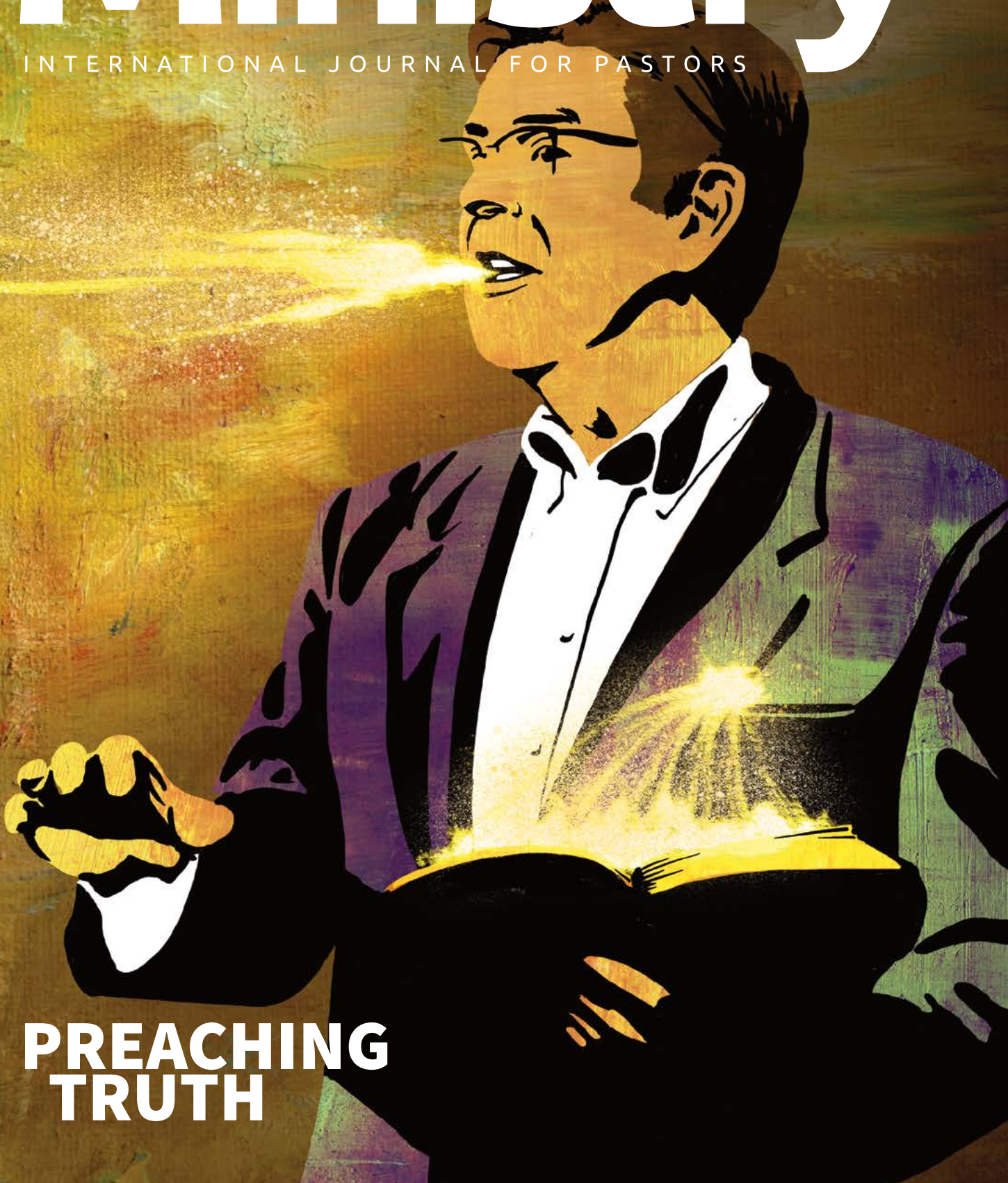


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A little Greek

In regard to Daniel Scarone's article "Taken or Left?" (December 2018), I have always taken the meaning of Mathew 24:40–41 from the immediate context. The interlinear Greek-English table below from Matthew 24:39 states that those being "taken" are the wicked of the antediluvian world. Therefore, it follows that those who are "left" in verses 40, 41 are those who are *left alive*, as were Noah and his family.

This simple, contextual explanation makes nonsense out of the *Left Behind* thinking. Only the righteous are left alive—again, according to the immediate context of Jesus' words in the Matthew passage.

Dr. Scarone quotes Ellen White's comment on Luke's account of this passage writing, "*The one shall be taken*. His name shall stand in the book of life." However, the immediate context of the Luke passage doesn't demand the same conclusion we draw from the Matthew passage.

—Dave Moench, email

other commentators agree, among them the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary and E. G. White. And later Matthew 24 continues on to another element in the chain of connections with an emphasis on Christian ethics (living right) because we do not know the time of the coming (vv. 42–44). Note: there are editorial touches that were not part of the original the author submitted. Blessings.

Take it to heart

I really thought the guest editorial from John Bradshaw titled "A Pulling Horse Doesn't Kick" in February 2019 was spot on!

So many times our churches get caught up in silly little things that escalate to *big* things, and I really feel it is the devil, as stated in the editorial. Satan is trying to keep us away from our task of telling the world about salvation and Jesus' second coming.

We shouldn't be coming to church to just get a blessing but to be working

As I See It" by Joe A. Webb. I am not a pastor but have served as a career missionary since 2013 and have faced some of the same workaholic issues that pastors face, with the addition of culture shock and compassion burnout.

I think Pastor Webb hit on an important point when he talked about overcommitting due to a sense of isolation or lack of communication with leadership. This lack of communication can happen even if a person works on a mission compound with leadership being only two steps away. Perhaps part of what can fuel our drive to overcommit is the ambiguity of never really knowing whether we are fulfilling expectations or not.

As a millennial employed by the church, I just wonder if it might be helpful to have a regular 360-degree review, which is common in the secular business world. It differs from a typical top-down employee review, in which only one supervisor gives feedback and

3756 [e]	1097 [e]	2193 [e]	2064 [e]	3588 [e]	2627 [e]	2532 [e]	142 [e]	537 [e]
ouk	egnōsan	heōs	ēlthen	ho	kataklysmos	kai	ēren	hapantas
οὐκ	ἔγνωσαν ,	ἕως	ἦλθεν	ὁ	κατακλυσμὸς	καὶ	ἦρεν	ἅπαντας ;
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Adv	V-AIA-3P	Conj	V-AIA-3S	Art-NMS	N-NMS	Conj	V-AIA-3S	Adj-AMP

Response from Daniel Scarone:

Matthew 24 is an answer of Jesus to the disciples, and from verse 36 on, there is a rapid sequence of connected scene situations to emphasize upon the manifestation of the coming of the Lord with a repertoire of emphasis on the sudden manifestation (vv. 38–39) and on the separation or distinction of the subjects (vv. 40–41). And this is the core of the article. The verbs in verses 40 and 41 are παραλαμβάνω (taken) and ἀφίημι (left), so the original marks the obvious meaning as I tried to emphasize in the article because παραλαμβάνω never is used as being taken to destruction, as the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament concurs, and several

together on how to reach others. Let's keep our eyes on mission! I got permission to reprint this article in our church newsletter and hope all will take this to heart!

—Jodi Giem, church secretary, Eagle SDA Church, Eagle, Idaho, United States

Bringing hope

The article "Our Miraculous Planet Earth" (December 2018) is very interesting, encouraging, and promising and brings hope to sinners. Through His love, we have hope for paradise.

—Pr. Ssekitto Noah, Uganda

A different kind of review

I really appreciated February's Practical Pointers column, "Pastoral Burnout:

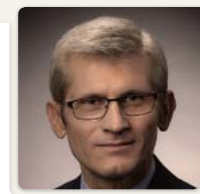
is a periodic opportunity for leadership, colleagues, and subordinates to give their opinion on the individual's performance. In relation to the temptation to overcommit out of a sense of performance uncertainty, having periodic 360-degree reviews might be helpful.

—Jaimie Eckert, email

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Including a letter in this section does not imply that the ideas expressed are endorsed by either the *Ministry* editorial team or the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Pavel Goia, MDiv, is the editor of *Ministry*.



Preaching:

The three main ingredients

I remember that when I was in college in communist Romania, pastors were very few. The government allowed only about two new seminary students a year, so most pastors could not retire. I was a member of a very large church, and the pastor was about 88 years old. He could hardly breathe or stand. He would speak so slowly that people could almost leave and come back between words! Most parishioners were either sleeping, talking, or reading.

Eventually he retired, and a new pastor came. He was spiritual, energetic, and creative; he used stories and parables. His sermons were profoundly spiritual. The church was packed, and new people kept coming every Sabbath.

That leads me to think about Jesus. Jesus' sermons were full of power—not power because He screamed; He didn't—but power because they transformed the listeners. His sermons were profound, spiritually charged, and captivating. People kept learning and growing, and they wanted to hear more.

I noticed that powerful, spiritual sermons such as those Jesus and the new Romanian pastor gave depend on three ingredients: fervent prayer, thorough preparation, and a connecting delivery.

Prayer

Prayer is the most important ingredient. It does more than any research. A lot of work and planning may provide a very informed message, yet it may not change hearts. A much-prayed-for and Spirit-inspired sermon may be simple, yet have the power to touch and transform.

Pray to speak Jesus' words. We should not worry about whether people

like the sermon or not; our concern should be whether we allow the Holy Spirit to use us and whether people will be changed, revived, and saved.

Preparation

Reflection and preparation are crucial. The best lessons come from real-life stories and incidents. They appeal to people because they touch real needs. While personal devotional time should not be used for sermon preparation, many times sermon ideas come from it.

Seek God's message. Do not find support for *your* ideas; rather, find what the Bible says and adjust your ideas to the Bible. Use the Spirit of Prophecy and other books—read, read, read. Analyze the passages you read and compare them with others on the same subject.

Sermon preparation involves many aspects:

- Do exegesis if possible.
- Read the story in the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, Bible commentaries, and other books. Read several Bible translations.
- Ask yourself questions related to the subject!
- If you have access to Bible Works, Logos, or eSword, use it.
- Use commentaries, archaeology, history. Share what happened, what it meant back then, and how it is relevant for today.
- Give series of sermons because people need to hear subjects many times to understand, decide, and change.
- Sermons should not be too short—you will have no time to prepare the audience, present

the lesson, and have an appeal. Neither should the sermon be too long. Listeners will get tired and forget it all.

- Stick with the main subject, do not get lost in too many explanations, examples, or secondary subjects. Stick with three or four main lessons.
- Sermons can have about five parts:
 1. Present a very short plot or story.
 2. Show many options or directions and perspectives.
 3. Give or help them see the good option or view.
 4. Give solutions.
 5. Make an appeal.
- Tell them at least a story or two, one at the beginning, one at the end. Stories touch the hearts, help people remember the lesson, and are not threatening or imposing.

Delivery

Clear and heartfelt delivery is vital.

- Pray that people will be transformed and saved.
- Read the sermon many times before you deliver it. Do not read it during delivery, but underline two or three key words in each paragraph to remind you. This method will allow the Holy Spirit to inspire you.
- Use narrative, examples, images, charts, objects, and practical applications from daily life.
- Engage, interact with, and challenge listeners to be part of the sermon.

Continued on page 8



Patrick Boyle, MA, is a retired pastor and evangelist residing in Watford, Herts, England.



The sermon:

Is it still central to worship?

Strong biblical preaching is integral to the health of both the individual church and the world church. I would suggest that the current malaise among church members in Western society (though not confined to it) is due in no small way to the anemic preaching in the pulpit. Any study of church history reveals that no reformation, revival, or progress happens apart from strong biblical preaching.

In the Protestant tradition, since the Reformation, the sermon has been understood as the central act of worship. This idea came about when the pulpit replaced the altar; the Bible replaced tradition; and the preacher replaced the priest.

Historically, the sermon in Protestant worship was clear and uncomplicated: the minister entered the pulpit, bowed in prayer, opened the Bible, announced the text or passage, and then presented it to the waiting congregation, all done with the intention of communicating God's message of salvation.

The modern sermon

In an age before computers, cell phones, and the internet, this task was relatively straightforward. Modern technology has changed everything, including the Christian pulpit. The contemporary pastor, persecuted by information overload, can find it difficult to escape the enticements of

technology, some of which can have negative consequences for the sermon.

In many pulpits today, the sermon is degraded; some would say, destroyed. If we are to save our pulpit ministry, we must return the sermon—its message, content, structure, organization, and delivery—to its primary place in worship. As when Peter stood up at Pentecost, every sermon has the potential to be a life-changing experience—for both the listeners and the preacher.

Sermon structure

The most useful way to create a sermon that will nourish and satisfy the preacher and congregation is by paying attention to structure. Whether expository, topical, evangelistic, biographical, or textual, all sermons benefit from a clear structure. Structure allows the congregation to follow and understand the preacher's message. Lack of structure can confuse the hearers and the preacher.

One of the finest sermons I have heard, in more than 60 years of listening to and preaching sermons, was an exposition of 1 Corinthians 1:18–25. The preacher organized the passage under three heads: the Cross derided, the Cross dismissed, and the Cross depended upon.

The exposition was clear, introduced with interest, directed to the head and the heart, and applied with power as befitted the passage. Structure held it

together from start to finish. That is why it was memorable. Structure is beneficial; it provides hooks upon which truth can hang in the head and heart.

The introduction

Every sermon needs a good introduction. Contemporary homiletics likens the sermon introduction and conclusion to the takeoff and landing of an airplane. These are the two most dangerous moments in flying. Error or mistakes can be disastrous. The same danger is relevant to preaching.

Interest, interest, interest is the key that opens the hearer's minds and hearts and gets their attention. As a proverb says, "Though the tongue never tires, the ear does."¹

In this respect many preachers work against themselves. They begin without an awareness of the need to gain the interest and attention of the congregation. They stand in the pulpit without a wide-awake awareness of why they are there. Some tell a dramatic story that gets interest but is not connected to the sermon. Others recount their experience during the past week (a flat tire, long line at the store, etc.). People come to church to hear a word from God, not to listen to what happened to the preacher or his or her family. They come to be encouraged, learn, and be confirmed in their faith.

The introduction should do just that—introduce the sermon. It is unwise

to begin by stating there are six points in the sermon. After three are presented, their eyes may start glazing over. Entice, grab their attention, but do not drag on and bore them right out of the gate.

The body of the sermon

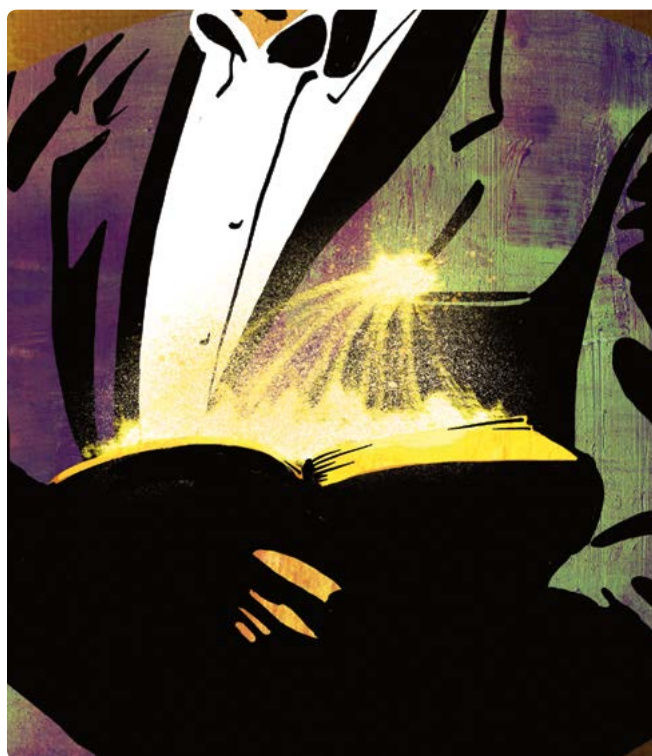
What should we preach? This question has particular relevance for Seventh-day Adventist preachers. “There is in truth only one religious problem in the world—the existence

The core of all sermons worthy of the name will be composed of the great themes of Scripture: the atonement, righteousness by faith, God’s grace, baptism, Christ’s high priestly ministry, prophecy, our Savior’s return, forgiveness, the mercy of God, the efficacy of prayer, and the assisting and saving grace of the Holy Spirit. These and other wonderful themes of salvation compose the body of Christian sermons. No authentic sermons will neglect these

The purpose of sermons is not only to lead men and women to saving faith and church membership but to guide them into the eternal kingdom of God. The majestic themes of Scripture are safe stepping-stones to direct people on their pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem.

The conclusion

The sermon needs to finish with a safe landing and take the listeners to a definite destination. Conclusions



Sermons saturated with prayer, hard thinking, serious study, and based upon Scripture have created living Christians.

of sin; and one religious solution of it—the Atonement, in which the love of God bears the sin, taking it, in all its terrible reality for us, upon itself. And nothing can be central or fundamental either in Christian preaching or in Christian thinking which is not in direct and immediate relation to this problem and its solution.”² The Cross is central in all Christian preaching. Ellen White pointed out, “Those who lift the cross will find that as they do this, the cross lifts them.”³ The only reason for preaching is to lift up Jesus before men and women so that they may be drawn to Him and be saved.

teachings. That is why the sermon is the central act of worship.

Seventh-day Adventists have some distinctive biblical doctrines that are of the gospel. They are not to be understood as denominational beliefs but as biblical truths: the seventh-day Sabbath; Creation; the mortality of humankind; the immutability of God’s holy law; the sanctuary; the pre-Advent judgment; and the millennium. These are biblical truths centered on Jesus. They are salvific, evangelical, and Cross-centered. These truths form the content of our sermons. They should not be neglected.

should grow out of the body of the sermon and be related to it. It is not a simple or easy task to introduce or conclude sermons satisfactorily. It requires hard work but is a vital element. Only after the body of a sermon has been constructed should the introduction and conclusion be developed.

A sermon cannot be developed from an idea about how to introduce or end it. These are added after the body, after the content has been worked out. Three or four minutes are adequate enough for an introduction and for a conclusion. If there is no planned conclusion, there will be no application.

Sermons have to take the congregation to a definite place.

The delivery of the sermon

Structure and content are vital but so is the delivery of the sermon. Many a fine sermon flounders on delivery.

Speaking too fast or too slow, shouting, dropping the voice, poor pronunciation, and long and involved sentences are the enemies of the preacher. Solomon's observation is more relevant for preachers than other mortals: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. 18:21, KJV). Words, and how they are used, have great power to influence mind and behavior. They can heal or hurt the soul, soothe and comfort the troubled minds; they can also wound and discourage. In the delivery of the sermon, the preacher's word and voice are important. An effective delivery connects the preacher's message and the congregation, and it should lead to a deeper, richer Christian experience for both.

Avoid being condescending or patronizing. Mind how you dress. Do not attempt to make a statement by your clothes. Avoid talking about yourself or your vacation, and do not give a long-winded greeting from a former member.

Do not forget to whom you are speaking. Youth, the elderly, children,

singles, young married couples? Mold your sermon to your audience.

Even the sermons of powerful preachers can benefit from pruning. For the pastor who has the task of a sermon week after week, the length of the sermon is important. Only exceptional speakers can hold a congregation's interest for extended periods of time. It is healthy to avoid falling in love with the sound of one's own voice.

A well-thought-out-sermon presented week by week, within a time frame that befits the culture, will have a ready reception by most congregations. The rehash of the message in place of a short benediction is not good and can be an irritation.

Define what you want to say—and say it

As preachers, we should write down in a sentence or two exactly what we want to say. If not, then our minds are filled with nothing more than a head full of possibilities.

Thomas Long makes a valuable point when he says the aim of a sermon is its focus, what it attempts to achieve, its function.⁴ Sermons with clear aims satisfy congregations and those who deliver them.

Preaching is a privilege, not a right. This truth should inform and inspire our sermons. Ellen White puts it this way: "When we eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood, the element of eternal life will be

found in the ministry. There will not be a fund of stale, oft-repeated ideas. The tame, dull sermonizing will cease. The old truths will be presented, but they will be seen in a new light. There will be a new perception of truth, a clearness and a power that all will discern. Those who have the privilege of sitting under such a ministry will, if susceptible to the Holy Spirit's influence, feel the energizing power of a new life. The fire of God's love will be kindled within them."⁵

Preaching is an essential part of training and growing the church, both spiritually and theologically. It, along with prayer, has been crucial in church transformation and revival. Therefore, we need to pay attention to the sermon's structure, preparation, and delivery. Moreover, we must immerse it all in prayer, to make sure the Holy Spirit touches and transforms the hearers, responding to their very needs. We, the preachers, will then be a valuable tool in God's hands to grow His church.

The sermon is the central act of worship; treat it that way. ❏

- 1 Richard Littledale, *Preachers A–Z* (Edinburgh, UK: Saint Andrews Press, 2008), 181.
- 2 James Denney, *The Death of Christ: Its Place and Interpretation in the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), 326, 327.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1955), 247.
- 4 Littledale, *Preachers A–Z*, 101.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 130.

EDITORIAL *continued*



Use songs, interviews, and questions.

- Ask questions that challenge the congregation and then help them discover the answers themselves.
- Make eye contact, and be aware of your body language.
- Change your vocal intonation.

Make it feel like a real conversation. Do not speak too fast or too slow.

- Produce and distribute an outline for people to take with them.
- A sermon has no value unless it has an *appeal*. Challenge the listeners to make a decision today.

While preaching, we should let God speak and show Himself through us. Inspired by God's Spirit, the sermon should touch, transform, and save. Sermons should lead to revival and mobilize the church. May God use our preaching to fulfill His purpose and hasten His coming. ❏



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Seth J. Pierce, PhD, is an author, a speaker, and a pastor who currently serves as an assistant professor of communication at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States.



Communication:

The rhetorical situation and preaching event

During college I witnessed one of the most profound sermons on September 11, 2001. After terrorists attacked the World Trade Center, our campus was scared, sad, and spiritually distraught. The college president called for a special service and spoke on Luke 13:4, 5, in which Jesus asks, “Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No’ ” (ESV). He shared a gospel perspective on life’s tragedies that gave comfort to a group of frightened young adults. At that moment the president could have spoken on anything. More than that, he could have just sent an email note with a generic sentiment about hard times. Instead, he found a text that matched our situation and spoke a Jesus perspective into it that helped us to process the tragedy. That lesson stayed with me as a young theology major.

Later, I found myself sitting in a large auditorium listening to a keynote speaker, someone known for their work in preaching, deliver a canned sermon from several years ago. The sermon was so well-known that I took out my smartphone, pulled up the manuscript, and followed it word for word. What made this situation especially painful

is that it occurred a day or two after the Pulse nightclub shooting, in which Latin LGBTQIAP+ young people were shot—resulting in 49 dead and 53 injured. News reports talked about police seeing the cell phones on dead bodies lighting up with calls from terrified parents. The speaker that day did not mention a word about the event. Instead, he stuck with a script and missed speaking Christian love to a situation that many social-justice-savvy millennials, as well as others, had heavy on their hearts. One comment I heard afterward came from a former church member of the speaker who expressed disappointment at having attended only to hear a message he had heard five years before.

The rhetorical situation

One of the most well-established rhetorical theories in the field of communication appears in Lloyd Bitzer’s *Rhetorical Situation*. In Bitzer’s view, any work of speech “comes into existence for something beyond itself. Rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation, in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem; a speech is given rhetorical significance by the situation.”¹

The implication is that the production of a sermon must be in response to the environment we find ourselves in. If our content does not match the situation our congregation lives in, then whatever we say will fail to receive a hearing.

Bitzer says every rhetorical situation involves an exigence (urgency), an audience that can be persuaded, and constraints given by the exigence. That means that certain dynamics in the situation demand to be addressed to an audience searching for an act of communication that gives it clarity. Constraints in a situation mean that whatever scenario we find ourselves in, it has symbols, realities, and actions that must be dealt with. Such situations operate as a question to the preacher—will we respond? Or will we dig out any old sermon and drop it into the service as though it did not matter?

Bitzer’s theory draws on the work of the ancient Greek Sophists. The Sophists believed in *kairos* (special seasons of time) above *chronos* (chronological time).² One of the reasons that some considered Sophists as suspect was their avoidance of absolute truths that sought to fit into every situation. While they did not reject objective truth in theory, they did deny that people had the tools to know it absolutely.

Therefore, they had to read a specific situation to know what communication would work best in it. While Christians believe in truth and that truth has been revealed in Jesus, we also acknowledge with Paul that we “see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12, KJV). That said, this theory is not meant to call into question objective truth; it is meant to recognize the communicative situations we find ourselves in, so that we may speak the truth more accurately into them.

Kairos and communication in the Bible

The idea of *kairos* exists in the biblical text and the ministry of Jesus. Mark

God’ ” (Luke 19:44, NRSV, emphasis added). How has Jesus visited our church members this week? How has He visited our nation, city, or us personally? Being able to recognize the *kairos* is vital for any communicator for the kingdom.

Beyond the use of the term, Scripture records numerous examples of those who recognized their rhetorical situation. When Nebuchadnezzar’s wise men fail to interpret his dream, the frustrated king sentences them all to death. However, “Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: ‘Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show

was able to read the situation, the Bible goes on to say, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41, KJV). So often the words spoken in the pulpit provide answers to questions people are not asking, and instead of souls being won, they remain in confusion.

Perhaps no greater biblical example of the rhetorical situation exists than what occurs in the book of Esther. When Mordecai learned of the genocidal conspiracy against his people, he went to his relative the queen and spoke timely words that saved thousands of lives. Within his words is an exhortation to impress upon Esther the seriousness of

If our content does not match the situation our congregation lives in, then whatever we say will fail to receive a hearing.

1:14, 15 describes how Jesus began His proclamatory ministry. “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The *time [kairos]* is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’ ” (NRSV, emphasis added). Mark sets the rhetorical situation by noting John’s arrest and Jesus’ response to it. Jesus uses the term *kairos* to designate the time of His ministry of proclamation, one calling forth additional rhetorical acts of repentance.

Elsewhere Jesus weeps over the lack of response to His ministry in Jerusalem. He laments, “ ‘They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the *time [kairos]* of your visitation from

the king the interpretation’ ” (Dan. 2:24, ESV).

Daniel recognizes the seriousness of the situation and seeks God’s wisdom in understanding the images that have created it. Thankfully, he appears before the king and is able to deliver the lifesaving words of truth.

At Pentecost, confusion breaks out as the Spirit falls on the early church. The supernatural manifestation creates a rhetorical situation that calls for the words of the gospel. Scripture says, “But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words’ ” (Acts 2:14, ESV). Then he delivers a sermon explaining the situation to the people in light of Joel 2:28—a text that explains the spiritual phenomena taking place. Because he

the situation: “ ‘For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ ” (Esther 4:14, ESV).

This final phrase has been the theme of numerous other rhetorical situations, such as youth retreats, camp meetings, and conferences. Perhaps it can be part of the homiletical situation we face each week. With this in mind, the pulpit can never be a placeholder for generic sermons unthoughtfully delivered.

Micro-rhetorics

Bitzer’s theory, partially inspired by the rhetoricians of ancient Greece, has also been enhanced by scholars such as Jenny Edbauer, who suggests changing

the name of the theory to “rhetorical ecology.”³ Edbauer says, “Situation bleeds into the concatenation of public interaction. Public interactions bleed into wider social processes. The elements of rhetorical situation simply bleed.” She suggests “an ecological augmentation adopts a view toward the processes and events that extend beyond the limited boundaries of elements.”⁴ In other words, rhetorical acts (such as sermons) happen against the backdrop of micro-rhetorics (smaller conversations) that help shape the communicative environments that we speak into. To craft a rhetorical response to a situation, we must first understand the conversations and symbols at work in our specific life contexts.

How do we discover such micro-rhetorics? Visitation. When we encounter others in their homes, at the hospital, at social events, or even in the hallways at church, pay close attention to the narratives people tell. Listen for




the metaphors people use that will clue you in to the imagery that fuels their life. New works on rhetorical ethnography call on researchers to reflexively do rhetoric “with” a group.⁵ By doing life among our parishioners, we become aware of the situations that lead up to the weekly worship situation we are called to speak into. Remember, part of the power of the rhetorical situation is noticing the elements that make it up and then weaving them into our messages.

Conclusion

In our weekly “rhetorical situations” it is critical that we ask Jesus for eyes to see and ears to hear what is happening in our people’s worlds. A good scripture to meditate on in regard to Bitzer’s theory is Proverbs 25:11, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (NRSV). The imagery is that of a jeweler doing filigree work—not a one-size-fits-all, prefabricated, bargain-bin

message from Sermon Mart. Jesus has placed you in a specific ministry context. What setting will you speak into this week? What words can you craft that will fit into the specific local context your people live in? What questions do you need to ask? May Jesus give us eyes to see and ears to hear the rhetorical situation in order to speak the truth needed in the right season. **V**

- 1 Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt (State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 2010), 8, 49.
- 2 Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, eds., *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings From Classical Times to the Present* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001).
- 3 Jenny Edbauer, “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 5–24.
- 4 Edbauer, “Unframing Models,” 7.
- 5 Michael Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations for Studying Rhetoric In Situ* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

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Lessons in preaching from Harry Emerson Fosdick

Preaching is personal counseling on a group basis.¹

Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969), regarded by many as a master preacher whose sermons attracted huge congregations and radio audiences, articulated the above simple statement of preaching philosophy. A Baptist, Fosdick graduated from Union Theological Seminary (1904) and served several churches in the New York City area and as a chaplain during World War I. He quickly became known as a gifted preacher, and his sermons caught the attention of John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller was then the main benefactor of the Riverside Church, a new and large cathedral church being built in upper Manhattan. At Rockefeller's urging, the church called Fosdick as its first pastor, a position he held from 1926 until 1946.

While there, he became one of the most influential clergymen and preachers in American history. In addition to preaching several times each week, he taught homiletics at Union Theological Seminary, authored 47 books, and wrote hundreds of magazine articles. He delivered sermons for NBC's "National Vespers Hour," which aired for 19 years and was carried on shortwave radio to 17 countries. Fosdick was on *Time* magazine's cover in 1925 and 1930. In 1928 *Harper's* magazine invited him to write a major essay on the topic "what

is the matter with preaching."² Based on that article, here are a dozen lessons in preaching from Harry Emerson Fosdick.

1. There are too many mediocre sermons

In his day, as in ours, there was simply an overabundance of clergy members who delivered uninteresting sermons. Fosdick's observation should be a wake-up call to every minister serving a congregation. He laments the "mediocre" and "uninteresting" sermon, saying, "It produces this effect of emptiness and futility largely because it establishes no connection with the real interests of the congregation."³ Too many clergy members, unaware of their congregant's needs and issues, miss the vital concerns of the laity who come hoping to hear helpful words of inspiration. Fosdick says: "It is pathetic to observe the number of preachers who commonly on Sunday speak religious pieces in the pulpit, utterly failing to establish real contact with the thinking or practical interests of their auditors."⁴

2. Every sermon should help listeners solve some problem

While we hear much criticism today of "self-help" sermons, Fosdick advocated helping parishioners with daily issues. "Every sermon should have for its main business the solving

of some problem—a vital, important problem, puzzling minds, burdening consciences."⁵ Preachers who do this will never lack an audience. "Any sermon which thus does tackle a real problem, throw even a little light on it, and help some individuals practically to find their way through it cannot be altogether uninteresting."⁶

3. A sermon should quickly state what it seeks to deal with

Fosdick believes that listeners have the right to know in its opening statements what issues a sermon seeks to address. "Within a paragraph or two after a sermon has started, wide areas of any congregation ought to begin recognizing that the preacher is tackling something of vital concern to them," he declares. They need to know that the preacher is "handling a subject they are puzzled about, or a way of living they have dangerously experimented with, or an experience that has bewildered them, or a sin that has come perilously near to wrecking them, or an ideal they have been trying to make real, or a need they have not known how to meet."⁷ One way or another, they should see that the preacher is engaged in a serious and practical endeavor to state fairly a problem that actually exists in their lives and then to throw what light on it he or she can.

4. Addressing the needs of people is the main task of the preacher

“Any preacher who even with moderate skill is thus helping folk to solve their real problems is functioning, Fosdick says.⁸ People in the pew will always find a sermon interesting when it speaks to their needs and issues. Such preachers “will never lack an audience. He may have neither eloquence nor learning, but he is doing the one thing that is a preacher’s business. He is delivering the goods that the community has a right to expect from the pulpit as much as it has a right to expect shoes from a cobbler. And if any preacher is not doing this, even though he has at his disposal both erudition and oratory, he is not functioning at all.”⁹

5. Be cautious with expository preaching

“Only the preacher proceeds upon the idea that folk come to church desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites,” Fosdick laments. He feels that expository preaching with a focus on history is doomed to dullness and failure. “The result is that folks less and less come to church at all,” he adds.¹⁰ Fosdick is critical of expository preaching because it rests on a faulty premise: “Many preachers indulge habitually in what they call expository sermons. They take a passage from Scripture and, proceeding on the assumption that people attending church that morning are deeply concerned about what the passage means, they spend their half hour or more on historical application to the auditors. Could any procedure be more surely predestined to dullness and futility. Who seriously supposes that one in a hundred of the congregation cares what Moses, Isaiah, Paul, or John meant in those special verses, or came to church deeply concerned about it?”¹¹

6. Allow the Bible to shed light on modern living

Though Fosdick disdains some types of expository preaching, he still

believes the Bible has great power to guide moderns in their daily life. “It has light to shed on all sorts of human problems now and always,” he states. “What all the great writers of Scriptures were interested in was human living, and the

learn the issues they grapple with on a daily basis. “A wise preacher can so build his sermon that it will be, not a dogmatic monologue but a cooperative dialogue in which all sorts of things in the minds of the congrega-



Harry Emerson Fosdick, 1925. Photo: Colgate University

modern preacher who honors them should start with that, should clearly visualize some real need, perplexity, sin, or desire in his auditors, and then should throw on the problem all the light he can find in the Scripture or anywhere else. No matter what one’s theory about the Bible is, this is the effective approach to preaching. The Bible is a searchlight, not so much intended to be looked at as to be thrown upon a shadowed spot.”¹²

7. Know your audience

The most effective communicators, whether they are politicians or preachers, understand their audience. Fosdick urges clergy to get close to people and

tion—objections, questions, doubts, and confirmations—will be brought to the front and fairly dealt with.”¹³

8. Appreciate the difference between an essay and a sermon

Too many sermons appeal only to the intellect without stirring the emotional side of a listener. “Here lies a basic distinction between a sermon and an essay. The outstanding criticism . . . against a great deal of our . . . preaching is that though it consists of neat, analytical discourses, pertinent to real problems and often well-conceived and well phrased, it does nothing to anybody. Such sermons are not sermons

but essays,” he firmly believes. “It is lamentably easy to preach feebly about repentance without making anybody feel like repenting, or to deliver an accomplished discourse on peace without producing any of that valuable

*Such investments
of time and
effort can nudge
an ordinary
preacher into
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extraordinary.*

article in the auditors. On the other hand, a true preacher is creative. He does more than discuss a subject; he produces the thing itself in the people who hear it.”¹⁴

9. The goal of preaching is transformation

The goal of transforming the listener should be paramount in the mind of every person preparing a sermon. Sadly, according to Fosdick, that is not the case. “One often reads modern sermons with amazement. How do the preachers expect to get anything done in human life with such discourses? They do not come within reaching distance of any powerful

motives in man’s conduct. They are keyed to argumentation rather than creation. They produce essays, which means that they are chiefly concerned with the elucidation of a theme. If they were producing sermons they would be chiefly concerned with the transformation of personality.”¹⁵

10. Effective preaching empowers people

A sermon that resonates with listeners will move them to reflect, act, change, and seek further information and assistance. Fosdick clearly states that clergy who understand their “people, their problems, troubles, motives, failures and desires” and then address those issues in sermons will see transformation take place in their lives. “People habitually come up after the sermon, not to offer some bland compliment, but to say, ‘How did you know I was facing that problem only this week?’ or ‘We were discussing that very matter at dinner last night,’ or, best of all, ‘I think you would understand my case—may I have a personal interview with you?’ This, I take it, is the final test of a sermon’s worth: how many individuals wish to see their preacher alone?”¹⁶

11. Preaching is challenging but rewarding

Those committed to excellence in preaching realize that each week the task includes hours of research, writing, rewriting, and mental rehearsal. Fosdick is aware of the challenge but also reminds preachers of the rewards. “Of course, nothing can make preaching easy. At best it means drenching a congregation, toil, and self-expenditure, it can be so exhilarating as to recreate in the preacher the strength it takes from him, as good agriculture replaces the soil it uses.”¹⁷

12. Poor preachers can improve

Fosdick does not write off weak and ineffective preachers. The good news is that even those lacking natural gifts for communication can improve. “No one

need preach uninteresting sermons,” he notes. “The fault generally lies, not in the essential quality of the man’s mind or character, but in his mistaken methods. He has been wrongly trained, or he has blundered into a faulty technique, or he never has clearly seen what he should be trying to do in a sermon, and so, having no aim, hits the target only by accident.”¹⁸ Such problems are correctable. Those who wish to improve their preaching skills can do so by taking additional courses in homiletics and public speaking; by reading about preaching; by studying the sermons of outstanding preachers; and by carefully listening to other gifted speakers. Such investments of time and effort can nudge an ordinary preacher into the realm of the extraordinary.

Conclusion

It is essential that sermons be well-prepared and prayed for so that they address the real needs of the listeners, enabling them to transform, grow, and be empowered. That will allow God and His Word to reach them with biblical truths. Good preaching influences not only the church as a whole but also the families and the individuals that hear the message. ❧

- 1 This sentiment is derived from several statements in Edmund Holt Linn, *Preaching as Counseling: The Unique Method of Harry Emerson Fosdick* (King of Prussia, PA: Judson Press, 1966), 23–25.
- 2 Quotations in the rest of the article are from Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What Is the Matter With Preaching?” *Harper’s Magazine*, July 1928, quoted in Lionel Crocker, ed., *Harry Emerson Fosdick’s Art of Preaching: An Anthology* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1971).
- 3 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 28.
- 4 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 28.
- 5 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 29.
- 6 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 29.
- 7 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 29.
- 8 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 14.
- 9 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 29.
- 10 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 30.
- 11 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 30.
- 12 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 31.
- 13 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 15.
- 14 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 17.
- 15 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 38.
- 16 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 39.
- 17 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 39.
- 18 Fosdick, quoted in Crocker, *Art of Preaching*, 28.

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Hermeneutical principles of early Adventists

and their influence on Adventist theology

Hermeneutical principles are fundamental to the study and understanding of the Bible. When it comes to the theological development among early Adventists, William Miller's hermeneutical principles and theological approach undoubtedly had an influence.¹ What were those principles, and how were they developed? How did Miller's principles influence the biblical interpretation and theological development of the early Adventists? This article will explore these questions.

Miller's understanding of Scripture

Born in 1782 in a Baptist home, Miller turned to deism at the age of 22 and remained so for 12 years. During that period, Miller held that the Bible was full of "inconsistencies."² After a series of life-changing experiences—his participation in the War of 1812 between the United States and England and the death of his father in the same year³—Miller decided to come back to the Scriptures and "take [his] chance respecting them."⁴ Thus, he determined

that he would either harmonize the so-called contradictions of the Scriptures or remain a deist. This search for harmony in the Bible led Miller to adopt a rationalistic view of the hermeneutical method.⁵ After two years of study and trying to harmonize the biblical text, Miller affirmed: "The Bible was now to me a new book. It was indeed a feast of reason; all that was dark, mystical, or obscure, to me, in its teachings, had been dissipated from my mind before the clear light that now dawned from its sacred pages."⁶

Miller adapted his newfound hermeneutical principle to the study of different prophecies to formulate a coherent system.⁷ He explains his hermeneutical method: "To get the whole truth, all those visions or prophecies must be concentrated and brought together, that have reference to the subject which we wish to investigate, let every word and sentence have its proper hearing and force in the grand whole, and the theory of system, as I have shown before, must be correct."⁸ Thus, one of the major hermeneutical presuppositions of Miller was the

concept of the Bible as a coherent whole, in which all the parts can be harmonized. He affirms: "The Bible is a system of revealed truths, so clearly and simply given."⁹

These two basic principles—Scripture interprets Scripture and the harmonization of Bible passages—have a prominent place in his "rules of interpretation." For example, the fourth and fifth rules state: "4. To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence, and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in an error. 5. Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself."¹⁰

These principles are based on the hermeneutical presupposition that the Bible is a harmonious system. Since the Scriptures have only one Author, there is no conflict between the message of the whole Bible as a system and any particular passage—in other words, the whole as a hermeneutical key does not jeopardize the interpretation of the parts. As Steen Rasmussen states: "A major assumption" of Miller's

hermeneutics “is that the Bible contains a systematic presentation of God’s words to man, and that it is a collection of harmonious truths.”¹¹

Early Adventist hermeneutical principles

Miller’s rules of interpretation had a deep impact on early Adventist hermeneutics.¹² James White, for example, took a systematic approach to the study of the Bible, affirming that it is necessary to “[collate] the different portions of it”¹³ in order to get the

word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts.”¹⁸

Based on the principle that the Bible is a harmonious system of truth, Ellen White emphasized the need to compare Scripture with Scripture as a sound hermeneutical procedure: “The Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side,

Adventist hermeneutical principles.”²¹ These principles uphold the Bible as a harmonious system of truth, in which all the parts perfectly fit in the whole. In addition to emphasizing the full inspiration of the Scriptures as the first principle, Waggoner lists four more, three of which are noted here:

“[1.] The Bible is one connected, consistent, harmonious book. It is composed of many books, but these books form only *one Book*. . . . This Book was written by many different persons, yet it has only one author, and that is the

Since early Adventists recognized the vital connection among parts of Scripture, the hermeneutical task was not over for them until a word, symbol, or topic was studied in the light of the whole Bible.

complete meaning of a word, sentence, or doctrine. “Scripture must explain Scripture, then a harmony may be seen throughout the whole.”¹⁴ “Let us have a whole Bible, and let that, and that alone, be our rule of faith and duty.”¹⁵ This hermeneutical approach to the Bible as a harmonious whole allowed James White to see “a connected system of truth, the most beautiful in all its parts, that the mind of man ever contemplated.”¹⁶

Ellen G. White also emphasized a systematic approach to the study of the Bible. In 1887, she wrote: “I saw that the Word of God, as a whole, is a perfect chain, one portion linking into and explaining another.”¹⁷ She understood the Bible holistically, where the parts are perfectly linked: “The student should learn to view the

the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident.”¹⁹

Although Ellen White did not elaborate a detailed list of hermeneutical principles, she emphatically endorsed Miller’s method. After summarizing Miller’s “simple but intelligent and important rules for Bible study and interpretation,” White affirmed: “The above is a portion of these rules; and in our study of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set forth.”²⁰ In her summary of Miller’s rules, White emphasized the harmony of the Bible as a system of truth and the need to bring all the Scriptures together on a given topic.

Ellet J. Waggoner, for his part, articulated in a *Signs of the Times* editorial what is considered “the first comprehensive presentation of Seventh-day

Spirit of God. The different parts are inspired by the same Spirit, and have one purpose; there is a vital connection between them.” . . .

“As a corollary to this principle it might be stated that the Bible does not need to be ‘harmonized.’ . . . The Bible is already harmonized.” . . .

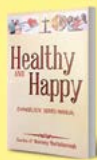
“[2.] The Bible must interpret itself.” . . .

“[3.] One part of the Bible cannot be fully understood when taken by itself, apart from its connection, or without reference to the remaining portion of the Bible. . . . If the Bible is one connected whole, then all the parts are necessary to the formation of that whole. There is a mutual dependence between all the parts, and therefore in considering one part, attention must be given to the other parts. True, we may not misunderstand

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one portion of the Bible even though we study it by itself; but it is certain that we cannot have a complete understanding of it until we study it with reference to the Bible as a whole."²²

In Waggoner's view, the systemic understanding of the Bible requires a systematic approach that takes into account the whole Bible in searching for a theological meaning. Clearly, the emphasis is on the overall view rather than on the meanings of isolated parts. Other prominent early Adventists, such as Uriah Smith, also followed these hermeneutical principles.²³

In summary, the Bible as a harmonious system of truth was the basic hermeneutical presupposition of early Adventists. This assumes the existence of a "system" (as a principle of articulation of the whole) in the Bible. Since early Adventists recognized the vital connection among parts of Scripture, the hermeneutical task was not over for them until a word, symbol, or topic was studied in the light of the whole Bible.

**Early Adventists'
theological approach**

Although early Adventists worked within the context of the principle of *sola Scriptura*, they did not use the modern tools of theological discipline, such as exegesis. Paulien points out: "When we examine the work of our SDA pioneers we quickly discover that, with the possible exception of J. N. Andrews, exegesis as we [know it now] was rarely, if ever, performed by them."²⁴

On the other hand, early Adventists' view of the Bible as a harmonious system of truths led them to develop a "systematic" approach to theology. They understood their theology as a harmonious system of interrelated doctrines with the heavenly sanctuary as its "center." The sanctuary gave a systematic point of integration to Adventism because it was connected to almost all basic Sabbatarian Adventist teachings.

Several early Adventists recognized the theological centrality of the heavenly sanctuary. Joseph Bates, for example, saw "a harmonious perfect chain" of truth in the antitypical

fulfillment of the typology of the sanctuary.²⁵ In Uriah Smith's view, the sanctuary is "the grand nucleus around which cluster the glorious constellation of present truth."²⁶ J. N. Andrews considered the sanctuary to be "the great central doctrine" in the Seventh-day Adventist system, because "it inseparably connects all the points in their faith, and presents the subject as one grand whole."²⁷ Ellen White summarized the general understanding about the sanctuary: "The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious."²⁸

Denis Fortin notes that the sanctuary doctrine was "the theological center of early Seventh-day Adventism and became the principle of articulation of all other doctrines."²⁹ This early Adventist search for the inner logic of Scripture in its totality required a systematic approach that used the synthesis or articulation of the texts, teachings, notions, and

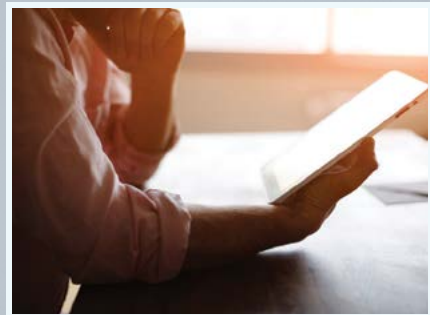
Early Adventists did both biblical and systematic theology, but they always searched for the coherent integration of the different doctrines in the harmonious whole of the theological system—a systematic approach, for sure. In summary, the early Adventists' approach to the Bible as a system, the use of synthesis as a methodology that seeks to put together the parts in a harmonious whole, the locating of a "center" around which all revealed truth relative to salvation clusters—all are elements that point to a systematic approach to the theological task.³⁰ However, it is necessary to clarify that systematic theology presupposes a previous task of interpretation of the text through the process of analysis that characterizes the exegetical and biblical theologies. Although early Adventists did not use the modern tools of exegesis, they went through a process of interpretation of the text that pays attention to the context but always with a systematic intention. To them, the system was the ultimate objective. ▮

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- 2 William Miller, *Apology and Defense* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1845), 3.
- 3 See Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 28–55.
- 4 Miller, *Apology and Defense*, 5.
- 5 David L. Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800–1850* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 10.
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- 7 Baconianism had become the classical scientific method of the Evangelical movement in antebellum America, which consists of gathering information from nature and deriving conclusions based on these "facts." See Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), xv.
- 8 William Miller, *Evidences From Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, About the Year 1843* (Troy, NY: Kemble and Hooper, 1836), 5, 6.
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- 10 William Miller, "Mr. Miller's Letters. No. 5: The Bible Its Own Interpreter," *Signs of the Times*, May 15, 1840, 25.
- 11 Steen R. Rasmussen, "Roots of the Prophetic Hermeneutic of William Miller" (master's thesis, Andrews University, 1983), 100.
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- 14 Joseph Bates, S. W. Rhodes, J. N. Andrews, and James White, "The Sabbath," *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 7, 1851, 62.
- 15 James White, "Gifts of the Gospel Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 3, 1854, 62.
- 16 White, *Life Incidents*, 267.
- 17 Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1945), 221. She repeated this same concept many times.
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- 19 Ellen G. White, "The Science of Salvation the First of Sciences," *Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 1, 1891, 737; see also Ellen G. White, "'Able to Make Us Wise Unto Salvation,'" *Signs of the Times*, May 1, 1907, 4; Ellen G. White, "Search the Scriptures," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 9, 1883, 625.
- 20 Ellen G. White, "Notes of Travel," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 25, 1884, 738.
- 21 Jeff Crocombe, "'A Feast of Reason': The Roots of William Miller's Biblical Interpretation and Its Influence on the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (PhD diss., The University of Queensland, 2011), 178.
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- 23 Uriah Smith, "The Bible, and the Bible Alone," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 19, 1857, 155.
- 24 Jon Paulien, "Three Ways to Approach the Bible: Disciplinary Distinctions—Some Suggestions" (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1997), 18.
- 25 Joseph Bates, *A Vindication of the Seventh-Day Sabbath, and the Commandments of God: With a Further History of God's Peculiar People, from 1847 to 1848* (New Bedford: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1848), 90.
- 26 Uriah Smith, "Synopsis of the Present Truth. No. 19," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 25, 1858, 148.
- 27 John N. Andrews, "The Sanctuary," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 18, 1867, 12.
- 28 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 423.
- 29 Denis Fortin, "Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism and Early Adventist Statements of Beliefs," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36, no. 1 (1998): 65.
- 30 George Knight remarks that early Adventists saw in the "theological orientation that saw 'the sanctuary in heaven as the grand center of the Christian system,' a concept that helped them unify all their other beliefs." Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 74, 75.

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Preaching to the “spirits in prison”: *A study on 1 Peter 3:18–22*

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Pet. 3:18–22).¹

First Peter 3:18–22 is among the most difficult passages of the New Testament. The statement in verse 19 that Jesus “went and preached to the spirits in prison” has perplexed many. It would be fair to affirm that the Petrine declaration that in the epistles of Paul “are some things hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16) can, effectively, apply also to this section of his own letter.

Among the issues it raises are (1) What is the meaning of the phrase

“being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit”? (2) To whom does the expression “by whom” at the beginning of verse 19 refer? (3) What is the meaning of the verb “preached” in the context of the passage? (4) Who are “the spirits in prison”? (5) Where and when did the events described happen?

Three main interpretations have sought to answer such questions.

Current interpretations

Interpretation 1: Jesus preached to disembodied spirits in hell. Some interpret the passage as declaring that Jesus, during the period between His death and resurrection, descended into hell and preached to the disembodied spirits of those who had died during Old Testament times and who had never heard the gospel or who, perhaps, had rejected God. Now, with the work on the cross accomplished, Jesus was offering them a(nother) chance at salvation. The spirits of the dead, according to this interpretation, were now able to hear the message of Jesus, respond, and make decisions.²

Such an interpretation, however, is both theologically and grammatically impossible. Theologically, it is contrary

to the biblical teaching that no chance of salvation exists after death (e.g., Heb. 9:27; cf. Pss. 88:10; 115:17). Moreover, the Bible teaches that at death humans sleep until the resurrection (Job 14:10–12; Ps. 146:4; Eccl. 9:5, 10; 1 Cor. 15:16–18; 1 Thess. 4:13–15).

Grammatically, the preaching to the spirits is not done by a disembodied Jesus in the interval between His death and resurrection; it is done by the resurrected Jesus in fully glorified bodily form. We see this evident in the two Greek participles of verse 18: *thanatōtheis* (“put to death”) and *zōopoiētheis* (“made alive”). Both are masculine. As such, they cannot refer to the “spirit” of Jesus, since the Greek for “spirit,” *pneuma*, is neuter. Nor can they indicate a supposed disembodied “soul” of Jesus, since the Greek for “soul,” *psuchē*, is feminine. Since they cannot apply to either spirit or soul, the two participles can only refer to Him, masculine, to Jesus as a complete person. The first pertains to His physical death, that of His earthly mortal body, and the second to His resurrection to a glorified existence.³

Interpretation 2: Jesus preached to the antediluvians. Others suggest that Jesus, “through” the Holy Spirit

working through Noah, preached to the antediluvians during the time of the construction of the ark. This is the prevailing opinion among Adventist scholars. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* identifies the spirits in prison in the following words: “the first part of v. 20 apparently identifies them as people who lived on earth before the flood.”⁴

This viewpoint, though better, still has its difficulties. One concerns timing. The text presents a chronological progression that begins with the death of Jesus, continues with His resurrection, and culminates with the proclamation

understands the “sons of God” who married the “daughters of men” as angels. It appears in several Jewish writings, most prominently in 1 Enoch, a nonbiblical pseudepigraphical work from the second century B.C. First Enoch gives the number of the lustful angels as 200 and calls them Watchers. The concept that 1 Peter 3:18–22 speaks about the Watchers is popular in the academic community.

A careful analysis of Genesis 6:1–7, however, reveals that the “sons of God” are not angels that fell but the descendants of Seth who were once obedient to God but ceased to be so when they

3:13–17), the disciple turns to the sufferings that Jesus had Himself endured, focusing on His death and resurrection. Peter uses the expression *thanatōtheis men sarki, zōpoiētheis de pneumati*, literally, “put to death in/by flesh, made alive in/by spirit.”

The expression *sarki* (“flesh”) probably indicates the physical nature that Jesus assumed in the incarnation.⁸ The term is in contrast to *pneumati* (“spirit”), a contrast seeming to suggest that *pneumati* refers to the glorified resurrection body of Jesus. Jesus died in His human, mortal nature and was raised as a glorified being.

With the enemy defeated, Jesus can now declare to His disciples just before His ascension: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18).

to the spirits in prison. So, to do justice to the passage, we should locate the preaching event after His resurrection. Another problem relates to the Holy Spirit. While some translations see the Spirit in the phrase *zōpoiētheis de pneumati* (“made alive in/by spirit”), the reference to spirit probably refers more to the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus, a spiritual glorified body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35–54) than to the Holy Spirit Himself.⁵

Interpretation 3: Jesus preached to the Watcher angels. A third interpretation suggests that Jesus preached to the Watchers, a group of angels who, according to a Jewish myth, lusted after and married human women. The result was the birth of giants who led the world astray, precipitating the Flood. The myth is an interpretation of the story of Genesis 6:1–7⁶ that

married inappropriately. Likewise, the “daughters of men,” whom the “sons of God” married, were descendants of Cain who lived in apostasy.⁷ Moreover, Jesus states specifically that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30), nullifying the Jewish myth. Furthermore, if Peter had in mind the Watchers, why would Jesus “preach” only to them since, after all, they numbered only 200—and not to the countless other fallen angels (one-third of all the angels of God according to Revelation 12:4) who also needed to hear whatever message Jesus had to give? This interpretation does not do justice to the biblical text.

An alternative interpretation

The death and resurrection of Jesus. After discussing the sufferings that early Christians were facing (1 Peter

The proclamation of Jesus. Peter continues: “by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison” (v. 19). The Greek *en ō*, translated by the NKJV as “by whom,” can better be rendered “in which” and thus indicate Jesus’ glorified resurrection state. After His resurrection, in His glorified existence, Jesus went to the spirits in prison.

The preposition *en* (“in”) in the phrase *en phylakē* (“in prison”) is a preposition with a locative sense⁹ and refers to a specific place where the spirits were imprisoned. Commentators sometimes interpret the noun *phylakē*, “prison,” allegorically to refer, for example, to the spiritual imprisonment and slavery to sin. However, the specific noun in the 47 times it appears in the New Testament (NT) always has a literal meaning and refers either to an actual prison or the individual guarding it.

We should also note that the NT never applies the term *pneuma* (“spirit”) to human sinners. Of the 32 times the plural appears in the NT, 24 refer to angels, mostly the fallen ones.¹⁰

Considering these facts, we find it more plausible to see the “spirits in prison” as fallen angels imprisoned by God on this earth. Of them Jude declares: “Angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). The expressions “reserved . . . under darkness” and “everlasting chains” suggest that such evil spirits are indeed imprisoned.

But how were fallen angels disobedient in the time of Noah, as 1 Peter 3:20 declares? The Greek *apeitheō* (“to disobey”) may suggest that the fallen angels did not believe in the message of the Flood and did not expect that God would actually manifest His justice by destroying the wicked antediluvians. And, when it did occur, that they questioned divine justice itself.¹¹

If our suggested interpretation is correct, in what sense did Jesus “preach” to fallen angels? The use of the verb *kēryssō* is important. Though usually translated “to preach” and thought to convey the idea of the proclamation of the gospel, it literally means “to announce something, to proclaim news,”¹² whether good or bad.

The English Standard Version is, therefore, more accurate in rendering *kēryssō* as “proclaim” in 1 Peter 3:19. So Jesus did not visit fallen angels to preach the gospel to them but to announce to them both His victory and their defeat and impending doom.

In this respect, it is interesting to note a parallel between verses 19 and 22, highlighted by the double use of the word *poreutheis* (“He went”). First, in 1 Peter 3:19 Jesus “went” to the spirits in prison, then in verse 22 he “went” to heaven to be enthroned at the right hand of the Father. In both instances references to the Resurrection precede *poreutheis*. In verse 19 *zōopoiētheis* (“made alive”) appears before *poreutheis*, while in verse 22 it is preceded by *di’ anastaseōs Iēsou Christou* (“the resurrection of Jesus Christ”).

So after the resurrection, Jesus did two things. First He went to the spirits in prison to announce His victory that spelled their doom and then ascended to heaven to sit at the right side of the Father. A relationship exists between the two events. It is Jesus’ defeat of Satan and his fallen angels that exalts Him to His position of authority as Conqueror: “[Jesus] has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, *angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him*” (v. 22, emphasis ours). Cognates of the phrase “angels and authorities and powers”

appear elsewhere in the NT to denote fallen angels (e.g. Eph. 1:21; 6:12; Col. 1:16). With the enemy defeated, Jesus can now declare to His disciples just before His ascension: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18).

Jesus announcing His victory to the fallen angels also helps explain Revelation 12:12: “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” The devil knows he has only a brief time left because Jesus has already declared his defeat and doom to him.

Conclusion

First Peter 3:18–22 is an encouragement to believers suffering because of their faith in Jesus. Peter assures his readers that though Jesus suffered and died, He rose from the dead, proclaimed His triumph to Satan and his fallen angels, ascended to heaven, and was enthroned at the right hand of the Father, a Victor. Through His victory, Jesus can also save those who trust in Him and help His followers, you and I, in our own trials. The suffering and death of Jesus for sin and His victory over the powers of evil is a strong invitation not only to die to sin but, even in the midst of great trials, to live life according to God’s will (1 Peter 4:1–3). ❧

1 Unless otherwise noted, Bible references in this article are from the New King James Version.

2 See, e.g., Uwe Holmer, *Primeira Carta de Pedro: Comentário Esperança* (Curitiba: Editora Evangélica Esperança, 2008), 212.

3 For more detail see, Ervin Ray Starwalt, “A Discourse Analysis of 1 Peter” (doctoral diss., University of Texas, 2005), 125, 126. *Thanatōtheis* and *zōopoiētheis* must refer to Jesus Christ as a whole person because *Christos* is the only related masculine noun in the text.

4 Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2002), 575.

5 Starwalt, “Discourse Analysis,” 127. Although there is the possibility of translating *zōopoiētheis de pneumatī* as “made alive by the Spirit,” the first option seems preferable because of the contrast to *thanatōtheis men sarki*, “put to death in the flesh.”

This is the most natural way to understand the text (see also Rom. 1:3, 4; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Cor. 13:4).

6 Robert Henry Charles, ed., *The Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 191–199. For an excellent summary of this myth and why it is not possible, see the analysis to 1 Peter 3 in the Spanish edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 (Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires Pub. House, 1996), 592–594.

7 For a careful analysis of this subject see Reinaldo W. Siqueira, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4,” *Kerygma* 1, no. 2 (2005), 37–47.

8 Juan Carlos Pizarro, “Los espíritus encarcelados en 1 Pedro 3:18–20” (master’s thesis, River Plate University, 1992), 58–61.

9 Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 372–375.

10 Matt. 8:16; 10:1; 12:45; Mark 1:27; 3:11; 5:12, 13; 6:7; Luke 4:36; 6:18; 7:21; 8:2; 10:20; 11:26; Acts

5:16; 8:7; 19:12, 13; 1 Cor. 12:10; 1 John 4:1; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 16:13, 14). The word also refers three times to the spirits of the prophets (1 Cor. 14:32; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 22:6 [Greek text/ESV]); four times to the spirit of God (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6); and one time to the spirits of the righteous (Heb. 12:23).

11 “Satan himself, who was compelled to remain in the midst of the warring elements, feared for his own existence. He had delighted to control so powerful a race, and desired them to live to practice their abominations and continue their rebellion against the Ruler of heaven. He now uttered imprecations against God, charging Him with injustice and cruelty.” Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2002), 99, 100.

12 Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 230.

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Justice and mercy:

God's forgiveness of David

When asked about the difference between grace and mercy, someone said grace is when you get what you do not deserve, and mercy is when you do not get what you do deserve. In exegeting the story of David, we find powerful lessons to lift believers, whether they be despairing or judgmental, to a platform of grace and mercy.¹

Second Samuel 10–12 narrates King David's war against the Ammonites, the context for the story of David and Bathsheba, as well as Nathan's visit and the terrible events that followed.

However sordid, the story of David having an adulterous fling with Bathsheba, murdering her husband, and then receiving God's forgiveness serves as an example of grace given for even the worst of sins. Hence, the narrative powerfully reveals a truth that pastors must constantly preach.

Nathan's visit

Verse 27 of 2 Samuel 11—"But this matter that David had done was unpleasant in the eyes of the Lord"—serves as a preamble to chapter 12.² According to 2 Samuel 12:1, the Lord sent Nathan to David, who approached the king, ostensibly, with a case for David to judge. Because the king has maximum judicial authority,³ the

prophet presents a matter for his consideration.⁴

A legal parable, short and concise, is what Nathan used to have David condemn himself.⁵ The parable contrasts two men, one very rich with many possessions, a lot of cattle and sheep; the other very poor, owning only a small lamb that he has raised like a daughter. Not wanting to take from his own herd, the rich man takes the beloved lamb from his poor neighbor and cooks it.

Self-condemnation

The angry response of King David is immediate: under a solemn oath, he declares the rich man worthy of death and condemns him to restore fourfold the lamb.

Throughout the narrative, the verb "to take" is repeated strategically. David Janzen analyzes the function of the Hebrew verb "to take" in the story.⁶ The verb appears in 2 Samuel 11:4; 12:4, 9, 10, and 11. Nathan does not mention adultery or homicide in the parable but only that the rich man "took" his neighbor's lamb. The syntax of 2 Samuel 11:4, together with the fact that verse 27 does not mention Bathsheba, has led some to conclude that verse 4 narrates a rape⁷—a scenario in which David *takes* advantage of his position as king. Here, too, the use of the verb "take" becomes important.

Janzen also shows that the emphasis in verses 7 and 8 of 2 Samuel 12 is on everything that God has given to David. God anointed David as king over Israel, delivered him from the hand of Saul, and gave him the house, and the women, of Saul. God gave him Israel and Judah and would have given him even more. In short, David had no right to usurp God's place by taking, with his own means, what God had not given him.

The just punishment

Thus, as part of the punishment, God will take David's wives and give them to a "friend" who will sleep with them in the full light of the sun, a punishment fulfilled dramatically in 2 Samuel 16:21, 22.

In verse nine, God condemns David's disdain for His Word. This condemnation has Deuteronomistic roots. In Deuteronomy, obedience and disobedience to the Word of God are mentioned as the difference between the path of blessing and the path of cursing.⁸ The Lord accuses David of having killed Uriah with the sword of the sons of Ammon. From now on, then, the sword will never depart from the house of David.

Twice the texts say that David took Uriah's wife to be his wife. The Scripture will remember this sad episode twice as well: in 1 Kings 15:5, where an

evaluation is made of the life and reign of David and in Matthew 1:6, where Solomon is mentioned in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus.

Meanwhile, before realizing that this parable was directed against himself, the king declares the rich man worthy of death and that he also must “restore fourfold for the lamb.” The

51 and 32 were composed by him in relation to this experience. Evidently his repentance is profound and sincere, which is why the Lord accepted it. His sin is forgiven, his death sentence commuted. King David’s sincere repentance is what makes the Lord characterize him as “a man according to his heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), an

the repentant sinner, such as David, as well as with the ungodly who do not repent.¹¹

And it is this balance of justice and mercy—coupled with the fact that it is God who ultimately bears the costs of the sin¹²—that allows the Lord to exercise mercy on those who, by praying and imploring His forgiveness, come



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four “payments” are executed, one after the other, against the house of David.

First, David’s son with Bathsheba dies; second, after raping his half sister Tamar, Amnon is killed by Absalom, who in turn flees (2 Samuel 13:1–38); third, Absalom dies after his insurrection (2 Samuel 18); fourth, Adonijah, after trying to usurp the throne (1 Kings 1:5–27), requests to have Abishag as a wife, and Solomon executes him (1 Kings 2:13–25). In short, four children of King David die dramatically, all as payment for David’s overt sin.⁹

Grace for the ungraceful

In 2 Samuel 12:13, King David recognizes his sin against the Lord. Psalms

idea that many have struggled with, especially in view of 2 Samuel 11.

Yet the character of God presents a perfect balance of justice and mercy. The formula of grace—“And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation’ ” (Exod. 34:6, 7, NKJV)—is abundantly worked out in the Old Testament¹⁰ as the best description of God’s character and the foundation of His dealings with

to Him in repentance. This is how God, when He forgives the repentant sinner and punishes the unrepentant sinner, can still be just as well the Justifier of sinners.

How does the pastor absorb and then dispense these biblical truths in a way that will profoundly impact the daily lives of people? Above all, the preacher must understand that he or she will be misunderstood. When Paul preached law and grace in this manner, he was misunderstood and cried out to his accusers: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:1, 2, KJV). John Stott maintains, “In Romans 6

he [Paul] refutes the slander that the gospel encourages sin.”¹³

In fact, if you are misunderstood, “count it all joy” (James 1:2); you are most likely on the right path. Martyn Lloyd-Jones states, “There is no better test as to whether a man [or woman] is really *preaching the New Testament* gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and

misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that

misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel.”¹⁴

In short, in the story of David, his sin, punishment, and the ultimate forgiveness given him, we can see a powerful example of Paul’s words, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15, NKJV). ▮

- 1 A version of this article was first published as “Tú eres ese hombre” 2 Samuel 12:1–15 y el juicio del juez” in the November–December 2018 issue of *Ministerio Adventista*. Used with permission.
- 2 Unless otherwise indicated, the biblical texts are direct translation of the Hebrew text by the author.
- 3 In 1 Kings 3:16–28 Solomon acts as judge. See Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, 2nd ed., vol. 12 (Dallas: Word, 2003), 61. Jerome T. Walsh, “The Characterization of Solomon in First Kings 1–5,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 no. 3 (July 1995): 479.
- 4 As instructed in Deuteronomy 17:18–20.
- 5 Arnold A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 11 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 160–166.
- 6 David Janzen, “The Condemnation of David’s ‘Taking’ in 2 Samuel 12:1–14,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*

- 131, no. 2 (2012): 209–220.
- 7 See Jennifer Andruska, “Rape in the Syntax of 2 Samuel 11:4,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 129, no. 1 (March 2017): 103–109; Bulus Audu Makama, “The Abuse of Power and Sexual Violence: A Close Reading of 2 Samuel 11 Against the Background of Boko Haram Atrocities in Nigeria” (master’s thesis, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, 2016), 60–99.
- 8 See Deuteronomy 28:1, 15, 45, and 58.
- 9 As the Talmud sees it, Yoma 22b says, “The lamb was a metaphor for Bathsheba, David, in fact, was punished by four for taking Bathsheba.”
- 10 See texts such as Num. 14:18; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; 2 Chron. 30:9; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2; Mic. 7:18–20; Nah. 1:2, 3a; Jer. 30:11; 32:18, 19; 46:28; and Dan. 9:4. See as well Ehud Ben Zvi,

- “Remembering Twelve Prophetic Characters from the Past,” in *The Book of the Twelve—One Book or Many?*, ed. Elena di Pele and Donatella Scaiola, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2, vol. 91 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 33; Donatella Scaiola, “The Twelve, One or Many Books?,” in *Book of the Twelve*, 190, 191.
- 11 See Carlos Granados García, “Misericordia y alianza en Ex 34,6–7,” *Scripta Theologica* 48, no. 1 (April 2016): 99–111.
- 12 According to Exodus 34:7, God bears iniquity, rebellion, and sin. The Hebrew verb that in this verse is translated “to forgive” literally means “to carry.”
- 13 John Stott, *The Incomparable Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 53.
- 14 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 6: The New Man* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972), 8, 9.

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Humanity's perpetual pacifier

Revival & REFORMATION

I was in church sitting in front of a newborn baby who had a pacifier attached to her clothes. As soon as she began to cry, her father popped that little miracle worker in her mouth, and, well, she was off to sleep in no time . . . until her older (and mischievous) brother scared her, startling her. The father, not missing a beat, calmly reached down and expertly inserted


the Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor, Strengtheners, Standby), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will help you remember everything that I have told you” (John 14:26, AMP). Just ten verses prior, he writes the same thing in a different way: “I

As a counselor, I understand this term because every day I come “alongside” my clients and walk with them through their problems and tragedies and comfort them. The amazing thing is that God uses His Holy Spirit to work through me to, many times, put into words the feelings, emotions, and thoughts that my clients have, that they, themselves, cannot even put into words (see Rom. 8:26, 27). I do not take any credit for that, because I am just the light bulb—God’s Holy Spirit is the power! And here’s the coolest part. Once you become a Christian, God gives you His Holy Spirit to be with you and *in you* (John 14:16, 17)!

Comfort in short supply

I don’t know about you, but I find it difficult (and getting harder) to live in this world of anxiety, death, disease, divorce, depression, and other evils. Living life in this world is exactly the opposite of comfort, and many people try to find comfort in their own way, through a great many things. In fact, I find it ironic that there is a type of alcohol with the name Southern Comfort.

However, God can and will give you His own brand of comfort that doesn’t cost you a dime (see Rom. 8:22–27)!

So do not wait another minute. Talk to God today—right now—and ask Him to take the driver’s seat of your life, and you will immediately be filled with “God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand” (Phil. 4:7, NLT). 

—Omar Miranda, who is an author, a lay pastor, and a youth counselor, resides in Plainville, Georgia, United States.

1 Baker’s *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Bible Study Tools, s.v. “paraclete,” accessed October 7, 2018, biblestudytools.com/dictionary/paraclete/.



that beautiful little piece of plastic into her screaming mouth, and that baby was calm and back to sleep in no time. No matter what situation she was in, she had the mechanism *attached to her* to help keep her soothed and calm. We, as Christians, have the blessing of that same thing—through God’s Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Comforter

When our daughter was two years old, she taught me a spiritual lesson I will never forget. I heard her giggling with delight—almost as if someone was tickling her, but as I entered our bedroom, I was shocked to see her jumping up and down on our freshly made bed topped by a thick and expensive comforter, and yelling at the top of her lungs: “Come on, Daddy, jump into the Holy Spirit!”

The apostle John tells us that we can have the same experience: “But

will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever” (John 14:16, NASB).

We are never alone

At this point, you may be saying to yourself, *That’s a nice thought, but that’s not what the verse says.* But, it is! You see, the Greek translation of “Helper” is *paraklétos*, or paraclete. “This word occurs 5 times in the New Testament, all in the writings of John. Four instances are in the Gospel and one in the First Epistle. In the Gospel [as] in the Epistle, 1 John 2:1, ‘Paraclete’ is simply the Greek word transferred into English. The translation of the word in English Versions of the Bible is ‘Comforter’ in the Gospel, and ‘Advocate’ in the Epistle.” The word basically means “called to one’s side.” It generally means a helper.¹



The Sabbath and the Bible, Theological Symposium, vol. 1

edited by Eriks Galenieks, Nairobi, Kenya: Adventist Theological Society, Adventist University of Africa, 2017.

The *Sabbath and the Bible* is a collection of essays discussing biblical foundations of the Sabbath and its theological and missiological implications, as well as the continuing relevance of the Sabbath for today. This book can be called a biblical study of the Sabbath because many of the chapters are exegetical in nature.

Since the essays were written by Adventist scholars, it is not surprising to see chapters dealing with the significance of the biblical Sabbath in the works of Ellen G. White (Anna Galeniece, 102–113), the Sabbath commandment of Exodus 20:8–11 (Eriks Galenieks, 27–42), the Sabbath of Colossians 2:16 (Ron du Preez, 77–101), and eschatology (Victor Figueroa, 114–123).

Although some of the essays presented seem well-worn, their relevance remains. For instance, Elias Brasil de Souza's chapter (11–26) tackles the question of whether the Sabbath is a day of rest or a day of worship. He uses texts from the Old Testament to show that the Sabbath is a day both of rest and of/for worship. There is no dichotomy.

In connection to the question of rest or worship is David Razafiarivony's essay dealing with physical intimacy within marriage on Sabbath (124–141). In this chapter, Razafiarivony digs into extra-biblical literature, such as the Dead Sea scrolls and rabbinic writings as additional evidence to show that the Bible demonstrates a positive attitude toward physical intimacy on Sabbath.

A thought-provoking view on the Sabbath and social justice is demonstrated in the conclusion of Sampson Nwamoah's essay, "The Sabbath in Luke 13:10–17." According to Nwamoah, the church today is still deciphering

what Sabbath observance should look like. The authors think that the story of the healing of the "bent over" woman and its accompanying Sabbath "controversy" can help the church to

helpful to see how some other religious bodies who keep the Sabbath in Africa engage with the topic. In addition, there is no empirical engagement of the topic. It would have been helpful to see what

Because God created the world and rested on the Sabbath, God's covenant community ought to remember the creative and restorative acts of God on the Sabbath.

gear its responsibility toward advocating acts of compassion and liberation while shunning the legalism that has consumed many (74). This kind of conclusion portrays a forgotten meaning of the Sabbath. Because God created the world and rested on the Sabbath, God's covenant community ought to remember the creative and restorative acts of God on the Sabbath. By so doing, they are able to reach and extend hope to those who are hurting as well as to mend broken relationships.

Aside from the few insights above, there are other salient points about *The Sabbath and the Bible*. One surprising detail is that there is no treatment of the relevance of Sabbath for young people. Secondly, since this comes from the African continent, it would have been

lay Adventists think of the Sabbath in the Bible through surveys or interviews. Moreover, besides a number of typographical errors (I stopped counting at 10), the book does not really have a clear structure.

Nevertheless, the publishing of this book by an Adventist University in Africa is commendable. By so doing, introductory materials are made available for theology students in those regions. I, therefore, recommend this book for theology students and pastors as an introduction to the topic of the Sabbath and the Bible. ▽

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

► Christian Record celebrates 120 years of service

Lincoln, Nebraska, United States—Christian Record Services, Inc., (CRS) celebrates 120 years of ministry to the blind in 2019. “With the Lord’s guidance, it is the members, donors, volunteers, and employees who have made Christian Record impactful all of these years,” said **Diane Thurber**, president of Christian Record.

In 1899, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists endorsed the ministry, which at that time consisted of a Braille magazine called *Christian Record* and a few pamphlets. CRS is now owned by the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists and *Christian Record* is still published to this day.

Christian Record led the way for many other innovations and services that together inspire and transform lives. It was the first organization to offer a blind camp, beginning in the 1960s. The camps give individuals who are blind an opportunity to be themselves and freely create and engage with the community. A couple of decades later, the organization was the first to pioneer a new kind of book that provides Braille along with images, print, and an audio disc for the entire family to enjoy.

There is an online library of nearly 2,000 titles. Members may request

many of these titles in formats specifically for them, including refreshable Braille, large print, audio streaming, downloading, and on National Library Service’s digital cartridges. Through the online library, they may request Bibles.

In collaboration with the Voice of Prophecy, Christian Record Services for the Blind has available the new Discover Bible Study Guides in large print and Braille for people who are legally blind.

“I am excited that local congregations can now offer Discover in accessible formats for their members to use in outreach,” said **Richard Clark Jr.**, the Bible School coordinator at Christian Record. “The large print and Braille formats will empower members who are legally blind with a convenient way to lead Bible studies.” The completed guides are mailed to Christian Record’s office for grading.

The new large-print and Braille Bible guides are currently available in the United States and its territories, Guam-Micronesia, and Bermuda but soon may be available in other regions of the world. To request the first two



lessons of the new Discover Bible Study Guides without cost for you or someone who is legally blind, call Christian Record’s office at 402-488-0981, or send an email to services@christianrecord.org. This is also the way to sign up for the course by correspondence.

Since the 1980s, Christian Record has awarded college scholarships to students who are blind and who demonstrate academic promise. In 2018, a total of eight scholarships were awarded. For more information on CRS, please visit the Christian Record website at christianrecord.org. [Christian Record Services]

► In Cyprus, young and old learn how to share their faith through social media

Nicosia, Cyprus—Members of Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Nicosia, Cyprus—aged 9 to almost 90—spent the weekend of April 5–7, 2019, learning more about both the theology and practical skills of using social media for God.

Social media is now an integral part of many people’s lives, including the residents of Cyprus. Program

participants recognized the need to be active and increase the profile of the church using personal social-media access to share their faith.

For one teenager, that meant creating a 60-second video clip sharing how he managed to keep the Sabbath even though a major competition was scheduled for a Saturday (Sabbath). That was just one of many ideas that

came from the Sabbath-afternoon breakout groups that led to a number of recordings on participants’ mobile phones.

To prove that social media is not just for the young, **Jony Manasian**, a retired pastor and former Middle East Union president, was filmed by another volunteer, **Branislav Hrubik**, telling a story from his days in the



Iranian army in the days of the shah. “Recent presentations in Iceland, Scotland, and Lithuania led me to

realize that getting people ‘hands on’ with the equipment and in front of the camera means they can then

have the confidence to continue once the training is over,” Trans-European Division Communication director **Victor Hulbert** said.

Both in Lithuania and Iceland, Hulbert took attendees outdoors to interview local people, creating a feature with local interest. Filming in certain locations could build bridges with local communities.

The Sunday morning training also included photography skills, such as knowing the difference between a snapshot and a creatively planned image. [Trans-European Division News]

► New Zealand Adventists connect with Muslims in attack aftermath

Christchurch, New Zealand—In the wake of the devastating Christchurch attacks on March 15, 2019, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South New Zealand has produced resources to help members connect with and support Muslim friends and neighbors in culturally appropriate ways.

With both video and printable assets, the simple techniques aim to break down barriers at a time when the people of Christchurch are struggling, according to South New Zealand Conference president **Mike Sikuri**.

Making connections is where Sikuri sees the resources as being important to coach church members. Yet, he said, he also recognizes that it is not only the Muslim community that is hurting. Christchurch Adventist School is quite close to the scene of one of the mosque attacks and was placed in lockdown during the incident. While counselors and pastors have been providing support, Sikuri said, there has been a rise in the number of children responding violently to disagreements and having anxiety and panic attacks, particularly those who watched a video of the attack. Leaders in the conference

church region are looking at how to best provide mental health first aid to the children and staff.

In the aftermath of the event, there was an outpouring of community support, Sikuri said, and the conference and ADRA are committed to long-term support as more needs become evident in the future. “We’ve touched base daily, offered accommodation at the Pascoe Park campground, including breakfasts from the Adventist food factory at the family center, but we are committed to helping with needs that may come up down the track.”

On the first Saturday (Sabbath) immediately after the attacks, most Adventist churches made time in their services for reflection. Sikuri said, “Some churches provided spaces where people could talk and process or a special time for prayer.”

Sikuri paid tribute to his pastors, especially Christchurch regional coordinators **Stephen Wilson** and **Younis Masih**. Both have had experience working with Muslim communities in the

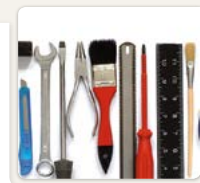


past. Masih is originally from Pakistan, and Wilson worked in Albania.

“We had a vigil of Christian churches,” Sikuri said. “Imams and Muslims turned up because of the Adventist connection. Stephen and Younis had been there [at the family center] almost every day. They have developed our resources to coach people to be culturally sensitive, and we’ve shared those with other Christian churches.”

Adventist churches are also gearing up for evangelism meetings in October. In some ways, Sikuri said, the tragedy has reminded local residents of the essential things in life, and they are prioritizing relationships and connections as never before. [Jarrod Stackelroth, *Adventist Record*]

Lilya Wagner, EdD, CFRE, is the director of the Philanthropic Service for Institutions, North American Division, Columbia, Maryland, United States.



The end of “one size fits all”: *Cultural influences in church giving*

It is more blessed to give than to receive” is a Bible text in Acts 20:35 that we have heard often quoted, whether from parents urging their children to share, fund-raisers presenting their appeal to donors, or pastors urging their congregations to contribute to the offering plate.¹ Research conducted by prestigious universities and research centers has proven that those who are generous will be happier, healthier, and live longer.²

So, on an individual basis, it is beneficial to be generous. And from an organizational standpoint, religion and generosity go hand in hand, as stated by Mark Rovner: “Religion and faith are both drivers and indicators of giving. Religious organizations capture a significant proportion of all money donated. Moreover, donors who report being actively engaged in a faith community are more likely to give—and to give more—to the full spectrum of nonprofits and causes.”³

Churches that embrace and encourage generosity regularly experience benefits. However, should church leaders approach giving in the same vein as advertisers of “one size fits all” products? If they did, many opportunities might be passed over for including diverse populations.

As regions of the world have grown increasingly more diverse, congregations and their leaders often—and unfortunately—overlook the fundamental differences in how generosity is approached and practiced within the cultures of the church members. Religion has often served as the basis for philanthropic development in any given country, but sometimes we forget to go back to those foundations and develop an awareness and understanding of the specific preferences and practices from countries of origin.

Defining culture is a complex task. To summarize, it might be best to say that culture is to a group what personality is to an individual. Church leaders who follow the example of Jesus should be known as those who embrace, value, and encourage diversity in their organizations more than anyone else, yet sometimes leaders are culturally challenged or may find it too much of an effort to address and include the cultural differences that members of their church, would-be members, or even community members bring to their context. Admittedly it may not be easy because differences can be misunderstood and lead to conflict. But perhaps these following steps can help in moving ahead in increments until a level of comfort and competence is achieved:

- Become aware of differences—ask, study, research, explore.
- Internalize the values. Believe in diversity.
- Gradually implement measures that monitor inclusivity.
- Revise procedures and processes if necessary.
- Involve others in planning and implementation. Ask questions to identify common beliefs and values among people of each cultural background.
- Get involved and interact with people of each culture.
- Be straightforward and honest in communications with people from different backgrounds.
- Above all, determine and know their values! What is important to the particular population group is critical to acknowledge, and from there work down through each level of community and family to the individual.

Putting these steps into the fund-raising context is vital because members in our congregations will tend to give their offerings or make donations to projects according to their own preferences and practices, often brought over from countries of origin. Recent arrivals are not the only ones who practice these characteristics. Second- and third-generation populations may also adhere to what is familiar or comfortable for them.⁴

A fairly recent volume that pulls together information about the culture, traditions, and religious motivations of diverse populations is available and can be a reference when planning offering appeals as well as fund-raising campaigns. *Diversity and Philanthropy: Expanding the Circle of Giving* is a thoroughly researched volume on how various populations prefer to practice generosity.⁵

Yes, it is more blessed to give than to receive, and the richness of cultures will bless our churches and us as we acknowledge and embrace those differences. The blessings are of mutual benefit, and to ignore them is to impoverish ourselves and our churches in many ways. ❏

1 A version of this column was previously published as Lilya Wagner, “End of One-Size-Fits All: Cultural Influences in Church Giving,” NAD Ministerial, December 10, 2017, nadministerial.com/stories/2017/12/5/end-of-one-size-fits-all-cultural-influences-in-church-giving.

2 For a summary of these research studies, please send an email to lilyawagner@nadadventist.org.

3 Mark Rovner, *Diversity in Giving: The Changing Landscape of American Philanthropy* (Blackbaud, Feb. 2015), 5.

4 For a complete version of this article in which summaries of various population groups’ practices and preferences are described, please send an email to lilyawagner@nadadventist.org.

5 Lilya Wagner, *Diversity and Philanthropy: Expanding the Circle of Giving* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016). For more information, visit the Diversity and Philanthropy website at diversityandphilanthropy.com.

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