

Ministry

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR PASTORS



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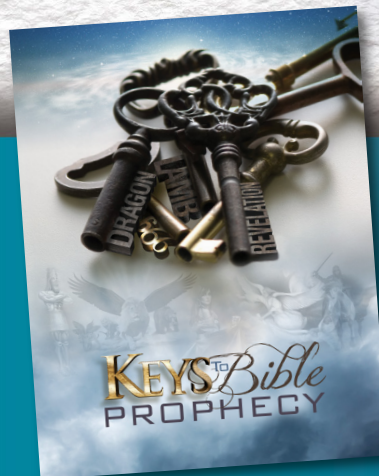
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“I am hopeful it will touch the lives of others in the same way it touched mine!”

The need to reconnect

I finished reading Janet Page's guest editorial in the May 2017 *Ministry* magazine titled “Someone’s Watching,” and I couldn’t wait to share it. Suddenly an idea blossomed! I am very involved in the lives of our children and youth at my church. We have had a very strong youth program for several years. Unfortunately, our youth program is in a downward cycle. While looking at ways to continue building relationships with these kids, I feel strongly that we need to reconnect with the parents—be a “soft place to rest” for them as well. Your article touched my heart because I work to consciously consider *who* may be watching my every move—what will they see versus what I profess? I

immediately requested permission to use your editorial in our church newsletter for the month of July. I am hopeful it will touch the lives of others in the same way it touched mine!

—Brenda Zock, St. John’s Lutheran Church, Warren, Pennsylvania, United States

The need for mentoring

I have been a pastor since April 2003. Now I am an assistant pastor at Ebenezer Church of God in Brooklyn, New York. I am Haitian and have lived in New York since 1986. I have worked closely with some Adventist churches in my community.

I enjoy reading *Ministry, International Journal for Pastors*. I have been a reader for over a year. The March 2017 issue is really an exceptional one. I believe the


article “Mentoring: A Way of Life,” is one of the best articles I have ever read in the journal. I thank God for the author. I love the article because I am also a mentor to a lot of mentees.

This magazine helps me in my ministry, as an assistant pastor, prayer line pastor, and radio host pastor.

May the Lord bless you all,
—Rev. Herold Laurent, Ebenezer Church of God, Brooklyn, New York, United States

The need for health

“The Adventist Health Message Unpacked” (March 2017 issue) was, for me, the best article in the magazine. I send my sincere greetings and many thanks to you and Lillian Kent.

—Albert Nunes, email 

The almost-closed church


As Pastor Peni Leo began his work on the island of Upolu, Samoa, he was confronted with tremendous challenges in the village of Siumu. The church in that village was not accepted by the people there, and he was not allowed to walk through the village for visitation or any missionary activity. The church building sat on land owned by the Tafu family. This family became immersed in legal problems with the chief—an extended relative—who wanted to remove the building from their land and close the church for good.

Church members responded to these difficulties with prayer and fasting, trusting that God would care for His church. After many struggles in court, the Tafu

family won the right to keep their land. And, incredibly, it was revealed that the rightful title of “chief” actually belonged to the immediate members of the Tafu family. This was a tremendous answer to prayer!

Since the ruling, the Siumu church has gained the favor of the Siumu Chiefly Council. Relationships with villagers have become positive, and the Siumu church has expanded its ministry to the local community. Last year, the congregation completed construction of a new building, which was officially recognized by the village council of elders. Pastor Peni was inducted as a village minister, granting him the ability to conduct Bible studies and outreach programs and to visit any

family in the village. Shortly after these events, 26 precious souls gave their lives to Christ and were baptized. One of those individuals happened to be a member of the Siumu Chiefly Council!

Pastor Peni and the members of the Siumu church continue to worship God with thanksgiving and praise, casting all their worries into the hand of a God who has never let them down. 

—Written by Pastor Kenneth Fuliase, Samoa-Tokelau Mission president, Apia, Samoa. A version of this story originally appeared in the Trans Pacific Union News Letter.

Jerry Page is interim editor of *Ministry* and ministerial secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Shutting the back door

One evening in 1984 at family worship, Janet and I prayed for our Lord to bring to our young family someone interested in knowing Jesus and studying the Bible. I was the personal ministries director for the Rocky Mountain Conference, which led us to be in a different church nearly every Sabbath, training members on how to reach out for Jesus. We knew we needed to be involved ourselves and to have our young son, Tyson, experience that joy, not just listen to his parents encourage everyone else to share their faith.

The very next day a friend called to say that her cousin Sal wanted to study the Word. So, as a family, we began to meet every week with Sal, and later with his girlfriend, Nancy, too. We studied the Word but also talked about various subjects and shared our lives together. Sal also helped us with needed repairs around the house. We became close friends.

More than a year later we received a call to move across the country to another conference. We had the wonderful joy of witnessing Sal and Nancy being baptized just before we moved. As they began to attend a local church, we realized how hard it was to connect them to someone in that church who would have nearly the same kind of love and concern to disciple them as we had. We tried to introduce them to several families, but nothing really developed to help assimilate them into the church family.

Within a year they had slipped out the back door of the church and away from their growing relationship with Jesus. We were brokenhearted. A couple of years later they asked me to come back and marry them. We had committed to keep our friendship going, and at least once a year, for about 20 years, when we came back to the area, we

would always take them out to eat, worship with them at a church, introduce them to some members, and pray they would get involved again.

Then one year when I called Sal, he shared that the elders from the little church I had last encouraged him to try were coming to visit with him and Nancy about their upcoming rebaptism! They had attended the church, become involved in the Wednesday night study and prayer group, felt drawn into helping in some ministries of the church, and now they were back! When I told our family about Sal and Nancy, they all said, “Hallelujah, they are home!”

That was more than ten years ago, and Sal and Nancy are still deeply involved, helping the church in a number of ways, like Vacation Bible School, a small study group, and construction projects. Sal just preached his first sermon a few months ago. He shared his testimony of how he became offended over relationship issues and thought of quitting again, but the Lord helped him to see it was the enemy trying to draw him away. They are back to stay. What a joy it will be on that first day of eternity when our family and Sal and Nancy fall down at Jesus’ feet, praising Him for His grace as we begin forever and ever together!


“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess. 2:19, 20, NKJV).

One of the biggest challenges we face in churches around the world today is keeping in the church the precious people the Lord helps us bring to Him. This issue of *Ministry* has a very practical lead article by Dr. Alan Parker sharing the proven keys to locking the back door! As we think of the need for every member to be involved for their

If many church members just took on three or four people as their mission, what a difference it could make.

own spiritual growth and the good of the church (total member involvement), the ministries of going after the one lost sheep or helping love and nurture one who is in danger of getting lost are two of the most beautiful ministries we can do. If many church members just took on three or four people as their mission, what a difference it could make.

For pastors wondering how to engage church members practically in this, share the stories and testimonies of friends like Sal and Nancy to move members to action.

Also in *Ministry* this month are excellent articles for those of us who were excited and motivated by the call to ministry but have become burned out or discouraged, and are now facing the back door of ministry. Let’s all pray the Lord will help us shut the back door, keeping His loved ones closer to Him. 

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.

Alan Parker, DTh, is a professor in the School of Religion at Southern Adventist University, where he is also director of the Pierson Institute of Evangelism and World Missions and director of the SALT program, Collegedale, Tennessee, United States.



Five keys to locking the back door

They don't stay!" the older lady in her perfectly ironed Sabbath dress told me emphatically. "We had an evangelistic meeting two years ago, and all those people are gone."

I was visiting a church where we were planning to have a student-led meeting as part of our field school that summer. This lady was not impressed. In her view, people just came in the front door and walked out the back door. In many cases, she may be right. We have not always done a good job at keeping people in the church.

The latest research indicates that 49 out of every 100 new Adventist members eventually leave the church.¹ At times we have focused so much on evangelism that we have forgotten the importance of nurturing and discipleship. Somehow, we left the back door swinging wide open.

Fortunately, we are finding ways to keep new believers. I have worked with a number of churches over the last five years where the number of people leaving the church is close to zero. We have discovered five keys to closing and locking that back door. The five keys may be common sense, but they are critical to ensuring that we both keep and disciple our new members.

Personal testimony

Before I get to these five keys, however, we need to step back and look at the broader picture of what is

happening when someone joins the church. If we can step into the shoes of a new convert, it will give us clues as to how to help keep them in the church. Perhaps a little of my personal story will help.

As a child, I lived in a motorcycle-racing, beer-drinking, cussing family with no interest in spiritual things. However, I had gone to an Adventist school for a while, and when I hit a personal crisis at the age of 13, I decided to look up an Adventist church and go there. So, one Saturday morning, I cycled 16 miles (24 kilometers) to church and back.

It felt good on that first Sabbath to be in the house of God. He was alive and real to me, and I wanted to find Him. However, over time, I discovered that church was completely different from what I was used to. They wore suits. They sang hymns. Many of them did not eat meat. They sat in programs all day and talked about things I did not understand. They quoted from some kind of prophet. It was a foreign land. People were friendly, but I did not feel as if I knew them. If it had not been for my desperate desire to find God, I am not sure I would have stayed.

Joining a church is as much a cultural transition as it is a spiritual one. The reason why many people leave the church is not because of theological differences but because they feel like they do not "fit in." It is similar to what happens when a person goes to study in a different country and ends up

feeling homesick. They have a sense of alienation from the culture that they are in. We even have a term for it: *culture shock*.

Sverre Lysgaard, a Norwegian sociologist, identified three phases that immigrants to a new culture experience. He termed it the *U curve* because there are highs and lows (as shown in the figure). The first phase tends to be excitement and anticipation as the person looks forward to interacting with the new culture. This is followed by a period of shock and disorientation as they are confronted with unusual patterns of belief and behavior (the bottom of the U curve). The third phase is adaptation as people learn to adapt and feel at home in their new culture.²

U-curve model of cultural adaptation

Imagine a person who has come to a prophecy seminar and is now attending church. They are excited and passionate about the truths they have heard. Members are friendly and

PHASE ONE:
Excitement and
"honeymoon"

PHASE THREE:
Adaptation and
feels "at home"



PHASE TWO:
"Culture shock"

welcoming. This person may even be experiencing victory over sins that they have been struggling with. They have a positive view of the remnant church and want to get involved. Talk about a honeymoon phase!

But give them a few months, and the picture begins to change. Somewhere along the way they discover that close friends inside the church are hard to come by, and friends outside the church are distancing themselves. The new believer stumbles into church politics, judgmentalism, and gossip. They find that some sins and addictions in their lives are not going away. While a new believer is taught the fundamentals

That is why I jumped on a program that a friend of mine, Gary Gibbs, shared with me. He called it Spiritual Friends. Every regular attendee or Bible study student is assigned a spiritual friend who is an existing church member. The church member agrees to spend at least twelve weeks intentionally being a “friend.” The twelve-week program is simple. Make contact at least once a week. Sit with your friend at church. Invite them for a meal. Share an assigned book or magazine. Invite them to join you for a social activity. Introduce them to others. Find out whether they are struggling with anything and support them.

believer to other members. We share dos and don’ts and tell a few stories.

I describe my own experience of how it took me two years to join the church. What helped me transition through my own cultural shock was a family that took me into their home on Sabbath afternoons and treated me like I was one of their sons. They bore with my many mistakes as a new Christian and, instead of lecturing me, loved me into the faith.

Key 2: Small groups

Frankly, our second strategy was a surprise. We discovered the power of small groups at keeping new believers.

The latest research indicates that 49 out of every 100 new Adventist members eventually leave the church.

of what to believe, he or she may not know the basics of how to live the Adventist faith. As a result, it is not hard to see why discouragement sets in and people leave.

The five keys that I am sharing with you have proved extremely helpful in enabling new believers to grow in their faith, adapt to the church, and connect with God and others.

Key 1: Spiritual friends

I am amazed at how new believers are often neglected, left to sit by themselves in church or lunch. Sure, people are friendly when the person first comes to church. But, once people are baptized, members revert back to their old friendship circles. Busyness and a lack of intentionality mean that we end up inadvertently forgetting new believers, right at the time when they are making major transitions in their lives.

There is nothing earth-shattering in this approach. What makes this program effective, however, is the accountability system. Once a week, members send an email to the Spiritual Friends coordinator to let them know that contact has been made with their new friend and to update them on any potential challenges. If they do not send an email, then the coordinator will check up to make sure nothing is wrong. Of course, it does not always work, but it’s amazing how a simple system helps us be more responsible with those God has entrusted to our care.

We launch the program with a short training to orient members to how it works. We talk about being positive and not sharing gossip or criticism with the new believers. We tell members not to share their theological hobbyhorses but to instead focus on practical Christianity. We talk about the importance of introducing the new

It came as a surprise because regular Adventists (in the United States) do not typically do very well with small groups. But new believers loved them! After an evangelistic series in a local church plant, we started three new groups with members leading out, but mostly new believers and their friends as the participants.

Our groups met in homes rather than at the church, and we focused on conversational Bible study, with leaders using questions from the *Serendipity Bible Study for Small Groups*. There was food and time for fellowship. We were amazed at how these groups grew and bonded. This really helped people feel less like strangers and more like family.

Of course, we learned that not all small groups succeed. As I have tried this elsewhere, I found that small groups rise and fall on good leaders. They also have natural life cycles. As we neared summer and Thanksgiving, the

groups would tend to wind down and might need to take a break. We learned to be flexible with our groups and to adapt them to people's needs.

Another "small group" that was very successful was the new believers' class. This was not just for those who were preparing for baptism; it was also for those who had been recently baptized. Once again, we focused on conversational Bible study, using the *In Step With Jesus* lessons for new believers. Church members were not generally invited unless they were spiritual friends with the new believers. These members tend to be much more aware of what the new believers need to hear. We spend up to 15 minutes just chatting and talking about how things are going in their lives, and then we have a meaningful Bible study. The result is that new believers would rather miss church than Sabbath School!

Having spiritual friends and small groups was incredibly powerful at keeping people bonded to each other, but there was still a danger. They might bond with their spiritual friend and with each other, but that did not mean they were connected to the church as a whole. That is why we needed another key.

Key 3: Social activities

To help transition new believers into the church, one of the things that we have been very intentional about is providing opportunities for fellowship and social activities. A number of churches that we work with now provide a large refreshment budget as part of their evangelistic meetings. Nightly refreshments, fellowship meals, and opportunities to interact socially are built into the meetings and the months following. This helps take care of the "vacuum" that new believers experience when the meetings end.

One way in which we did this was to plan a social event at the church for either the final day of the series (Saturday night) or for the following week. We would try to make this the best social event of the year, with lots

of opportunities to interact, laugh, play, and pray together. Having scheduled social events made it much easier to integrate the new believers into our church.

Key 4: Involvement in the mission

While social connections are important, we realized that this was not enough. We needed to involve our new believers in the mission of the church. Just like Jesus involved His disciples in missionary activities, even before they were fully converted, so we sensed that we needed to give opportunities to people to get involved, even before they were members. We noticed that when we had afternoon outreach activities, a number of those who had just started attending church would show up.

We decided that our outreach programs would be a great way to connect with those who were attending but not members. They helped us do our canned food drive, deliver cookies to doors, and drop off and even give Bible studies. When we had a large Bible worker training event for the church, a number attended who had never been baptized. We discovered that some people want to "belong" before they choose to "believe."

One of the reasons why I am in ministry today is because, when I was a new believer, the church got me involved. Even before I was baptized, I was doing outreach and teaching Pathfinders how to rebuild motorcycle engines. Once I was baptized, I was made a junior deacon at 15 and a junior elder at 17. There were a lot of ways in which I needed to grow, but the church took risks with me and placed me in positions where I could do ministry under mentoring leaders.

Key 5: Evangelism seminars

Recent research suggests that it takes an average of 6 to 18 months for attendees from an evangelistic seminar to join the church.³ They are very vulnerable during this time as


they try to make sense of their new faith. They often do not absorb all that they have heard. One of the best ways to keep new believers in the church is to invite them to participate in an evangelistic seminar. We have found that new believers are some of the most consistent attendees at evangelistic meetings.

Ellen White indicated this same philosophy. "After the first efforts have been made in a place by giving a course of lectures, there is really greater necessity for a second course than for the first."⁴

In one of our meetings we used round tables and had table leaders and coleaders. About 25 percent of our table leaders were either new believers or not yet baptized. Being paired with a mature member helped grow their faith and make them feel a part of the church.

As a new believer, I preached my very first evangelistic series at age 16. This experience helped me fall in love with Jesus and decide to do ministry.

Conclusion

These five keys are not foolproof. People leave for a variety of reasons that may have nothing to do with connecting with the church. Members do not always take their responsibility for new believers seriously, even if they are given training. But, as my own experience as a new member showed, in most cases, if you love them, they will stay. Being intentional about keeping new believers connected and involved can go a long way toward shutting that back door and keeping it locked. 

1 Andrew McChesney, "Every Adventist Urged to Help Stem Membership Losses," *Adventist News Network*, <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2016-10-10/every-adventist-urged-to-help-stem-membership-losses/>.

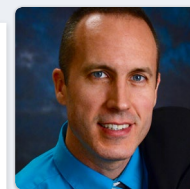
2 As quoted in Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, *Intercultural Communication in Contexts*, 2nd ed. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000), 211.

3 This was based on research on data from more than 30 churches in Michigan, Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee who held evangelistic meetings from 2009 to 2016.

4 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn.), 334.

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David M. Klinedinst, MDiv, is an evangelist for the Iowa-Missouri Conference, Saint Louis, Missouri, United States.



“Lord, I don’t want to be a pastor anymore!”

What happens when you experience discouragement and disillusionment in ministry? How do you move forward when the negative seems to outweigh the positive? What should you do when you have lost your passion for ministry and reach the point of saying, “Lord, I don’t want to be a pastor anymore”? Most pastors will go through something like this—almost inevitably.

Discouragement in ministry

I had been a pastor in the XYZ Conference for years. We were at the annual camp meeting. The conference had arranged for all the pastors to take a comprehensive health test, sponsored by the Health Ministries Department, complete with labs and a seven- or eight-page survey. This survey had various sections related to lifestyle, eating habits, exercise, spiritual health, and even mental/emotional health.

As I filled out the survey, I answered the questions as honestly as I could. A couple of days later the health ministries director pulled me aside and said, “David, I want to talk to you about the results of your test. Physically, you are fine. But I’m concerned about the results of the mental/emotional part of your survey. It says you are heading towards depression.” Now, I was not

clinically depressed, but I was going through a difficult time in ministry.

A few days later, the conference president called me on the phone to encourage me. So I shared with him the things that were going on in my district. He knew one of the churches had a reputation for being a challenge, and I felt as if I were at the lowest point in my ministry.

The circumstances

First, I had a head elder with whom I did not connect very well, and this made my life miserable. I am not sure why he did not like me. He was always criticizing me publicly and privately and sometimes would even do so right before the service. There was a room behind the platform where people would gather before the service. Sometimes it was just him and me in the back room, and there was no one else to protect me from his attacks. At other times it would be indirect jabs where I had to read in between the lines. He did not come right out and say it, but I knew what he meant, and so did everybody else.

Once I was standing at the door at the end of the service, greeting people as they left the sanctuary. He came up to me and said, “All you do is preach Sunday sermons.” I should have ignored it. But, being young and naïve, I asked him what he meant. He said, “All you do is preach about Jesus. I can

hear that in any Sunday church.” *I was being criticized for talking about Jesus?* Apparently a sermon series on the life of Christ was not welcome.

What really floored me is that he did not think I should be conducting evangelistic meetings. “That’s what the conference evangelist is for,” he said. According to him, I was not supposed to conduct evangelistic meetings or preach sermons about Jesus. These were two of the main reasons I became a minister in the first place. So, what was I supposed to do? I was confused and frustrated.

Another time a member of the elder’s family was extremely ill. So my wife and I would minister to and pray with them, but I knew that they did not really like us nor want us there, so it was uncomfortable. Unfortunately, the family member died. They chose to have another minister conduct the funeral, a previous pastor of their church. That was fine. I understood that we cannot connect with everyone, and people will always have their “favorite” preacher.

It was what happened after that which hurt. They had a dinner for the family and those attending the funeral. This elder and another person were standing at the buffet table. When I came up behind them, the conversation quickly stopped. The elder looked at the other person, then looked at me and said, “Oh, there’s no comparison.” I knew what he meant. They were

talking about this other minister and comparing me to him, and obviously, in his eyes, I fell far short. Even though I was used to it by now, it still hurt.

Enough is enough

After one board meeting that went horribly wrong, I was thinking to myself, “This isn’t what ministry is supposed to be like.” I was shocked at the things people would say to a pastor. I had buried it all deep down inside. As the frustra-

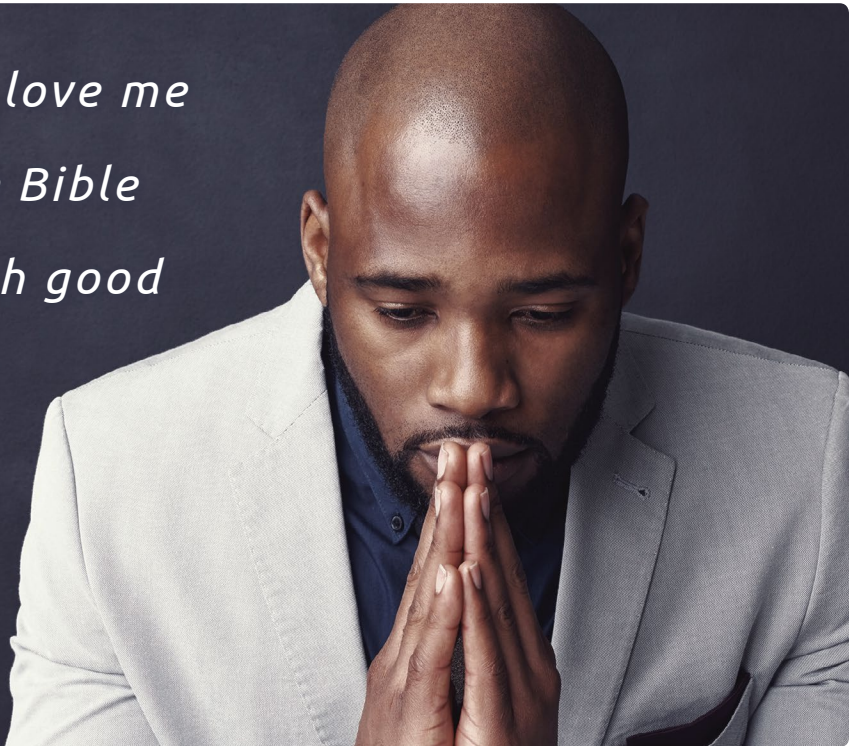
yelled. Sometimes I argued with Him. Other times I sat in silence listening for His voice. I begged God to change the church and all the difficult people in it. But, I finally came to a point where I looked at my own heart and asked God to change me. A counselor once told me that “you can deal only with your side of the fence. Changing others is not in your control.” God heard that prayer.

There is a powerful promise in Micah 7:7 that says, “Therefore I will look to

sermons, visit people, or even baptize people. God loves me because I am me, He created me, He knit me together in my mother’s womb, He died for me, and I am His child. I cannot make God love me more than He already does.

Why do I stress this? Because when people say negative things about us, sometimes we tend to believe it. When we are going through a time of discouragement, we are vulnerable. More than ever, I needed to remember that God

God does not love me because I give Bible studies, preach good sermons, visit people, or even baptize people.



tions of ministry crashed down upon me, I just fell to the floor crying, “Lord, I don’t want to be a pastor anymore!”

All that led me to the point where I had lost my sense of calling. I had come to a crossroad where I could not ignore my feelings any longer, and I knew I had to deal with it.

So I poured out my heart to God. For me, this meant setting aside my schedule and taking long portions of the day to spend time with Him—taking a few days to separate myself from the busyness of life. I took long walks in nature, where I could be alone with God. Sometimes I cried. Sometimes I

the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me” (KJV).

Six lessons

From that experience, there were six important things I learned:

1. *I am worth everything to God.* No matter what may happen in the church, no matter what others may think or say about me, no matter what mistakes I might make, it does not change the fact that God still loves me.

My worth is not based on what I do. My value is not based on the fact that I am a pastor. God does not love me because I give Bible studies, preach good

loves me even though I am not a perfect pastor. I am infinitely valuable to Him. No one can change God’s love for me.

2. *I need to protect my daily devotional life at any cost.* A number of years ago, a group of pastors were asked to list their top five challenges in ministry. Almost every pastor listed that one of their greatest struggles was finding time to have meaningful daily devotions. According to a recent study of pastors in the North American Division, two-thirds of pastors were concerned about the difficulty of finding time for personal devotions.¹ After 20 years of ministry, I still believe that is true.

Preparing for a sermon, praying with someone, giving a Bible study—these are not my daily devotional life. *My daily devotional life* means the time I personally spend in God’s presence allowing Him to touch my heart, speak to me, and draw me close to Him.

So, in order to keep my spiritual life alive, I need to spend time with Jesus every day. It needed to become my number one priority, because it was not. I had to make the choice that nothing will interfere with my personal time with Jesus. This does not mean I will not have problems. It does not mean I will never need counseling. But it does mean my house will be built on the Rock. It means the presence of Christ will be with me through the wind and the rain.

3. *My marriage must be nurtured.* My marriage has become the second most important relationship I have. It can make or break my ministry. If the devil wants to ruin my ministry, he will try to attack my marriage. The stress of a dysfunctional church can weigh heavily on a relationship.

No matter what it takes, I need to protect my time with Marquita. I realized the importance of having a date with her every week. I needed to spend time connecting with her on a regular basis. When my relationship with my spouse is positive, it gives me a foundation for handling the frustrations of ministry.

But, by far the best thing I can do to protect my marriage is to have a couple’s devotional time. Take 10–15 minutes every morning to read something together. Then take each other’s hands and pray. There is immense power in a husband and wife praying together. The devil cannot break such a union. I am sorry to say, it has taken me 20 years to realize how important this is, and I was foolish to neglect it.

4. *My passion must be restored.* I remembered the excitement I had when I first entered ministry. I remembered the passion I had for winning souls, but I had let the frustrations of ministry destroy that passion. Once you

lose your passion, ministry becomes drudgery. When you are just going through the motions, ministry is a joyless experience.

If you sense you are starting to lose your passion, do not ignore it. Talk to a trusted friend. Enlist the support of a mighty prayer warrior. Go to a Christian counselor. Take a couple days off and go to the mountains. Immerse yourself in the Psalms. Pour your heart out to God and get real with Him.

There is a special promise in Ezekiel 36:26: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (NKJV). Then in the next chapter He promises to breathe life into those dry bones (Ezek. 37). That promise is for pastors too.

5. *There are more positives in ministry than negatives.* There are more things to rejoice about than to complain about. The problem remains that human nature tends to focus on the negative experiences because they hurt so deeply. They get embedded in the emotional recesses of our mind. Discouragement tends to give us “ministerial amnesia.”

This is when I need to stop and reflect on the joy ministry has brought into my life. I need to remember the people whose lives have been touched by my ministry, moved by my sermons, blessed by my visits, and changed through my Bible studies.

You may want to create a “Joy Box” for ministry. Every time something special or significant happens, write it down or take a picture, and put it in your Joy Box. When someone gives you a note of appreciation or you have a memorable experience, store it in your Joy Box. Then, when times get tough and you start feeling like Elijah in the wilderness, get out your Joy Box and be reminded about all the precious moments you have probably forgotten.

6. *I need to remember my story.* Take time to remember how God called you into ministry. Remember the circumstances that led you to become a pastor. Reflect on how He opened the door,


removed the obstacles, and confirmed His call on your life.

For me, that meant remembering how God spoke to me during my senior year of college and moved me to take some religion classes even though I was a business major. This meant remembering how two years after I graduated with a business degree, I sensed that He wanted me to do something else. It meant remembering how I sent out resumés and a conference that had never knew me sponsored me to seminary—a miracle. It meant remembering how God led me to my wife, who would share that call to ministry. It meant remembering how I quit seminary and how God reopened the door to enter ministry a second time.

Ellen White once said, “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us . . . in our past history.”² Remember your story. It will awaken faith and courage. Nothing can ever change the fact that God called you.

Pressing on

These are the lessons I learned from the valley of discouragement.³ I did not enjoy the experience, but it did make me stronger. It did make me wiser. It did help me to remember how much I need Jesus.

Maybe you are going through a difficult time in ministry. Maybe you have been wounded and discouraged. Pour out your heart to the Savior. He will not forsake you. Ask Him to make these dry bones live again, and He will deliver you. He did it for me. He will for you too. 

1 David Sedlacek, Duane McBride, and Wendy Thompson, “Seminary Training, Role Demands, Family Stressors and Strategies for Alleviation of Stressors in Pastors’ Families: Final Report to the North American Division Ministerial and Family Ministries Departments in conjunction with the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists” (unpublished paper, September 8, 2014), 4.

2 Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), 196.

3 If you would like for me to speak on the topic of pastoral discouragement, contact me at davidmklinedinst@gmail.com or visit davidklinedinst.org.

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From burned out to burning bright: Cures for eight causes of burnout

Burnout statistics and stories about those who leave the ministry because of burnout abound, but we try to insulate ourselves. “It will not happen to me. I’m different.” Unfortunately, this attitude can be dangerous because it blinds us to the warning signs, allowing burnout to creep up on us. In this article, we tell our stories, pointing out causes of burnout and explaining the process we have discovered to find healing and hope. Jonny Wesley Moor story provides the background for the first four causes; Joseph Kidder’s for the next four.

Burning out when you are fresh

After a few years of pastoral ministry, I, Jonny, left my district to earn my master of divinity. I had been in ministry for only 32 months, but I was burned out. I had joined the 33 percent of pastors who indicate a burnout within their first five years of ministry.¹ What happened?

Burnout cause 1: I started working in full time ministry in 2012 after four years of theological training. Ministry consumed my life. An apt example comes in the form of a ten-pound bag of corn chips I found at the church and relocated to my office. That bag was all I needed. I would stay late into the night

making phone calls, developing handouts, crafting sermons, and preparing for presentations—me, my chips, and my ministry. Who needs regular sleep when you are doing the Lord’s work? After getting married, my habits did not change much. Even at ten o’clock at night, if that church member was calling again, I had to pick up. I could not say *No* to work. My problem was a lack of boundaries.

Creating positive boundaries is a key factor in preventing burnout.² Without boundaries, people in helping professions find themselves dangerously constricted.

Burnout cause 2: My work responsibilities encroached on essential areas of my life. I began attending meetings and school events, mentoring students, teaching regularly in Bible classes at church and school, running ministries, and performing other ministry-related activities. With all these responsibilities, my daily prayer, study, and reflection time was replaced by ministry activities, and my soul began to suffer. I was running on empty, for I lacked vibrant spirituality.

Diane Chandler names spiritual renewal as one of the three major factors “crucial” for preventing burnout.³ As my personal connection with the Divine decreased, daunting activities I

used to accomplish by God’s power had to be done in my own strength.

Burnout cause 3: My work responsibilities also affected my relationships with friends and family. My parents lived less than ten minutes away, but months would pass before I would see them. Even when my parents’ church held a special dedication as they were moving across the country, I missed most of the program because I “had” to teach a Sabbath School class. They are not mad at me. They still love me, but I can never undo my absence. I was not there to support them in a key time of transition.

My relationship with my wife suffered. Often, I did not give her my full attention until there was some sort of relational emergency. We did not date much, and sometimes our dates would be school or church events. We began to drift apart, and my other friendships fared no better. People who could have been friends were cloistered into ministry groups. I took on the responsibility of being a pastor, my friends and, in so doing, ended up feeling alone. I was lacking deep relationships.

Research demonstrates that “strong relationships outside the ministry setting [are important] for promoting clergy resiliency.”⁴ We need relational intimacy.

Burnout cause 4: I had two supportive churches, but even then, conflicts arose. I had a church member who told me my preaching held back the Holy Spirit, another who insulted me with profanities because of a decision I made, and individuals who felt it was their responsibility to inform my wife and me where she or I needed to be and when. Then there were the conflicts between church members regarding the use of the church, words that were said, or decisions made on the church board. I was not adequately prepared to maneuver through these conflicts. Many of them I simply left unresolved, and the tension clung to me. I lacked the ability to manage conflict.

Conflict in the church becomes a significant contributor to pastoral burnout.⁵ Often the individual conflicts we face are not particularly severe, but these small wounds and strains take their toll over time.⁶ The resentment builds.

Burning out when you are seasoned

I, Joe, had been in the field for several years. I finished seminary, was ordained, and found a system that seemed to be working. My churches did relatively well, and my supervisors were happy with my performance. Then one Thanksgiving my wife and I went to visit her parents. As I drove, my heart started beating tremendously fast, so fast we had to stop. My wife took me to the hospital, but there were no signs of a heart attack or stroke. “What you have is severe stress,” I was informed. I felt good because this did not seem like a real health problem. But then, the next day, it happened to me again. Maybe my problem was real after all. What was causing this stress? This led me to seek counseling, and I discovered I was burning out and that several factors were to blame.

Burnout cause 5: In my approach to pastoral leadership, I had to be at every committee, every function, everything. I thought I had to be omnipresent. I was working more than 60 hours each week and often invested my time in activities

that were not in my areas of strength. In addition to my long hours, no day was set apart for rejuvenation. I had no Sabbath and no evenings off. I lacked the biblical practice of rest.

Consistently working more than 50 hours each week is harmful to pastors because it tends to induce suffering “physically, relationally, and spiritually.”⁷ Without rest, the likelihood of burnout increases dramatically.⁸ In addition to long hours, many pastors do not create margins in their schedules of dedicated opportunities to rejuvenate.⁹ Pastors, too, benefit from Sabbath rest.¹⁰

Burnout cause 6: I had received a quality education, but I still felt deficient in casting vision, planting churches, resolving conflict, and so on. I was hungry to learn these skills. One day my church administrator called me and said he wanted to take my wife and I out to dinner. Perhaps this contact would bring resources addressing the issues I was facing in my ministry. We had a fine time at dinner, but I did not hear from him again. To be fair, even meeting with a supervisor once comes as more support than many pastors receive, but I needed more. I, like so many other pastors, lacked intentional, professional support.¹¹

Ministry professionals do not know it all. Support from church organizations or outside sources such as a counselor or support group can provide essential guidance, training, and encouragement. Without it, pastors stagnate. This rut often leaves them feeling empty and overwhelmed.¹²

Burnout cause 7: In every church endeavor, we had to meet our expectations; the church had to perform. Baptismal goals were one example. The church led the union in baptisms five years in a row, but the sixth year we did not. One afternoon the Union executive secretary called me and asked whether there were any more baptisms than I reported. There were none. I felt as though we had let him down. If the church did not perform, I, as its leader, had to work harder so that we could accomplish our goals. I lacked

the ability to relate to expectations in a healthy manner.

Managing expectations is one of the factors most frequently cited by pastors experiencing burnout.¹³ Churches and denominations have many expectations for their ministers, and pastors often fall prey to these expectations.

Burnout cause 8: My high expectations affected more than my work performance; my expectations also became my gage for self-worth. If the church was doing well, I was good. If the church was doing poorly, I felt inadequate. If my sermon went flat, it was a personal failure. My identity was bound up in the success of the church rather than Jesus Himself. I lacked healthy self-worth.

A “sense of inadequacy” has been identified as a significant contributor to burnout.¹⁴ No matter what the specific causes of this self-worth issue, inadequacy complexes will whittle away at health.

Curing burnout

Both of us—the beginner and the experienced—came to the realization that we were burning out and needed help. Regardless of background, age, experience, or intentions, burnout looms at every pastor’s door.¹⁵ What did we do? We read books, talked with counselors and friends, recognized the causes, and began to make changes in our lives. This three-step strategy becomes synthesized from our experiences, and provides a framework to help struggling pastors heal, remain healthy, and keep burnout at bay.

1. Cultivate biblical self-worth. Whether our value comes from others, our ability to finish projects, or some other place, these sources will never satisfy us. God wants our sense of self-worth to come from Him. As His created beings, we are dependent on our Creator for complete emotional health. Even Jesus did not preach a sermon, perform a miracle, or gather disciples until He had received affirmation from God about His identity. “And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am

well pleased' ” (Matt. 3:17).¹⁶ Jesus' self-worth came from His Father. God gave Him a sense of identity, and He wants to do the same for us.

Reflect on how your identity in God can be stronger than any other identity. Common sources of identity, such as our heritage, accomplishments, positions, or possessions, can be taken away from us. But, according to the Bible, we have more and are more than all of these; we are princes and princesses of God. We are beloved children of the King, and no one can take away that position. Our Father gave it to us. God so loved us that He sacrificed His Son as a ransom for our

Bible demonstrates that they must be maintained in balance. Here are some of God's highest ideals for us:

Spirituality. God wants an intimate connection with us. In Genesis, value is given to walking with God (Gen. 5:24; 6:9; 17:1; 48:15). God's rationale for the sanctuary was that it would allow Him to be with His people (Exod. 25:8). Jesus practiced spiritual disciplines to be close to the Father (Luke 5:16). He also recommended seeking God's kingdom to others through fasting (Matt. 6:33; 4:2; 6:16), engaging scripture (Matt. 5:17–20; Luke 10:26; 24:45; John 7:38), worshiping (Luke 4:16; John

Himself called His followers to rest: “And He said to them, ‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’ ” (Mark 6:31 cf. Matt. 11:28–30). When we rest, the entirety of ourselves experiences rejuvenation, and we can work and live with enthusiasm.¹⁹

Vision of the church. God has a mission for the church. He intends for our church to bless the world, invite people into God's way of life, and train up those who respond (Gen. 12:2; Exod. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 28:19, 20). God wants us to make eternally significant impacts on the lives of others rather than simply checking boxes on the church's list of

Even Jesus did not preach a sermon, perform a miracle, or gather disciples until He had received affirmation from God about His identity.

sins in order that we could be a part of His family. We can be discredited, but nothing can discredit our God and what He has done.

Remember that in beholding we become changed (2 Cor. 3:18). God can renew our minds and transform us (Rom. 12:2). In your time with God, take moments to seek out who He is. Read Scripture, pray, and journal, listening for God's voice. Do not merely ask what He wants you to do; also ask what He thinks of you and how He delights in you (Zeph. 3:17).

2. *Adopt God's priorities.* As we begin to identify as God's sons and daughters, our priorities also begin to change. This priority transformation is essential for resolving burnout because much of our burnout results from a misappropriation of priorities. Though we are tempted to elevate one above the others, the recurring presence of these priorities throughout the

4:24), praying (Matt. 6:6–13; Mark 14:38; Luke 18:1). Jesus was always busy, but maintaining His connection with God protected Him from burnout.¹⁷

Close relationships. God intended for us to live in community (Gen. 1:27; 2:18). One way to explore the depths of community in the New Testament would be by studying the “one another” verses. Examples include “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 5:11).¹⁸ Loving and deep relationships provide insulation against burnout.

Rest. God created us in such a way that we need time to rejuvenate. He gave us the Sabbath as a weekly reminder of this reality (Gen. 2:3). He promises to give rest (Exod. 33:14). The principle of the festivals provides times of rest throughout the year. Jesus

busy work. Realizing God's clear and meaningful vision prevents burnout because it motivates us and helps us identify which tasks are helpful and which are not.

3. *Develop the skill to draw boundaries.* Having adopted God's priorities, we now need to protect them. In Acts 6:1–7, the early church demonstrates functional, priority-oriented boundary drawing. There was a need for more care for the widows, but it was too much for the apostles. If they took it on, it would have detracted from what they were called to do. In verses 2–4, the twelve said: “ ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ ”

Are you burning out?

If you can check any of the following boxes, you may be on your way to burnout.

- I cannot say no to my members or employer.
- My personal spiritual time is eroded by work.
- I do not maintain close relationships.
- I feel overwhelmed by the results of conflict.
- I do not receive adequate professional support.
- I am not equipped to perform my ministry.
- I regularly spend more than 50 hours working each week.
- I do not take at least one full day weekly to rejuvenate my soul.
- I feel like I am failing if I do not meet my ministry expectations.
- I catch myself determining my value by how well ministry is going.


The apostles did care about the needs of their community. They recognized something must be done, but they also recognized that with everything else on their plates, they could not attend to this matter as well. So they chose the priorities God had placed in their lives—prayer and the Word—and delegated other responsibilities.

Jesus also set boundaries based on God's priorities. His mission was "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Because of this mission, He drew boundaries throughout His life. Jesus did not allow Himself to suffer untimely abuse (Luke 4:28–30). He did not pander to the disciples' political agenda for Him (Matt. 16:23). And He withdrew from the crowds to rest and rejuvenate spiritually rather than spending all of His time healing and preaching (Luke 5:16).²⁰

If we are to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and be free of burnout, we must draw boundaries. Most of us know how. The problem is putting our expertise into action.²¹ Start small and begin to communicate your boundaries clearly with others. Recognize that maintaining boundaries seems to be what it takes to be true to your calling not only today but also for years to come, and remember, boundaries are beneficial for your health and for the growth and character of others. We do not need to feel guilty about our boundaries.²²

From burned out to burning bright

Burnout strangles the vitality out of life and ministry. Lack of boundaries, vibrant spirituality, deep relationships, conflict-management skills, support, rest, expectation-management skills, or healthy self-worth can lead to burnout, but this does not come as an unassailable foe. We can restructure our lives to overcome these root causes and reignite the joy of knowing and following God in ministry. This restructuring follows the framework of establishing biblical self-worth, adopting God's priorities, and developing healthy boundaries. God's vision for us is that we would live life joyfully and "abundantly" (John 10:10).

So, what will it be? Do you want to settle for burnout, or do you want to burn bright? Recovery becomes a journey and this may be daunting at first, but we find it worth it. Burning bright is worth it. 

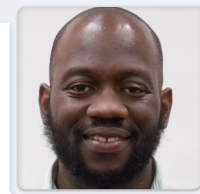
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Bring back the romance

On various occasions, my wife has reminded me that I do not write letters nor pen words of poetry to her, as I regularly did while we were dating. She reminisces about the times I surprised her with rose petals and cards. She talks about the walks we took in the park and when we spent time on the phone until the wee hours of the morning. She transports my recollection to the moments that I entrusted her with my innermost secrets. We did not have a care in the world.

Without being obnoxious and blunt, her soul screams to me: *Bring back the romance!* Romance keeps the fire burning in relationships; it draws out the best in each individual and guards against insecure feelings. Romantic activities communicate to the love of your life that you are still acutely in tune with the essence of her or his soul. I have noticed that when I am aggressively letting my wife know that she is the most important thing to me in the world, there is nothing she will not do for me.

Might there be a spiritual lesson here for us as well?

Intimacy with God

When the wedding bells rang and Christ vowed to love us in sickness and in health, ecstatic emotions ran rampant as Christ made the church His bride. After the high of being in a saving relationship with God waned, the fire and the passion began to disintegrate into a flickering flame. God savors the moments when we talked to Him all

night long and remembers when we gave Him the flowers of our prayers. He is now longing for His bride to bring back the romance.

Obviously, if there is a lack of communication in any relationship, the relationship will decompose. If absent discourse between God and His bride defines the talking points, if our souls fail to engage God on the hotline of heaven, and if prayer evaporates from our souls, the connection with God will cease to exist.

Prayer has fallen from grace in the eyes of the church, and prayer has become the least “erotic” thing that it does. The church engages in more planning than praying. E. M. Bounds relates the importance of prayer when he says, “The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.”* Prayer is the primary fuel that makes the church combustible. The church cannot run without prayer any more than a car can run without gasoline. I am talking not only about the importance of prayer but about the necessity of establishing the prayer assembly.

The high-octane church in the book of Acts understood the urgency of prayer. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8, KJV).

The word *power* in verse 8 is important. It comes from the Greek word *dynamis*, and from this we get the word *dynamite*. Jesus promised the church

“dynamite” in order to carry out her high-octane commission. Notice what the assembly does after Christ gives this promise and ascends into heaven: “Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room. . . . These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:12–14, KJV).

Jesus promises perpetual power. The assembly does not wait by listening to the ticks of the clock counting down until Pentecost. Instead, they hibernated in the upper room and commenced a prayer meeting. For ten days, this group of people who had endured the trauma of their Savior being crucified, but were renewed with the delight of His resurrection, crammed into the prayer room, zealously supplicating the throne room of heaven, until they heard the sound of the mighty rushing wind and received the dynamite that came from heaven through the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:2–4). Therefore, the prayer chamber became a waiting room where the prayer assembly gathered until the endowment of the Holy Spirit was manifested.

The power of prayer

From the inception of the new church that emerged from the day of Pentecost, prayer meeting was the cultural norm of the church. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’

doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42, KJV). When the text mentions that they continued steadfastly, it means they were devoted to, among other things, prayer. The assembly continuously engaged in prayer.

It was no less than what Jesus did during His earthly ministry. Luke 6:12 tells us, “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (KJV). Since divinity ran through the veins of Christ and He saw the need to pray all night, how much more should we who are mere mortals, susceptible to sin, powerless to resist temptation, and prone to leave the God that we love, engage in ardent prayer sessions.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, He left behind a prayer assembly. No wonder. Consider the commission Jesus gives them in Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; and Luke 24:46, 47. Jesus challenged this meager group of 120 people to go into all the world, without sophisticated forms of transportation or the novelty of the Internet. Going to familiar territory and pursuing the lost sheep of Israel in Matthew 10:5, 6 paled in comparison to the fact that they had to venture into uncharted territory. The disciples must have felt overwhelmed at what Christ was asking them to do.

But instead of allowing their sense of inadequacy to smother their calling, they were driven to their knees, understanding that only God could empower them to accomplish such a feat. The commission has not changed, nor the importunity to accomplish it, nor God’s need to have militant prayer warriors. Prayer remains the prerequisite of the Holy Spirit perching on our shoulders as He did on the day of Pentecost. There has yet to be a revival or a great awakening, in all the history of humanity, that was not initiated by corporate prayer.

Prayer meeting?

Most ministry leaders in America maintain a robust program to administer the Word, but they have a feeble, frail, and flimsy prayer meeting. Some

churches have a prayer service during the week, but only a few attend. Others, on the other hand, do not have a prayer service at all. The churches that have a consistent prayer meeting do less praying in those services than they do preaching. This is something that I have encountered in my own pastorate. I found myself trying to pack prayer, testimonies, singing, and preaching into one program. I was always bothered by the fact that we describe our mid-week service as prayer meeting, but when I tallied the total time that was spent on each segment of the program, approximately 5 minutes was spent engaged in prayer; I spent 30 minutes, at least, preaching.

The apostles

In Acts 6, there arose a quarrel in the midst of the called-out assembly because the Hebrew widows were being served more favorably than the Greek widows. To meet this tension head on, the apostles decided to appoint deacons who would take care of the daily ministrations.

In verse four, the apostles said, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word.” The passage reads in the original Greek, “But we to *the prayer* and the ministry of the word.” I have read this passage many times, and I always assumed the apostles were referring to their own personal prayer life. I was shocked when I realized that the apostles were talking about prayer meeting. The apostles saw their main responsibility consisted of two things: (1) organizing prayer meeting and (2) ministering the Word.

Most preachers are prolific at ministering the Word, but the prayer assembly is in disarray. The dissemination of the Word and vibrant prayer assemblies are fraternal twins. Preaching and teaching only put us at a disadvantage because we find ourselves doing all the work, and the church becomes dependent on our charisma and adopts our personality. When prayer meetings saturate the life of the church and we allow the Holy Spirit to work, He dazzles the church with His

glamour, and we adopt His sanctified personality, power, and purpose.

Spiritual warfare

Another story powerfully makes my point.

Peter, James, and John descended a high mountain with Jesus after watching Him transfigured in their presence and witnessing Jesus’ grand display of glorious affirmation. Once they made their way back down to the foot of the mountain, a man who had a son with an evil spirit confronted Jesus with the reality of His disciples’ impotence. He

The churches that have a consistent prayer meeting do less praying in those services than they do preaching.

explained to Jesus, “ ‘And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid; So I spoke to your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not’ ” (Mark 9:18, NKJV). Frustrated at the disciples’ incompetence to wage spiritual warfare, Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit. Jesus delivered training and mentorship to these disciples to steward one of His greatest technological advances, the church. Their training wilted in the face of this demonic threat. Obviously embarrassed, the disciples pulled Jesus aside privately, and asked Him, “ ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ ” (Mark 9:28, NKJV). Jesus answered in verse 29 that

“this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting” (NKJV).

In chapter 6, Jesus gave them power over unclean spirits. What happened three chapters later? The disciples had neglected the cultivation of their prayer lives. They were ministry-driven, yes, but their ministry did not have the luster it needed nor the anointing to thrive once thrust into enemy strongholds. As a result of their sloppy prayer behavior, the disciples experienced defeat and humiliation.

The church battles constantly, but human ingenuity cannot supply her arsenal of weapons. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Cor. 10:4, KJV). We can craft extraordinary mission and vision statements, create exceptional programming, conjure best practices and an impeccable organizational machine,

compensate the most experienced and qualified staff, claim that we have the best show in town, and compound our ministry with exponential membership growth. But, only ceaseless, combative, corporate prayer will act as a battle ram to destroy the walls of Jericho and put our churches on the right path to becoming high octane.

Focus on prayer meeting

Prayer does not seem as romantic as praise and worship, preaching, church conferences, or church socials, but the prayer meeting can be by far the first and most important step in becoming the church God envisioned. There will be pushback from your congregation, church leadership will disparage your efforts, and you will become discouraged because initially only a few will show up. The enemy will work overtime to plant problems in your church that did

not previously exist.

Yet, I say: Put much of your energy into having high-octane prayer meetings—prayer meetings where the only thing taking place is prayer. Your closet prayer plays a major role in your spiritual development, but corporate prayer plays an enormous role in the church’s spiritual development. Teach your people how to pray, preach sermons on the importance of prayer, incorporate collective prayer in the worship services, implement seasons of prayer at staff meetings and all church functions, and take your church on prayer walks in the community. Do not allow anything or anyone to distract you from this most important step.

Serenade God with your earnest prayers and, indeed, bring back the romance! 🙏

* Edward M. Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008), 8.

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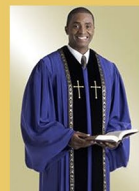
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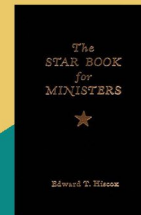
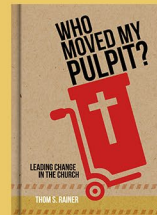
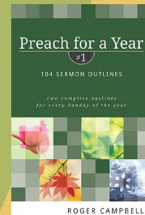
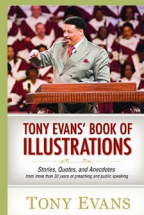
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Roy Adams, ThD, retired at the end of 2010 as associate editor, *Adventist Review/Adventist World*, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



“Seventy times seven”: How we misinterpret Peter’s question and Jesus’ answer

“Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times’ ”

(Matt. 18:21, 22, NRSV).¹

The date was May 28, 2016. And in this particular Adventist church I ran into the Sabbath School lesson study, already in progress, being conducted plenary style in the main sanctuary. The discussion was lively, and within minutes I found myself scribbling notes, especially as the conversation drifted to the Peter-Jesus dialog on forgiveness.

Quoting Jesus’ answer to Peter’s question about how many times we should forgive an offending member (“seventy times seven”), the teacher asked the class: “What was Jesus saying?” After a few answers had floated, he summarized what he was hearing: “So it means,” he said, “that we keep on forgiving, keep on forgiving, keep on forgiving.” And although he did not use the word *regardless* at the end of his peroration, that is exactly what he meant to say—that we keep on forgiving, *regardless*.

Citing a case from Philadelphia, in which a black youth had killed a Korean

exchange student, the teacher (who was black) told of how the Korean parents came over to the United States and, kneeling before the judge, pleaded that the black youth be given over to them, so they could care for him properly.

“Explain *that* to me!” the teacher said, with an air of confidence that he had nailed the point.

This has been the usual interpretation of Jesus’ response to Peter; and, frankly, I find it encouraging. None of us would want to live in a world where there was less (rather than more) forgiveness. Has humanity not suffered enough from centuries-old animosities between the various tribes and factions on the planet? Do we not all know of regions of the world where ancient grievances and bitterness continue to fester, producing a never-ending stream of ugliness, bloodshed, and death? “Not forgiving someone,” one brother said toward the end of the discussion (obviously quoting), “is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.”

Touché.

The beauty of forgiveness

Just about every pastor has had to deal with situations within their congregations involving deep-seated and long-standing grudges among

members. A young woman in a church I once pastored, complaining about losing her boyfriend to the new girl who had come to town, said to me: “Pastor, I won’t harm her myself; but if I should see danger coming to her, I wouldn’t tell her about it.” Such bitterness and unforgiveness within our ranks impede the mission of the church in very practical ways, especially when it infiltrates the clergy itself, and other leadership.

It was heartening to hear such noble sentiments being expressed in a local Adventist church by lay people, unfiltered by the educated protocols of academia. And, in truth, such sentiments have a strong appeal in the broader society, as can be seen in the spirited media coverage of stories in which magnanimous forgiveness comes into play.

The aftermath of the October 2006 killings in Pennsylvania, for example.

One October morning, Charles Roberts entered the one-room West Nickel Mines Amish School near Lancaster City, Pennsylvania, and shot eight young Amish school girls, ages 6–13, murdering five of them before killing himself.

“In the midst of their grief over this shocking loss,” one news report said, “the Amish community didn’t cast blame, they didn’t point fingers, they

didn't hold a press conference with attorneys at their sides. Instead, they reached out with grace and compassion toward the killer's family.

"The afternoon of the shooting," the report continued, "an Amish grandfather of one of the girls who was killed expressed forgiveness toward the killer. . . . That same day Amish neighbors visited the Roberts family to comfort them in their sorrow and pain.

"Later that week the Roberts family was invited to the funeral of one of the Amish girls who had been killed. And Amish mourners outnumbered the non-Amish at Charles Roberts' funeral."²

According to a CBS News report, the killer's mother's "initial reaction was that she had to move away," fearing reprisals. "But the Amish came to her the night of the shooting to say they wanted her to stay." Said Terri Roberts, "There are not words to describe how that made us feel that day."³

"For the mother and father who had lost not just one but two daughters at the hand of our son, to come up and be the first ones to greet us—wow. Is there anything in this life that we should not forgive?"³

Such stories tug at the heartstrings. And when I hear them, no one says *Amen* louder.

How we misunderstand Jesus

As I reflected on the Sabbath School discussion described above, it occurred to me that, however praiseworthy, none of it got to the essential issue raised in Peter's question and Jesus' answer. For without any of the participants seeming to recognize it, Peter's question was not, "Should I forgive?" The answer to that was already clear to him from other discourses Jesus had given, including the Sermon on the Mount.⁴ Peter's question, rather, was, "How many times?"

The context of his question was the church community. His query did not envision the Charles Roberts kind of infraction. What he had in mind were common, everyday offences that "my brother [or sister]" may commit. Jesus had just finished dealing with

matters of more serious interpersonal consequence, and the steps that should be taken to address them—up to and including expulsion from the church (see Matthew 18:15–17). With that discussion behind them, Peter now switched to the more mundane frictions and infringements that occur as we live together in community.

This does not mean, of course, that serious (nonmalicious) problems will never arise within the community of faith. Early in 2016, I read a tragic news story out of New Jersey that could easily happen among church members. In the story, a father had left a loaded gun under a bed in his house, where his four-year-old son found it and used it to kill his six-year-old, visiting friend as they played together.⁵

A horrific tragedy, indeed—for both families. But one family still had their son; the other did not. And one can only imagine what it would have taken for the bereaved parents to forgive that father who had carelessly left a loaded gun within reach of a curious child. Conceivably—and for their own psychological and spiritual well-being—the grieving parents have long since come to terms with the horrible incident, forgiven the father whose boy had pulled the trigger, and moved on.

But how many who discuss Peter's question and Jesus' answer forget that 99.9 percent of such ghastly events occur *just once*? In all likelihood, people like those bereaved New Jersey parents will never have to face that kind of tragedy twice, caused by the same person.

This takes us back to the ordinary, day-to-day affairs of life assumed in Peter's question and Jesus' answer. In a related passage in Luke, Jesus had expressed similar sentiments: "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them" (Luke 17:3, 4, NIV).

Undoubtedly, Jesus was thinking here of a variety of sins, since a sane person does not punch their brother or sister on the nose seven times a

day, returning each time to beg forgiveness for the identical offence. Nor is it conceivable that Jesus would have had in mind incidents like that between those two New Jersey families. But in the normal course of events in everyday life, particularly in the home, church, or workplace (involving myriads of interactions with others), infractions can, in time, literally approach 7 a day, 70 over time, and even 490. And what was meant by what Jesus said was that for His followers, forgiveness under such circumstances should become second nature, a habit, a lifestyle—to the extent we *stop keeping score*.

But we misinterpret Jesus and distort the whole concept of forgiveness when we insinuate that His answer to Peter's question encompasses the whole gamut of human situations that confront us.

Facing the reality of dark evil

As an international community, we have long gone beyond shock at the specter of dark evil. The names Boko Haram, the Lord's Resistance Army, al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda, and ISIS strike terror into whole communities and nations today. From ISIS, the most brutal of them all, we have seen incidents of sheer barbarism, such as beheadings and people being burned alive.

How does Jesus' statement on serial forgiveness apply in such cases? Or in other cases of severe personal abuse and injury?

An acid attack, for instance?

"According to the Acid Survivors Foundation . . . , a Pakistani . . . organization working to eradicate acid violence, . . . the intent [of the perpetrators] is particularly sadistic and malicious—to maim permanently, consequently leading to lifelong physical disabilities, ostracism, severe psychological distress, and economic dependency for survivors."⁶

The point would not be that the victims of such brutalities should not forgive. The point, rather, is whether it is appropriate to suggest that Jesus even remotely had such situations in mind in

His discourse with Peter that day. Or, indeed, in any of His other statements on forgiveness.

Back in November 2004, five teenagers went to a supermarket in Ronkonkoma, New Jersey, bought a frozen turkey and, while driving down the highway, hurled the frozen bird out their car window as a prank. The heavy flying object smashed through the windshield of a 44-year old woman going in the opposite direction, critically wounding her.⁷

unforgiven in my book. That is a good feeling. But it probably comes from having lived a relatively sheltered life and gives me no right to pass judgment on others not so fortunate. Imagine, for example, the pain, anguish, and terror of that Jordanian mother as she watched the video of her son being burned alive by ISIS. Imagine the horror of someone who has had acid thrown in their face. Do I have any idea what either of those two experiences mean? People already experienc-

Which raises the question: How does one apply Jesus' words ("until seventy times seven") in cases of sexual abuse, where a single occurrence can leave permanent psychological damage on its victim?

In his book on street people and others on the margins, researcher Robert L. Okin tells the story of a woman who, returning from a trip, was told by her four-year-old daughter that her husband's brother had raped her—and not even in the usual manner,

Even Jesus did not preach a sermon, perform a miracle, or gather disciples until He had received affirmation from God about His identity.

Would it even be Christian to press Jesus' response to Peter upon a person in that woman's condition? Or to use Jesus' statement on forgiveness in Matthew 6:14, 15 (to cite another forgiveness statement) to insist that she forgive the lads if she ever wanted her heavenly Father to forgive her?

My sense is that in cases of severe personal injury or trauma, equally good people may respond differently. As he was being stoned to death, Stephen, reflecting sentiments uttered by Jesus on the cross, prayed: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60, NIV). By contrast, the prophet Zechariah, dying under similar circumstances, said in his last breath: "May the LORD see this and call you to account" (2 Chron. 24:21, 22, NIV). Significantly, in His litany of woes against the Jewish nation toward the end of His ministry, Jesus seemed to endorse Zechariah's prayer, holding those Jews who were involved in His death culpable (Luke 11:51).

Forgiveness is a beautiful thing. And for my part, I cannot think of any person or situation that remains

ing unspeakable trauma should not have to face the added stress of being confronted with the words of Jesus on forgiveness, as if the Master had cases like theirs in mind.

Interpreting Jesus

In the Adventist *Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, the lesson for July 5, 2004, asked the question: "Can children honor parents even if the parents are abusive?" Then followed this quote from Ellen G. White: "Our obligation to our parents never ceases. Our love for them, and theirs for us, is not measured by years or distance, and our responsibility can never be set aside."⁸ The juxtaposition of these two ideas made me cringe. And I imagine Ellen White would have also cringed to see it.

The way Jesus dealt with the abuse of children suggests that, for Him, forgiveness was not the preferred option in this situation. "It would be better," He said of the offender, "if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6, NKJV).

to put it delicately. The brother-in-law disappeared immediately thereafter and was found hanging from a tree 40 days later. "If he hadn't hung himself," the child's mother said to Okin, "I would have killed him!"⁹

I believe Jesus would have understood that mother's outrage.

Years ago, I read the story of a child the news media dubbed "Girl X." When she appeared in court March, 23, 2001, one newspaper gave this description: "Raising her head and making eye movements to communicate, the 13-year-old . . . testified today about the attack in 1997 that left her severely disabled.

"She was the third witness in the trial of Patrick Sykes, 29, who is accused of raping her, beating her, and pouring roach killer down her throat in the attack at the crime-ridden Cabrini-Green housing project."¹⁰

Do we think that any of Jesus' statements on forgiveness enjoins this victim to put up with a single additional occurrence of such horror?


In the words of Ellen White, "We are to be guided by true theology and

common sense.”¹¹ “God wants us all,” she said, “to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things.”¹²

And common sense tells us that a multitude of physical and psychological offenses exist that are so egregious, abhorrent, and emotionally damaging that they could not possibly fall within the purview of Jesus’ response to Peter nor be contemplated in His other statements on forgiveness. Offenses so ghastly that the specter of enduring them for even a *second* time (let alone a seventh or a seventieth) becomes unthinkable.

This means that victims experiencing unspeakable evil and tragedy should be allowed time to vent; time to grieve;

time to process the enormity of what has happened to them; time to heal; time to come to forgiveness at their own pace.

And for those who, physically, are too hurt to ever let it go, we need to offer this assurance: “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18, NIV). 

- 1 Many translations read “seventy times seven.” But the variation is immaterial to our purpose in this article.
- 2 “Amish Grace and Forgiveness,” LancasterPA.com, accessed June 15, 2017, <http://lancasterpa.com/amish/amish-forgiveness/>.
- 3 Jeff Glor, “Mother of Amish School Shooter Shares Amazing Story of Forgiveness,” CBS Evening News, December 12, 2013, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mother-of-amish-school-shooter-shares-amazing-story-of-forgiveness/>.
- 4 Matthew 6:14, 15; 18:35; Mark 11:25, 26.
- 5 Julia Talanova and Laura Batchelor, “New Jersey Police: 6-Year-Old Dies a Day After Being Shot—by a 4-Year-Old,” CNN, April 10, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/09/us/new-jersey-child-shooting/index.html>.

- 6 Ameenah Ilahi, “Acid Crimes: A Growing Crisis in Pakistan,” The Asia Foundation, October 1, 2014, <http://asiafoundation.org/2014/10/01/acid-crimes-a-growing-crisis-in-pakistan/>.
- 7 Associated Press, “5 Arrested in Turkey-Hurling Incident,” MSNBCNEWS.com, November 19, 2004, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6520848/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/arrested-turkey-hurling-incident/#.WDpNvFwTGMw.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), 360.
- 9 Robert L. Okin, *Silent Voices: People With Mental Disorders on the Street* (Mill Valley, CA: Golden Pine Press, 2014), 92, 93.
- 10 Mike Robinson, “‘Girl X’ Testifies About Assault That Left Her Disabled,” *Washington Post*, March 24, 2001, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2001/03/24/girl-x-testifies-about-assault-that-left-her-disabled/42661661-bbb8-4fba-b9e3-9faaee55818/>.
- 11 Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn, 1977), 148.
- 12 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 217.

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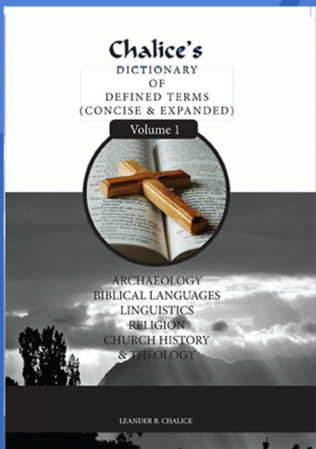
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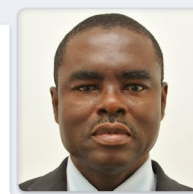
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Towards a theology of the call to pastoral ministry

Ministry is the heartbeat of Christianity.¹ The apostle Paul affirmed that “anyone who aspires to the ministerial office, desires a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1).² As such, a call to full-time ministry is a vocational alternative for Christians. Why then is it so demanding?

Research in East Africa highlights stress as one of the major hindrances to pastoral performance.³ Psychologist Richard Blackmon states, “Pastors are the single most occupationally frustrated group in America.”⁴ Dr. Richard J. Krejcir states, “After over 18 years of researching pastoral trends and many of us being a pastor, we have found (this data is backed up by other studies) that pastors are in a dangerous occupation! We are perhaps the single most stressful and frustrating working profession, more than medical doctors, lawyers, or politicians. We found that over 70 percent of pastors are so stressed out and burned out that they regularly consider leaving the ministry. Thirty-five to forty percent of pastors actually do leave the ministry, most after only five years.”⁵

These same pastors are then confronted by their young people seeking confirmation as to whether full-time ministry is their calling. The relevant question then follows, is there really such a thing as a call from the Lord? If so, how do we know that we have received such a call?

There are two extreme views relative to the divine call into the ministry that may be considered equally extreme. The first has been labeled the liberal view. This seeks to debunk the presence of the supernatural in the call and regards the embrace of full-time ministry as a career choice rather than a divine call. The second is the mystical view. This is where the minister supposedly “hears voices” and “sees literal visions,” such as Constantine’s “cross in the sky.”⁶ Neither of these views does justice to the call to ministry, because ministry incorporates both divine call and human stewardship. A call to full-time ministry may include the following four elements:

1. *The general call: public invitation.* This is where all are called upon to take up the cross of Christ and embark upon a life of discipleship, hearing and doing the Word of God in repentance and faith, etc.
2. *The secret call: private conviction.* This is the inner persuasion or experience whereby a person feels himself or herself directly summoned or invited by God to take up the work of full-time ministry.
3. *The providential call: personal affirmation.* This is the assurance that comes through the divine guidance of his or her life by all circumstances and through the equipping of a person with the

talents necessary for the exercise of the office.

4. *The ecclesiastical call: institutional confirmation.* This is the invitation extended to a man or woman by an institution of the church to engage in full-time ministry.⁷

There should not be any hard and fast rules as to how these elements connect, whether in importance or modes of relationship. The key guiding principle is that any clear idea of what constitutes a call to the ministry should acknowledge the need for all four calls and their relationship to be carefully ordered. Let us examine each in turn.

The general or public call. Why does God call people? Christ called the disciples while on earth, trained them, and sent them to make disciples of all nations (Mark 3:13, 14; Matt. 28:19, 20). One must therefore find Christ before one can preach Christ. The call is nullified if one does not live it. Only a crucified person is able to testify to a crucified Christ. This is the point where one’s call to be a Christian ties in with one’s “secret” call—the inner conviction that one is invited by God to take on full-time ministry. How does one transition from the public call to discipleship to the “private” call to full-time ministry? For many, the call of God is viewed as putting one’s hand to the plow and not letting go (Luke 9:62). It is a call to lifetime ministry (Isa. 6:11). As such, any

strong inclination for the ministry must not turn out to be some momentary impulse or temporary fascination with outward honors that might accompany the position of a pastor. Rather, it must be the outgrowth of agonizing soul-searching and earnest prayer. Mere infatuation with the possibility of public ministry will fade. A true call to full-time ministry will persist after attempts to fulfill other careers have failed. And a true call will be a bulwark for survival when the going gets tough.⁸

The inner, or private, call. The Christian ministry is first and foremost a divine calling. Both biblically and historically sound, a man or woman of faith may, through personal communion with God, feel an inner compulsion to enter the Christian ministry. Paul says that Christ extended to him the call into ministry (1 Tim. 1:12–15). He was sure of his call and could not help but respond (Gal. 1:15–17). Isaiah said, “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips.” He then heard the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Strengthened by the thought of a divine touch, Isaiah responded, “Here am I, send me.” (Isa. 6:5–8, KJV). When the Lord calls, you will know no rest until you respond. Jeremiah said, “There is fire in my bones and I cannot quit” (Jer. 20:9).⁹ The need for one to feel obsessed by his or her call stems from the purpose of the call to ministry. Spurgeon says, “For a true call to the ministry must be irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst for telling to others what God has done to our own souls.”¹⁰ Some have received the call and not answered it; to their own distress. Like Jonah, their lives have been riddled with turbulence, and they found peace only when they stopped running from the call of God.

The providential call. The ministry is not for those who cannot be successful in any other line of work. It is for those who say with Paul, “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16, KJV). Without the Word of God as a fire in their bones, not only would persons be unhappy in ministry, they would be

unable to bear the self-denials required in ministry. But this, though worthy, is not enough. The strong desire to become a pastor should be accompanied by gifts necessary for that office. Just consider the One for whom you are working. According to Ellen White, “True ministers are co-laborers with the Lord in the accomplishment to His purposes. God says to them, Go, . . . preach Christ.”¹¹ By and large it can be said that to succeed in the ministry a person must possess the gifts for the calling. Co-laborers with Christ ought to have an aptness to teach and an ability to preach. According to Flynn, “To that extent, preachers are born, not made.”¹²

It must be pointed out here that, if you are called, the Lord will ensure that you are qualified. Titles and seminary degrees may be necessary and important, but they are no proof that a man or woman has a right to ministry. Not only will there be an awareness of the gifts required, there will also be an awareness of the sacrifice required. Self-denial within the ministry is such that anyone without a love and passion for his or her calling cannot survive. The person will either need to leave the drudgery or continue on in discontent, burdened with monotony as tiresome as the blind horse in a mill.¹³

The ecclesiastical call. The voice of the church plays a vital part in the call to the ministry. Church historians tell us that in the reformation times, the call of the church came first.¹⁴ When others detected the pastoral gift in some young people, they would urge them to “stir up that gift.” Then, if they sensed the inner call, they would move forward with the support of everyone. In any case, the candidate’s call required a demonstration of talents approved by the church as evidence of that call. In the New Testament, the choice of ministers searched for people with spiritual qualities and the necessary capabilities for the particular tasks envisaged (1 Tim. 3:1–13).¹⁵

A person should therefore submit his or her claim of call to the scrutiny of loving, mature, and discerning brothers and sisters. An even more important

outward indication of a man’s or woman’s call to the ministry would be that there should already be some evidences of aptitude and unction upon him or her as a future preacher. In other words, the crowning confirmation that one does possess the pastoral gift is recognition by others. Thus the ministry is not the result of one call, but of two. As Gaylord puts it, “Theologically, the call to ministry is from God, confirmed by the church.”¹⁶

John Calvin alluded to this when he contended that “if one is to be considered a true minister of the church, it is necessary that he [or she] considers the objective or external call of the church and the secret inner call conscious only to the minister himself.”¹⁷ Once the inner call is accepted, then comes the need for validation by the church. According to Jock Stein, the idea of an inner conviction has, by itself, very real dangers, as the history of the church has often proved. The church must have objective criteria by which the call can be confirmed and validated.¹⁸

Authentic ministry

It can safely be concluded that an authentic call will indeed encompass all the elements of a call to ministry in one form or the other. The providential call and the ecclesiastical call are inextricably bound together. Above all, the candidate’s conviction about his or her call must be paramount. For if one is not sure about the call, then, according to Jock Stein, however suitable and promising in all other respects he or she may be, the church has not only the right but also the duty to call his or her candidature into question.¹⁹ Gaylord places the onus on the minister by saying that “because the call comes from God, the minister has a calling that transcends loyalty to employer and client.”²⁰

Church administration, chaplaincy ministry, educational ministry, and humanitarian ministry are all part of the mission of Christ, engaged in by home missionaries and overseas missionaries. I have been a pastor, a professor, and a church administrator.


I have loved them all, but in my present role, I lift up the calling to be a local church pastor. In an interview after the Lausanne II Conference in 1989, John Stott, rector emeritus of All Souls Church in London, said regarding his call to the ministry, “I love Cambridge, and felt attracted to the academic life, but God called me to the pastorate.”²¹ In the final analysis, authentic ministry is presenting ourselves as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Rom. 12:1).

Fulfilled ministry

As pastors drop out of ministry at an alarming rate, this question of the call becomes not an intellectual issue but a survival one. According to Leslie Flynn, “The ministry today can be tough and rough. To survive, a pastor needs to know that God has called him. Otherwise, the task may be overwhelming.”²²

One may meet the qualifications and be ordained by the church, but only God can enable one to fulfill the Christian ministry. As such, one must first and foremost be called by God.

Once a person is called, the Lord will ensure that he or she is recognized and qualified. Walter Wiest states, “We must make allowance for the Spirit of God Who works when and where God chooses and He has worked wonders despite the limits on individual ministers’ abilities.”²³ Once we are sure of our call, what remains is to surrender to the Lord and trust that He will take over the rest in terms of training, opportunities for service, and success.

I believe God calls men and women today, even as He chose Moses as His messenger. Heavy is the woe resting on those who dishonor their holy calling by lowering the high standards of giftedness, humility, service, and sacrifice set for us in the life and labors of the Son of God.²⁴ 

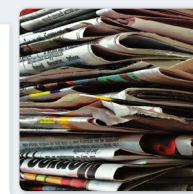
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- 2 Author’s translation.
- 3 Crispus Micheni Ndeke, “An Assessment of Pastors Stress Management Models Among Pastors in Presbyterian Churches of East Africa in Meru South and Maara Districts” (master’s thesis, Mount Kenya University, August 2013), <https://erepository.mku.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/1351/h>

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 - 8 Leslie B. E. Flynn, *How to Survive in the Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992), 23.
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 - 16 Adapted from Gaylord B. Moyce, *Pastoral Ethics: Professional Responsibilities of the Clergy* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 175.
 - 17 Ibid.
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 - 21 John Stott, “Humble Scribe,” interview in *Christianity Today* (September 8, 1989), 63.
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 - 24 Ibid.

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DATELINE

▶ Ministers explore creative mission in Europe



London, England—A team of pastors from the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference (NZPUC) visited with Trans-European Division (TED) staff in London April 11, 2017 with the aim of gaining an insight into how mission can be achieved within secularized and diverse cultures. Led by Pastor **Victor Kulakov**, the group specifically chose to visit the TED territory because they see themselves facing similar issues.

Dr. **Daniel Duda**, director of Education and of Adventist Mission in the TED, highlighted the challenges

to sharing the gospel that are faced by the 11 unions and three attached fields within the TED. “While nineteenth-century methods are still having some success in a few areas, we have to be innovative and change our mindset in order to reach out to people groups who have radically changed their worldview, either post-Communism or post-Christianity,” Dr. Duda said.

Part of that learning was a review of some of the success stories and mission experiments that have taken place in the TED over the past 12 months. TED

Communication director **Victor Hulbert** took the group on a whirlwind virtual tour of a variety of projects including Messy Church, a pizza church, health clubs, a motorbike club, and creative youth and Pathfinder initiatives.

In relation to initiatives focused on the European refugee and migrant situation as well as other forms of outreach, Hulbert noted how genuine compassion makes a significant difference in people’s lives. He showed how the church in the UK was highlighted for the work it did around the 100th anniversary of the

outbreak of World War I—and the stories of courageous Adventist conscientious objectors. More recently, Adventists in Hungary and Poland (among other places) were able to make significant community impacts by focusing on the Desmond Doss story during the release of the *Hacksaw Ridge* film.

The fourth presenter, **Patrick Johnson**, the TED Ministerial Association secretary, showed how good mentoring

and discipleship can not only benefit the pastor and his or her family but will ultimately help the church grow as a positive discipleship track leads to an increased and natural process of total member involvement. [Victor Hulbert]



Photo credit: Victor Hulbert

▶ Adventist University president attends meeting at the White House

Washington, DC—Oakwood University president Dr. **Leslie N. Pollard** attended a meeting convened by President **Donald J. Trump** at the White House in late February 2017, as part of a group of more than 60 leaders of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Congress Representative for Alabama's 7th congressional district, wrote that while "many HBCUs were founded by churches and former slaves to educate the children of former slaves," presently, "75 percent of all black officers in the Armed Forces, and 80 percent of all black federal judges graduate from an HBCU."

top predominantly white institutions (PWIs) have," and that "the endowment gap between the top HBCUs and the top PWIs has doubled in the past 20 years."

Addressing HBCUs specifically, President Trump pledged his support to these schools, their mission, and to "our shared mission of bringing education and opportunity to all."

Pollard's visit to the White House garnered mixed reactions. Some questioned the purpose of the meeting and its tangible effect on Oakwood University. Pollard said he would like to answer questions regarding his decision to attend the meeting in these simple words, "Because I'm fighting." He explained that his resolve is to seize every single opportunity to garner support for Oakwood University and its mission. "I believe my job is to make sure that Oakwood's agenda is always on the table."

"Going to the White House also presented a chance for Oakwood University to represent all of Seventh-day Adventist higher education," explained Pollard.

On March 16, President Trump unveiled a discretionary budget blueprint. According to news reports, the budget increased defense and security spending, while slashing the funds allotted to other departments and programs. Higher education did not escape deep cuts, said Pollard. Overall, the budget for education was reduced by \$9.2 billion, or 13.5 percent. [Marcos Paseggi | *Adventist Review*]



Photo credit: AP/Oakwood

Pollard communicated that the purpose of the meeting was "to confirm a national agenda for assisting HBCUs [to] continue and strengthen their contribution to the nation's graduation rates."

In his newsletter, Pollard shared some startling facts: while HBCUs make up only 3 percent of all institutions of higher education in America, they graduate annually 21 percent of all African Americans that receive bachelor's degrees from all institutions. **Terri A. Sewell**, United States

The special "listening session" was convened by President Trump before he signed "a new and stronger" executive order recognizing the importance of HBCUs. Pollard also explained that HBCUs and partner organizations requested "to increase... grant funding." Still, "we seek investment, not charity," tweeted Pollard, who remarked that "the HBCUs output is a national gift."

On the same note, Sewell explained that "the top HBCUs in the country have only a fraction of the endowment that



Global conference focuses on issues impacting families, women, and children

Budapest, Hungary—Close to 400 delegates from more than 60 countries gathered in Budapest, Hungary in May 2017 for the first-ever International Leadership Conference focused on issues impacting families, women, and children.

Doug Venn, coordinator for Mission to the Cities and director of the Global Mission Urban Center for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and his team displayed postcards brought by delegates on a wall, surrounding a sign that read “I Want This City.”

The Hungarian Minister of State for Churches, Minorities, and Civil Affairs, **Miklós Soltész**, emphasized the need for faith communities to address societal challenges by sharing Christian values. “It looks like we live in a better age,” said Soltész. “In many countries we have many opportunities. But there is a question. Do we recognize all the problems and fears that are all around us?”

The first keynote address of the multiday conference was delivered by Dr. **Ella Simmons**, a general vice president for the General Conference.

Simmons focused most of her thoughts on the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, pointing out the significant dysfunction within that family unit. She concluded that most of the alienation within families occurs due to lack of forgiveness present in broken relationships, and she challenged church leaders and members to take seriously the “ministry of reconciliation” entrusted to believers by Christ. Simmons reminded attendees that “if we want to reach the world, we need to remember that the first victories must be won in the home life.”

Another notable aspect of the conference was the presence of Dr. **George Barna**, well-known author, researcher, and statistician, whose research has informed the Christian community around the world for decades. Barna spent most of his time unpacking the

concept of worldview—a set of filters by which we perceive the world around us—and the impact society is having on younger generations.

His 2017 survey revealed that while 58 to 70 percent of parents see value in their children being exposed to extended family gatherings, church services, art exhibits, and the Bible, children on average spend only two hours per week on these activities. In contrast, 33 to 43 percent of parents do not see value in their children being exposed to professional sports, television news, online content, and current movies, yet children on average spend seven hours per day on these and related activities.

Statistically a very small amount of younger people have what he called a “biblical worldview”—only 4 percent of 18- to 30-year-olds and 7 percent of 30- to 49-year-olds. “We are in a crisis,” Barna said. “If the church does not wake up and solve it, biblical Christianity in the United States is in jeopardy.”

Barna then turned his attention squarely to parents, offering a statistical call to parental responsibility. He pointed out that while children form their worldview by the age of 13, only 5 percent of parents with 5- to 13-year-old children in the United States have a biblical worldview. “Our children usually make their spiritual choices by default, acquiescing to cultural norms,” he concluded.

Barna ended on a positive note, emphasizing that though not easy, worldviews can be changed through proper asking of questions and meaningful dialogue with children and teens in an effort to “dislodge what culture has placed in their minds.”

“Parents must be intentional about making sure sound biblical values are passed on to their children on a daily basis through family worship and by modeling godly living,” said **Willie Oliver**, director of Family Ministries for the Adventist General Conference and one of the organizers.

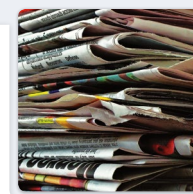
“You can’t get more missional than this. Because, when we have strong families, we will have a strong church that can share the gospel with power and joy and help hasten the coming of Jesus Christ.”

Dr. **Kiti Freier Randall**—a pediatric neurodevelopmental psychologist from Loma Linda University Health Care—emphasized from the beginning the role the home plays in childhood development. “Although other supportive institutions in society play a role, it is in the family that nurture is effective and meaningful.”

Randall contrasted the idyllic statement with the reality that children around the world are at risk due to a great number of factors. Lack of access to education, especially for girls, is a significant risk, leading to other risk factors such as poverty, drug use, and an increased rate of teen pregnancy and gang violence. Childhood obesity is another risk factor, leading to “serious lifelong consequences.”

At the same time, malnutrition and starvation continue to present a risk to children around the world, in addition to abuse of various kinds. Randall explained in detail the effects of trauma and abuse, including showing a brain scan that showed a visible difference in the brain of an abuse victim. “Trauma, abuse, and neglect actually change the architecture of the brain,” said Randall, who also informed participants that if children are born healthy and die before becoming one year old, the number one reason they die is “because their parents will kill them.”

Randall also spoke to a controversial subject, the risk factor involving technology addiction. “Too much or misused technology can impact a child’s physical and mental health,” she explained, leading to negative impacts such as sleep disturbances, depression, and anxiety. She challenged parents not to expose children younger than two years old to technology.



Randall offered a bright spot to the daunting realities she began with. Science is focusing increasingly on the idea of resilience, “the capacity to maintain or develop competent functioning in the face of major life stressors.” Factors such as social support, connectedness, meaningful activity, and exercise all lead to increased resiliency.

When asked how these insights impact the Adventist Church, Randall realized that “what they need, our church has to offer. Our church has all the elements that we need to change the trajectory to a positive one. We have the ability to provide meaningfulness and hope in life. We have the ability to provide nurturance and relationship with healthy adults, and access to healthy activities.”

Among other topics, Family Ministries directors **Willie and Elaine Oliver** facilitated a dialogue surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT) issues and questions. Dr. **Ekkehardt Mueller**, an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI), gave an overview of the subject, highlighting research done by BRI in gathering biblical insights into the matter.

Mueller made it clear that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not “condone the sin of homosexual activity.” However, he reminded attendees that “we distinguish between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity.

“As Adventists we respect all people, whether heterosexuals or homosexuals,” Mueller presented. “We acknowledge that all human beings are creatures of the heavenly Father and are extremely valuable in God’s sight. Therefore we are opposed to hating, scorning, or abusing homosexuals.”

Mueller also reminded delegates of the broader reality of sin, even within Romans 1. “Sin is serious business whether sexual sin or other sin, whether heterosexual sin or homosexual sin,” he explained.

A second presentation was delivered by **Virna Santos**, a representative

of *By Beholding His Love*, a ministry focused on equipping “individuals, families, churches, and schools with biblical-based training, while teaching the methods of Jesus to understand the methods of Jesus to understand issues related to sexual identity struggles” and “facilitating healthy, genuine and intentional connection between Church and LGBTQ communities.”

“With parenting in general, it’s amazing what you can learn if you just listen,” explained Elaine Oliver. “Sometimes we become impatient, forgetting that God is never impatient with us. The same principle applies to the way we should interact with children wrestling with sexual identity questions.”

“We need to be careful not to cherry-pick when it comes to sins,” concluded Willie Oliver at the close of the panel discussion. “We need to be like Jesus. We have to genuinely love others. You’re not going to reach anyone for Jesus, unless you genuinely love them.”

Meanwhile, the Women’s Ministries department hosted seminars centered on women interacting meaningfully and purposefully with women of other faiths. Department director **Heather-Dawn Small** and associate director **Raquel Queiroz da Costa Arrais** invited guest speakers to both teach and inspire women on how to reach out into various communities of women.

“We’ve got to help our women look beyond themselves and the ones they know to the ones they don’t know,” said Small, “to the ones who don’t look like them; the ones who don’t speak their language and whose culture is different. That was the main focus of our training here.”

Across the hall, the Children’s Ministries department, led by **Linda Mei Lin Koh**, director, and **Saustin Mfunne**, associate director, was exploring a topic—among others—with an unexpected twist. Seminars focused on impacting and ministering to children from affluent homes.

Presenters shared several of the leading causes contributing to the possibility of emotional troubles

within affluent environments.

Various principles and ideas were shared for effective ways to minister to children in these circumstances.

While the topics covered and the dialogue facilitated were both practical and critical for mission, it was the unprecedented collaboration of three world church departments that stood out most.

“This has been a tremendous collaboration between these three departments,” shared **Geoffrey Mbwana**, a general vice president of the General Conference.

Measuring success is many times a moving target, yet organizers of the global conference expressed confidence in the event’s positive outcome. “Many shared new convictions established during the conference by listening to compelling truths that were not clear to them before,” said Willie Oliver—“especially the fact that areas they once believed had nothing to do with their respective ministries were obviously also their concern.”

“I’m a convert,” shared **Carla Baker**, Women’s Ministries director for the North American Division, at the close of the conference. “I do believe that Women’s Ministries can do a lot to reach the mothers. I will be doing something about that.”

Willie Oliver also pointed to requests for future events as an indicator of success. “This level of new synergy, as well as requests by many conference participants to repeat this kind of event in the near future, are indicators of a level of success we expected as an outcome of this shared effort by Children’s, Women’s, and Family Ministries.”

The collaboration was further extended when Willie Oliver welcomed the Ministerial department’s offer to focus a special edition of *Ministry* on the issues of the conference. Each delegate received a complimentary copy of the May 2017 edition in their package, which was very well received. [Costin Jordache | *Adventist Review*] 

The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures

by Jayson Georges, Time Press, 2016.

Available in French, Spanish, and Russian, the *The 3D Gospel* is structured in three parts: culture, theology, and ministry, or mission. The author, Jayson Georges, a missiologist in residence for an evangelical organization, calls for a three-dimensional (3D) gospel that speaks to every context instead of a one-dimensional approach (western) that addresses only guilt and innocence.

Culture: In the first part of the book, cultural paradigms are simplified into a guilt-fear-shame trichotomy. This trichotomy serves as a framework in understanding orientations underlying every cultural context. Why do such cultural orientations exist? It is based on how resources are attained and how a particular group rewards (innocence, honor, and power) or punishes (guilt, shame, fear) (27). In such systems there are three primary gatekeepers controlling resources: formal institutions, human communities, and unseen spirits. This is further illustrated with a chart (30, 31) that shows several human needs and how each culture meets them or responds to them.

Theology: How does the guilt-shame-fear trichotomy help in doing theology? For Georges, since “the Bible is one narrative in which forgiveness, honor, and power are woven together” (35), the trichotomy can serve as a framework for contextualizing the gospel as well as interpreting scripture. He thus develops three dimensions of salvation—forgiveness, honor, and power—to speak to the cultures of guilt, shame, and fear.

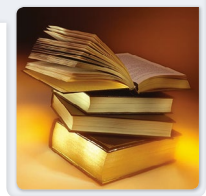
This is demonstrated with narrative theology (which pervades much of the book) to sketch guilt-innocence, shame-honor, and fear-power narratives of salvation. In the outline of fear-power narrative, the death of Jesus on the cross disarmed the dark powers and authorities (44). By turning to Jesus, believers are transferred from the

kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light and are able to have power and dominion over all other authorities; thus, “God’s grace restores our authoritative position in the world” (45).

The author further posits that guilt, shame, and fear can be alleviated only by the atonement of Jesus’ death. Interestingly, theologians have made attempts to use atonement theories to speak to guilt, shame, and fear contexts through history. This is seen in the auspices of ransom theory for fear, satisfaction theory for shame, and penal substitution theory for guilt. In this way, the author engages historical theology by observing that the various substitution theories be prioritized according to the context since they help present a 3D gospel that speaks to all cultures (52). He even charted various systematized categories in the guilt, shame, and fear languages. (53, 54)

Ministry: How can the gospel be communicated in each cultural setting? This can be done by presenting a 3D “plan of salvation” and “story of salvation” combined with a suggestion to use three contextual approaches of Christian witness—truth encounter, power encounter, and community encounter—to help people engage the gospel through meaningful forms (56). The three approaches were taken from Paul’s ministry in the book of Acts (61). For instance, in truth encounter the author says that what Paul did at the end of his message in Acts 13:13–42 in proclaiming the truth as Jesus’ forgiveness of sins is the truth encounter needed for western Christianity. Unsurprisingly, this is what Western Christianity (guilt-innocence context) is known for—imparting truth whether through apologetics, rational arguments, or systematized theology.

A similar trend is followed to demonstrate community encounter. Using the conversion of the family of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, Georges




THE 3D GOSPEL

MINISTRY IN GUILT, SHAME, AND FEAR CULTURES



Jayson Georges

opines that people from contexts of shame need communal encounters that redefine individuals through genuine group relationship. Thus, a biblical community encounter involves an interface of experiencing the glory of the divine Trinity as a community of honor, the participation in God’s earthly family (church) as an expression of honor as well as involvement of the family unit as an affirmation of honor.

In this easy to read theological and practical book, the use of narrative theology as well as semantics and familiar words and phrases for each element of the trichotomy is commendable. Also, considering the globalization phenomenon, the author’s recognition of the fact that each element of the trichotomy can be seen in each cultural context makes this little book outstanding. Moreover, this book is a contribution to the ongoing global theological discourse of intercultural missiology. Finally, although this book seems to be written for western theologians, it is worth reading for everyone engaged in any form of ministry. 

—Reviewed by Chigemezi Nnadozie Wogu, research associate, Institute of Adventist Studies, Friedensau Adventist University, Möckern, Germany.

Fred Hardinge, DrPH, RD, is an associate director of the General Conference Health Ministries department, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



The protective blessings of sunlight

Many people today long for the simpler life of what they believe to be the “good old days.” Even then, not all was to be envied. Listen to the following description of city life: “A basic problem was the polluted air that permeated almost all sections of the city. Brownstone residents were advised to keep their windows permanently shut against outside air, which was ‘redolent with a mixture of soot, factory vapors, and animal stench.’ Indoors, because of the lack of ventilation, the air was comparable in quality, if not worse. Sewer gas from primitive drainage systems posed a constant peril to health; dampness and odors plagued the homes of rich and poor alike.”¹

The contrast of rural living was not much better: “Country life in the post-Civil War era was an unremitting hardship. The farmer and his family toiled fourteen hours a day merely to sustain themselves. . . . Nor did their endless drudgery reward the farmers with prosperity; during the economic distress of 1870–1900 few small and middle-sized farms produced anything beyond bare subsistence, and many foreclosed. In place of a neat rose garden, an expanse of muck and manure surrounded the farmhouse, sucking at boots and exuding a pestilential stench that attracted swarms of flies, ticks, and worms to amplify the miseries of man and beast. The elemental task of survival precluded any concern for hygiene or sanitary installations.”²

These are grim descriptions of life during those times. In most homes rooms were dark, dank, and dusty. Thus, it was a revolutionary idea in 1865 when an early health reformer, Ellen G. White, first encouraged church members to allow light and fresh air into the rooms of their homes! “Rooms that are not exposed to light and air become

damp. Beds and bedding gather dampness, and the atmosphere in these rooms is poisonous, because it has not been purified by light and air. . . .

“Sleeping rooms especially should be well ventilated, and the atmosphere made healthy by light and air.”³ Only four years earlier, in 1861, germs had been discovered by Louis Pasteur. At that point in time little was known about the cleansing power of sunlight.

It was not until 1944 that a British researcher, Dr. L. P. Garrod, reported on studies he had conducted on hospital dust. He found low-intensity daylight (ultraviolet radiation) and fluorescent lighting at room temperature enhanced the death rate of all the organisms studied.⁴ He found that in wards housing patients with hemolytic streptococcal infections, the organisms were numerous in the dust near the beds. At room temperature in the dark, some survived 195 days in dust. Yet, dust close to the windows or on window sills, never contained them. Ordinary daylight was germicidal even through glass in winter in London!


In the same year, 1944, a study done at the University of Chicago found that even diffuse daylight is definitely germicidal to meningococci, the germs which cause meningitis—even though the test was done in winter and early spring when daylight is less intense than in the warmer months.⁵

A few short years later, these early observations were confirmed when one half of a Petri dish, cultured with bacteria, was covered to protect it from sunlight and the other half was exposed to the sun. In the half exposed to sunlight no bacteria were found. However, the protected half swarmed with bacteria.⁶

Many years later the *Medical Journal of Australia* commented on the findings of a research thesis: “It is astonishing

that the abundant occurrence of the house-dust mite in the domestic environment should have escaped notice so long. The reasons are that it is small, not easy to demonstrate and dispersed throughout the house. . . . House dust asthma, like the house-dust mite, is commoner in damp than in dry houses, and reaches its peak prevalence in autumn.”⁷

Long before these scientific findings, Ellen White specifically stated that germs are present and survive in dark, dank, dusty areas. This counsel was taken seriously and implemented in the early Seventh-day Adventist medical institutions which had large windows to allow sunlight and fresh air into the rooms. “Every form of uncleanness tends to disease. Death producing germs abound in dark, neglected corners, in decaying refuse, in dampness and mold and must.”⁸

Often today we fail to recognize the great benefit of sunlight in purifying our environment and making it safe and healthy. Whenever possible pull back your curtains and open wide your windows to allow the sanitizing rays of the sun to flood your home and environment. Thank God every day for the blessings of sunlight! 

1 Otto L. Bettmann, *The Good Old Days—They Were Terrible!* (New York: Random House, 1974), 34.

2 *Ibid.*, 47.

3 Ellen White, *Counsels on Health* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1957), 57.

4 Lawrence P. Garrod, “Some Observations on Hospital Dust: With Special Reference to Light as a Hygienic Safeguard,” *British Medical Journal* 1 (February 19, 1944): 245, doi: 10.1136.

5 C. Phillip Miller and Doretta J. Schad, “The Resistance of Meningococci to Drying,” *Journal of Bacteriology* 47 (January 1944): 79.

6 O. M. Lidwell and E. J. Lowbury, “The Survival of Bacteria in Dust,” *Journal of Hygiene* 48, no. 1 (March 1950): 28–43.

7 *Medical Journal of Australia*, June 8, 1968, 1010.

8 Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 276.

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