data-gathering instrument used to learn about religion in America. Research began in 1990 and was based on more

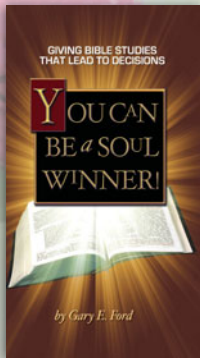
than 113,000 interviews. In 2001, 50,000 more were conducted, and recently 54,000 more. This last year's results show alarming trends for those concerned with the effectiveness of the Christian faith in our society.

For the first time in American history, the number of citizens claiming no religion is becoming a significant segment of the population—almost double the number from 1990. While one in four Americans claim Catholicism as their religion (25.1 percent), the Baptists, who are the largest Protestant faith, barely surpass the No Religion category (15.8 to 15 percent). More people say No to

religion than Generic Christians (14.2 percent), mainline Protestants (12.9 percent), Pentecostal/Charismatic (3.5 percent), or other Protestants (3.1 percent). In fact, the survey shows the only religious groups that have grown considerably in the last 18 years have been Eastern religions (125 percent), Islam (100 percent), and new religious movements such as Wiccan, pagans, or Spiritualists (50 percent), although all these remain a relatively small percentage of the total population (about 1.2 percent).²

Thirty-four percent of the Vermont population, for example, claim no religion, significantly outnumbering

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every other group in the state. But this trend is not only seen in New England. In South Carolina, the number of “Nones” has more than tripled since 1990, while the number of Protestants has dropped by 15 percent.

In 1992, Harold Bloom warned that American religion was already becoming “gnostic” in nature. That is, *experience* was replacing truth as the pivotal center on which to make spiritual decisions; a religion with “strong antinomian impulses.”³ Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten called it “ ‘this American neopagan religion,’ ” asserting that “Gallup-style findings show that the American believers are religious in a general sense with scarcely no correlation to the specific beliefs of historic Christianity. They become church members without believing in the biblical sense.”⁴

Even among so-called committed Christians, there are clear signs of concern. “Mark Silk, director of the Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College, sees in the [ARIS] numbers ‘an emergence of a soft evangelicalism—E-lite—that owes a lot to evangelical styles of worship and basic approach to church.’ ”⁵

The rise of evangelistic atheism

But experience-only religion, or the intentional avoidance of religion, is not the only challenge for those seeking to reach others with the gospel. A new atheism has surfaced, and although not directly responsible for making atheists out of Christians, significant inroads are being made in the minds of secular people who may have once been open to the benefits and logic of a Christian worldview.

Atheists and intellectuals subscribing to scientific naturalism as the end-all explanation for life and meaning were once quiet and long-suffering, clearly outnumbered in a “Christian” society. That was yesterday. Today, writers like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens have become the bold

apostles of a very aggressive atheistic agenda, having sold millions of copies of their books to mainstream American society and making many converts.⁶ They contend that the source of all trouble in the world can be identified as faith, that is, an innate desire to believe in God when the whole notion of God cannot be proven. For example, religious faith causes suicide bombings, they say. Thus, only science can be trusted as the compass to reliably verify or falsify human propositions. Of course, the new atheists define faith as “belief without evidence,” something that thoughtful Christians have never endorsed. But the damage is being done. So many secular Americans have such a minimal understanding of what the Bible teaches or claims, that the superficial assessment of Christian claims made by the new atheists appears plausible to millions.⁷

How do you reach out to a society increasingly confused about truth and inherently distrustful of organized religion? The answer to this question must avoid simplistic sound bytes, such as *share one’s personal journey, engage with the community, or develop a proper apologetic*. Although these may be *part* of the answer, they ignore some of the complexities already alluded to above.⁸ Nevertheless, the answer *is* simpler than one thinks, and it stems from the two-pronged articulation of God’s principles for life, as seen in His law. That is, love for God, and love for one another (Matt. 22:37–40).

The God of the Bible

When Billy Graham wrote in 1997 that it was imperative to rediscover “the full biblical message” in order to bring back evangelism in America, he was right. His argument, though, was primarily because people no longer knew what Christians believe in anymore.⁹ But the problem has become more basic than that, for

HOW DO YOU REACH OUT TO A SOCIETY INCREASINGLY CONFUSED ABOUT TRUTH AND INHERENTLY DISTRUSTFUL OF ORGANIZED RELIGION? THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION MUST AVOID SIMPLISTIC SOUND BYTES, SUCH AS *SHARE ONE’S PERSONAL JOURNEY, ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY, OR DEVELOP A PROPER APOLOGETIC.*

people don’t know who God is anymore. The influence of Eastern mysticism and postmodern thinking, coupled with a surprising ignorance of Scripture and the additional aberration of Christian traditions, have made many believe in a God not found in the Bible.

Many people in and out of the church believe, for instance, that God burns people in hell for eternity as a holy vengeance for having spurned the grace of God. The teaching of eternal punishing versus annihilation is so pervasive that this is not only taught as fact, but also preached as an “incentive” for people to get right with the Lord in order to avoid the “hot place.” Doesn’t the Bible say that the goodness of God, not the fear of hell, will lead us to repentance? (See Rom. 4:2.) This is just one example where the actual teaching of Scripture is sorely needed. More and more thoughtful theologians have come full circle on this issue, giving credence to the teaching of Scripture over an abomination of medieval theology.¹⁰ The nature of God is at stake here. And the Bible clearly teaches God will take the initiative in the final and complete destruction of the wicked

(Rev. 20) versus watching with delight the eternal torment of unrepentant sinners.

Other biblical teachings could be added, such as the biblical worldview of the controversy between good and evil, helping people wrestle with theodicy, or the full impact of the atonement of Jesus on the cross. The whole point here is that the recovery of biblical truth will be the only way to help sinners learn about the true character of God and find the Savior. But this is not due to knowledge of biblical dogma, as such, but because only by knowing Scripture can we have a big enough, and an accurate enough, picture of God that it will be nigh impossible not to fall in love with such a God. This is something no other literary source or commendable evangelistic activity can come close to achieving.

It also means, at the very least, that public evangelistic Bible meetings remain *a must* for the sake of evangelism. Public meetings remain the most effective way to help people decide for Christ.¹¹ Unless people are exposed to direct and clear Bible teaching, how else will they know to be free from false systems that misrepresent the true nature of God and His plans for us? Historically, every major Christian reformation movement in history has been anchored in the renewal of biblical preaching. Small groups, prayer, and world events have all been factors in evangelism. But what has truly led people to make decisions of eternal import for their lives was the hearing of God's Word (see Rom. 10:13–18). When truth is shared, it liberates the one receiving it (see John 8:31, 32). We must keep finding ways to tell the story of the Bible, to teach it and preach it, and give people a chance to hear it.

Love for the lost

The other principle that, when practiced, will inevitably make an impact for evangelism, is a genuine love for others. Jesus made this a


critical command on the night of His betrayal when He told His disciples that *all* would know they belonged to Jesus if they exercised love for one another (see John 13:34, 35). This transcends cultural challenges or even knowledge of the true God. This is God at work through you in your daily life. This is being salt and light in a world with warped tastes and blinded by darkness (Matt. 5:13–16).

When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, the Lord answered him with a recitation of the last six commandments: how to love his neighbor (Luke 18:18–21). He wanted the young leader to think about the failure of external law-abidingness. For even though he had kept the law from his youth, his heart was still so empty that he despaired at his current condition. Then, Jesus told him the rest of the story: if you *give* of what you have to others, you will not only have treasure in heaven, you'll be unhindered to follow Me (v. 22).

What the rich young ruler wanted was to follow Jesus. Like a child counting on his hero, he instinctively knew Jesus could fill the gaping hole in his heart.¹² But what Jesus knew the man needed was to make love a reality. Giving of himself to others would finally allow him to keep the *spirit* of the law, not merely its letter. Thus, he could be saved and help others find salvation as well.

Today, that is known as servant evangelism, and practitioners like Steve Sjogren and Dave Ping have done it successfully for years.¹³ The basic premise is to set out and bless your community with no strings attached; to demonstrate the love of God in some practical way. That's exactly what Jesus asked the young ruler to do. A sincere love for others, seeking to genuinely bless them just because the love of God cannot be contained in your own heart, becomes the most powerful way to reach out to others. It transcends socioeconomic, age, and educational differences. It is applicable anywhere you live. And love

is a language everyone understands when you speak it as a native, when it flows out of you unhindered.

Evangelistic methods will vary with the times, and times may not get easier for those seeking to share Jesus with the world. But these biblical principles will remain true every time: preach and teach the love of God as seen in the Bible, and share the love of God with your neighbor. Love never fails. 

- 1 Quoted in Cathy Lynn Grossman, "‘Nones’ Now 15% of Population," *USA Today*, March 9, 2009, 6A.
- 2 See cover story by Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Almost All Denominations Losing Ground, Survey Finds," *USA Today*, March 9, 2009, 1A, 6A.
- 3 Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).
- 4 Jeremy Lott, "American Gnostic," review of *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*, by Harold Bloom, *Christianity Today*, Nov. 1, 2002, http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2002/novdec/19_36.html.
- 5 Grossman, "All Denominations Losing Ground," 6A.
- 6 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006); Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004); *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006); and Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2007).
- 7 For a helpful theological assessment of new atheism's claims, see John F. Hought, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).
- 8 Mark E. Dever, in his insightful book *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), expands on what evangelism *isn't* on pages 69–82.
- 9 Billy Graham, "Recovering the Primacy of Evangelism," *Christianity Today* 41, no. 14, (1997), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1997/december8/1te027.html?start=1>.
- 10 Over the last 30 years, distinguished evangelical scholars have questioned the traditional view, settling for annihilationism and conditional immortality. Among them are F. F. Bruce, in Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry; A Biography of the Later Years* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); David L. Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988); John Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974); *Facing Hell: An Autobiography* (London: Paternoster, 1998); Clark H. Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (1990); and Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment* (Houston: Providential Press, 1982).
- 11 For some evidence on this point, see Russell Burrill, *Reaping the Harvest* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 2007), 27–38.
- 12 Note the story follows the free acceptance of children by Jesus (Luke 18:15–17). This must have made an impression on the young man.
- 13 Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness: A Unique Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus*, rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003); *101 Ways to Reach Your Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2000); Steve Sjogren and Dave Ping, *OutFlow: Outward-Focused Living in a Self-Focused World* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2007); Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, and Doug Pollock, *Irresistible Evangelism: Natural Ways to Open Others to Jesus* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2003). See also an excellent Adventist version of the concept, chock-full of practical suggestions and inspiration, in Ruthie Jacobsen, *Bridges 101: The Kingdom Advances Among Friends* (Self-published, 2008).

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New to the ministry— with four churches

When I was asked to pastor four churches, I was quite surprised. In college, I failed to finish ministerial training and switched to elementary education. Later when an opportunity to learn a trade presented itself, I saw something I could put my whole heart into and honor God in the process. I became a masonry contractor. Because I often pondered the fact that Jesus was a builder, I tried to do my work with that thought in mind. Manual labor is honorable if its motive includes serving others and bringing glory to God.

While active in my local church, I stayed as a layman for many years and served God the best I could. Never did I dream that I would be called to pastor a church—let alone four. Yet, when the conference called me to pastor, a strange conviction gripped my heart that God would not have permitted such a call without knowing my inadequacies. God knew that I had limited training for ministry, but He also knew that I was an instrument in His hands. I believed that He would not have allowed this opportunity without having prepared me in His own way. In addition, I also knew that the One who calls also enables and equips. He would surely offer new energy and on-the-job training equal to the requirements of the work He was now giving me.

Most of my training up to this point had been in the school of practical experience. My work had been first as a builder and then as a computer programmer and teacher.

When many of my friends were talking about retirement, I was about to take up a new career. As I thought about this ministry, I also had to consider what I had learned and what I must still learn in order to work as a pastor. Was it possible that working with four churches at once might offer some sort of advantage over working with just one congregation?

As I considered the challenges of a multichurch district, I tried to recall each of the pastors I had known, remembering those things they had done especially well. Through the years, my membership had mostly been in small churches with a pastor who had a multichurch district. Some pastors had been especially close to one church in the district. Others seemed to spread themselves equally with each church. Some tended to maintain tight control over what was happening in the church. And others seemed not to have such tight control, perhaps as a way of developing local leadership or maybe because of the frustration of having so many things happening at different places in the district.

A large part of any married person's life is the spouse. In my case, Sanita had hoped to marry a pastor. Instead she married me, and we have lived a happy life. Now what would her reaction be if I took up ministry? Would we be able to make the transition together? Would we be able to support each other in this demanding opportunity? Would she feel the call too?

After much prayer together, we decided to accept the call.

Choosing my style of leadership

Recognizing my limited formal training, I decided to rely on the local leadership in each church to help me with the focus of my pastoral responsibilities for that church. This seemed especially appropriate because the district had been without a pastor for several months and had managed quite well. It was good for me to realize that the success of each church might well depend on them more than me. If I could remember this, perhaps I could convey to them my trust in their connection to God and lean on them for guidance as to the direction each church should go in its effort to fulfill the gospel commission.

A short time after taking up my pastoral responsibilities, one of the churches expressed a strong desire to have evangelistic meetings. They had already discussed what they thought would work; my job was to support their decision and to help them coordinate with the conference in order to reach our goal.

Another church had been interested in conducting a CHIP (Coronary Health Improvement Project) program as a form of service evangelism. They had tried to implement the program in a previous year, but the community had not adequately embraced the program. Now the church decided to try again. In the process, they determined that more people should receive training for conducting the seminars. Then, the leadership from within the church put the program together, planned the advertising, and did the presentation. My job was to support

them in whatever way I could. This same church is now giving their third presentation of the CHIP program with ever-increasing success. They didn't need my expertise in order to do this sort of evangelism, but they needed my interest and support.

My congregations have the greater part in accomplishing the commission given them by Jesus. They understand that they are to go to the world and share a glimpse of the hope they have experienced in knowing Jesus. They do not look to me for all of the ideas, and I would be remiss to suppose that I *have* all of the answers. My life has clearly shown me that I do not have the total picture in my own mind. Every group has its own dynamics and strengths. The worst thing I could do as their pastor would be to stifle their creative approach as to how they are to fulfill their commission. When it's their program, they get behind it.

My job as a pastor

So what does my job include as the pastor of these churches? Among other things, I must support and encourage them as they consider what they can do in their communities for God. Other pastors before me helped make them what they have become. God forbid that I should slow them down.

With my temperament and view of life, I cannot, in good conscience, ignore one of my congregations for the benefit of another congregation. I must rely on each church to play a very large part in setting its own goals while I provide support and encouragement. Each church must then take responsibility for their growth.

People generally respond to need. This becomes especially true as they realize that something may not get done unless they do it. Each

congregation seems to understand that I would be spreading myself rather thin if I spend time with each church every Sabbath. This works out for the best because every member has an opportunity to be more involved and intentional about their role in the church.

Some might say that this cannot be considered pastoral leadership at its best. My reply? A church cannot exist as the result of one person's gifts. Jesus has given His church gifts and there are enough gifts for each church. When it appears that gifts are lacking in a congregation, we need to pray for gifts to be given to people within the church and for those people to carry the responsibility their gift addresses.

I MUST RELY ON EACH CHURCH TO PLAY A VERY LARGE PART IN SETTING ITS OWN GOALS WHILE I PROVIDE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT. EACH CHURCH MUST THEN TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR GROWTH.

Godly balance

There are times when a person thinks God has called them to run the church by themselves. This is less likely to happen when each person in the church takes action in regards to their gifts. It takes a godly balance to know when to use one's gift and when to step aside and let another person exercise their gift. This godly balance comes to those who focus on Jesus. The pastor must also demonstrate this balance.

A large part of my work as a pastor is to introduce fresh ways of seeing God in His Word. I need to apply what I learn to the things happening in our homes, communities, and the world at large. How we make sense of our existence has a strong bearing on how we serve our communities.

Being able to bring hope to others requires a strong hope within oneself. I see my time preparing for a sermon as a sacred and important part of my ministry. People generally come looking for a blessing. The blessing comes from God. I want the sermon to be part of the process that brings hope and a deeper trust in what God has been doing and will continue to do in each life.

As a pastor's wife, Sanita has been very supportive. Because our children are grown, she has been able to devote more of her energies to the churches than would have been possible with children to care for. Her support and wisdom have made the difference at crucial times in our ministry together. Her prayers have made a telling difference in the ministry we share.

Conclusion

The church belongs to Jesus Christ, and I am fortunate to worship together with the people in each congregation. And Sabbaths are a bit like camp meeting—

we move from congregation to congregation. On a given Sabbath, we may meet with three congregations. This can be tiring, yet inspiring.

My most important responsibility is pointing others to Jesus. I can only do this as I seek to focus on Him while living in today's world with its distractions arranged by the devil to get me off track by forgetting from whom I receive my strength.

God is good. I praise Him for allowing me to serve Him in this new way. All along the paths of my life, He has been preparing me for the next step. All the steps along the way have been profitable and interesting. He has brought good out of bad. And most of all, He has given His life for me. My prayer is that I give my life entirely to Him. ■

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Faith community nursing in congregations

Pastors attending a health ministry team building class were asked, "What does the ideal church look like?" The responses were encouraging. One pastor said, "A place of healing." Another: "A vital place, full of life." Still another: "A place where we reach out to the community." These comments provide a vision for the church today and might easily have described the early church. The book of Acts presents the church as a place where members "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:42, 43).¹

Scripture records the results of such a faith community: "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (v. 47).

Christ commissioned the apostles to preach the kingdom of God and to heal (Luke 9:2). The apostles formed a community where the Scriptures were studied, people were valued and cared for, and their needs were met. They created a community where the dynamics of daily living were intertwined in personal encounters with the power of the Lord Jesus. The result? "[T]he Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (emphasis added).

The Greek word translated as *saved* has been used to describe Christ's ministry of healing. It has a multidimensional meaning, relating both the salvific aspect of Christ's

ministry, "to save," and also "to heal" or "to make whole," which revealed His work of complete healing. Scriptural use of this word helps us understand that the work of the apostles was *to make people whole*.

How does the church today create this apostolic model? How does the church demonstrate God's plan for redemption and reconciliation *and* adopt a godly perspective for the complete restoration of the believers and, in doing so, become a witness for the greater surrounding community?

A deeper mission

Clearly, the church has an established role in the community for sharing the message of God's plan of salvation. The church should also function as a place where broken relationships with God can be restored and fractured personal relationships can be reconciled and healed. While the church has maintained these established positions for spiritual revival and renewal, what has become of its role to make humanity whole?

Science and medicine have made great strides in dealing with disease and trauma; in the midst of this medical model, however, we have become dependent and passive, content to wait until illness forces us to change our lifestyle. As a result, the church responds to those who suffer from the *effects* of a hazardous lifestyle and/or chronic illness. A great deal of time, in fact, is spent in ministries that focus on visitation of the sick and crisis response. Though

it's important that we minister to those in need, how do we reconcile the work of the church with Christ's words, "I have come that they may have *life*, and have it to the full" (John 10:10; emphasis added)? Shall we, as Christ's church, be content with only comforting the suffering or is there an additional and historic role of Christ's ministry of healing that we need to reclaim?

Part of Christ's mission was to address human needs. "Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man's necessity. He 'took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,' that He might minister to every need of humanity. The burden of disease and wretchedness and sin He came to remove. It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give them *health and peace and perfection of character*."² For the church to reclaim its New Testament role as the center for healing in the community, and for the members to experience full restoration in Christ, the messages of health and methods of becoming whole must become an intentional ministry of the church equal to its work for redemption and reconciliation.

For starters, the pastor must understand the healing ministry. Because this is not well defined during seminary preparation, many pastors have come to rely upon health-related events. Often, when the event ends, the ministry also ends. To assume that the pastor has current knowledge beyond a general level of the physical, mental,

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and emotional principles for the well-being of the congregation is unrealistic. Yet, understanding how these areas intersect and impact a person's life may be key to spiritual growth and healing. The pastor needs support from a colleague who also was called to ministry, has knowledge of holistic health principles, and can implement an inclusive health ministry process that functions year-round. The Faith Community Nurse, a holistic health colleague, can be the catalyst for the development of a healing ministry.

The Faith Community Nurse

The Faith Community Nurse (FCN), a specially prepared registered nurse, provides the pastor with the missing link in ministry preparation. Working within a health ministry team, which includes members with a variety of backgrounds and gifts, the FCN seeks to help meet the health needs of church members. The health ministry process includes a strategy, implemented throughout the year, to help members understand health principles and disease risks *prior* to encountering a crisis. It empowers people to obtain knowledge of their body, mind, and spirit; to gain control over (with the help of others) unhealthy habits and lifestyle; and to access professionals who assist in managing the issues of life.

Because Faith Community Nursing is a specialty practice of the nursing profession, the roles and duties are governed by the Nurse Practice Act of each state and by the Scope and Standards of Faith Community Nursing (published by the American Nurses Association). The laws that dictate the nursing practice may vary between states and countries, but generally the functions of primary health care are similar and can be adopted by any culture. (The International Parish Nurse Resource Center offers more information on establishing a FCN. Their Web site, www.parishnurses.org, offers information and global leadership contacts to assist in

Roles of the Faith Community Nurse

- Intentional spiritual care
- Integrator of faith and health
- Assessment of individuals and groups
- Liaison to community resources
- Referral agent
- Health advocate
- Personal health counselor
- Health educator
- Facilitator of support groups
- Trainer for membership

establishing a FCN ministry. The Center for Community Health Ministry, a Florida Hospital Web site, www.communityhealthministry.net, provides additional information and a video for viewing online.)

A demonstration ministry project

In a recent faith and health project in Winter Park, Florida, three interfaith congregations worked with Winter Park Memorial Hospital, a facility in the Florida Hospital system, to develop a health ministry and implement the role of a FCN within the leadership of the congregations. A fourth congregation was included as a control group and did not have a parish nurse or a health ministry team.

As part of this medical-religious partnership, the hospital provided project participants with an annual health risk appraisal (HRA), including biometric measurements and comprehensive lifestyle questionnaires, in order to determine baseline health risks and measure health behavior change over time. A variety of health and lifestyle change courses were provided in order to address the health risks and needs—nutrition, fitness, exercise, weight loss, grief recovery, etc. The FCN's role included working with the pastor to integrate faith and health in the services, develop a health ministry team, and respond to holistic health needs for both individuals and groups.

This project demonstrated that congregations often reflect the culture in which they live. From 947 total project participants, 221 participated for three years consistently. Of these 221, more than 60 percent were identified as having an elevated risk for cancer and heart disease (with elevated blood cholesterol levels and blood pressure), poor nutrition, low fitness levels; many were overweight too. At the end of the project, the participants' blood cholesterol levels improved by 28 percent, nutrition improved by 20 percent, and their cancer risk was reduced 12 percent, weight and elevated blood pressure was reduced by 10 percent, and overall fitness improved by 8 percent.

Participants were also asked about their spiritual health. When asked about their belief in a higher power as a source of direction, 99 percent responded affirmatively. In response to a series of questions about the influence of faith on their meaning and purpose in life, their joy and harmony, their comfort during crises, their strength to deal with problems, and their reason to help others, the responses, between 86 percent to 93 percent of the time, were "Yes, very much" and "Yes, very often." Faith, obviously, played a big role for most of them. One question, however, scored lower: how faith influenced their life as a support and motivation for a healthy lifestyle. Responses to this question showed only 69 percent responding, "Yes, very much" or "Yes, often" in the first year. After three years, affirmative responses had increased by 14 percent, which indicates that though a substantial number of people within a congregation may tend not to associate their faith to healthful living, when intentional interventions were implemented throughout the years, their thinking changed.

The control church did not request any follow-up for project participants following the health risk appraisal, nor did they hold any health courses. At the end of the

first year, they declined participation in the project. This outcome was particularly interesting; it was an indication that, despite the pastor's willingness, if the church does not share a passion for wholeness and there are no health ministry leaders to guide and direct the process, the interest and commitment soon dies.

The personal journey

Many people touched by Christ recognized the changes that had occurred in their bodies and lives. They became witnesses for Christ and wanted to share their encounters of how He healed them. Here is one story of a participant in Project HOPE, just prior to her second year measurements: "I can hardly wait for this year's measurement results. Last year, I found out that I was at risk, and so I began to work on my health.

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I took a class here at the church called Fitness for Life, and I learned how to make simple changes—it's not a diet, it's about lifestyle. Now, my husband and I get up and walk every morning at 5:30. I have lost weight and feel great!" Then she added another unexpected comment with excitement, "And, I'm attending church three times a week." The last comment is a surprise because usually people do not share their church attendance details. Out of curiosity, the staff person asked her how often she had attended church before this, and she replied, "Oh, about once a month."


This story is an example of holistic health behavior change. The project participant was made aware of certain health risks. She made a decision to change. She attended a class offered by the church and made adjustments

in her lifestyle by altering her diet and adding a simple exercise program. She lost weight, had more energy, and admitted to feeling "great." Thus, her health was positively affected. In addition, she had a positive influence within her family as her husband also joined her in walking. Finally, in concert with all the other changes taking place, her ability and desire to participate in her church increased. The work of the church resulted in a personal journey toward wholeness and, as if her personal experience wasn't enough, she wanted to tell someone else about it.

Health is truly the enabler, because it gives people the capacity to become involved.

Conclusion

Through the addition of a Faith Community Nurse, ministry

today can be expanded to reflect Christ's ministry of healing. The FCN becomes a resource for every pastor, ministry leader, and individual member. Membership can be transformed from today's society of passive people into a true reflection of God's active love. The ultimate result of such a ministry is that members grow to experience what *becoming whole* means and are empowered to experience the blessings of God for life in the present. The Faith Community Nurse can be a catalyst as the church reclaims its role as the center for healing and wholeness in the community. 

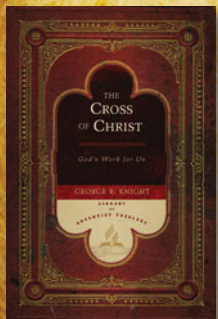
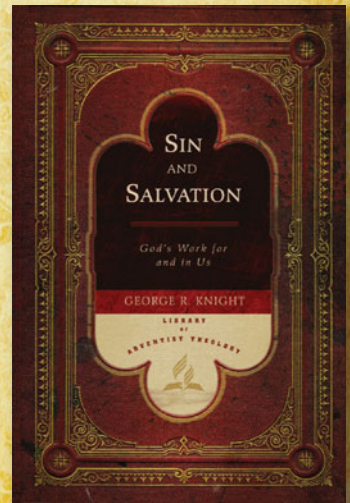
1 Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quoted is from the New International Version.
2 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 17; emphasis added.

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Preaching as community building

A majority of church leaders are increasingly focusing their worship service on building a sense of community as well as encountering God. Hence, members stand to greet one another—visitors too—during a welcome and announcements period; music teams use songs that encourage audience interaction with one another as well as active participation in movement and singing; and prayer times invite people to unite as a congregation in prayer or let members pray in small groups throughout the sanctuary.

Can sermons focus on the same sense of community building? Yes!

Preaching often consists of the pastor's exegesis and study to understand a passage or topic, a search for illustrations and stories, and then a presentation to an audience. The exegesis and illustrations usually come from study sources, not from interaction with the membership.

An interactive sermon creates a climate of community—helping members connect with one another as well as with God. Interactive preaching not only parses the passage and teases out the topic, but also involves members in creating the content.

Preaching content that builds community

The most common preaching content that builds community includes stories that feature members. The stories are real and local. Audience members listen more closely because they know the

person in the story. Pastor Michael preached on 1 John 2 about the apostle John's message to those young and old. An 11-year-old asked to share with the church that week, and Michael let him share what it means to be a young person in an old-person-dominated congregation—and what this passage meant to him. Church members listened in rapt attention—and learned about another person in their church community.

Equally compelling is an interview during the sermon. Pastor Kermit asked a member to come forward one Sabbath and tell the story of how he lost a watch he treasured and how he searched for it. The story illustrated a sermon on Luke 15—and made the desire of the Savior to find us real.

But member participation in preaching content also can stretch to the message. During a series on the three angels' messages, Kermit asked members to share with him, in 25 words or less, what each angel's message meant. He started each sermon by quoting several members' brief descriptions—which helped the audience to know each other better. Kermit then shared his own understanding of each message over the three-week series to highlight his insights into the angels' messages.

Michael asked members to share their interpretation of the story of Zacchaeus—but in a far more immediate context. He had children come forward to act out the scripture passage, with an adult sitting near the front serving as the tree. The younger

children found themselves immersed in the message. Michael also asked members to text message him while he was preaching to respond to the question: *what would you do if Jesus came to your house today?* Michael shared those text messages with the congregation at the end of his sermon. Every teenager listened to that message! In fact, one 13-year-old gave Michael a high-five on the way out of church, stating that he was going to make sure he came to church from now on. The teenager saw his text message as a part of the collective worship experience.

We have found that members have keen insights to Adventist doctrines, and people appreciate hearing what their fellow members have to say on the topic.

One last idea: ask members what they want to hear you preach about. Kermit did a series at Easter called "Cross-eyed Christians," stories of people who saw Jesus die on the cross. Kermit picked four of the five sermons in the series, but asked members to suggest who should be the fifth person in the series. (He also didn't reveal who the person was until the sermon started, which helped to build a stronger sense of community participation as well. And now, thanks to the diverse set of suggestions, Kermit will preach "Cross-eyed Christians II" during another Easter season!)

Creating content that builds community

Stories and other content that build community don't just happen

but must be planned in advance. We have found that the following three techniques can do wonders to help find the community-building content.

Pastoral visitation has been a cornerstone of pastoral ministry for centuries, and the experiences uncover content that builds community in sermons. They can procure stories from the members to share during a sermon (after obtaining permission to share the stories in a public sermon)

ways of generating content. We both have used text messaging during a sermon. Kermit and his wife, Ronalee, were giving a joint sermon on tips for a successful marriage—and they asked the audience to text message tips to Kermit’s phone. One message said, “I’m a teenager, and I don’t know much about marriage. But it’s so cool to text message during church!” Other messages had valuable content, and Kermit

worship and ties members closer to one another as they grow in connection with God. The participation may be as slight as simply announcing the passage in advance of the sermon. Members will find a sense of ownership that strengthens their relationship to the church—and Christ.

A side benefit results as visitors feel the sense of warmth and welcome that comes from the participation of everyone in

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and seek insights to the passages on which you will preach.

Technology has opened new ways to create the content. Emails to members, Web-based newsletters, Facebook and MySpace accounts,¹ and text messages appeal to a wide range of members and can bring stories and insights to pastors that can help create community through the sermon itself.

Kermit produces a Web-based weekly church newsletter that frequently asks members to contribute ideas and stories for sermons. Life@Beltsville circulates each Thursday and produces many responses. The ease of replying to the email enhances the response rate. Michael creates a similar newsletter, not only sent out by email but forms the basis of a pastor’s blog on the church Web site.

Pastors can quickly disseminate information and solicit sermon topics using MySpace or Facebook. Pastors can also subscribe to RSS feeds² from church members and read blog posts—sometimes even posts about a recent sermon or other church life. This creates interactive connectivity from which to draw stories from church members. Text messaging has been one of the more interesting


shared that content at the close of the message.

Michael used text messaging in a slightly different way. He read a passage, then posed the question of what it meant. Congregants texted their thoughts, and Michael shared them—along with his more studied discussion of the passage.³

Every interactive experience seeks to produce some kind of desired change in the listener. We both have found that a very traditional technique, a call or appeal, helps create community by showing that others have been touched by the message as well. Not everyone responds to a call to stand or come forward; sometimes the call should be to complete a commitment card, create Thank-you notes among church members, or sign a pledge that people plan to put on the mirror in their house. Ultimately, the call needs to tangibly affect their lives.

Benefits of content that builds community

We both have found that interactive preaching—using the thoughts, stories, ideas, and sometimes even exegesis of our members—creates a sense of community that enhances

the creation—and sometimes the delivery—of the sermon. Preaching as community building becomes an important part of building a healthy, growing congregation. 

- 1 Facebook and MySpace are social networking Web sites.
- 2 “RSS (Rich Site Summary) is a format for delivering regularly changing web content. Many news-related sites, weblogs and other online publishers syndicate their content as an RSS Feed to whoever wants it.” <http://www.whatissrss.com>.
- 3 Pastors should realize, of course, that encouraging text messaging during the worship service may be disturbing to others who do not have the device or would prefer that this use of technology be saved for occasions other than the worship service.

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Keeping the Sabbath intensely holy

I have been conducting Bible studies with a handful of children at my church's elementary school. They are preparing for baptism and, despite the fact that the group ranges from third-graders to seventh-graders (which presents a number of challenges), the lessons have gone fairly well.

However, when we came to the introductory lesson on the Sabbath, some of them were perplexed. After we saw that God declared the seventh day as the Sabbath; therefore we would want to refrain from work on God's holy day, we also talked about how spending time with God would naturally lead us away from wanting to do our "own pleasure" (Isaiah 58:13).¹ As we pondered this idea, I mentioned that we probably wouldn't want to go the mall, watch TV, eat at restaurants, or play sports.

That last idea—about not playing sports—bothered a few kids. With a puzzled look, one boy responded, "You mean we can't play soccer in our backyards on Sabbath afternoon? What's wrong with that?"

Of course, not wanting to make a list of "dos" and "don'ts," I replied that it's not that we can't, but that we should not want to spend time on what wouldn't turn our minds toward God. "The Sabbath was designed so that we could worship God and help others," referring to Matthew 12:12. I continued, "I don't know about you, but I have a hard time doing either of those things when I am playing basketball or spending the day at the beach."²

I don't think he comprehended the concept, because I later overheard him saying to a classmate, "Pastor Brace said that we can't play sports on the Sabbath." Yet I believe that his bewilderment reflects the overall present attitude, both of the young and old, towards the meaning of keeping the Sabbath holy.

Secularizing the Sabbath

Of course, the issue isn't necessarily about playing soccer, going to the beach, or eating at a restaurant. We're concerned about the principle because, in the end, that's all we really have. Though we may try to come up with our rules for appropriate Sabbath observance, the Bible itself doesn't give us many. Besides the fact that we're not supposed to work, buy, or sell, the Bible allows each individual to decide how to keep the Sabbath holy.

Yet in this freedom—and in our ever increasing desire to rightfully steer away from a legalistic form of Sabbath observance—many Adventists seem to subtly and slowly secularize the Sabbath. In the past, the day was once considered holy, totally devoted to God; now it's almost as if the Sabbath has become a time to relax, have fun, and pursue personal hobbies and self-improvement projects. We can worship God in nontraditional activities, but we've often grown lax about jealously guarding the Sabbath from things that turn our minds away from God.

Thus the crucial question is, *Are we, who since the 1800s have heralded the apocalyptic importance*

of the seventh-day Sabbath, in danger of forgetting the day ourselves? (Wouldn't that be ironic?) For an answer, we turn to the Bible for a precedent that speaks to our situation today in the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel and the Sabbath

Though Ezekiel is a somewhat controversial figure himself, and his writings are not always easy to understand, many turn to him when emphasizing the importance of keeping the Sabbath holy: "Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. . . . "Hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God" (Ezek. 20:12, 20).

God's reminder of the importance of the Sabbath reveals that Israel did not always hallow the Sabbath. Three times in this chapter alone God reminds His people that they "profaned" His Sabbaths (Ezek. 20:16, 21, 24.). At the center of Israel's apostasy was, apparently, their disregard for the seventh day.

Yet we are confronted with a challenge if we try to make a case that profaning the seventh-day Sabbath laid at the heart of Israel's apostasy during Ezekiel's time. Many commentators maintain that God does not here refer to the seventh-day weekly Sabbath; rather, to the annual Sabbaths. Ezekiel "has more than the weekly Sabbath in view," writes Daniel I. Block. "Included would also be the special holy days

the Sabbath with zealous fervor (the Hebrew of the word “hallow” in Ezekiel 20:20 means “intensely holy”), we risk forgetting the day altogether and, more significantly, forgetting the Lord of the Sabbath as well. This does not mean we must create a list of “dos” and “don’ts” as the well-intentioned rabbis did in hopes of making sure Israel never met destruction again. However, this does mean that when we respond to God’s love wholeheartedly by faith, we will want to do only what facilitates a deeper and more intimate walk with God on His holy day.

Abraham Heschel writes, “In the tempestuous ocean of time and toil there are islands of stillness where many may enter a harbor and reclaim his dignity. The island is the seventh day, the Sabbath, a day of detachment from things, instruments and practical affairs as well as of attachment to the spirit.”¹⁰ Within the Sabbath God invites us to detach from things—to detach from those secular affairs that crowd

our thoughts during the rest of the week, thus shutting God out. And, somehow, the idea of playing sports, eating at restaurants, or wasting the afternoon away while napping doesn’t seem to be an activity that would draw us closer to the Lord in a special way.

On the other hand, we can respond to God’s invitation—and promise—of rest. How we spend the Sabbath reflects our priorities and where God ranks in our hearts. May we, as leaders in God’s church, direct our people—even our children—to a true experience of the Sabbath rest. 📖

1 All Scriptures, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *New King James Version*.
 2 For a recent discussion on these issues, see May-Ellen Colón, *From Sundown to Sundown* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2008). It is not the purpose of this article to address specific Sabbath practices per se, but to encourage a sincere re-examination of how we are keeping the Sabbath today. Although there are general principles in Scripture about Sabbath keeping, the particulars are left to the individual. This specific example of playing sports on the Sabbath was given as to how, a few decades ago, few Adventists would even think about playing sports on Sabbath, and now many view it as a non issue. And this particular writer is personally challenged by reconciling the

idea of keeping the Sabbath holy and playing sports. Others may disagree, which is fine, so long as they can, in clear conscience, reconcile the two ideas.

3 Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 632. Cf. also Brandon L. Fredenburg, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Ezekiel* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 2002), 184.
 4 Translated differently in various versions, the Hebrew word *qadosh*, as found in 20:20, means to “set apart,” “to sanctify,” “to hallow,” or “to keep holy.” It is the same word used in Genesis 2:3 where we are told that God “blessed the seventh day and sanctified [qadosh] it.”
 5 See also Deut. 5:12; Neh. 13:22; Jer. 17:24, 27. Although Ezekiel 20:20 is the only place where the word *qadosh* is in the imperative form as it relates to the Sabbath, the other five are infinitive constructs, thus making them essentially commands.
 6 See also Exod. 31:13; Lev. 19:30; 26:2; Isa. 56:4. For a very good discussion of this issue, see also Ron du Preez, *Putting the “Sabbath” To Rest: A Scriptural Study of Colossians 2:16*, 2d ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Omega Media, 2006).
 7 See also Leviticus 26:35, which is a little more ambiguous, but likely also refers to the annual Sabbaths.
 8 To compare this passage to the only other places in the Old Testament where “appointed feasts” and “Sabbaths” are mentioned together, see 1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:3; 8:13; 31:3; Neh. 10:34; Lam. 2:6; Ezek. 45:17; Hos. 2:13. Each passage seems to draw a distinction between the yearly and weekly Sabbaths.
 9 See Jer. 52:12–34. Cf. also Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 618.
 10 Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 29.

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The art of listening

The art of listening can be a challenge for pastors who are often occupied (or even preoccupied) with sermons, board meetings, their own pain, and a host of other issues. Nevertheless, church members must feel confident that their clergy will listen to them, especially in times of need.

Skilled pastors not only listen, but they listen actively. Active listening involves empathy—the ability to set aside personal thoughts, feelings, and agendas in order to enter into another person’s world. Such listening enables one to see other people’s concerns from their perspectives. Pastors with strong personalities or those whose main focus is on something else, find this especially difficult. Compassionate, active listening can be foreign to pastors, too, because they sometimes have not often themselves been recipients of good listening. To be a good pastor and minister to the flock, one needs to learn how to listen and listen actively.

Trained to listen

One difficulty with active listening is that this topic has not gained prominence in theological education. Pastors enroll in extensive education in order to exegete and preach; listening skills are, it seems, just assumed. Because few people naturally know how to preach, pastors are required to take homiletics. Clergy are also required to take biblical and theological courses to develop exegetical skills. Yet how many are taught the art of listening?

Listening, a complex skill, seldom comes naturally. For example, Jesus spoke of His crucifixion many times, but His disciples did not seem to be very good listeners for they missed the

point. Contemporary pastors may feel they are good listeners, but are likely limited in their listening skills unless they have intentionally cultivated them.

Anne Long wrote a book entitled, *Listening*,¹ that can help pastors listen to others, to themselves, and even to God. Books on listening usually encourage people to set aside personal bias, agendas, busyness, natural inclinations to speak, and to listen more than seems natural.

Listening requires discipline and education. A book such as *Basic Attending Skills*² would be a good source to help pastors improve their listening skills. Some of the basics of listening include honest eye contact, attentive body language, appropriate vocal style, and a relaxed attitude.

A barrier to effective listening is that it is not typically rewarded, as are activities such as baptisms, fundraising, and good sermons. Also, pastors, being knowledgeable, are tempted to speak more than to listen. Pastoral insecurity and the need to appear competent or in control can be another barrier to effective listening. Pastors may also fear their own pain or the pain of others, and, therefore, be uncomfortable with “merely” listening.

Caring hearts, not talking heads

When pastors are in situations where they do not know how to relate or what to say, they can feel helpless. The sense of helplessness may also lead to superficial speaking that minimizes careful listening. As a hospital chaplain, pastor, and human being, I have especially felt such helplessness when I have watched people die or observed a medical team try to revive someone. During such times, people need a listening, compassionate heart

more than a talking, intellectual head that most likely speaks in superficial platitudes or worse.

During one pastorate, I was on a mission to build a new sanctuary. An older member voiced her strong disagreement, arguing that the old facility was just fine. Listening helped me realize that her disagreement was, partially, a desire to share the many memories of baptisms, funerals, and weddings at the old church. I had to set aside my agenda in order to listen to her. This took time, yet as I actively listened to her recount these many memories, her opposition to the new building started to wane.

Listening becomes especially vital when people experience pain. Because we have experienced similar situations, we commonly assume that that we understand them. Typically, people console others by saying, “I know how you feel” or “I understand what you are going through.” Such phrases can leave the other person feeling especially alone and misunderstood. Such statements may even minimize another person’s pain. More appropriate, you might say, “I can not imagine what you are experiencing right now, but I want you to know that I am here for you and am open to listening if you would like to share your experience.”

In one recent case, an elderly lady was devastated when her husband died in a car accident. During the funeral service, a faithful church member tried to console the bereaved woman by saying, “I know how you feel; my son was hit and killed by a car two years ago.” The church member meant to help, but did she express empathy to the older woman or did her own life perspective get in the way? It was

the latter, for sure. No situation is ever identical, no matter how similar they may seem. People are all different and may react quite differently to seemingly similar tragedies.

At the same time, suppose this grieving wife came to her pastor? How helpful would it be if the minister replied by discussing the existence of God, the reality of evil, the notion of God's love, or some other form of apologetics? Not much. The widow did not ask for a systematic theology of human suffering; she needed a caring, listening ear. In such a case, sermonizing becomes inappropriate. In contrast, listening, *actively* listening, is not only appropriate but crucial. Listening communicates human care, which demonstrates divine care. Listening shows concern by action rather than words.

Listen, listen, listen, listen

As a young pastor I remember being quick to defend God, yet slow to listen to God's people. Active listening, identified as hard work, requires one's full focus and takes

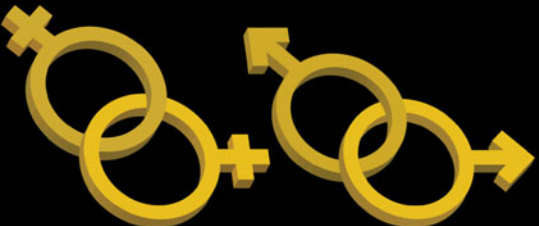
enormous mental energy. Pastors may have heard and understood the words of someone, but did they really understand what they felt and how these feelings impacted their life? Active listening involves trying to identify a person's emotions and concerns, but without communicating the idea that we, somehow, know what they are feeling and going through. And that's because so often we do not understand what they are going through, nor could we ever.

Any ideas that we have about what others are experiencing are only guesses. This realization should help us to clear our minds of preconceptions and allow us to be tentative in how we approach others. Listening includes being careful in what we say and may involve using such words as, "I am not certain what you are experiencing, but I imagine that this is a difficult time for you. Can you help me understand more of what you are going through?" Those we serve in ministry know best what they are feeling; thus, *we need to listen to them more than they need to listen to us.*

Pastors are in an elevated position to care and listen. No other professional caregiver has such intimate access to people's personal lives. This unique role of caring must be maximized by active, empathic listening. "Listen, listen, listen, then listen some more before taking action or giving advice."³ Listening earns one the right to speak.

Listening is demanding, yet also a tremendous gift. Listening requires humility. Philippians 2:3, 4 says, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others" (NKJV). Active listening requires giving up self for someone else, accepting others, respecting others, and encouraging others to keep on talking.

A primary component of listening includes avoiding changing the topic; listening also means being comfortable with difficult issues, such as death, anger, pain, confusion, and guilt. People sometimes feel the need



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to shift difficult conversations to more optimistic topics. Pastors are often too quick to speak, quote Bible texts, pray, and switch to what they feel the Lord would have people feel, think, or say. Often the last thing people need is someone changing the topic from what weighs them down with grief and concern to something that they care nothing or little about at the moment.

Another component of good listening includes awareness of cultural, personality, gender, religious, and other differences. For example, eye contact among some Southwest Native Americans may represent a hostile act, the physical distance between two speakers may vary from culture to culture (people from the Middle East tend to have less distance between them than many westerners are accustomed to), and vocal tones and speeds vary among cultures.⁴ We need to avoid stereotyping, yet it is helpful to be aware of differences in communication.

“Tell me about . . .”

Depending on the culture and the situation, there are also times to speak (Eccles. 3:7). Skilled counselors need to understand theories, methodologies, and be able to speak confidently and wisely in order to intervene during times of psychological and spiritual trauma. Nonetheless, most clergy could probably improve their ministries by speaking less and listening more. Training in counseling intervention strategies would be a bonus; yet, in the end, the foundation of caring includes having good listening skills.

An enormously useful phrase to encourage others to open up

and share is, “Tell me about . . .” This phrase is useful in numerous contexts. Some examples, “Tell me about your ailing mother, your child in trouble, your academic stress, your tears, when you learned you had cancer, your loneliness.” I have used this phrase to connect with numerous people. I remember a lady devastated by her father’s death from cancer. By simply saying, “Tell me about your dad,” I opened the windows of emotion and ministry. Saying “Tell me about . . .” is open-ended and promotes active listening.

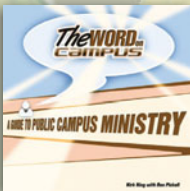
Are you actively listening to those around you? Human hearts are in pain, joy, and ambivalence; all have stories

to tell, and all have emotions that need to be heard. By actively listening, you can extend God’s grace to those who so sorely need it. By listening to an aching heart, you can be a major catalyst in helping it heal. What can be more pastoral than that? **M**

- 1 Anne Long, *Listening* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd Ltd., 1999).
- 2 Allen E. Ivey, Norma B. Gluckstern, and Mary Bradford Ivey, *Basic Attending Skills*, 3rd ed. (North Amherst, MA: Microtraining Associates, 1997).
- 3 Ivey, Gluckstern, and Ivey, *Basic Attending Skills*, 6.
- 4 Ivey, Gluckstern, and Ivey, *Basic Attending Skills*, 20.

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A GUIDE TO PUBLIC COLLEGE MINISTRY



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RESOURCES

The Word on Campus: A Guide to Public College Ministry, by Kirk King and Ron Pickell, Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2008.

For anyone interested in ministry on any secular college or university campus, *The Word on Campus* is essential reading. Kirk King and Ron Pickell, working in collaboration with

other experienced campus ministers, have produced a valuable resource that has been a long time coming.

Ellen White urged the Adventist church to see public universities as a





ripe mission field back in the 1890s—the same time period in which other denominations were starting their public campus ministries. Adventists were slow in following her counsel, but in countless places Adventist students have borne faithful witness. In some college towns, local Adventist churches have seen their mission as including a campus outreach. Some conferences, notably Michigan, Ontario, and, more recently, Georgia-Cumberland, have developed conference-wide strategies for campus outreach. A section of the book discusses these examples and more.

King and Pickell list three goals for an Adventist ministry on a college campus. First, be concerned for Adventist students—building and maintaining relationships with them so that they are retained as practicing church members. Second, evangelize the campus itself. Third, this outreach


to the campus can't be simply a matter of seeking new converts. We need to use our influence to attempt to make a difference on campus.

A section on "Essentials" gives guiding principles for ministry on campus. This part of the book includes reflection questions after each chapter, and could serve as the basis for small group discussions with students and/or with church leaders. The evangelization model suggested includes sharing the story of Jesus, inviting students to grow in Him, and encouraging them to reach out to their fellow students.

The next section features a practical guide for starting campus ministry while recognizing that all campuses are different, and each ministry will take on a unique shape. Emphasis is placed on obtaining recognition as an official student group and building a relationship with the university.

Appendices include a sample constitution (necessary for recognition by the university), programming ideas, sample budgets, and a bibliography. A DVD is included with two short videos, "Where Are the Students?" (useful for showing to a congregation introducing this vision) and "Can You Walk the Walk?" (for students).

I think the most important counsel they give is to "just do it." If you have a passion for students, don't wait for a budget, a building, or a calendar full of programming. Start reaching out to students, especially if you can see a campus from the front door of your church, and students are already coming. Welcome them—and step out into their world with the good news. Help them take the Word to campus.

—Reviewed by William J. Cork, associate pastor, Houston International Seventh-day Adventist Church, Houston, Texas, United States. 

Ellen White on Leadership: Guidance for Those Who Influence Others, by Cindy Tutsch, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2008.

In the complex leadership environment in which we find ourselves in the twenty-first century, does Ellen White, a visionary from the nineteenth century, still have wisdom to lend the leaders of today? After reading *Ellen White on Leadership*, I say the answer is a resounding Yes! Every pastor should consider this book a must read—a meaningful collection, fresh with direction, grace, and hope.

Ellen White was a leader of leaders. As one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a prophet, and a preacher, her experiences and publications hold insights foundational for leaders. Through her book, *Ellen White on Leadership*, Cindy Tutsch, an associate director of the Ellen G. White Estate in Silver Spring, Maryland, aims to reconnect

today's leaders with the wisdom found in Ellen White's writings.

More than just position or power, good leaders desire meaning and purpose—to know at the end of the day they have done something significant for the kingdom of God. This book seeks to distill the praxis of Ellen White's leadership experience and the wisdom of her counsel into leadership principles that can be applied across the wide spectrum of today's cultural terrain.

Tutsch concentrates on four main characteristics of godly leaders from the works of Ellen White, summed up in the following statement: "Leaders who find Ellen White's voice authoritative will motivate and equip others in the church to evangelize across generations; make joyful, intentional provision for full gender inclusiveness and racial diversity; and find more increasingly effective ways to serve the poor and marginalized" (12).

The writings of Ellen White on the subject of leadership make it clear that she was seeking to center the

church on the clarion call of God for full inclusion in the life and ministry of the church. We are called to train and mobilize leaders of all ages, inclusive of gender and race, to make a difference for the most oppressed of the world. This calling becomes all the more crucial as the church seeks to communicate the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6–12.

Ellen White on Leadership makes a great contribution to the ongoing conversation concerning current leadership issues by drawing our attention to the inspired words of Ellen White. Tutsch's structure presents increased understanding of the leader's relationship and responsibility to God, to those they serve, and to the world as a whole. Far from offering simple answers, Ellen White invites us into the mess and mystery of being a follower of Christ, a leader in God's kingdom.

—Reviewed by Tara VinCross, pastor, Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States. 



Avoiding the preaching temptation of egotism

One of the most dangerous temptations for a pastor comes from the pulpit itself. You may plan to communicate a biblical message; but somehow you end up being the center of attention in the sermon. Most likely, you did not plan it that way, but the important question is this: How do you make certain that the center of the message is Jesus Christ and not you?

Center of attention

Preaching loses strength when the preacher becomes the center of the sermon. Every sermon must be firmly rooted in the Bible. The Bible guides you as a navigational system does a pilot and gives you authority. After all, the only authority a preacher has is the authority of the Word of God. Paul declared, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5, KJV).

Preach expository sermons. In preparation of the sermon, be certain that you focus on the message of the biblical passage. If you use that approach, you will have the same focus during the delivery of the sermon.

An example for us

John the Baptist was a humble preacher. He declared, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30, KJV). In other words, Christ must be exalted in all our sermons; self—in contrast—must be hidden or very carefully used. Perhaps you

have had a powerful experience in which the Lord worked through you, and you want to share it. Be careful, however, not to let self take the place of the Lord.

Jesus said, “‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, / because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. / He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives / and recovering of sight to the blind, / to set at liberty those that are oppressed’ ” (Luke 4:18, RSV). Jesus recognized the Father and Spirit as the Source of His power. How can we not do the same?

Avoid the overuse of the pronoun *I*. “*I* did this,” “*I* did that,” “When *I* was working here, *I* . . .” Tell your stories, but keep the focus on what God has done and not on yourself.

However good our style, our delivery, our diction, and organization, we must preach biblical theology to our members. Again, Christ must be the focus of the sermon, not self. Anything else is mere empty noise.

“Our task as preachers is to proclaim the whole counsel of God. We will not fulfill our calling if as preachers we fail to do biblical theology. We may get many compliments from our people for our moral lessons and our illustrations, but we are not faithfully serving our congregations if they do not understand how the whole of scripture points to Christ, and if they do not gain a better understanding from us of the storyline of the Bible. May God help us to be faithful teachers and preachers, so that every

person under our charge will be presented perfect in Christ.”¹

Approbation

Some preachers desire affirmations, applause, “Amens,” and other responses that cause them to shout while speaking. So focused on themselves and their delivery, they are not able to preach with real power, and their messages touch only the skin of their listeners, not their hearts. They think of themselves more than they think of the thirsting souls in the church. By this act, many congregations are poorly nourished.

Ellen G. White wrote, “It is not safe to speak in praise of persons or to exalt the ability of a minister of Christ. In the day of God, very many will be weighed in the balance and found wanting because of exaltation. I would warn my brethren and sisters never to flatter persons because of their ability, for they cannot bear it. Self is easily exalted, and, in consequence, persons lose their balance.”²

Conclusion

As we respond to the Master’s commission to preach the gospel around the world, let’s reflect on the wonders of God’s grace. Let this grace flow through our thoughts and actions as well as in our sermons. Let our church members see a humble minister, both away from the pulpit and, especially, *in* it. **M**

1 <http://sites.silaspartners.com/CC/article/0,PTID314526%7CCHID598014%7CCID2277968,00.html>.

2 E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 185, 186.

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Pastor's DVD 15 offers young adult ministry tools

The Pastor's DVD volume 15 (PDVD 15) is now being shipped to various church entities in North America. PDVD15, a product of the NAD Church Resource Center, features practical resources for young adult ministry in the local church. Ranging from best practice examples to worship media resources, this edition gives special emphasis to discipling those who are post-high school age through young parenthood.

"I found PDVD15 very useful and relevant," endorsed Pastor **Jose Bourget**, Illinois Conference young adult ministry coordinator. "With young adults creating much of the content, it amplifies the significance of this pertinent tool, nimble enough to nurture a very eclectic audience."

In collaboration with the SonScreen Film Festival, PDVD15 has captured award-winning video segments, produced by young adults, and coupled them with biblically based discussion questions. This makes for simple-to-use, yet thought-provoking media resources for young adult small groups and Bible study.

"I enjoyed the inspiring and creative SonScreen videos by young adults," offered Pastor **Tara VinCross**, of the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Philadelphia, PA. "They invite us to reflect on the spiritual journey in new ways."

Beyond the DVD media files, there are electronic resources available for download to a leader's computer. PowerPoint worship slides, ministry articles, and newsletters are among the host of documents that augment the captivating video segments.

"PDVD15 contains newly developed ministry tools, resources, and emerging ministry profiles," observed **Amy Prindle**, associate

communication director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mid-America. "These put a spotlight on what many leaders across the country are doing to involve younger adults in the important work of spreading the good news, and putting faith where it belongs: in action."

"Best of all, PDVD15 is free to each North American Division church, distributed through each region's conference to the pastor of each congregation," says **Allan Martin**, associate professor of discipleship and family life, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. "So don't let it sit on the pastor's library shelf. Make full use of *The Pastor's DVD* 15 to deepen the devotion of young adults to Jesus!"

For more information, please call, 1-301-680-6699. [*Stacia Dulan Wright*]

Health expo in Israel

Haifa, Israel—Haifa Auditorium at Carmel Center was the venue of a health expo held by the Adventist Church in Israel, May 3–8, 2009. More than 150 people participated in a variety of health screening services on the opening day, which included measuring blood pressure, body fat, and lung capacity. There was also cardiovascular testing, antistress massages, hydrotherapy, and counseling by physicians and health educators.

Registration and customer service was handled by **Oleg Elkin**, pastor for the Russian Adventist churches in north Israel, together with Adventist youth and other volunteers who had attended a three-week health training class prior to the health expo.

The event was organized and coordinated by **Dan Nikolai** of Romania, **Oxana Filipova**, health director for the Adventist Church in Israel, **Elena Dema**, and Pastor


John Lascu from Israel, and pastors **Charles Cleveland** and **Daniel Seniuc**, experts in conducting health seminars. **Magdalena Dan**, from the United States, also dedicated her time, skills, and abilities in teaching health training classes.

One of the objectives of the health expo was to organize a health club, and at the end of the event, 224 individuals decided to join the Adventist health club in Haifa. [*Julio Mendez/TED News Staff/TED News*]

Youth Week of Prayer in Pakistan

Farooqabad, Pakistan—"Jesus My Super Hero" was the theme of the Youth Week of Prayer at Pakistan Adventist Seminary and College (PASC), April 28–May 3, 2009. The speaker for the week was **Baraka G. Muganda**, youth director for the world church of Seventh-day Adventists.

Young people from throughout Pakistan attended the meetings along with their church pastors and youth leaders. The climax of the week was the baptismal service at which 54 youth and adults publicly expressed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior by being baptized. Assisting Muganda during the baptisms were **Younis Noor**, president of the Adventist Church in northern Pakistan, **Selmon Dio**, principal of PASC, and **Isaac Jalal**, president of the Adventist Church in southern Pakistan.

Samuel Nazir, youth director for the Adventist Church in Pakistan, said, "We were richly blessed by the messages aimed to help youth choose Jesus on a personal level. Dr. Muganda's visit has inspired the local youth leaders and pastors to revive and accelerate youth activities and help our young people to prepare to serve Him." [*Samuel Nazir/TED News Staff/TED News*] 



Smile-winning

During our first years of ministry, my wife, Sharon, and I were invited to associate on a short-term assignment with a veteran evangelist who would teach us the finer points of obtaining spiritual decisions. We eagerly planned for the six weeks during which we expected to learn new skills and insights into the art of working with people.

Within a few days of joining his team, we quickly came to the realization that we might learn more by observing what *not* to do than by seeking a pattern to emulate. For example, in his public preaching, he would divide his attendees over inconsequential issues such as telling females who were wearing pantsuits that they were bound for perdition and not to return to his meetings if they could not dress appropriately. As you can imagine, the next night about half as many guests attended as the evening before.

Then there was his technique of intimidating decisions from the students at the parochial school where we had been invited to conduct a Week of Prayer. Although I had been given the assignment to present the messages, my supervisor—quite certain I was failing to sufficiently warn the youngsters of the dangers of rejecting his plan to baptize them in the next two weeks—took the platform one morning to announce in the sternest tones imaginable that he had one simple question to ask the kids: “Do you want to go to hell or don’t you?”

The students were stunned at an interrogation so incongruent with the messages they had been hearing. Their parents were angry. The teachers asked us not to return. The evangelist decried the Laodicean attitude of all involved. Sharon and I began one-on-one visits with the families in their homes and accomplished

more in gaining favorable choices through friendly visitation than could have ever been extracted by hellfire admonition.

I learned that heaven cannot be proclaimed as merely a “fire escape” and that the best motivation for following Jesus springs from a loving, concerned relationship far more than it does from fear or intimidation.

Today, I believe we still have the opportunity to best represent Jesus’ character by a joyful countenance and friendly demeanor rather than stern, joyless approaches. I have learned not to argue theology or debate finely divided issues. While I could typically win the argument, I could easily lose a friend in the process.

Jesus’ methodology is far different. Instead, He asks us to invite people to share the benefits of knowing our Savior by demonstrating His love and interest in their welfare. “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”¹


Evangelism is a process, and that process begins with making people glad they know me as Christ’s ambassador. If they don’t like me, they will probably not warm to the idea of knowing my God. Several passages of inspired counsel will help us comprehend the necessity of doing Jesus’ work in Jesus’ way.

“A cultivated intellect is a great treasure; but without the softening influence of sympathy and sanctified love it is not of the highest value. We should have words and deeds of tender consideration for others. We can manifest a thousand little attentions in friendly words and pleasant looks, which will be reflected upon us again. Thoughtless Christians manifest by

their neglect of others that they are not in union with Christ. It is impossible to be in union with Christ and yet be unkind to others and forgetful of their rights. Many long intensely for friendly sympathy.”²

“He who is successful in His work for God must be courteous. Courtesy gains access to hearts. The worker for Christ must be to principle as firm as a rock, but at the same time he is to reveal the Saviour’s gentleness. He is to be kind as well as true. He is to observe the weightier matters of the law, and he is also to observe the little proprieties of life. Christ desires our lives to be fragrant and refreshing, a blessing to others. The Christian is to be true and honest, and yet kind and forbearing, pitiful and courteous.”³

“We are taught in the Word of God to be kind, tender, pitiful, courteous. Cultivate Christlike love. Let all that you do bear the impress of this love. Those who do not speak the words and do the works of Christ are trying to climb into heaven by some other way than through the door.”⁴

“The religion of Jesus softens whatever is hard and rough in the temper, and smoothes whatever is rugged and sharp in the manners. It makes the words gentle and the demeanor winning. Let us learn from Christ how to combine a high sense of purity and integrity with sunniness of disposition. A kind, courteous Christian is the most powerful argument that can be produced in favor of Christianity.”⁵ 

1 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 143.

2 White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1977), 85.

3 White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 18 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 146.

4 White, *This Day With God* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1979), 266.

5 White, *Gospel Workers* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Pub. Co., 1901), 122.

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