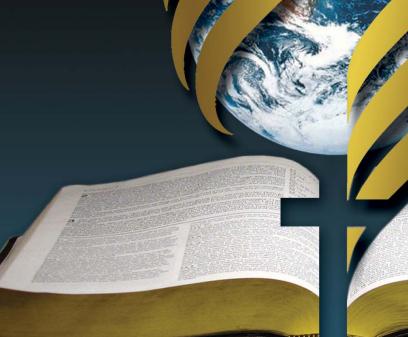
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I've encouraged all of our pastors in the Montana Conference to read this issue. Thank you for upholding our unsung heroes!

Multichurch district ministry

Your articles on the theme "One pastor, many churches" (August 2006) were so timely and enriching—particularly to the readers who have been facing such pastoral challenges in their church districts. I am one of those who experienced such challenges, which is why I applaud all those who have taken their time to share their experiences and bring words of encouragement that make ministry in the multichurch districts so enriching.

I was touched by Reger Smith's comment, in the article also titled "One pastor, many churches," that one of the advantages of ministering to the church district is that "everybody knows they have to do something; and knows it's not just on the pastor's shoulders to make the church run." If there is a place where the priesthood of all believers is practiced, it is in multichurch districts. Reflecting upon something that my mentor in multichurch pastoral ministry once said, "It is the sheep (church members) who produce the lambs and not the shepherd (pastor)." The duty of the shepherd is to ensure that the flock is directed to the rich pasture and fountains of living waters that enhance the healthy growth of the entire flock.

It is true that there are enormous pastoral challenges in a district where a pastor has to take care of several churches. However, I concur with my fellow colleagues in pastoral ministry that the advantages outweigh the challenges. In this kind of setting it calls for team ministry that automatically makes a pastor a trainer and equipper of

the church leaders who, in turn, will help in nurturing the church members.

I am sure that the practice of having one pastor taking care of many churches is here to stay. It is therefore necessary to have workable mechanisms that will help the district pastors overcome these challenges with ease.

—Samuel Chemurtoi, youth, education, and chaplaincy director, Western Kenya Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, Eldoret, Kenya.

Thank you for spending much of your issue on the multichurch pastor (August 2006). In spite of possible benefits of having many churches, it would seem advisable to find out why multichurch districts are becoming so common. I have noticed that when there is a financial crunch in a conference, the number of pastors decreases and the number of churches under one pastor increases. Perhaps serious research would be helpful to see if fewer dollars spent on administrative levels would free up monies to bolster the pastoral force and prevent many multichurch districts.

One author mentioned conducting prayer services in four of five churches, one each night of the week. Family life could easily go out the window with such a schedule. Juleun A. Johnson ("Remembering those closest to us") is to be commended for his strong emphasis on family. After all, the pastor is a role model of healthy marriage and family. Thanks again, for remembering the pastors of small churches.

—Larry Yeagley, Gentry, Arkansas, United States.

Thank you for dedicating the August 2006 *Ministry* magazine to our faithful pastors who minister to God's people in multichurch districts. So often we spotlight the pastors of big churches—forgetting that the majority of our pastors around the world pastor small congregations.

I've encouraged all of our pastors in the Montana Conference to read this issue. Thank you for upholding our unsung heroes!

—John Loor Jr., president, Montana Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Bozeman, Montana, United States.

Remembering the forgotten

was particularly impressed by two articles in the June 2006 issue of *Ministry*: "Forgotten," by Myma Tetz, and "Including all—omitting none," by Charlotte L. V. Thoms—in which ministries to the elderly and disabled, respectively, were highlighted. Because the elderly are often unable to attend services like they once did, they need special encouragement to keep their faith buoyant. They also need to feel that they are still treasured in spite of the fact that they do not participate like they formerly did.

I think of some of these elderly saints who spent as many as 30 years in ministry to the sick and elderly. Now that they are in their 80s and 90s, some are disabled and unable to attend services. Some may have moved away to other locations: nursing homes, hospices, or to the care of children or grandchildren. These saints ought not be neglected. continued on page 28

The place, the outcome, and the future of theology in the church

ow does a church with nearly 15 million adult members living in more than 200 countries and using hundreds of languages do its theology? The members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church must ask themselves this question and respond to it until the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

Some may not see the importance of asking this question. They may think that this consists of following the Bible and our theology will be done. Others may posit that the work of theology has been done by the pioneers of the church and that our role involves following what they established. The pioneers would be disappointed by such a position because they certainly did not advance the concept that they completed the task of doing theology.

How does the worldwide church do its theology so that unity, harmony, and agreement within the denomination result? I believe that the world membership must be involved in the development of theology.

The places where we do theology

Where do most of the theological discussions take place? Certainly theologians discuss theology, but there are other venues where discussions occur.

Churches. More theological statements are made in the 60,000 Adventist congregations around the world than anywhere else—in Sabbath School classes, youth meetings, worship services, board meetings, calls for offerings, and a multitude of other activities that take place in the local congregation. What is being said? Is it theologically sound? Or is there a personal agenda that drives the statements? Do visitors and members hear sound theology supported by Scripture? What happens in the congregations has great theological significance for the theology of the church.

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER



Pulpits. Congregational pastors perform a critical theological role in the church. Congregational pastors have a major input on both communicating what the world church accepts and listening to its members. Each sermon includes a theological statement and places great responsibility on those who have the privilege of preaching.

Schools. The 65,000 teachers in the denominational schools have significant theological influence on the more than 1.3 million students—a significant number who do not come from Seventh-day Adventist homes. What kind of theological message do the students receive?

The outcome

If the whole church becomes involved in doing theology, what would be the outcome in light of the diversity of the church? The Seventh-day Adventist Church exists as one of the most diverse and widespread denominations in the world. Is the theological landscape similar or are there significant differences in the denomination? I am pleasantly surprised at the level of agreement that exists. On the other hand, I am concerned that certain theological positions (often without biblical support) are advanced in certain areas even though the world church does not share the same view. Such local or personal views appeal to some, but they do not contribute to the unity of the church.

The future

What lies ahead? Because the study of theology cannot be considered static,

we will continue to review and explore theological issues. The Holy Spirit has been available to the church, and He will continue to be available as we face theological issues. But will we listen? We must remember that the Spirit does not work in isolation—the Spirit leads us in the interpretation of the Word. And that is where my concern lies—a significant number of members do not study the Word of God on a regular basis.² Will the Holy Spirit overrule ignorance of the Word? Most likely not; thus all of us need to refocus on the Word. If we are faithful students of the Word. I believe the Spirit will lead us and bring us together theologically.

The participants

Who, then, does theology? Certainly not a select group in some office removed from the eyes and ears of the membership. In this issue we have an interview with the theological staff of the Biblical Research Institute, an entity of the church's world headquarters. Assuredly that team does not claim that its role includes the setting of the theology of the church. Involved in research, exploration, and confirmation of church theology, the institute does this with input from the theological community and membership at large.

Theology, then, is something the whole church does. At times the task challenges us, and we have to work diligently to reach consensus. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with the Bible as the foundation, it will continue to be done. It's a challenging task but a task the church must do. Otherwise, individuals or selfappointed groups will hijack the theology of the church. And that we must not allow to happen.

- 1 For the purposes of this editorial, I am defining theology as the beliefs and practices of the church as defined by Scripture.
- 2 A study presented to the 2002 Annual Council of the church indicates about 50 percent of the members read the Bible daily.

A conversation with the directors of the Biblical Research Institute

Nikolaus Satelmajer Willie E. Hucks II





Nikolaus Satelmajer is editor of Ministry magazine.

Willie E. Hucks II is assistant editor of Ministry magazine.

The Biblical Research Institute (BRI) is a service organization of the General Conference of Seventhday Adventists, providing theological resources to the world church and promoting the study and practice of Adventist theology and lifestyle. Recently Ministry magazine editors Nikolaus Satelmajer (NS) and Willie E. Hucks II (WH) spoke with BRI director Ángel M. Rodríguez (AR), Th.D.; Kwabena Donkor (KD), Ph.D.; Ekkehardt Mueller (EM), Th.D.; and Gerhard Pfandl (GP), Ph.D.; associate directors. This article presents some excerpts from that conversation.

NS: What is the Biblical Research Institute all about?

GP: The Biblical Research Institute was established as a service department by action of the General Conference Committee in 1975. The historical roots of the institute go back to the Defense Literature Committee, established in 1943, and the Committee on Biblical Study and Research, established in 1952.

AR: Among its many functions, perhaps the basic one is to act as a resource center on doctrine and theological issues for the world church. That means providing books, materials, articles, and so forth. The second one is to promote the unity and theology of the world church. The interaction with the church's theologians is more dynamic, and we hope that as a result of listening to each other, we will be

able to strengthen the theological and doctrinal unity of the church.

KD: There is also a critical aspect to what we do. That's when you have to look at an issue and say, "How does this square up with what we believe?" Then we have a constructive aspect. We don't stay with just what we have; we explore to see what else is there. That's when we discover a new dimension of doing theology. Then there is an apologetic task—to clarify what we as a church believe so that others will understand us better.

NS: I am impressed that the BRI Committee depends on the work of many individuals around the world. How is your work done?

AR: We have four theologians—resident theologians here at the General Conference—that head up the Biblical Research Institute. We don't claim to know everything. So, we have a larger group of theologians and a few church administrators who make up the 40-member Biblical Research Institute Committee (BRICOM) that meets twice a year. The committee comes together and looks at issues, and BRI gets guidance from them. They go through articles, materials, and manuscripts and critique them before we publish any of them. We listen very carefully to their advice because we want to represent the thinking of the world church.

EM: We also use persons who are not part of the committee. Thus we have access to other scholars. In our recent Bible conference in Turkey, we involved many scholars, teachers, and church leaders who are not part of BRICOM. To work with this teamwork of scholars was very rewarding. We are also involved with GRI (Geoscience Research Institute). Then there are matters involving faith and life, direction and mission of the church, and when such issues involve theology, BRI is called upon to participate and give its counsel. For example, in the recent "Growing in Christ" addition to the church's fundamental beliefs, BRI was quite involved. So it is in the preparation of Sabbath School lessons.

AR: One important point. It is necessary for our readers to understand that the BRI does not produce any doctrine. It works with the positions that the world church adopts during the General Conference Session.¹ Our responsibility is to take that which the church considers to be truth and work with it, trying to deepen its understanding.

NS: So who defines doctrine?

AR: The church, the world church, as it understands the Scripture.

EM: The entire church does theology.

NS: And maybe, more fundamentally, the Scripture defines doctrine and the church as a whole interprets. Is that not what we as Adventists have said historically?

AR: It seems to me that historically we have worked with the scriptural position that the Spirit works through the church, and He creates a consensus of belief. It may take months or years, but He creates a consensus among believers, and this consensus becomes the Adventist way of life and thought. A General Conference session simply acknowledges what the Spirit has done among us. And then officially the church embraces that kind of consensus created by the Spirit.

WH: What are some of the theological issues that Christianity faces today?

AR: Perhaps the first one is the role of the Bible in theology and doctrine. This is a serious matter. In many circles, the Scriptures have been set aside.

KD: Perhaps underlining this idea of putting aside Scripture is the whole question of the role of the supernatural. Once you begin to question the supernatural, the first doctrine that gets attacked is the doctrine of God. Your understanding of God affects everything else you say about anything. Thus we see the rise, even among some Evangelicals, of open theism.

NS: Open theism?

KD: Open theism says that God has a relationship with reality that is not fixed but open-ended. For example, has God foreordained how history would end? The open theists would say that He hasn't. Open theism is an attempt to minimize the involvement of God and the supernatural in history.

GP: In other words, open theism suggests that God does not stand

sovereign over history, but He's part of history. He does not know the future in details, but only in outline.

EM: Let's come back to the Scripture. There seems to be greater emphasis on the reader than the original author. The reader approaches the Scripture with criticism, and as a result the historicity of events is thrown off. For example, many theologians reject a literal resurrection, and hence they don't accept the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. What does that do to my faith? Well, it affects my perception of God. It affects my perception of eschatology, and then my perception of how I should live my life. Does morality matter? Thus, you see, if you reject the historical, Protestant principle of the authority of Scripture, where do we go?

AR: Back to your question about issues among Christians in general. Look at the Evangelical community in North America and its direct involvement in politics. The situation raises many issues with respect to the role of the church and the state: To what extent should the church use the secular system to promote its views? This is an important issue for us because of the prophetic scenarios and the role the Christian world will play as it seeks support from the political arm to promote its cause.

WH: What are some of the theological issues facing the Adventist Church?

GP: The interpretation of Scriptures is one. What method do we use? How do we interpret prophecy? Do we throw out historicism and replace it with futurism or preterism? Then there is the issue of Creation. We have had four conferences on the issue, and that shows how significant the problem is to us as a church. There are other problems, like the Trinity, which is under heavy attack, and the issue of salvation and how it is related to the Cross.

KD: Inspiration is a significant issue. There is a tendency to emphasize the human aspect of the prophet, of the writer of the Bible, and de-emphasize the

divine aspect. Again, it is the same idea of diminishing the supernatural. Some even deny the creative fiat of God, who spoke and it was.

AR: If you look at the issues that are debated the most, it's very easy to see that they are the core of what makes us the church, and what defines our identity. If you look at the Creation, Creation is a seven-day event. Is there anything more offensive to the scientific mind of the twenty-first century than to say that Creation was completed in seven days? The seven-day Creation is perceived by many as an academic insult, an intellectual suicide, and therefore there is a strong reaction among a limited number of individuals in our midst. I want to point that out carefully. When you look at the world church in general, I think the world church with the theologians around the world, the majority is solidly with the church on this issue. But you do have this vocal minority that's trying to influence the way we think. Then there is the interpretation of the apocalyptic prophecies. Some Adventists feel uncomfortable with the way we interpret these prophecies. They would say, "We believe in the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, but don't say anything about 1844 or the 2,300 days." Yet the pre-Advent judgment, 1844, and seven-day Creation are part of the very core of who we are.

NS: You're talking about five, six, seven doctrines—however many—that identify Seventh-day Adventists. Do you feel that's where the hattle is?

GP: That's where the battle is. However, some theologians have problems even in respect to the second coming of Christ. They believe in the second coming, but when pressed a little, they will tell you that they don't know how this is going to happen.

KD: It becomes an existential matter.

GP: Four other issues also need to be mentioned. The remnant issue is one that is highly debated. The Spirit of Prophecy is another. And then you



Clockwise from bottom left: Ángel M. Rodríguez, Nikolaus Satelmajer, Willie E. Hucks II, Gerhard Pfandl, Ekkehardt Mueller, Kwabena Donkor

have the sanctuary truth, which is specifically Adventist. Even the Sabbath has come under attack recently. These are fundamental truths that mark us as a church, and they are under attack today, not from outside but from within. To preserve these theological positions is to preserve our identity and unity.

AR: I want to emphasize to the readers that the world church is standing firmly on who we are, what our message is, and what our mission is. The number of theologians who are trying to push the church away from the identity acquired from the Bible is rather small, but vocal.

EM: There's another issue that I want to mention, which is not so much theological but nevertheless an important concern that affects the church. At the church membership level, there is a declining interest in Scripture—to study it daily, to define one's belief and lifestyle by what it says, to build one's future on its promises. Members make a theological decision when they accept or neglect the Scripture. For example, if I opt for a particular lifestyle, do I seek what the Scripture says about it and let the "Thus saith the Lord" govern my decision? Neglect of Scripture at the practical and personal level may be a danger for the entire church.

AR: This is an area in which the theological and the practical side of the Christian life interact. The decline in the study of Scripture really has an impact on the life of the church. It's a matter of time. This is something that we at BRI are very concerned about. I know that church leaders are also concerned, and

so is *Ministry* magazine. And this brings us to the role of pastors. After all, pastors are the ones interacting with church members on a regular basis.

KD: Along with this declining interest in Scripture, we also notice a disinterest in theological issues at the local church level. This is what I might call a new mysticism in Christianity in which what matters is not doctrine, but an immediate feeling—a "feel-good" satisfaction—that also affects one's concept of preaching and worship.

NS: Are you differentiating between having joy in the Lord and just some emotional experience?

KD: I'm not saying we shouldn't enjoy our worship experience, but when worship has no theological basis or content, you are in trouble, and you think of worship in terms of its cash value.

NS: Cash value of worship?

GP: The focus is on the people, not on God. It's what they can get out of the worship service.

EM: Some are just not interested in theology and doctrine.

WH: When I was teaching pastoral ministry, I used to tell my students there are three types of pastors in terms of preaching. The preacher who does theology well, but can't preach; the preacher who can preach well, but doesn't really do theology; and the one who can blend theology and preaching. How does a preacher blend theology with practics?

AR: As a preacher, a minister cannot function properly without interacting

with theology. The fundamental source of preaching is Scripture. As a preacher prepares the sermon, he or she must spend time with the Scripture, drawing from it a message from God. The moment you begin to reflect on Scripture—what it says about God, this interaction with me, and you—you are doing theology. In my early ministry, I relied quite a bit on the writings of professional theologians, and then compared that with the Scriptures, trying to find my way through a mass of information. This is what most pastors do. They turn to the Scripture, reflect on it, use the resources, and then they go to the pulpit and try to make the Scripture meaningful to the congregation. It seems to me that this is something that everybody in the church should do. So when we limit theology to the academic area, to the one who was trained to do theology, we are doing damage to the community of believers. As we said earlier, theology is the result of the work of the Spirit in the community of believers, and that includes theologians, pastors, and church members. And pastors are in the middle—between the academic and the community—struggling to mediate theology in understandable and practical

GP: I completed my theological studies at Avondale in Australia. At that time there were a lot of things going on, and the field was theologically very active. During the first seven years of my pastoral ministry, I spent the mornings in my library, and the afternoons and evenings in visiting. If you don't spend time with the Lord, with Scripture, and with your books, you won't have anything to preach. Later as a teacher, I always told my students to first feed themselves. If you don't spend time in study and prayer, you will not have anything to give to others.

KD: Sometimes there's a tendency to think that spirituality is different from truth or theology. Such an attitude leads to the position that one could be a very good preacher and preach spiritual sermons, without bothering about doctrine. That attitude needs to be changed to realize that truth and spirituality go hand in hand.

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And once I have made that mind change, I can see that truth ministers spirituality, and that my preaching must rightly divide the Word (2 Tim. 2:15).

EM: I pastored for about 16 years. I tried to be at home in the morning. I devoted time to study, pray, and also do some administrative duties. I tried in my ministry to focus more on biblical sermons than on topical sermons. I've noticed many pitfalls with topical sermons. Early in my ministry, I noticed that often I came to a text with a preconceived idea. To deal with this problem, I always took pains to translate the text. I never preached on a text without having translated the text and done the work for myself. That was a rule I made right from the beginning. But if you can't translate the text, you can still study the text carefully in its context. Follow the principles of exegesis, and apply the text to the situation. Your sermon will carry a definite, biblical authority.

AR: I realize ministers are very busy. Nevertheless, they need to keep themselves well-informed about theology because everything they do is somehow connected with it. Ministry is a theological task. Ministers have to define what the church is and what it is in respect to the universal church. Church members come to church to learn from the Scripture, to hear the Word proclaimed. This places an ethical burden on the minister, and the minister must make sure that those who come to get a scriptural understanding get it and that they get it correctly.

EM: Often a church member would say, "I cannot go to my pastor with theological questions; he won't answer it." This is sad. Even if a pastor is unable to answer right away, he or she should go home, research the issue, and give a knowledgeable answer. Such a step would strengthen the member's appreciation for Scripture. I want to touch on another endemic issue—a seeming dichotomy between systematic theology and applied theology. Such a dichotomy is unnecessary, and pastors and theologians need to reject that artificial divide. Both systematic and

applied theology are needed in Christian faith and proclamation.

NS: A significant number of pastors in various parts of the world have no theological training at all. That's very scary.

EM: What's scary to me is that these people may become church leaders, and they know nothing about theology.

NS: Church historians say that churches go through cycles. A church starts out with a certain mission, and as it grows the mission gets watered down and organization takes over. Organization evolves to institutions. And then the church fossilizes. The original mission tends to fade away. How do you see the Adventist Church in that concept of history?

AR: I haven't done any scientific study of this phenomenon. If the church stops growing, it will be impossible to stop the process of initial enthusiasm fading away. As long as the church is fulfilling its mission, and is going out and bringing first generation Adventists, you will keep the church alive and this spirit of expectation will remain. In places where you see strong institutionalization, church growth seems to slow down or reach a plateau. But where the church is actively involved in preaching the gospel, with the second and third generation of Adventists deeply involved in the mission—that keeps the hope alive and keeps the church from beginning to fossilize. It seems to me that's why the Lord put together a message and a mission. You cannot keep them apart. You cannot say, "we have the message, we are Adventists," and do nothing else. You keep the message alive by sharing it, involving others. That, in my opinion, is probably one of the two elements in preserving the church, and the first love of the church until the end.

KD: I believe the more we become the people of the Bible, the more we will keep the initial excitement.

NS: You are all experienced, ordained ministers as well as trained scholars. I have a personal question for each of you. What

gives you hope personally? What nourishes your spiritual life?

GP: When I worked in Australia, what gave me hope was going out to the islands and seeing the kind of primitive Christianity where people were not spoiled by the so called "good life." And even today, when I go around the world, I see how people struggle, how they live out their faith. That gives me hope that Adventism is still alive.

KD: I will just go back to what Ellen White said. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history." Being a pastor in Canada I didn't really have that much time to look at these theological issues, but since I've been here at BRI, I've looked at some of these materials, and I am amazed how the Lord has guided the church through these theological landmines. I believe that if He has done it in the past, He will do it again.

EM: I believe that God is the Lord of the church, and I believe that He will see to it that she reaches her final destination. I am also confident that He will always have people that are completely consecrated to Him and willing to serve Him in whatever capacity is needed. I can see the enthusiasm of our young people who are moved by the Holy Spirit, loving God and ministering to others. What nourishes my spiritual life is my devotional time and my daily walk with Jesus. These are important to me, because it is in Him whom I trust and in whom I hope.

AR: On a personal level, my hope is centered in Christ, what He did for me on the cross, His substitutionary death for me—and then connected to that, the consummation of that hope in the second coming. For me, the second coming is what orients me, constantly orients me. With respect to my church, I see the best years ahead of us. I don't see us heading toward a collapse. I see us heading toward the most glorious consummation, the most glorious experience of the church.

NS: You're not concerned about a theological black hole ahead of us?

AR: No. I believe this movement is in the hands of the Lord. To remove anything from the hands of the Lord is not an easy task. I see the church going from victory to victory. I see in the church a new generation of theologians coming out, fully committed to the church, to its message, and to the mission of the

church. I'm beginning to see in the church a revival of love for evangelism. In all the divisions, there is a tremendous concern for evangelism. I see leaders taking seriously their responsibility as leaders. What gives me hope is that I see the hand of the Lord leading the movement.

NS: What you, as ministers charged with guarding the theology of the church,

are saying is that hope is nourished by Scripture and mission. \square

Learn more about BRI and its resources at www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org

- 1 Regular General Conference sessions are held every five years. The next one will be in 2010 in Atlanta, Georgia, United States.
- 2 Ellen G. White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, (Boise, ID: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1915), 196.

Consensus Statement from the 2006 Bible Conference in Turkey

Editor's note: During July 7–17, 2006, about 250 theologians and church leaders met for a Bible conference in Izmir, Turkey. The theme was the doctrine of the church. This is the consensus statement from the Bible conference.

Preamble

The Second International Bible Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Theologians brought together Bible scholars and administrators from around the world to Izmir, Turkey. The purpose of this gathering was to explore the biblical doctrine of the church, to inspire commitment to its mission and unity, and to foster fellowship. The program included visits to archeological sites related to the seven churches of the book of Revelation. Theologians and administrators prayed and studied together, seeking a deeper understanding of the truth about the church that we hold dear.

Affirmations

At the conclusion of the Conference we, the attendees, make the following affirmations:

- 1. We affirm, first and foremost, our commitment to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to the final authority of God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, and to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- 2. We affirm the unique contribution of the writings of Ellen G. White to the study of the nature and mission of the church.
- 3. We affirm our commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as God's

end-time people, recognizing that it is the responsibility of the world church to establish biblically-based doctrines and standards.

- 4. We affirm, in continuity with our understanding of Bible prophecy and our theological heritage, the unique identity and role of our church as God's end-time remnant, entrusted by Him with the message that prepares the world for the soon return of our Lord.
- 5. We affirm that the fulfillment of our mission as a church depends on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To a large extent it also depends on a clear understanding of the nature and function of the remnant church and the degree of theological unity in the church.
- 6. We affirm the vital role of theologians in the fulfillment of the mission of the church—a task to which all theological activity should aim, and without which our endeavors are incomplete.

A call

In view of the above affirmations, we extend:

- A call to all theologians, teachers, pastors, administrators, and local elders around the world to join us in our commitment to take positive steps that will bring these affirmations to fruition.
- A call to all institutions and organizations worldwide to support and promote the affirmations set forth in this document.
- A call to all local churches and church members to study the Scriptures

and, together with us, affirm the unique role of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as God's end-time remnant.

Thanksgiving

We praise God, for in His abundant grace He has called us to the pastoral, teaching, and administrative ministry of His church. We thank Him for this conference, and for the care and protection He has extended to us during our travels and meetings. In a response of love and gratitude for His goodness we reconsecrate ourselves to that divine call and ask God to grant us wisdom and power to effectively continue to serve Him and His church.

Recommendation

Since international Bible conferences contribute to theological unity and to a better understanding among Bible scholars and administrators, we recommend that the leadership of the church allocate the financial and human resources needed to convene these conferences at least once every quinquennium. We also encourage church leaders to make provision for division-wide Bible conferences that will include the participation of a limited number of theologians from other divisions and from the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. Such conferences will contribute to further research on issues of theological significance, enhance trust and collegiality among theologians, Bible teachers, and administrators, and strengthen the unity of the church. M

Pastoral response to criticism

John Skrzypaszek

riticism inflicts emotional wounds. We dread it, and we dream of being free from it. Yet life's events remind us about its overpowering presence. "When we are pounded by the missiles and depth charges of friends and enemies," writes Hans Finzel, "it does have a devastating effect on our emotions. It can bring our work to a screeching halt and we find ourselves having to deal with the criticism itself."

One wonders, what triggers the vicious onslaught of criticism, and how does one deal with its impact?

Roots

The spirit of criticism arises out of "the desires that battle within you" (James 4:1–3). In other words, human nature contributes to conflicts, quarrels, and fights. Finzel identifies the following causes for criticizing: jealousy, unfulfilled expectations, misunderstanding, organizational crisis, values conflict, failure, distrust, pride, and arrogance.

Rarely have I experienced criticism originating from the well of pure intentions. If this were often the case, the outcome would have always enhanced the relationship. However, the criticism I am referring to includes the devious, dehumanizing, judgmental, and self-orientated flood of opinionated views, which devalues character—the criticism that we all know so well. Usually the biased and opinionated arrows target the nerve center of emotional responsiveness. In effect, the pain-inflicting criticism activates

human defense mechanisms, evoking the attitude of fight or flight. In that sense, both criticism and an emotionally heightened response are reactionary and equally harmful. Finzel lists the following reactions to criticism: quit, run, hide, get angry, get depressed, seek revenge, fight back, belittle the criticizers.²

Personal rights

Let's discuss another view so widely promoted in our contemporary climate—mainly the fight for personal rights. When used as a defensive countermeasure against criticism, this can be equally damaging. Both offensive and defensive responses reduce objectivity, and so the parties in conflict continue an endless dogfight, which increases the depth of emotional wounds and defrocks human dignity. My analysis of different conflicts suggests that individuals who are reactionary in responses to criticism amass greater emotional damage than their opponents. In addition, because of the high level of emotional tension, crossing the boundaries of relational morals becomes easier.

Figure 1 explains this point. The arrows in the text box represent the build up of emotional tension. Clearly at the center of the conflict is the increasing build up of emotions. In this frame of mind, hurting individuals see other people and issues through the sensitive and emotionally volatile screen of distorted reality.

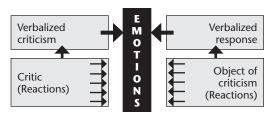


Figure 1

The God factor

How does God fit into this equation? If we consider the responsibility of pastoral care as leading people into God's presence, how does one carry this task in trying circumstances? Interestingly enough, Finzel introduces God in this context in a whole new light. "God," Finzel asserts, "uses criticism and personal attack to deepen and mature us."³

What? Does God do this? If so, is God in the business of playing emotional games with us? Says Finzel, "It seems to be a process that He uses to knock off the rough edges and to deepen our humility and our sense of dependence on him." ⁴ To support his belief, he quotes James 1:2–4.



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In this day and age, when God seems so distant, and at times when we are so self-dependent on our wisdom to solve life's problems, the notion of stepping into the workshop of the Divine Potter (Isa. 64:8) creates nervousness. Yet rather than seeing this experience in a skeptical light, consider it as a response to God, who heals human brokenness. As stated previously, reactionary responses intensify the pain of emotional wounds. These responses lack the healing power and openness to deal with criticism objectively. Confronting it in the garments of our "nakedness," we adhere to mechanisms of our "selfenclosed egos standing over against each other."5

The first human conflict

Commenting on the nature of Adam and Eve's conflict, Elizabeth Achtemeier unfolds the futility of the first couple's attempt to resolve the trauma of the existing conflict. She states, "And so they made coverings to hide behind, flimsy protection against one another." I suggest that in this case the air was loaded with emotional pain, frustration, shame, and blame. In fact, as figure 2 shows, separation from God invaded life with new emotions. This condition opened gates for unexpected and perplexing reactions.

Note the likeness between Adam and Eve's responses (flight, blame, hide) and Finzel's list of human reactions to criticism.

Fear, quilt, Reactionary shame, anger, responses to frustration, GOD God blame God steps in MALE to provide an alternative Where are way of dealing you? with damaged **FEMALE** Gen. 3:9 emotions.

Clearly in the original experience, solution to the tension did not emerge from the spontaneous reactionary

Figure 2

responses. Rather, it was embedded in the healing power of the voice that searchingly called, "Where are you?" Exploring further the deceitful egocentricity of human nature, Achtemeier writes, "How often we cover ourselves with lies and deceits and rationalizations to protect ourselves in our deepest relationships."⁷

Our responses

The deeply ingrained insecurity of our brokenness affects the way we respond to criticism. We are prone to handle it from the depths of our fears, guilt, shame, anger, frustration, blame, and hurt. Thus, as Finzel has said, is it possible to consider this as God's way of helping us to mature and to deepen our trust in Him? In 2 Corinthians 5:2–5

Paul expresses his desire "to be clothed with the heavenly dwelling" (NIV). He reasons that this heavenly dwelling covers up human nakedness. I suggest that by naked he means

the full exposure of self with all its inconsistencies. Yet, God has created us for eternity. This present state makes us uncomfortable and reluctant to be transparent (2 Cor. 5:4). The inner longing involves human response of

trust in the One who enters our emotional pain and hurts calling passionately and lovingly, Where are you? A reply to this invitation means to "release control of our relationship with God to God, coming face to face with the kind of a person we are in the depth of our being." Here, God desires to cover our fears and shame by shaping gently the rough edges of our humanity. Yes, adverse life circumstances and all that human

brokenness offers shape characters for eternity. They touch the responsive chords of our emotions, enabling us to see ourselves in the true light. What Finzel views as God's way of knocking off the rough edges of our egocentricity I define as a human response to divine defusion.

Divine defusion

Divine defusion has to do with the process by which one begins to handle criticism from a relationally oriented and God-centered perspective. Because we consider God as the Healer and the Potter, the priority in handling criticism was not meant to provide a reactionary response to our opponents but to find out the lesson God tries to teach us. As figure 3 suggests, the increase of emotional pain is directed to the source of healing (Mal. 4:2; Isa. 40:28–31).9

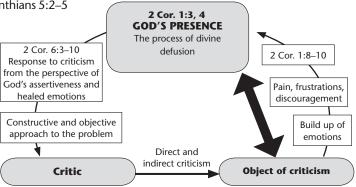


Figure 3

The wide arrow represents the constant current of relational reciprocity. Opening our lives to God's presence and surrendering into the hands of the Divine Potter, we give the dangerous weapons of our damaged defense mechanisms over to the healing power of God's grace. The relational reciprocity simply indicates the opening of God's heart to the measure of our trust in Him. Said the psalmist: "In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears" (Ps. 18:6, NIV). Note the following:

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you

will not slumber. . . .
The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at
your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over
your life (Ps. 121:1–3, 5–7, NIV).

Remember, defensive treatment of criticism evokes militant reactions. On the other hand, God's healing power creates new authenticity and openness. Relational trust in the Potter's hand empowers individuals to handle human brokenness with new confidence, as well as new openness to value people, even the most ardent opponent, as God's inheritance. Thus, guiding people into God's presence means to expose them to the authenticity of God's healing power-confirmed by the pastoral response to criticism that is no longer reactionary but relationally empowering. It includes a full measure of sensitivity and tact in handling lovingly those who inflict pain.

Jesus' example

Jesus left us an example of implicit trust in God's fairness and justice. "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. *Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly"* (1 Pet. 2:23, NIV, emphasis added).

Is it possible, then, to see our critics as God's instruments shaping our relational trust and dependence on Him? It is not out of place to suggest, at this point, that Jesus encouraged His followers to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44).

I am not suggesting that one should not address conflicts and criticism. However, the assertiveness I am referring to should display the presence of divine healing and relation-building qualities. Compare the reactions to criticism suggested by Finzel with the list of Paul's reactions to adverse circumstances as noted in 2 Corinthians 6:3–10 (see figure 4).

Paul highlights the reality of emotional discomfort created by difficult people. He refers to the experience of dishonor,

quit	endurance
run	purity
hide	understanding
get angry	patience
get depressed	kindness
seek revenge	sincere love
fight back	truthful speech
belittle the criticizers	genuine

Figure 4

bad report, regarded as impostors, beaten, sorrowful, and poor (vv. 8–10). He also presents a contrasting view, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (v. 10). It seems that Paul knew the secret of this empowering, refreshing, and energizing change in attitude. He anchored his trust in the power of God's grace as expressed in Jesus (2 Cor. 8:9). Consider the following:

- God's presence heals emotional wounds.
- God's presence provides empowerment, sensitivity, and tact to handle criticism with openness and to respond to critics with firm gentleness. One must not forget that critics have feelings and emotions.
- God provides vision needed for our personal growth and improvement.
- God provides patience.
- God provides reasons for praise, adoration, and responsive love.
- God provides a sense of objectivity, which helps us to distinguish between accurate criticism and unjust slander.
 As well, He provides strength to cope with unjust slander.

God's empowered response to criticism guides people into His presence. Amid hardship and trials, Paul stressed the purpose of God's mission. Firstly, God reconciled us to Him through Jesus. Secondly, He committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. Thirdly, we are the ambassadors (2 Cor. 6:18, 19). Note that in Paul's mind it involves personal healing. What follows is the accountability of tackling life's issues

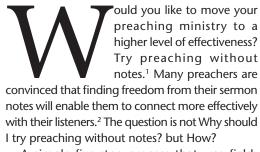
as the ambassadors of God's grace. God's ambassadors respond to the pain-inflicting circumstances with the attitude of relational wholeness. How fitting are Ellen G. White's words: "If we keep uppermost in our minds the unkind and unjust acts of others we shall find it impossible to love them as Christ has loved us; but if our thoughts dwell upon the wondrous love and pity of Christ for us, the same spirit will flow out to others. We should love and respect one another, notwithstanding the faults and imperfections that we cannot help seeing."¹⁰

Commenting on forgiveness, J. P. Pingleton infers, "We are most like God when we forgive. No other description of godliness approaches the quality of forgiveness. Genuine forgiveness is necessarily empowered by divine love, mercy and grace." This—the apex of pastoral leadership for receiving and sharing God's forgiveness—shows psychological and spiritual maturity and is, indeed, the essence of a successful life. M

- 1 Hans Finzel, *Empowered Leaders* (Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group, 1998), 76.
- 2 Ibid., 77.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Elizabeth Achtemeier, "The Story of Us All: A Christian Exposition of Genesis 3" in Preaching Biblical Texts: Exposition by Jewish and Christian Scholars, ed. Fredrick C. Holmgren and Herman E. Schaalman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 5.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 M. Robert Mulholland Jr., Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 31.
- 9 Figure 3 illustrates my proposed model of divine defusion. Note that the proposed model does not suggest disregard or a nonresponsive approach to criticism. However, assertiveness that derives from healing experienced in God's presence includes endurance, purity, understanding, patience, kindness, love, truthful speech, authenticity, and joy (2 Cor. 6:3–10).
- 10 Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ (Washington, DC: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1892), 121.
- 11 J. P. Pingleton, "Why Don't We Forgive: A Biblical and Object Relations Theoretical Model for Understanding Failures in the Forgiveness Process," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 25, no. 4 (1997): 411.
- 12 Ibid.

Preaching effectively without notes

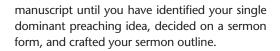
Derek J. Morris



A simple five-step process that was field-tested in a local church and will help you preach effectively without notes, follows:

Step 1: begin your sermon preparation early

Wise long-term preparation should include the development of a preaching calendar.3 This advance preparation will help you avoid wasted time. At the beginning of each week with your starting point clear and your preaching passage already selected, you'll want to make sure that you schedule regular time for sermon preparation. Without a plan, the tyranny of the urgent will take over. We've all heard horror stories about preachers who prepare their sermons the night before their preaching appointment. Or even later. Such lack of planning does not honor God or contribute to the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of the preacher. You'll want to begin your sermon preparation early so that doesn't happen to you. Carefully and prayerfully study your preaching passage and gather notes at the beginning of the week. Do not begin writing your sermon



Step 2: write the first draft of your sermon manuscript

No later than three days prior to your preaching appointment, write the first draft of your sermon manuscript. Perhaps you thought that preaching without notes would eliminate the need for a sermon manuscript. Not so.4 Preaching without notes does not substitute for the discipline of writing, and it does not qualify as a shortcut. Rather, preaching without notes is a step beyond the written sermon and centers around the importance of writing the first draft of your sermon manuscript early in the week. Make sure that you write an oral document.5 Your sermon should be classified, not as an essay or an article, but as a creative and engaging conversation with your listeners. Vocalize the sermon while you write. According to William Shepherd, "it is when we actually hear words spoken that we notice the subtle differences between written and oral language."6 So write aloud. Don't be concerned about writing a "perfect sermon" on the first draft. This is the beginning, not the end. Pray while you write the first draft of your sermon manuscript. The Holy Spirit wants to be with you just as much in the preparation as in the preaching. This early "birthing" of your sermon allows time for the next step, which is crucial in preparing to preach effectively without notes.

Step 3: internalize your sermon

During the last two days of preparation, walk through your sermon like a tour guide becoming acquainted with this new attraction. Use your sermon manuscript like a map. Your goal is not rote memorization but internalization.⁷ Walking through your sermon will test its structure⁸ and highlight the need for additions or deletions to your sermon manuscript. Early in the internalization process, walking through your sermon will require your full and undivided attention.9 Take notes. After each walk-through, make revisions to your sermon manuscript. Later in the internalization process, you can walk through your sermon while engaged in other activities, such as taking a shower, driving to an appointment, or waiting in line. Walking through your sermon right before you go to bed very effectively lodges the sermon in your memory.¹⁰

This process of internalizing your sermon will also enable you to address issues of oral interpretation and nonverbal communication. The



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words themselves are just a small part of the communication process. How will you say those words, and what gestures and facial expressions will you use? Allow at least 25 percent of your total sermon preparation time to internalize your sermon.¹¹ This is a time of revision *and* rehearsal. By the end of this internalization process, you will be well acquainted with all of the moves and submoves of your tour. Like a skilled tour guide, you are now prepared to lead your listeners over well-traveled territory.

Step 4: do a last-minute walk-through

Immediately prior to your preaching appointment, do a last-minute walkthrough of your sermon. Prayerfully review only the main moves of your sermon. This last-minute walk-through should take 60 seconds or less. There is no need to panic. Do not concern yourself with all of the details of your sermon. Most of those details will be recalled as you lead your listeners on the now familiar sermon tour. Don't be anxious about details that might be omitted. Joseph M. Webb emphasizes that "even though everything is well prepared, the preacher stands in front of people literally thinking out loud. The ideas have been worked through, both consciously and unconsciously; but even after the ideas have been outlined and memorized, they are refined and rethought right up to and even through the course of the sermon delivery."12

This inductive speech mode increases a sense of anticipation and discovery both for the listeners and for the preacher. So don't be anxious. That which you lose by leaving your sermon manuscript behind is minor compared to that gained in effective communication. Conclude your last-minute preparation by reviewing the first few sentences of your sermon. Know exactly where you are going to begin when you stand up to preach. With a clear and compelling introduction, your listeners will fall in step alongside of you as you lead the tour.

Step 5: listen while you preach

During the preaching of your sermon, ask the Lord to help you to remember the important message and to forget the unnecessary. Ask Him to help you be attentive to your listeners. Give Him permission to bring new insights to your attention that will be helpful as you lead the sermon tour. Freedom from your sermon notes will enable you to be much more attentive to the verbal and nonverbal responses of your listeners. Remember that all effective communication can be categorized as dialogue. So listen as well as speak. Listen to verbal responses and respond to them. Don't just look at your listeners in order to "establish good eye contact." Be attentive to their nonverbal feedback. Like a skilled tour guide, repeat important points if it is evident that you have not been heard. Pick up the pace of the tour or add an additional illustration if you sense that your listeners are losing interest. Your goal is not to repeat all of the words of your sermon manuscript but rather is to help your listeners to receive maximum benefit from the tour.

Be prepared to experience a degree of awkwardness when you preach your first sermon without notes. That's normal. Don't panic or give up in despair. Recognize that any skill requires practice before it becomes a natural response. Do you remember when you learned to ride a bicycle without training wheels? It wasn't easy at first, was it? You felt unstable. Wobbly. Anxious. But with practice, you learned the skill. Before long, you could jump on your bicycle and enjoy your newfound freedom!

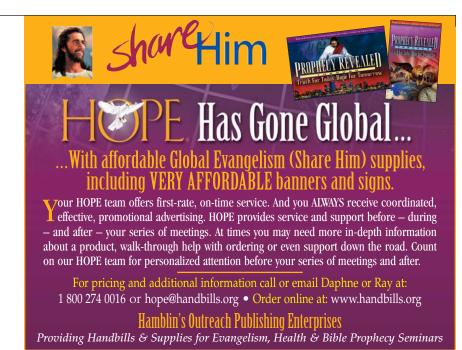
Preaching without notes requires practice too. So be patient with yourself. Allow yourself some time to develop the skill and listen to the feedback of your listeners.¹³ I remember my first sermon without notes. After 20 years of preaching with a sermon manuscript, I had lost my training wheels. And I was stressed out! What if I lost my balance? What if I crashed? After first service, my wife gave me some helpful feedback by suggesting, "You're still acting like you have a sermon manuscript!" And she was right. I was confined behind the pulpit, desperately trying to retrieve all of the words off of my invisible document. Her counsel? "Just get up and preach!" I listened to her feedback, and my preaching experience second service was totally different. I felt free. Liberated. No more training wheels. Now I could focus on connecting with my listeners. That was ten years ago, and I have never looked back!

I encourage you to give this five-step process a try. ¹⁴ If you have never preached without notes, or if you would like to preach more effectively without notes, this five-step process can help you on your journey. Take a deep breath. It's time to discard the training wheels. Preach without notes and move your preaching ministry to a higher level of effectiveness.

¹ Charles W. Koller, in his classic work Expository Preaching Without Notes, recognizes that certain preachers preach effectively from a manuscript or sermon notes, but "the same preachers would be even more effective if they could stand note free in the pulpit" (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House,

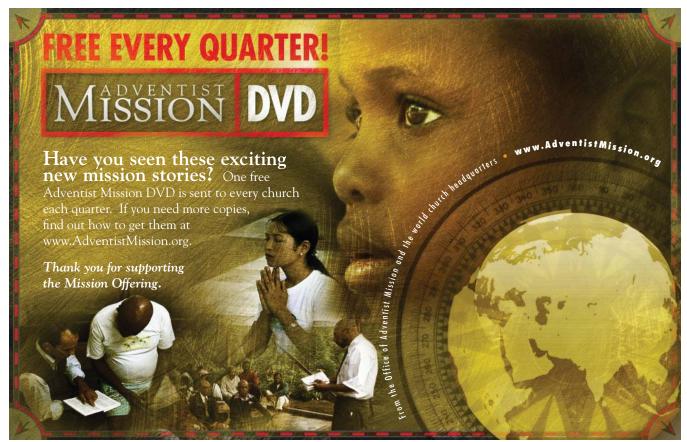
1962), 34. This classic volume has been combined with Koller's book *Semons Preached Without Notes* and has recently been reprinted as *How To Preach Without Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997).

- 2 Joseph M. Webb, in his excellent book *Preaching Without Notes*, suggests that preaching without notes will also maximize audience participation and reflect an authentic witness who speaks from the heart (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 25–30.
- 3 For help in developing a preaching calendar, see "From Panic to Purpose: The Process and Benefits of Planning a Preaching Calendar" in the September 2004 issue of *Ministry*.
- 4 I disagree with Webb on this crucial step. I consider the writing of an oral manuscript an essential part of preparing to preach without notes.
- 5 For a helpful presentation on writing an oral manuscript, see William H. Shepherd's book Without a Net: Preaching in a Paperless Pulpit (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Company 2004), 100–121.
- 6 Shepherd, Without a Net, 103.
- 7 Shepherd notes that "we learn our sermons as actors learn their lines, but unlike most actors, we have the freedom to improve our lines as we rehearse, and even as we deliver the sermon." Without a Net, 123.
- 8 A clear and logical outline is of the utmost importance when preparing to preach a sermon without notes.
- 9 This initial walk-through of your sermon is best performed overtly, out loud. Later in the internalization process, the walk-through can be covert, in your head.
- 10 That is, assuming that you are not physically or mentally exhausted. Good physical and mental health is essential for optimal memory function.
- 11 A common error in sermon preparation is leaving inadequate time for internalization. As a result, preachers are all too often preoccupied with



words when they preach rather than focusing on connecting with their listeners. I would recommend walking through your sermon four to six times during this internalization process.

- 12 Preaching Without Notes, 28.
- 13 Shepherd suggests that a preacher just learning to preach without notes might "pick a small section of the sermon and resolve to preach that section—and only that section—without referring to your manuscript. Pick a story first, since stories are easily remembered. Preach your sermon as before, but when it comes time for the story, look up at your
- audience and keep your eyes there. Let the story come. Next week, pick another part of the sermon. . . . Gradually build up your confidence so that you can do two or three thought units each week without referring to your manuscript." Without a Net, 133.
- 14 Your experiences as you experiment with this five-step process for preaching effectively without notes will be helpful to other preachers. Send feedback, comments, or suggestions to dmorris@ forestlakechurch.org.



Through a land not sown:

interview with Kari Paulsen

Sharon Cress

Editor's note: Kari Paulsen is the wife of Jan Paulsen, president of the General Conference of Seventhday Adventists and also serves as sponsor of Shepherdess International

Sharon Cress: Kari, you and your husband have had such a varied ministry—both in terms of the roles you have been called to fill and the areas you have served. Looking back, is this the journey in life you had imagined?

Kari Paulsen: Well, it has had some unexpected twists and turns. It's a path we could not have predicted fifty years ago when we were starting out. You know, I sometimes think of the

words in Jeremiah 2:2, "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown." This is how it has often felt; that we were headed through uncharted territory, on an adventure designed by God.

SC: Tell us about growing up in Norway.

KP: Jan, my husband, and I were both born in Norway. My brothers and two sisters and I grew up in a farming community where everybody knew everybody. Norway is a beautiful country with mountains, lakes, and fjords with long, dark winters and short summers with a midnight sun. World War Two took place during my childhood.

SC: Growing up during World War Two must have been difficult.

KP: It's a long, long story, and it's about how I became a Christian. When I became very ill, Mother took me to a heart specialist, and after an extensive examination he told my mother I was born with a heart defect. He said that I probably wouldn't live through puberty.

They didn't tell me, but they told the neighbors, and they told their children. When we were playing, my friends would say, "Oh well, never mind, you're going to die." "Well, doesn't everyone die?" I asked. "Yes," they said, "but you could die tomorrow." I felt scared.

My parents were like most Norwegians. They went to church only for christenings, confirmations, weddings, and funerals. All I knew about death was that you were buried in the ground under cold marble stones, and I didn't want to die.

Sharon Cress (right) interviews Kari Paulsen (left).



Sharon Cress is an associate ministerial secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, with the privilege of serving pastoral families.



The doctors told my parents that with surgery I had a fifty-fifty chance of survival, but they decided to risk the surgery. The surgery was to be the first heart surgery in Norway, and so the operating theater was arranged to allow other medical people to watch and learn. The surgery was successful, but an infection set in. At that time penicillin was a very new medication and not generally available.

There were a couple of American soldiers who were patients in the hospital, and they heard about my story. I was told that they contacted America, and penicillin was made available for me. And these soldiers also arranged for a beautiful big box of all kinds of foods like nuts, oranges, dates, figs, and bananas. Then they gave me a pink dress and a pair of beautiful brown patent leather shoes. Because of the war and the shortage of things, these were very special gifts to me. I wanted to thank these kind soldiers, but by the time I was well enough, they were gone.

After the surgery I thought I was still going to die because I felt like a mountain was pressing on my chest, and it was so hard to breathe. I told God that if He would let me live, I would become a Christian. But I realized that I had no idea how to become a Christian—should I pray at night or say a grace before my meals? Or should I do both? I didn't know what to do and I was scared—thought lightning would strike me.

When I was thirteen, preparation for confirmation began. You go to church every week, study and memorize the catechism, and learn hymns. Because I had promised to become a Christian, I also started reading the Bible I was given. Some things troubled me. I thought, *This is strange. Why do we keep Sunday?* So I said to the minister, "Why does it say in the Bible to keep the seventh day?" He replied, "We do that because Jesus was raised on the first day."

I asked other questions, and the minister said, "Well, Kari, you are just a child, and we have ministers who study Latin and Greek and Hebrew and they don't worry about it. So don't you worry about it." I was becoming more

and more confused because this was my chance to become a Christian, and it just didn't sound right to me.

The Sunday before confirmation, one receives one's first Communion. I thought, If I take Communion and I haven't become a Christian, something bad will happen to me. So I went to the minister and told him I could not take Communion. "What's that all about?" he asked. I said, "I'm not a Christian." "Of course you are a Christian," he responded. "No," I said, "I'm not a Christian, and I can't take part in that Communion." "Well," he said, "if you're not going to take Communion, you can't be confirmed." I felt safer but also sad. I would miss out on all the nice presents on confirmation Sunday.

During our last time together the minister said, "I've discussed this with the church board and we have decided that you may be confirmed without taking Communion. But remember, when you sit there and all of them go up to take Communion, you will be there by yourself and the whole congregation will look at you."

SC: That's a lot of pressure. So what happened after that?

KP: The following summer I was fifteen years old and very fond of dancing. I wanted to go on an outdoor summer dancing party some distance from where I lived, so I arranged to stay with one of my mother's aunts. Another was an Adventist, but we had very little contact with her. The next day, however, I decided that I wanted to visit the Adventist aunt, who lived only a forty-five-minute walk away.

SC: You were quite independent!

KP: Yes, maybe so. As I got closer to her home, I noticed a group of people in a garden playing guitars and singing. Unbeknown to me, this was a small Adventist church community. A man, whom I later learned was the church-school teacher, and his wife welcomed me and said that the young people were all going over to their place for a couple of hours to play games, and

I was welcome to come. He asked me what my interests were, and I told him I liked to read. He said, "I have a book I'd like to give you and a couple of books I can lend you." Books were still scarce then, and how I loved books. He gave me *Steps to Christ* written by Ellen G. White.

SC: Did you find out how to become a Christian in that book?

KP: Yes, I went home and read *Steps to Christ*. But I thought this was too good to be true—it can't be that easy. Then I read the other books.

SC: What happened?

KP: Every time I went back, they did Bible studies with me and then enrolled me in the Voice of Prophecy lessons. By Christmastime I believed many things and knew that I should not eat pork. When I refused it on Christmas Eve, my father became furious and ordered me to leave the house. So, I went by train to my aunt's house again. She had moved closer to us by then. I stayed there so I could go to secondary school because I had one more year.

SC: So, you finished secondary school living with this aunt?

KP: Yes. Her husband worked on the Norwegian railroad as an engineer. He would leave and be gone all week and be home by the weekend. Away from home he had started to attend some meetings. Believe it or not, they were Adventist meetings. Independent of each other, we started to keep Sabbath on the very same day. Three weeks later, my aunt joined us, and all three of us were baptized on the same day.

SC: So, did your other aunt who was already an Adventist come and see all of this?

KP: She was thrilled and so excited. She had prayed for us all of these years.

SC: Isn't that something! So what was that date and how old were you?

KP: August nineteen fifty-one. I was seventeen. The next year I went to the Adventist Junior College in Denmark.

SC: It was at the Adventist Junior College in Denmark that you met Jan [Paulsen]?

KP: Yes. We both studied theology.

SC: Wonderful! Were there many women studying theology?

KP: No, just one other woman. I arrived at the college two weeks late, and the counting in Danish was very different. In the Old Testament Prophets class I could hardly understand a word of what Professor Olsen¹ said. It was all about who reigned when. So Jan saw my perplexity and said, "Don't worry. I'll explain it to you later." That was it.

SC: It must have been very difficult for you—a slightly different language and lacking a basic Christian biblical background from childhood.

KP: Fortunately I was a good student, but I had to study a lot. I kept my grades high and thoroughly enjoyed it. Jan and I sometimes went for long walks. We would discuss everything, from topics raised in our classes to present issues.

SC: From the moment you met, was it love at first sight?

KP: No, we were actually friends. We somehow seemed to enjoy the same things. To this day we still enjoy discussing topics and issues.

SC: What did your parents think when you told them you were going to marry an Adventist who would become a minister?

KP: They were not pleased. After junior college, Jan worked as a ministerial intern in southwestern Norway, and I worked as a church-school teacher and Bible instructor in northeastern Norway. The following summer we got married and sold books for five weeks so that Jan could come to America. Then it took us

nine months to collect enough for me to come.

SC: Did your parents come to accept your faith and your marriage?

KP: They did. It took time, but they came to love and appreciate Jan ever so much.

SC: What about Jan's parents?

KP: They loved me. Jan grew up in a lovely, happy Christian home, and they couldn't have been more welcoming.

born in Norway, although we lived in Ghana at that time, and our third child, Rein Andre, was born while Jan worked on his doctoral degree in theology at Tübingen University in Germany.

SC: After Ghana—what then?

KP: We moved to our college in Nigeria, where Jan was registrar and head of the Religion Department and later became president. Then we spent two years at Newbold College in England, where Jan was head of the Religion Department



Photo: S

SC: Did you continue with your theology education after you married?

KP: We went to Andrews University [then Emmanuel Missionary College]. After some years of study in America, intermingled with pastoral work in Norway, we were called to Bekwai, Ghana, where we stayed for two years.

SC: What about your children—where were they born?

KP: Laila, our daughter, was born in Norway. Our second child, Jan Rune, was

and president. After that we went to Germany for Jan to finish his doctorate degree.

SC: Now, you've experienced being the spouse of a student, a pastor, a missionary, an educator, and an administrator. Do you think some of these roles have been easier than others? Do you feel each one has had its own benefits and challenges?

KP: I think it was kind of a natural development. We just went one step at a time. When we left Newbold, the illness

I had contracted in Africa had become chronic, and I was quite ill. I couldn't do much, so I felt a bit isolated, but that had its silver lining. I got the idea of phoning people. I thought there must be people out there who are lonely, have lost a loved one, or are discouraged for some reason or other, and that's a ministry that I've kept up. Wherever I know of somebody who needs some support, maybe a word of encouragement, I will phone them.

SC: So despite all the challenges, you found a way to minister to others.

KP: And it has been such a blessing to me as well. It's something that I feel is so important in our church.

SC: Sometimes it's not what you say, it's just listening.

KP: Yes, we all need somebody who listens to us at some time or other.

SC: Do you think people expected different things from you in these different roles—wife of a pastor, educator, administrator?

KP: You know, I think it is very important as a minister's wife that you define your own boundaries. There are some areas where you can gradually train yourself, but we all have our talents. And look at nature—a dandelion will never be a rose. You've got to try to see what the Lord wants you to do, what talents you have, but then you shouldn't feel guilty with something you just cannot do. For instance, I could never, ever sing. And so I think that if you learn that early on, you don't constantly go around with a guilty conscience.

SC: I hear you saying, have faith that God gave you the gifts He wanted you to have, value those, and don't look to try to copy someone else's.

KP: Yes, and if you have a bit of aptitude in something, then work at it.

SC: But no matter how much training you or I could receive, neither of us will ever sing a solo! What counsel would you share

with pastors' wives who serve long and hard and sometimes feel unappreciated?

KP: I do feel very much for pastors' wives like that. Maybe they have served with their husband for a long time. Maybe their husband died or even divorced them. I think that it's important to remember that they really have a very high credit rating with God that no one can take away from them. Secondly, I think it's important for the rest of us to remember them and include them because they really deserve all the payback they can get.

SC: I think all of us, as pastors' wives, struggle to maintain a relationship with Jesus Christ. Sometimes there's a mix-up between the body of Christ and Christ Himself. While we serve the body of Christ, that doesn't necessarily mean a relationship. How do you maintain that? Do you have a secret to share?

KP: Maybe I've been fortunate in that way. I have experienced quite a lot of illness and this close proximity to death does something to you and your relationship with the Lord. Somehow you rely more on Him. It's important to stay close to Him, to pray, to read. It's kind of a constant reminder that this life might not last that long. I'm fortunate that I'm still here.

SC: You have dealt with the adversity that you've experienced and said that draws you closer to Jesus. There are some pastors' spouses who say, "Why me? I serve the Lord. My husband serves the church. Look at all that we've given to this church. Why would God let this happen to me?"

KP: I have had a quote at the back of my Bible for many years written by Ellen White. "Nothing tends more to promote health of body and soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray. If we are heaven-bound, how can we go as a band of mourners, groaning and complaining all along the way to our Father's house?... It is a law

of nature that our thoughts and feelings are encouraged and strengthened as we give them utterance."²

SC: Amen. What do you think is Jan's secret for helping you stay positive about being a pastor's wife?

KP: What I have appreciated very much is that Jan has always valued what I have done. He's always given me credit. He's never pushed me to do things that I've felt uncomfortable with. And when he comes home, it's our time. He has this wonderful "rule of life" principle. He prefers to leave the things back at the office or out there with the parishioners. He needs that space to recharge; he gives us time together, and it makes me feel important. He gives me my space, my time, our family time. For us, it works.

SC: We've covered a lot of things today. In conclusion, if we could gather all the ministers' families from all over the world in one huge amphitheater, what would you say to them?

KP: To me, when I think about all the different ministers' families, it's like an enormous megapuzzle. And in a puzzle, as you know, every piece has to fit into its place, big or small. The puzzle is not complete unless all the pieces are there. And a small piece is just as important as a big one. The beautiful one is just as important as the obscure one. It's the same with ministers' families. We are all waiting and hoping for the Lord's return, and what gives me encouragement is that we all do it together.

SC: I love that analogy. Each piece has a unique cut that, when merged together, makes a whole beautiful picture. Kari, thank you for being so open and honest about your life and family. And thank you for sharing your wisdom from fifty years in the parsonage. God bless you.

V. Norskov Olsen, who served the church in various capacities, retired as the president of Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, CA, United States.

² Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1905), 251.

Three questions for every marriage

Ron Edmondson



Ron Edmondson, M.A., is the head of Mustard Seed Ministry, Nashville, Tennessee, United States.

hough I have spent many hours counseling people who say that they want to save or improve their marriage, I often discover that what many really wanted was some justification to end the marriage. These people were hoping I would be so convinced that their marriage was beyond repair that I would encourage them to end it. Though encountering some seriously damaged marriages, I have not found one beyond repair if both people are willing to try to make the marriage work.

I have learned one thing about life that applies very well to marriage too: You cannot take people where they do not want to go. When people are convinced their marriage is over, either they will have to change their mind or God will have to intervene. I have seen both happen, but if neither does, the time in counseling may be wasted.

With that perspective in mind, I have learned to ask three powerful questions during the counseling session that help me to quickly determine how serious the couple are about saving or improving their marriage.

Although I have used these questions in a counseling setting, they are also very good for any couple who wants to take their marriage to a deeper level of commitment and intimacy. These questions can be self-applied by each individual or by the couple, but it is helpful if the couple allows another person, perhaps a minister or close friend, to ask these questions and guide them through the discussion of their answers.

Where do you want this marriage to go?

You have to know where you want to go before you can develop a plan to get there. Many couples have never talked about what they want out of a marriage. One person may think living two separate lives within the same house comprises a marriage while the other wants to share everything. Many people, especially men, think that if there isn't much fighting in the marriage, the marriage must be doing well while the other person in the relationship wants deeper intimacy.

With a marriage in trouble, one person may have already decided he or she wants out. Until that is known, any attempt to help the couple will flounder. Getting people to be truly honest in answering this question can be considered critical. I usually ask people to take a few days to answer this question, to search their hearts and pray about their true feelings. As hard as this question can be, I have been surprised many times how this question opens a dialogue that leads to an understanding of the true condition of the marriage.

How are you going to get there?

Once a couple knows what they want in their marriage, the next step involves developing a plan to get there. Even so, having developed a plan, a couple cannot implement that plan until all three questions are answered. Sometimes couples want to jump straight into the solutions, but if each person's heart is not into the changes, they will be short-lived.

Taking the goals each person has for the marriage, the couple then thinks through what must occur in the marriage in order for each goal to be realized. If the couple wants their relationship with each other to be continually growing closer, for example, then the couple might need to plan more time to be alone with each other. It's difficult to grow closer to someone you never see.

Some couples I know have used this question combined with the first question to come to an understanding of how their attitudes and the things they say play a part in building or hurting the marriage. Using this strategy, a couple constantly criticizing each other will quickly see that such actions do not improve the marriage. Constant criticism certainly will not help the couple take the marriage where they say they want it to go.

Detailed answers to the questions should be written down and agreed upon by each person. Again, a third party assisting is helpful, for that person can then keep the list for future reference WHEN PEOPLE ARE CONVINCED THEIR MARRIAGE IS OVER, EITHER THEY WILL HAVE TO CHANGE THEIR MIND OR GOD WILL HAVE TO INTERVENE.

and ask the couple on a regular basis if they are operating from the plan.

Are you truly willing to do whatever it takes to get to the place you want to be in your marriage?

This question cannot be answered until the other two questions have been resolved. When I have asked couples, Are

you truly willing to do whatever it takes to get to the place you want to be in your marriage? I have had people say to me, "Well, of course I am willing to do what it takes. Would I be here if I weren't?" That's a fair question, but if most of us were really willing to do whatever it takes to make the marriage work, it probably wouldn't have degenerated as far at it already has.

People are usually willing to do the things that they want to do; likewise, they aren't willing to do what they don't want to. That may sound like common sense, but the importance should not be underestimated. This third question helps to shake out the truth of the other two. Sometimes the first two questions can be answered easily, but this third question forces the person to take another serious look inside their heart.

Conclusion

These questions are not intended as a shortcut to professional counseling, for many couples need counseling to work through deeper or more serious issues. These questions will, however, provide couples with a basic understanding of the current condition of their marriage. They can be helpful at any stage of marriage, and, regardless of the condition of the marriage, they can assist in encouraging any marriage to grow in strength and intimacy.



The top seven ingredients of staying power

Branimir Schubert



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ne morning after entering my office and checking my emails, I noticed one from my son Filip, who now lives in Australia, describing his first year at the university.

In the room next door was my wife, Daniela, to whom I have been married for 20 years. I am as passionate about her and love her as much—and more—than on the day we said "I do." Miraculously, she feels the same about me.

Our youngest son, Timi, just a short while ago ran out of the house (with his cricket bat, of course), yelling, "Bye, love you." Now he sits in his high school classroom, 20 minutes away from us, doing something he will tell us about later today at the dinner table.

Staying power

Our circumstances work against us, but we have staying power, and that works for us. My wife and I have diametrically opposite personalities, come from different social backgrounds, have moved ten times in 20 years, and have lived and worked in five different countries. I love the changes and new challenges; my wife loves stability and long-term commitment. We experience God in different ways, and we interpret "reality" through different lenses.

And so many times there seemed to be sufficient reasons to allow our differences to drive a wedge between us.

However, as I reflect on this staying power that we seem to have, I realize that the only contribution I can claim is that my presence in this family necessitated a huge outpouring of God's grace in order for us to stay together as a happy family. Have I contributed anything else? As I was reflecting on this, I decided to ask my family what has kept us together. I wrote a letter to our two sons and my wife asking them to tell me the top seven reasons why our family has stayed together in spite of our differences and constantly changing circumstances.

I expected to wait for at least a week for the answers to come. Amazingly, my wife sent her reply back within an hour. The moment our younger son came from school, he filled in the seven blank spots and handed the sheet back to me. The next day, our other son sent an email indicating that within a day I would get my answers.

The following are the seven answers (ingredients) I received from my family. Perhaps you will find them helpful. After all, the institution of marriage is under constant attack, and anything that will tip the balance in the favor of married couples should be considered.

Choice

Our deliberate choice to be a family has resulted in our staying together. Daniela said, "If we wanted to separate, we could find many reasons to do so, but we chose not to and found enough reasons to stay together." Timi said that in spite of many changes and challenges, "we love each other and stick with one another." He further emphasized that the circumstances we have been facing thus far have "put us more together." He also said that our choice of staying together has to do with our choice to "believe in God," and He made our family a "major success story." Filip also reflected on the importance of allowing God to be "our Guide." He perceived that God has blessed us as a family, and one of those blessings "is being a strong family."

It seems that a two-fold choice made a difference. We as a family chose to be together, and at the same time we allow God to add His blessing and protection over our family.

I remember our engagement. Immediately after our graduation, my dad, an ordained minister, took Daniela and me for a walk around the lake. After the walk, I promised Daniela I would be a good and faithful husband. I promised my parents that I would take care of my future wife, and I made the same promise to her parents. Finally, I made a promise to God that my choice and our decision were permanent.

From that moment onward, we had to face many difficult years of adjustments, hurts, arguments, and misunderstandings, but never did we consider giving up being husband and wife. The choice

to stay together made other choices imperative: to work things through, to explore possible solutions, to be patient and allow for growth. Our choice was not negotiable, and in the context of our marriage being *secure*, we have addressed other issues while growing into a strong family.

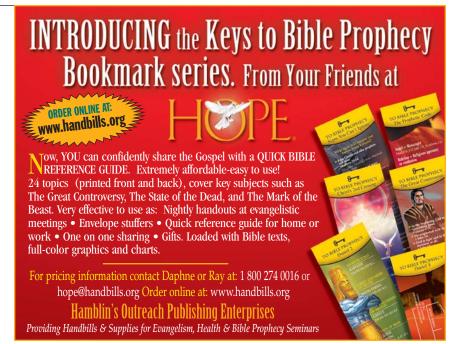
Respect

Definitions can be tricky. While meanings become clarified, they also, at times, limit the term and leave us with a narrow view. When my family talks about *respect*, they describe it as an attitude of esteem. In our context, this means paying proper attention and consideration to others. From what they say, respect remains crucial if the family commits to staying together.

Timi says it most succinctly: "We respect each other and others' opinions. When we show respect, it is given back to us." More specifically, Filip talks about the fact that we respected his needs for good education and a proper environment in which to grow up. He also adds that we were supportive and have given advice but have also allowed him to learn some lessons on his own.

It appears that over the years we have developed the ability to "esteem one another" by paying proper attention to each others' needs. By what we say and do, we try to communicate the importance and value of each member of the family. We acknowledge our differences and respect them. Our understanding of those differences creates an environment in which respect can be appropriately demonstrated.

I admit that it is extremely difficult for me to show respect to my wife because of our differences. I am impulsive and make decisions fast. She is analytical and considers every possible angle and possibility—which makes me more impatient and frustrated. But because we have learned to respect each other, we can now read the circumstances and let our differences play in our favor. When fast decisions are needed, I am respected by being allowed to make them. When more thought needs to be given and other options explored, I respect my wife by allowing enough time for this process to take place.



One more thing: Respect does not always mean agreement. Often Filip and Timi make decisions with which we disagree, but we respect those choices. This allows an environment conducive to open discussions of the implications and perhaps points to better options.

Tolerance

Tolerance has many aspects. In the world of physics, tolerance means the "capacity to endure pain or hardship." No family can stay together without a high degree of tolerance—pain and hardships affect every family. The ability to deal with such conditions keeps families from disintegrating.

As a family we have traveled a lot. We have lived in various cultures and have had to adapt to new environments and were always graciously accepted and welcomed. We also learned that to survive in a different culture, there must be tolerance. Daniela said that as a family we "keep in mind each others' needs." She also perceptively explained that "when you are in a new place, you don't demand to have your own way, but try to fit in."

There's nothing wrong with expressing your needs or views. On the contrary, this indicates a healthy family relationship. Demanding that your needs be priority and imposing your views creates stress, and many families experience testing beyond what they can withstand.

Authenticity

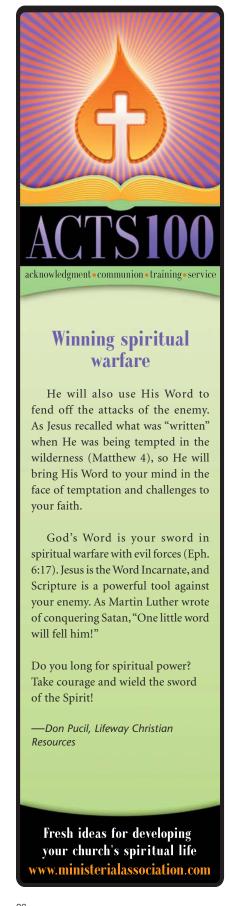
Being who you are stays as something most important in the family. You can fool people outside your home for a long period of time, but those closest to you can see the real you. Christian leaders particularly should pay attention to this aspect of "staying power." Publicly, they articulate values, explain ethical and moral principles, and call for purity and holiness. Privately, they may struggle with practicing what they preach.

In Daniela's opinion, we, as a family, are who we are "regardless of other people's ideas and expectations of us." She added, "We are at home the same people as [we are] outside."

Being authentic inspires trust among the members of the family. Timi feels that "we can trust each other on important things, like backing each other up. If you trust someone, you want to talk to them and share your secrets with them." Authentic relationships foster trust, and trust is the foundational material for good relationships.

Filip's perceptions are that the "parents set a good example." About his mother, he continued by saying that she "was always honest and very generous. She set an example of how to treat each other." He also stated, concerning me, that I "set the example of leadership, trust and hard work."

More than once Filip has commented on a sermon I preached and challenged



some of my assertions of how I apply them in my life. I would then explain that sometimes preachers preach the ideal without necessarily practicing it . . . but then I have to simply confess that I was preaching to myself more than to anyone else.

Community

"Families that pray together, stay together," is a well-known Christian cliché. Here is another one: "Families that play together, stay together." Not only play, but "do stuff" together, whatever that includes.

Daniela observes that "we do things together: wash dishes, cook, make the bed, mow grass, travel, drive, eat, read stories, pray, play . . . " Most of our everyday activities can be translated into "community events."

She also says that we "talk about issues." Any issues: dissatisfactions, joys, likes and dislikes, religion, sex, and other topics—a sign of a healthy community. We take the time to look at old photos or watch videos, and to tell family stories.

Filip brought the spiritual aspect of the community into focus. He noted that "we always had God as our Guide and He gave us many blessings, one of them being a strong family." In other words, God remains as part of our "family community."

Humor

This aspect of staying power may not be as essential as other aspects, but it was strongly emphasized by Timi. "We are together," he said, "because we are humorous. Laughing all the time and making jokes keeps many bad thoughts running away from us." He added, "Many people wouldn't think this is part of our sticking together but I think it is." And I agree with him.

We have learned to laugh at everything: from watching a TV show (or criticizing it because of poor acting) to watching each other. We tease one another, finding something we can make fun of.

Teasing, however, can easily backfire. Sometimes a joke can offend, and teasing can go too far. But families that stay together tend to know the boundaries so that the risks of hurting another person become minimal.

Any situation has a humorous side to it—it's all a matter of perspective. Families with staying power have this wonderful ability to discover the funny side of life, and that acts as additional glue binding them together.

Grace

Has my family painted an unrealistic picture of who we are? Maybe so. We have to remember that the question was "why are we still together?" If other questions were asked, additional sides to our family would have been discovered. And some of those might be sides of which we are not necessarily very proud.

Tense moments exist at times. Disagreements lead to "silent treatments" and unhappy faces. Differences in personalities and human selfishness cause hurts and even tears. No, we are not a perfect family. We do not laugh all the time; we do not exemplify the perfect community. Sometimes our tolerance is very thin, and the respect is not so obvious. But, we are still together. Why?

I believe this is all God's grace. Somehow, our family became the place where God decided to grow all the elements of staying power—elements we did not have in and of ourselves. Because we individually and collectively chose God, He in turn chose us and made sure that all the ingredients necessary for keeping us together are there—slowly developing over the years and now being transmitted to the next generation through our children.

Conclusion

By God's grace we have stayed together with that staying power found in clear commitment to each other and to our God. With my family I have discovered that staying power resides in God's commitment to us and our surrender to that commitment. Ultimately, our staying power resulted in our response to the gift that God has given to us as individuals, as a couple, and as a family.

An adjustment in the plan

Dave Livermore

t's Sunday morning, and I am watching a riveting football game. One team dominated the other during the first half. But in the second half, the other team made so many good adjustments that it took the lead—and eventually won the game.

What can we, as a church, learn from that second-half comeback victory?

The problem

First, I'm sick of what the devil does to our communities—the crime, the drugs, the broken homes, and the vacant stares on so many faces. When we look to the church as a place of hope, a place where questions can be answered and where life can begin anew, we often see independent attitudes, critical spirits, divided efforts, a relative morality, and a holiness that's often very unappealing. To go back to my football analogy, according to the scoreboard, we are losing the game.

Let's pretend it's halftime. What adjustments must the Seventh-day Adventist Church make that can turn our "team" around to have a greater impact on our communities? Plenty. But first, if you're in the locker room at halftime, you must give full attention to the coach. Jesus, the Coach, has mandated our mission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with

you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV).

The personal approach

Some believe that public evangelistic series have become costly and largely ineffective. Many pastors have given up on them entirely. I've heard about pastors holding an evangelistic series, and no community people came. "Well, these meetings are good for the church too," they say in response. Maybe that's true, but that's not why we hold evangelistic meetings. The church is not the target. The community is. Some also believe that, because evangelistic series are not working well in some countries, people are not interested in our last-day message. That's simply not true!

I believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church will not grow without public evangelism. I'm convinced that the church I pastor will not grow without public evangelism. We have done an evangelistic series each of the last nine years, and I know that we must, all year long, plow ground, plant seeds, and fertilize the soil. This crucial adjustment will focus the church in a direction that leads toward a successful evangelistic series. Our "Coach" set the example: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.' "1

No amount of handbills or literature hung on a doorknob will ever take the place of oneon-one contact. As we make friends for friends' sake, as we participate in community picnics, as we visit over our fences in our neighborhoods, as we have opportunities to pray for troubled family and friends, we win their confidence and people feel and see our sympathy. We earn the right to speak further to their hearts, and then we can invite them to a small group designed only to deepen that relationship (small groups like those with which I am familiar, such as Marathon Madness, Monday Night Football, Your Best Life Now, Intimacy Issues, Knitting Together, Learning Spanish, Marriage Matters, Doing Community Surveys, Personal Devotions, Creationism, etc.).

Our small groups don't need to do anything more than just make friends. One of our small-group leaders tells me, "I'll provide the friendship, relationship, and foundational studies; then I'll bring them to the evangelistic series, and you, Pastor Dave, take them the rest of the way." Just make friends. If you do, the opportunity to invite them to a series will become natural.



Dave Livermore, M.A., is senior pastor of the Kelso-Longview Community Seventh-day Adventist Church, Kelso, Washington, United States.

A new model

Adjustments can make a big difference. For instance, this year we realized that it was a stretch to expect community people to come to an evangelistic series for 17 or 19 nights. I love to play golf; but I could not attend a series of rounds of golf for 19 nights at any time during the year, including summer, no matter how much I might want to, because I'm just too busy. Our community people are too busy and, likewise, the church family.

What, then, can we do to make it easier for them to come to a series? Acts 15:19 (NIV) says, "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." How did we make it easier?

First, we prepared throughout the year. Then, and here's where we made some adjustments, we had three weekend meetings. That's it. That was our evangelistic series.

On opening night, a Friday evening, two sermons were preached: no preliminaries, no music, no theme song, nothing other than a warm welcome, snacks on the tables, an explanation of child care, and a short preview of what will happen the next night. The two sermons were preached by two different speakers—I opened with "Signs of His Coming," and our associate closed the first night on "How Jesus Returned." We invited everybody back to church the next morning, when I spoke on Daniel 2 for the Sabbath worship service. We fed everyone dinner each Saturday

THINK OUR "COACH" IS CALLING FOR A NEW PLAY.

evening, with many community friends in attendance. Throughout the series, we had 115 community people participate in our effort. Our second night began with dinner at 6:00 P.M., followed by two more sermons that began at 7:00 and ended by 8:30. We used three speakers because we found in using a multiteaching staff that people connected to the message better than connecting to the messenger, as can be a problem if we use a guest evangelist. We covered fifteen topics in those three weekends, including our Sabbath services.

After we completed the three-weekend series, we formed a new Sabbath School for our community friends and for members who had formed relationships with them. Here we covered additional teachings and then immediately moved into a program called "In the Footsteps of Paul." As a result, we have baptized or have accepted by profession of faith 25 people so far this year. Because of those who haven't made a decision yet but who continue to stay with us, we finished "In the Footsteps of Paul" and moved them into a Sabbath School class taught by our Bible worker. Now they are studying through our fundamental beliefs, and we will make several appeals through the next 24 weeks for them to take the next step in their Christian experience.

A simple adjustment, a transformed church

When these community people know who Seventh-day Adventists are, something powerful happens to the church. Everybody comes to life; the church takes on a whole new flavor with a new atmosphere pervading the foyer that then flows into the worship center. You can find energy and expectation in the kitchen, at potlucks, and in the restrooms! It permeates the church, and the culture that once was inward focused, now, through an adjustment, becomes what God would have it be: outward focused. All this because quests have arrived, and we planned in advance to treat them as Christ treated quests.

A simple adjustment, that's all. And things came back to life. I think our "Coach" is calling for a new play: same team, same rules, but a new strategy. It's halftime, and He's calling for an adjustment in the game plan. Will we keep doing what we've been doing and have a second half as moribund as the first? Or shall we come out after halftime with a new attitude and with a new aggressiveness after adjustments have been made?

1 Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1905) 143

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Their former churches should contact the church in closest proximity to their new location, suggesting that they adopt these members and minister to them.

Additionally, in some situations ministry to care-givers must also be considered. How delighted would some care-givers be to be able to attend the divine worship hour even once a month! What a warm feeling to be greeted by the saints and to take love and

greetings to the sick relative at home! Simultaneously, care-givers would have their spiritual batteries recharged.

As a church, we seem to have more ministries than we can manage, but if pastors, local elders, and the Women's Ministry department plan carefully, the elderly can be visited at least twice a month. In larger churches there may not be much difficulty in organizing disability and/or senior citizen committees. However, in smaller congregations

there should be a coordinated plan in which the Women's Ministries can have a major role. Both Mrs. Tetz and Mrs. Thoms have given excellent suggestions, which if incorporated would make an impact on ministry to the elderly and disabled.

—Gloria Josiah, St. Croix, Virgin Islands

write to express appreciation for Ron Edmondson's article on the continued on page 29

Dateline

Church representative adds Adventist voice to global concerns

ew York—Over 2,500 representatives of nongovernment organizations gathered September 6 at the United Nations in New York to consider the best practices to develop better partnerships for security and development. Under the banner theme of "Unfinished Business: Effective Partnerships for Human Security and Sustainable Development," the UNsponsored conference brought together the leaders of civil society and government to find practical methods to make the world a safer and more humane place.

"We have such huge tasks now that I sometimes ask myself, 'Will we make it?" " UN General Assembly President Jan **Eliasson** told the conference participants, adding that "working together, creating international structures, creating strong and effective international cooperation, strengthening the United Nations, is a good thing for the world." He called on nongovernment organizations to become more involved, saying "We need your voices; we need your contribution. I want you to feel that you are partners with us in the work on development, security, and human rights, and the basic pursuit that we must work for a life of dignity for all."

Seventh-day Adventists attend regularly such conferences and express continuing concern for the deplorable living standards and threats of violence facing people in many parts of the world.

"Adventists are committed to social action, recognizing that our interest is in the whole being of what makes us human—mental, physical, social, and spiritual," says Dr. Jonathan Gallagher, Adventist Church representative to the UN and participant at the conference. "Consequently we are very much involved in making this world a better place through humanitarian action that includes health, education, disaster relief, development aid, social development programs and so on. We believe that by so doing we are following the example of Jesus in caring for all the needs of humanity." [PARL News]

Geological Field Conference

From August 20 through August 31, the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) led out in a field conference in Colorado and Utah, United States. Some 35 scientists, theologians, church leaders, editors, and others participated in the event.

Dr. James Gibson, GRI director, in his message to the participants, stated that "The relationship between biblical creation and science is a complex one, with many

implications for our church." GRI, located on the campus of Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California, United States, was "established to study this relationship and advise the church."



Dr. Benjamin L. Clausen, scientist with GRI and conference coordinator, shows a specimen to several conference participants.

Those in attendance participated in presentations by scientists and theologians and spent considerable time in the field studying various geological formations. One of the participants, **Gerry Karst**, a vice-president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, stated that "it is important and healthy for us to look at all evidence while knowing that God will continue to lead us in understanding His creation."

GRI provides a variety of resources, and readers may wish to contact the institute at www.grisda.org for additional information.

Letters continued -

ministry that the church can have for the divorced. This is Christ-centered ministry.

Many have accepted the myth that by ministering to such marginalized groups of people the church is encouraging divorce. While divorce is a hard reality that the church must deal with, we hardly have programs in the family life department—nor do we have training that helps us as ministers—to effectively deal with the issue. If anything, we are

told how to deal with the guilty in terms of discipline.

Honestly, it is time for the church to both acknowledge the need for ministry to the divorced among us and equip its ministers to deal with the situation. If the church does not deal with this problem, then to where will the divorced among us turn?

Although Edmondson correctly points out that this may lead to loss of members, it is important to note that in some parts of Africa, this may simply increase the numbers of nominal members. It is therefore important for the church to come up with resources for ministry, developing material to assist the divorced through times of transition—and beyond.

—Boitirelo Kabo, executive secretary, Botswana Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, Gaborone. Botswana. ■

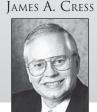
Practical Prophecy

long with several itinerating colleagues, I teach a Bible class at our local congregation. Teaching schedules are determined by which dates we can attend our home church. Imagine my concern when I was scheduled to teach the lesson on Daniel 2, a prophecy that I have preached many times, but also one that most of my class attendees would have often presented.

Searching for a fresh approach, I determined to present a verse-by-verse exegetical presentation of practical lessons that arise from the prophecy. Next time you are called upon to plow familiar furrows, try a fresh approach of asking what God says in the story behind the prophecy.

(Daniel 2:1) Pay attention to what keeps you awake. God may be trying to get a message through. He may use insomnia to arrest your mind.

- **(2) Desperate people will try anything.** The magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers all proved to be charlatans.
- (5) People will turn against those who deceive them. Never underestimate the wrath of those who have been deceived.
- (12, 13) Good people get caught in the turmoil of the wicked. All will suffer the consequences of rebels.
- **(17, 18) Small groups have great power.** When Daniel and his friends prayed, heaven moved!
- **(19, 20) God cares for His people.** God does not act without revealing His secrets to His servants, the prophets.
- (21–23) God remains in control. He sets up and takes down kings. His throne remains the constant of history. Never doubt His power to work in your own circumstances.
- (24) Righteous believers spare the wicked. Just as God was willing



to spare Sodom if a few righteous were found there, the lives of Babylonian soothsayers were spared because of Daniel and his friends.

- **(25) Some nonbelievers make correct judgment calls.** Arioch acted quickly to resolve the death decree.
- **(26) Don't be intimidated by the skeptics.** Nebuchadnezzar could hardly believe that a novice would provide answers that "wise men" had missed. He discovered that wise answers, indeed, can come from unexpected sources.
- **(28–30) Don't take credit for someone else's wisdom.** Daniel was quick to credit the God of heaven as the source of all truth.
- (31–35) Plainly proclaiming facts brings conviction to your listeners. The king was so amazed by the truth that he never doubted the application.
- **(37, 38) Always begin with the good news.** What despotic king could resist the appeal of "Thou art this head of gold" (KJV)?
- (37, 38) But keep everything in perspective. "For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory" (NKJV).
- **(39) Watch your backside.** Your downfall could come at the hands of a weaker force. Heaven sometimes uses inferiors to bring judgment.
- (39) History demonstrates the reality of devolution. Humanity grows worse, not better. Just as silver is inferior to gold, brass to silver, and iron to brass, the natural order of a sinful

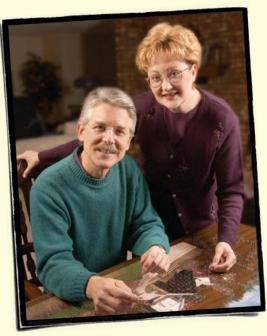
world is progressive degeneration, not evolutionary progress.

- **(40–42) Historicism is proven by history.** The historicist approach to understanding Bible prophecy has been validated by the flow of human history. God's Word can be trusted with the few prophecies yet unfilled.
- **(43) Iron and clay don't mix.** The strength of iron is compromised by the fragility of ceramic pottery. Human efforts to forge strength from weak ingredients always fail.
- (44) Kingdom-building belongs to God. Nebuchadnezzar as well as succeeding empires discovered that God has been setting up His kingdom—first His kingdom of grace; ultimately His kingdom of glory—"in the days of these kings."
- **(45)** We live in history's latter days. Great prophetic way marks have moved "past the kingdoms four, down to the feet—part of iron, part of clay, soon to pass away" (song written by Franklin Belden, 1886).
- (45) The dream is certain; the interpretation is sure. Without help from human hands, God will set up His kingdom. His kingdom of glory is next! God's judgment, God's fiat creation, and God's permanence will stand. The conclusion is as certain and as sure as the original dream.
- **(46) Truth tellers are exalted.** In a world engrossed with counterfeits and overwhelmed by falsehood, those who testify to truth will be rewarded.
- (47ff) End with the good news. Prophetic messages lead to conversions. Understanding God's truth develops trust in His promises. Preach that the God who moves through history is still on His throne. With His plan, His promise, His providences secure, His return is as certain as the dawn!



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