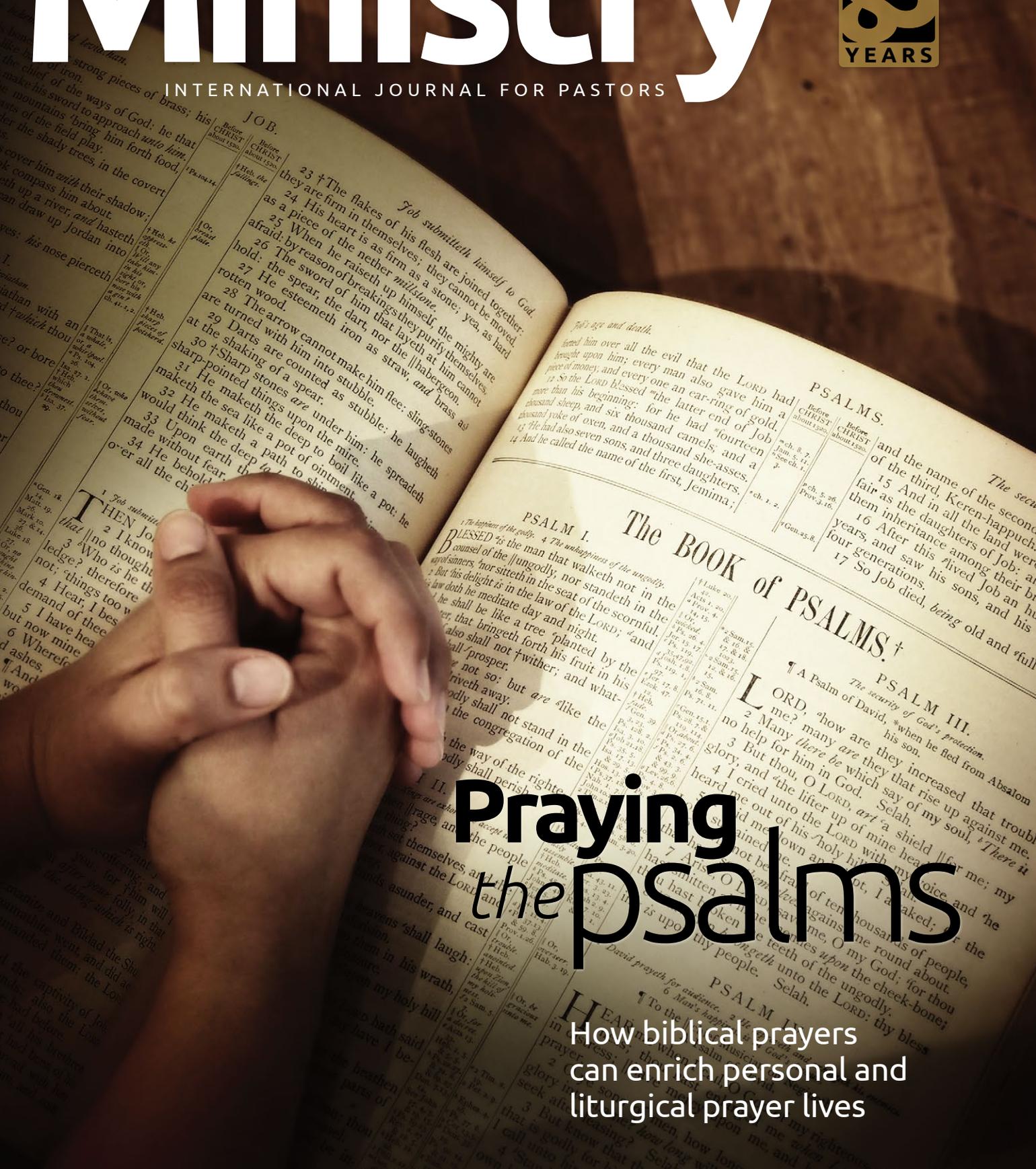


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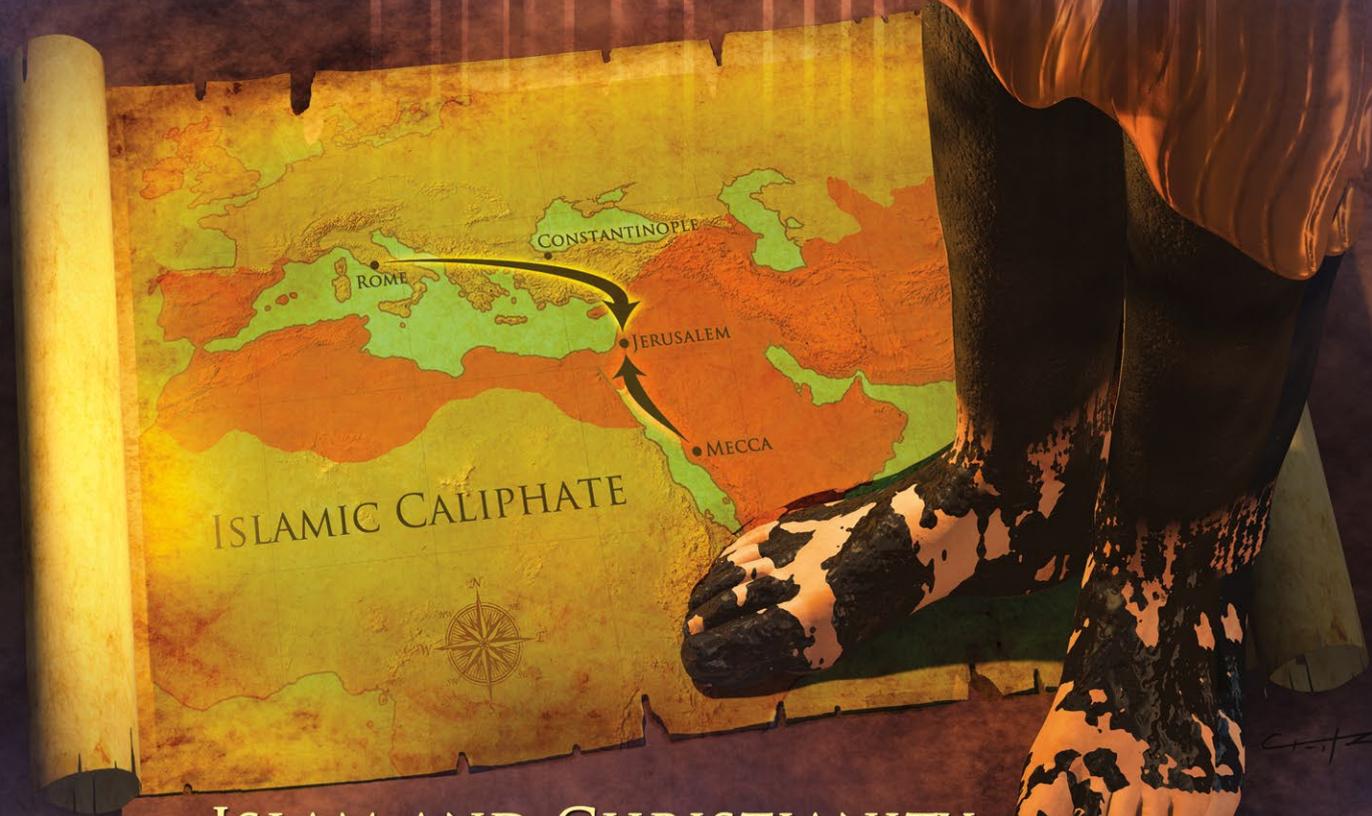
## Praying the psalms

How biblical prayers can enrich personal and liturgical prayer lives

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*“As of late, I’ve been going through my stack of Ministry magazines that have accumulated, and I have found a treasure trove of material that has stimulated my present and future preaching.”*

### Another gospel?

Marguerite Shuster had a very good article, “Another Gospel? (Galatians 1:1–10)” (September 2013), with all the objections people then and now had against the true gospel, and why we should hold on to it, seeing that Paul would anathematize even an angel from heaven with a false gospel. It would have been nice to have greater clarity on the resurrection of Christ, but this is an exposition on Galatians (which, as Shuster notes, mentions that only once, in contrast to Romans and 1 Corinthians).

One interesting point under “There Has to Be a Better Way” shows the weakness of human efforts. One important topic in connection with Galatians 1 would be its implications for the doctrine of the church. During the Reformation, the Lutheran Confessions used that text to counter the claims of the papal office being descended from Saint Peter, saying that historical credentials meant nothing if the gospel was not being preached.

—Ron Thomsen, Katy, Texas, United States

### More about Junia

In her article “Junia the Apostle” (July 2013), Nancy Vyhmeister presented detailed biblical and extra-biblical information about Junia. It was a careful and skillful work of an expert. However, I would suggest additional elements to be considered on the topic.

I would not discuss so much about whether the gender of Junia is masculine or feminine. I would rather do a historical-contextual study about the ministry of the apostles. It seems to me, based on my quick observation, the apostles (Paul, Peter, Jude, John) wrote epistles only to the places and churches where there is no apostle taking care of the church in that area. To fill the absence of an apostle in a city or region or church, there are two things the apostles would do: either visit the place or write a letter.

In the case of Romans, when Paul was writing the epistle, he must have been aware that there was no apostle taking care of the church in Rome. For that reason, he wrote to the Christians there. Andronicus and Junia were there.

If they were apostles, then Paul should have just entrusted the care for the church to these apostles. He did not need to write a letter to them.

Moreover, Paul does not want to boast over the work done by other apostles nor territories where other others have entered (2 Cor. 10:15, 16).

I would study the way Paul greets the long list of names in Romans 16:3–15. As much as possible, he always said something about those names, indicating his personal contact or acquaintance with them. About Junia, Paul says that Junia was his fellow prisoner. As far as the New Testament references are concerned, all of Paul’s fellow prisoners are males (Col. 4:10; Philem. 23). Paul was put in prison many times (2 Cor. 11:23); but only one of them was described in detail, namely, the Philippian imprisonment, where his fellow prisoner is Silas. If Junia is a woman, we need to study if the prisons during Paul’s time put men and women together. If not, the meaning of fellow prisoner could be that Junia and Andronicus served Paul during one of his imprisonments.

Before deciding whether Junia was a female apostle or not, one question should be asked first: Is Andronicus an apostle himself? Another paper should be done to answer this question.

—Richard Sabuin, Silang, Cavite, Philippines

### Helping or hurting the health message?

I appreciate Fred Hardinge’s article “Should We Love People More Than the Health Message?” (March 2013). Sometimes, in our attempt to live [the health message], we hurt others, or even ourselves, when we mingle with people who are not enlightened with this message.

Continued on page 26



## Going digital

We are excited to announce the launching of an electronic version of *Ministry* on January 1, 2014. If you have a subscription to the journal, you can request a complimentary digital version in addition to your printed copy.

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Why, you might ask, are we offering a digital version? The answer is simple. It's time. Delivery systems are changing. Look around the next time you walk through the lobby of a hotel or the hallways of a convention center. People are reading their smartphones or handheld tablets. We still like our hard copy of the journal, but we can't carry all of our paper journals with us.

In the past 24 months, we have also noticed an exponential increase in traffic on our Web site. We have increased from approximately 4,000 unique visitors per month to more than 50,000. Visitors are accessing our Web site using their laptops, iPads, and smartphones. Most of our visitors are reading our archived materials in English, but a growing percentage is utilizing our Google Translate option to read a working translation in the readers' first languages. You can access all of our resources at no cost at [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org).

In the midst of all of these changes, we are still deeply committed to our threefold purpose as a professional

journal for clergy of all faiths: (1) to deepen the spiritual life of the pastor, (2) develop intellectual strength through a careful study of the Scriptures and relevant professional issues, and (3) provide practical instruction in pastoral and evangelistic ministry.

Our lead article in this month's issue focuses on deepening the spiritual life—specifically the spiritual blessings

networks to help others hear the good news about Jesus? We welcome your feedback and input on how to use social media more effectively at [feedback@ministrymagazine.org](mailto:feedback@ministrymagazine.org).

Larry Lichtenwalter recently left a pastoral position in the United States to accept a teaching position at a Christian college in Lebanon. Currently serving on the front line of intercultural ministry,

*We still like our hard copy of the journal, but we can't carry all of our paper journals with us.*

that come as we pray the psalms. You can join me, and thousands of other Christians, as we read through them at [www.revivedbyhisword.org](http://www.revivedbyhisword.org). Many of those psalms are prayers, inspired and preserved by the Holy Spirit. The psalmist David testified, "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2, NKJV). Dragoslava Santrac challenges us to reexamine these ancient prayers as a valuable resource for our lives and ministry. Praying the psalms, according to Santrac, articulates, supervises, transforms, and broadens the experience.

In our changing communications landscape, Marty Thurber challenges us with a practical article on social media and the pastor. He reminds us that there are many voices out there, and one of them can be yours. Thurber addresses a vitally important question for each one of us as Christian leaders: How can you use social media

he boldly asserts, "The eternal message of Scripture to the world is unequivocally the translatable gospel."

You'll also find excellent articles in this month's issue by Kayle de Waal on "The *Katartismos* Pastor," David Ripley on "Size by Design: The Elusive Growth of the Local Church," and Roy Gane on "Legal Substitution and Experiential Transformation in the Typology of Leviticus."

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**Dragoslava Santrac, PhD**, is associate professor of biblical languages and Old Testament, University of the Southern Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies.



# Praying the psalms:

## *How biblical prayers can enrich personal and liturgical prayer lives*

Recently, I was in a faculty meeting discussing the meaning of prayer in contemporary liturgy. It did not take long before complaints were expressed about the length and, particularly, the language of liturgical prayers. The prevailing impression was that public prayers tended to be too long and saturated with superficiality. One person objected that some people were inclined to preach, teach, and even supply information to God when praying. This made me think. Although this article is not based on research on how people pray or how they view public prayers, I want to share some thoughts on how we could better our prayers and find new ways that will enrich both our liturgical and personal prayer lives.

### Unjustly dismissed borrowed oil

Rolf Jacobson shares an interesting anecdote from his friend's life. An evangelist was visiting her home, and as they were sitting down for dinner, her father began the meal with a prayer that consisted of reciting Psalm 145:15, 16: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing."<sup>1</sup> As

he was in the midst of his prayer, the evangelist interrupted him: "We thank you God that we do not have to burn our lamps with borrowed oil." Jacobson rightly remarks that with this pejorative critique, the evangelist dismissed the irreplaceable value of prayer uses of psalms.<sup>2</sup>

A belief that only spontaneous, unlearned prayer is real prayer appears to be prevalent among many Christians. God placed a prayer book, Psalms, at the heart of the Bible not simply to inform us about how people of ancient times prayed but to teach us to pray today. With all due respect to spontaneous prayer, I am arguing here that our conventional, routine prayer lives can be offered new dimensions and power when the spiritual oil of the psalms is poured into our lamps.

Here are some ways of how praying the psalms can transform our individual and communal prayers.

### Praying the psalms articulates our experience

Careful use of Psalms in liturgy can exalt God's power and splendor. The psalms can praise God for His marvelous deeds and salvation. While thanksgiving psalms can be heard from pulpits quite often (e.g., Pss.

8; 23; 147–150), other psalms, with complaints and laments, seem to be inappropriate for many liturgies. For example, the words of Psalm 137:8, 9 just do not seem right to most of us, "O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us—he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks." Many would argue that Psalm 44 does not fit a worship service: "Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness" (vv. 18, 19). Thus, the selectiveness of Psalms in liturgy reflects the exclusiveness of moods and words that we express in our communal prayers.

Sometimes contemporary worship services featuring the popular genre of praise music attempt to create "a sense of 'false happiness' as the main purpose and normal state of the Christian Church and of individual Christian lives."<sup>3</sup> This could cause us to miss the point of worship. Such restrictiveness may be a sign of our inability or uneasiness to engage the dark realities of life and worship. Walter Brueggemann rightly observes that "surface use of the Psalms coincides with the denial of the discontinuities in our own experience."<sup>4</sup>

This is true not only of the selective use of Psalms but also of prayer. Though we may sometimes feel that God treats us unfairly when suffering hits us, we do not find it appropriate to express our thoughts in liturgy or even in private prayer. The failure to express honestly and openly our feelings and views before God in prayer often leaves us in bondage to our own emotions and sin. This also denies us confidence and trust in approaching God. Praying the psalms gives “an assurance to us that when we pray and worship, we are not expected to censure or deny the deepness of

make it bearable, manageable, and, hopefully, meaningful in the community. The psalms make the experience “formful just when it appeared to be formless and therefore deathly and destructive.”<sup>6</sup>

Praying the psalms will sometimes reveal a dissonance that may exist between the emotions of the psalms and the emotions of the worshiper. Imagine a worshiper who learns that he is dying of cancer. The lamenting words of Psalm 22:1 will help him express his grief and sense of loneliness: “My God, my God, why have you

When my husband and I lost our first child due to some complications at delivery, I was left without any spiritual oil in my reservoir. As I was lying alone in my room that Friday evening, I reached for my Bible to begin the Sabbath. I could not pray; I had no words to say. The Bible opened at the place where the marker was placed the day before. This was Isaiah 49, that is, the song of Restoration of Zion. I began reading mechanically. It seemed as if each word of the song was meant to pierce my heart: “Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth;



**Praying the psalms** *makes the believing community aware of the full range of human experience and teaches the worshipers to engage the various facets of that experience and worship.*

our own human pilgrimage.”<sup>5</sup> Psalm 44, for example, can help worshipers articulate their experiences of innocent suffering freely and adequately. Praying the psalms also helps us experience the freedom of speech in prayer. The psalms give us words that we cannot find or do not dare to speak.

### **Praying the psalms supervises our experience**

Praying the psalms does more than enable worshipers to articulate freely their experience. Walter Brueggemann and Patrick Miller suggest that the psalms supervise the experience according to God’s standards that

forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?” However, he will also read in the same psalm: “I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you” (v. 22). These words may not coincide with his present experience, and they may even drive him to despair. Rolf Jacobson argues that pastors and theologians must learn to make fruitful use of this dissonance and help the worshiper resolve the spiritual discomfort by letting the psalms introduce new cognitions and attitudes into him.<sup>7</sup> By giving us words to pray, the psalms teach us that we pray first and later feel what we pray.<sup>8</sup>

burst into song, O mountains!” (v. 13a). But when I read verse 14, I felt that my lost words came back to me, and I read over and over again: “But Zion said, ‘The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.’” These words became *my* words for they expressed everything that was in my heart. These were the only words spoken by Zion in the song. The Lord continues the song by answering Zion: “ ‘Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!’ ” (v. 15). I felt that God was talking to me. I was still sad and desperate, but not forsaken and forgotten anymore.

One of my students copied Psalm 42 on a beautifully decorated scroll and sent it to me in the hospital. “My tears have been my food day and night. . . . Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (vv. 3, 5, 6). These words filled me with hope—that tears would be exchanged for praise one day in the future. Isaiah 49 and Psalm 42 became my prayers at the time when I had no words of my own. Over the days and weeks, I began to feel and mean the praise and hope expressed in these two songs. I still pray them when I wish to express special thanks to God.

Praying the psalms supervises the experience by taking the worshipers to new spiritual horizons. The psalms let the worshipers express their feelings and understanding, but the worshipers are not left where they presently are. Worshipers are led to abandon their burdens of pain, disappointment,

hatred, anger, and despair before God and adopt new understanding and eventually healing. In the same way, praying the psalms provides a joyful, grateful heart with inspired ways to experience new dimensions of praise and thanksgiving.

### Praying the psalms transforms our experience

Tremper Longman says that when “we read the Psalms with faith, we come away changed and not simply informed.”<sup>9</sup> The language of the psalms is creative. Praying the psalms does not always pronounce what is, but rather “evokes into being what does not exist until it has been spoken.”<sup>10</sup>

The psalms are not simply ancient human words that help believers express their inner feelings before God. The psalms are the Word of God by which a believer is transformed into, for example, a person with a

broken and contrite heart as described in Psalm 51. The constitutive power of the psalms in relation to piety is demonstrated in the ability of a psalm to enable the believer through the Holy Spirit to act in the way demanded by the psalm. “In other words, the praying of the psalm is an event by which God’s grace is made manifest in the lives of believers.”<sup>11</sup>

However, a mere repetition of the words of the psalms with only a slight comprehension of their meaning may not produce the authentic transformation intended by their use. Praying the psalms does not mean to serve as a kind of use of amulets with quotations from the Hebrew Psalter that are believed to have some kind of magical curing power.<sup>12</sup> James Mays observes that the words of the psalms may become empty and perverted if they are spoken without an understanding of the distinctive faith of the psalms. “We must by means of the psalms enter and live in that particular world

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if praise and prayer with their words are to be authentic.”<sup>13</sup>

## Praying the psalms broadens our experience

Sometimes there may be a total disjunction between the words of a psalm and the worshiper’s present experience. Imagine a happy newly wedded couple praying Psalm 88: “May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave” (vv. 2, 3). However, Jacobson shares two reasons why praying a lament psalm is beneficial to the worshipers who are not in distress. First, it prepares them for a time of trouble that may come in the future. Contrary to the popular gospel of prosperity, the psalms make worshipers aware that suffering is part of general human experience and happens to the righteous, not just to the wicked. The psalms give the assurance that God is

in control and provides strength and solution in times of trouble. Second, praying the lament psalms teaches the worshipers compassion towards the sufferers. We must be mindful of the less fortunate when expressing our happiness and gratitude to God. In the same way, introducing a psalm of praise to sufferers can transform their suffering by creating hope.<sup>14</sup>

Praying the psalms makes the believing community aware of the full range of human experience and teaches the worshipers to engage the various facets of that experience and worship. The responsibility of a pastor or priest includes leading in that process and keeping the lamps of the congregation burning constantly with good oil. The psalms are abundant with precious spiritual oil. The psalms are divine-human prayers. For that reason, praying the psalms brings the believing community to the center of God’s powerful healing grace

while empowering the worshipers to share the deepest impressions of their hearts. 

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the NIV.
- 2 Rolf Jacobson, “Burning Our Lamps With Borrowed Oil,” in *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed. Stephen Breck Reid (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 90.
- 3 Beth LaNeel Tanner, “How Long, O Lord! Will Your People Suffer in Silence Forever?” in *ibid.*, 144.
- 4 Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 8.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 6 Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995), 86.
- 7 Jacobson, “Burning Our Lamps,” 92, 93.
- 8 Ari L. Goldman, *Being Jewish: The Spiritual and Cultural Practice of Judaism Today* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 209.
- 9 Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 13.
- 10 Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms*, 18.
- 11 Harry P. Nasuti, “The Sacramental Function of the Psalms in Contemporary Scholarship and Liturgical Practice,” in *Psalms and Practice: Worship, Virtue, and Authority*, ed. Stephen Breck Reid (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 83.
- 12 Eli Davis, “The Psalms in Hebrew Medical Amulets,” *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 2 (1992): 174.
- 13 James Luther Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 6.
- 14 Jacobson, “Burning Our Lamps,” 94–97.

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## Reviving Laodicea

“The church is stagnant. Its lethargy is driven by complacent self-satisfaction founded on shadows of the past and vain hopes that what it has is good enough. Blind to its condition, it is repugnant and repulsive. So much so that God wants to turn away in disgust.”\*

You just read a simple paraphrase of God’s description of the church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14–17). Typically, we apply this to our church and focus on our problems. We look at the counsel in the next few verses and talk about what we must do to revive this struggling church. Often we think we should solve our own problems. But what if the solution is much

simpler? What if we find the answer in a Person?

Jesus still speaks to His struggling church with an incredible invitation, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock” (v. 20). He promises that as we respond He will grant us the intimacy described as “eating together”—one of the most intimate experiences in John’s culture. Then Jesus continues with the promise of sharing His throne with those who overcome (v. 21). Paul tells us that God has already lifted us to His throne and thus has given us the victory in Jesus (Eph. 2:5, 6).

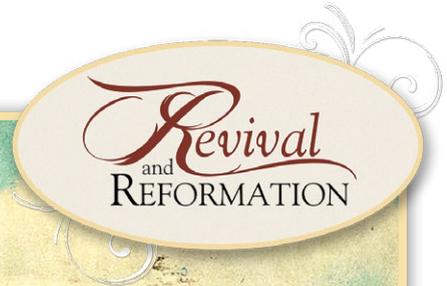
Could the revival we long for come with our response to the

invitation of Jesus? After all, John tells us that when we have Jesus the Son, we have life (1 John 5:11–13).

I find only one way to revival—saying Yes to Jesus, allowing Him into every single area of our lives and church. Everything else comes with Jesus.

—BEN MAXSON, DMIN, IS LEAD PASTOR OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN PARADISE, CALIFORNIA.

\* Author’s paraphrase.



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# The gospel's worldwide ethos: Culture, identity, and heart implications of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit's outpouring—Part 1

Various New Testament passages assume the gospel's translatability: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14; cf. Mark 13:10); "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19; cf. Mark 16:15); "repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations" (Luke 24:47); "you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8); "I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people" (Rev. 14:6).<sup>1</sup>

Each text nuances, in one way or another, the gospel's reach to the entire human family. Acts stretches the gospel's horizon from Jerusalem to "the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Revelation's "eternal gospel" engages nations, people groups within nations, unique languages, and dissimilar tribes, accentuating both the possibilities and challenges of gospel translation. Revelation further

envisions social status and roles within human social order: the rich and poor, the slave and free, the small and great, the kings, noblemen, commanders, and the strong (Rev. 6:15; 11:18; 13:16; 19:5, 18; cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). Thus, the global, regional, local, varied roles and standings within society as well as the individual person are alike in view. All peoples are to hear the eternal gospel. Every culture and worldview and person is imagined and involved.<sup>2</sup>

Together these passages point to the holistic nature, cosmic dimension, and universal application of the gospel. Not merely the transference of knowledge or the change of behavior is in view here but also worldview transformation, which results in personal redemption, conversion, and discipleship in relation to our risen Lord. "Christ commissioned His disciples to proclaim a faith and worship that would have in it nothing of caste or country, a faith that would be adapted to all peoples, all nations, all classes of men."<sup>3</sup>

## The book of Acts

No New Testament book reveals this translatability better than does the book of Acts. There we encounter the

story of "the church's earliest efforts [we might better say the Holy Spirit's efforts and mentorship] to tailor its witness to particular cultural settings and groups of people."<sup>4</sup> The narrative of Acts lends profound insight into both the gospel's character and nature in relation to our resurrected Christ and the Holy Spirit's empowering presence. Here we find a pattern of contextualizing<sup>5</sup> the gospel—real-life examples of the church's Spirit-empowered gospel witness<sup>6</sup> to various groups of people and cultures.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus commissioned His apostles to go "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NKJV), and they did just that. The gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to Rome itself. The gospel touched and transformed a variety of cultures and lives: an Ethiopian eunuch on his way to Gaza, a Roman prison officer despairing of life, a businesswoman in Philippi, governors Felix and Festus, and King Agrippa. The gospel reached into the great cities of Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Thessalonica, rippling through Asia Minor, finally reaching Rome. But Rome was not the end of the earth (as per Acts 1:8); rather, it was civilization's center. Here now, there is a sense of incompleteness about

Acts. Luke has finished his story, but the story of the translatable gospel has not finished. “There is an unwritten ‘*To be continued*’ in the progress of the Gospel.”<sup>8</sup>

The last sentence of Acts stretches the imagination and horizon of the gospel’s reach, potential, and power, and contains the words *openness* and *unhindered* (Acts 28:31).<sup>9</sup> Paul is under house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier. Given his circumstances, he is hindered. And yet Scripture leaves us with a very positive picture of the gospel. Paul is hindered, but the gospel is not.<sup>10</sup> The gospel will continue to be spread and change lives no matter what. It is the translatable gospel—eternal, pervasive, aggressive, life-changing.

Pentecost is an epochal moment in history.<sup>11</sup> It is followed by “three crucial decades in world history” (A.D. 33–64), during which the gospel “got sufficient growth and credibility to become the largest religion the world has ever seen and to change the lives of hundreds of millions of people.”<sup>12</sup> That is all it took, 31 years for the gospel to turn “ ‘the world upside down’ ” (Acts 17:6, ESV). During these decades, hundreds of churches were formed through preaching, pastoral care, social concern, prayer, and the Holy Spirit’s anointing. We can learn much from the sacrifices, lifestyles, proclamations, and attitudes of the early church’s gospel workers. We cannot help but ask ourselves: What are the implications for today, given all the differences brought about by culture and time? What made the difference? Was it what these early gospel workers did and how they did it? Or was it something about the gospel itself together with the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit?

## Pentecost

In exploring answers for these questions, let us begin with Pentecost.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them

and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:1–12, ESV).

Notice the narrative detail Luke provides: people were present from “every nation under heaven” (v. 5, ESV), “each one was hearing them speak in his own language” (v. 6, ESV). The Greek words employed display the different languages that the disciples were empowered to speak (vv. 4, 8).

## Worldwide ethos

The questions that this phenomenon produced echo across the centuries: “And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ ” (v. 12, ESV). Peter’s answer was Christological and compelling, filled with a host of nuances; but we will attempt to answer this question in the context of the gospel’s translatability. Translatable is the gospel’s character and nature, manner and activity, purpose and summons. The gospel has a worldwide ethos at its very heart as it engages every language and culture in a global expansion.<sup>13</sup> This worldwide ethos means that,

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no matter the culture or context, there is to be an indigenous reception and usage of the gospel. Translatability assumes that the implications of the gospel can be explored in different directions. No single person, language, or culture is capable of experiencing all the riches implicit in the gospel.

Also, the Christian Scripture's relation to culture differs from that of other world religions.<sup>14</sup> For example, "Buddhism conceives an ultimate reality which transcends human words, culture is of transitory value. For Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism, the founding culture becomes itself the sacred mode of encountering ultimate reality. Consequently, Arabic, Hebrew, and Sanskrit have become inseparable from the [spiritual and moral] truth as seen by adherents of these religions. . . . [T]ranslating scriptures for canonical purposes in these religions is considered invalid, for the tones and sounds [and the richness of the meanings of words] cannot be reproduced in other languages."<sup>15</sup>

In particular, "[t]he position of Islam, as a missionary religion, on nontranslatability provides an illuminating contrast to Christianity" and the book of Acts.<sup>16</sup> Of the three world religions, "only Islam has emerged as a major missionary movement, with converts spread across innumerable cultural frontiers."<sup>17</sup> But "the missionary success of Islam has never been fueled, or followed, by the translation of the sacred Qur'an. . . . [T]his implies a major downgrading of the mother tongues of these Muslims in the decisive acts of faith and devotion. For these non-Arab Muslims, Arabic is also the exclusive mode of religious orthodoxy."<sup>18</sup> "All Muslims must step into Arabic when they daily enter the mosque to perform the obligatory rites," or join the annual *hajj*.<sup>19</sup> "From its uncompromising Arabic pre-eminence, Islam confers on mother tongues the pejorative status of 'profane.'"<sup>20</sup> For Islam, other cultures and languages are not legitimate vehicles for revelation. They may be of temporary "tactical advantage . . . [but] ultimately irrelevant to faith."<sup>21</sup>

## Mother tongues

Not so with the translatable gospel!<sup>22</sup> Pentecost "set a seal on mother tongues as sufficient channels of access to God."<sup>23</sup> In doing so, the gospel exhibited the truth that "no culture is inherently unclean in the eyes of God."<sup>24</sup> And so, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, including visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans, and Arabians—all were to receive the gospel in their own tongue. "In the jumble and tumble of social encounter, Christians spoke a bewildering variety of languages," and from the point of view of God's plan of salvation, all cultures, while equally inadequate, were nevertheless accessible to the gospel and could authentically express the gospel in its own unique way.<sup>25</sup>

Translatability assumes that the implications of the gospel can be explored in different directions. No single person or culture is capable of embracing all the riches implicit in the gospel. "[D]ifferent cultures ask different questions and view reality in different ways," so that God's truth will be expressed somewhat differently from one culture to another.<sup>26</sup> We know that language and the culture it reflects are "a complex system of values, assumptions and habits of mind that reveal themselves in the words we use and leave unsaid."<sup>27</sup> In fact, much is left unsaid, and yet values or meaning are assumed. Pentecost and the book of Acts project a cultural (and linguistic) maturity and open-mindedness on a staggering scale. The eternal message of Scripture to the world is unequivocally the translatable gospel. 📖

(Part 2 will appear in the January 2014 issue)

1 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NASB.  
2 See Larry L. Lichtenwalter, "Worldview Transformation and Mission: Narrative, Theology, and Ritual in John's Apocalypse," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21, nos. 1–2 (2010): 214–217.  
3 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 820.  
4 Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns*

for *Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 16.

- 5 *Contextualization* has proven to be a slippery word—often more nuanced by linguistics, anthropology, cross-cultural communication studies, or contextualized theology than Scripture. And yet we all know that at bottom it has to do with "how the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious and historical setting" (*ibid.*, 13, 14). Our task here is to see through the book of Acts how Scripture itself can offer us a more adequate approach to the challenge of gospel translation. However, one must remember that our modern notion of cultures and contextualizing the gospel for various cultures was a notion unknown in the early church and should not be imposed on the book of Acts. The message of Acts is not about a strategy of cultural contextualization, nor is it about cultural sensitivity; rather, it is about the translatable gospel. It is calling one to both experience it and become its witness.
- 6 See Michael Green, *Thirty Years That Changed the World: The Book of Acts for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).
- 7 Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 25–88. See M. Dumas, "The Church of the Acts of the Apostles: A Model of Inculturation?" in *Inculturation: Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures*, ed. A. A. R. Crollius (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1987), 10:3–24; David K. Strong, "The Jerusalem Council: Some Implications for Contextualization: Acts 15:1–35," in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context* eds. R. I. Gallagher and P. Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 196–208.
- 8 Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011), 739.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 739.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 12 Green, *Thirty Years*, 7.
- 13 See Lamin Sanneh, "Pluralism and Christian Commitment," *Theology Today* 45, no. 1 (1988): 23.
- 14 I am indebted to Lamin Sanneh for some ideas expressed in this section in connection with the translatable gospel but do not share his presuppositions or notions of pluralism in the context of Christian commitment (*ibid.*).
- 15 Sanneh, "Pluralism and Christian Commitment," 23.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 *Ibid.* I remember an exchange with an imam regarding Arabic preeminence in reading the Koran. Somehow contextual understanding and implications of a text read in English were overridden by supposed nuances and deep meanings of Arabic words. In the dialogue, he was shocked to realize that his own choice of possible meanings of a given Arabic word was itself a translation. Similarly, rabbinic readings of the Hebrew text create multiple possibilities of meaning that, in the end, yield no meaning unless context is included. See also Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 27–31.
- 21 Sanneh, "Pluralism and Christian Commitment," 23.
- 22 Early Muslim scholars were "aware of this difference, and in consistency with their position judged [translatability] a major defect of 'falsification'" in Christianity (*ibid.*, 23, 24).
- 23 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 26 Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 47. See the chapter titled "The Missiological Implications of an Epistemological Shift."
- 27 E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 71.

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# Social media *and the* pastor

**T**he social media landscape has varied shades. How do you find your voice and what does it sound like? What does social media do to your ministry and church?

Both *voice* and *vocation* are rooted in the Latin word *vocare*, “to call, or invoke.” Our voices are the things that are called out of us in the midst of our work. They are the underlying *whys* of our passions.

By looking at what you are fervent about, you will find your voice. It is there in your passions, actions, and conversations. Great leaders are well aware of their voices and how to project them. Pastors learn how to use their words and voices well and seek listeners for their voices wherever they can. Social media offers a studio for your voice, producing and calling forth your creative efforts and enlarging your audience. Which pastors do not want to reach more people with their passion for Christ and His Word?

Social media amplifies your voice with new and often surprising audiences. How do you find your voice in social media? What network should you be a part of—Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and so on? Why should you take the time and effort to use these forms of media?

The potential of social media is the opportunity to have your voice reach out and touch people farther away than you thought possible. People near or far will have a chance to hear you. The possibilities for expanding the range of your voice through social media are worth exploring for that reason alone.

A caution is in order: social media is no substitute for personal ministry in your local parish. How do you keep social media from diminishing your local ministry? Will you have to find a balance between social media ministry and personal ministry, or can the two ministries become united and work well together? Can it actually enhance your local ministry, making you more effective as a shepherd to those in your immediate care? The answer is Yes, it can. Let us talk about how that can happen.

## Social media ministry

When the telephone first came on the scene, people did not know what to say when it rang or how to answer it. They would pick it up and wait for someone to talk. The shift from hearing someone that was very near to you to someone who could be many miles away was something of a miracle. It put you in touch as it were. The telephone became a tool of encouragement and collaboration, among others things. Yet, it still lacks some of the close personal connection that being in the same room offers. I remember a friend of mine buying an 800 phone number just so his daughter could call home for free from college. He was so grateful for the 800 number and the access it provided for his family, but it did not replace his daughter’s presence at home.

Social media today can share a voice and visual and is convenient. It is inviting, useful, and creative in our relationships, having the power to enhance our existing relationships and the encouragement to create new

friends and new collaborators. In fact, it excels in this.

Radio and television became our primary delivery systems for all kinds of information, much of which was arguably useless or momentary. Then computers set the stage for the Internet. Today, the Internet has created a portal into the lives of those we collaborate with and is just beginning to show its collective potential.

However, it is impersonal and distant. But the tool and gadget lovers of today often ignore that argument and plow right into using their smartphones and laptops in order to talk, laugh, illustrate, choreograph, and just simply live their lives. The Internet and, more specifically, social media are not one-dimensional voices over the airwaves. They truly are tools that aid in reaching out and touching others, hopefully for the better.

As the Internet and social media continue to blend with our lives, we need to figure out how to make the most of the journey as shepherds, for ourselves and our flock.

## The rules of engagement

*Connect.* Look for ways to connect with people, open new doors, share a message, and influence a group. Build people and institutions through your posts. On Facebook, this is done by finding people who will follow you. Twitter is a little different. You can follow anyone on Twitter, but they do not need to accept you as a friend. This makes Facebook more personal. You know more of your friends there face-to-face. That is why Facebook is more

valuable at first for making connections. Whatever social media site you use, post positively and intentionally to improve and encourage others.

Remember the friendship between Jonathan and David? Their souls were knit together. Knitting yourself to others is the main value in social media. Your purpose is to build and strengthen kingdom relationships. Remember that, and you will prove to be a wise voice to your friends and readers.

*Maintain confidence.* Social media is revealing, sometimes shockingly so. We see people in new ways. You know when they are going to the hospital. You know when they are feeling blue, and when they are feeling great. Not everyone is on social media and not everyone who is on social media is so revealing, but many are. Sometimes they talk about a bar they go to and you are shocked, or they curse out a police officer for giving them a ticket. Sometimes you wonder if they are really members of your church.

After you calm down a bit, you begin to see another side to your members. It might not be pretty, but it is a chance to minister to them. Do not run over to their houses and tell them what you saw on Facebook, and do not use social media to judge them or correct them in public. The fact that they allowed you to be their online friend brings a certain judgment factor to the relationship. They know you are watching. How will you respond to what you see? A loving and patient response is needed, if a response is needed at all.

Remember that many folks are more transparent online than they are in person, so do not judge them or you will quickly lose your right to minister to them. Promote good living, Christlike living, and the message will get through eventually. Jesus is the way.

*Do not be critical.* Avoid complaining, grousing, sarcasm, hidden innuendo, critiquing, and other messages that could be misinterpreted as judgmental and critical. This is huge, and it is not natural. Many have found the Internet to be a place to air out their complaints and show how they really feel. Again, do not do it. It will harden your voice,

branding you as critical, and you may never recover from that.

There are places for critiquing and challenging conversations, but your social media output is not the place. If you are a full-time blogger for a magazine or a world-class prophet, maybe you can and should be known as a voice calling others out of the wilderness. But chances are, you are not. You are leading people through the wilderness. Act like it in your social media usage, and you will have a much better influence in your flock and beyond.

## *A caution is in order: social media is no substitute for personal ministry in your local parish.*

*Social media is not self-help media.* It is not there to fix people. People do not want to be fixed; they want to be discovered. Social media tempts you to correct others because others are so quick to share their opinions. It is far better to let people keep their opinions, even if they fly in the face of public opinion or scriptural guidance, than it is to correct them every time they come up with an unreasonable idea.

*Avoid politics, but share your faith.* Both can be controversial subjects, but only one is the responsibility of the pastor. You are certainly welcome to have an interest in politics, even to be engaged with the politics of your local community. But even a few political posts will overshadow your pastoral posts on faith. Allowing yourself to be thought of as a political leader will also cut you off from a certain online audience. In fact, having friends who post a lot of political material can cause you to be branded in the same way. You might want to turn off some of their posts if that is the case. You do not have to drop them as friends, but you can prevent their posts from showing up on your Facebook time line. Avoid political posting, and post like

a pastor who loves people of all political persuasions.

Point others in the direction of helpful material; talk less about yourself and more about Jesus. Do not gush over Jesus; let Scripture speak for itself. Offer a good quote from Scripture or something you are reading.

*Learn to take criticism without giving it back.* In fact, be prepared for what you think is unreasonable criticism. Remember, we judge other people by their actions but wish others would judge us by our intentions. If you learn

how to take virtual criticism well, others will learn from it and often become very supportive.

*Move from self-promoter to reporter, producer, and pastor.* Your posts are like cards, get-well wishes, care packages, and sometimes life rafts for someone who is about to go under. Take care with your posts and communications and make them about Christ and other people instead of yourself. You can talk about yourself and your family from time to time, but be sure to focus on others more.

The pastor can make use of these technological tools in order to carry out his or her work, which is to shepherd, feed, and heal the flock. A brief reminder of this is found in Psalm 23, where the shepherd cares about several things. The sheep have to know the shepherd's voice and be close enough to hear him; he has to care about their meals, water supply, security, and health as well as their eternal futures. Combine these shepherding responsibilities with your social media, and you will discover the prescription for right living that a shepherd personifies and uses to lead his or her flock in new and exciting ways.

## Real ministry ideas using social media

Start with Facebook. After you are comfortable with Facebook, check out YouTube, Twitter, Google+, and Pinterest. Facebook has the edge right now in terms of users. The various networks are like gold, silver, and diamond mines, each providing a different treasure to mine and refine.

Here are some brief descriptions of what I have seen happening while using social media.

- *Virtual prayer meeting.* Wherever you are, take the time to pray for your members in general and post the prayers to your church's Facebook page. You can do this at the same time each week while praying over the past week's prayer requests.
- *Private prayer requests.* Use Facebook messaging to pass prayer requests to your prayer team. Pray for the requests.
- *Counseling.* Short messages on Facebook lead to opportunities to offer counsel and encouragement.
- *Use the Facebook Like button as much as you can.* Liking is a form of online smiling, and we know how much a smile is worth.
- *Use Facebook and Twitter for good communication.* Each has built-in tools to enhance your personal and church communication.
- *Use Facebook for discipleship.* Share Bible studies, doctrinal statements, and other documents related to growing in Christ.
- *Link to discipleship resources.* There are many good resources for growth in Christ. Be selective about them and learn to link to them.
- *Write your own discipleship resources, Bible studies, even a series of videos.* Share them on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.
- *Use photos and comments to strengthen your members' relationships.* Videos and photos are very important in social media. Take advantage of your smartphone's camera. It probably takes good photos and excellent videos.
- *Promote events.* Facebook has a built-in calendar for events. Use it with your church's Facebook page and Web site.
- *Promote various resources.* Find resources on the Internet; link and promote them.

## Conclusion

These ideas are already working in churches. They might take some getting used to for those of us who were born without smartphones in our hands, but they are more than flat-screen ideas. They bring a new dimension and context to spreading the voice of Jesus into homes and hearts that would not be possible otherwise. Jesus loved to see well-fed people and lots of them. Use social media well to feed those who hunger and thirst. 

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Around the globe, hope and anticipation are in the air. Whatever our faith, we sense the potential of the times.

Open almost any portion of the Bible, and you will also find reminders of gift giving and thanksgiving—from the earliest pages of Genesis, with its gift of a new, beautiful planet to humanity, to the closing scenes of Revelation, with the promised gift of a new heaven and a new earth. The Bible makes it clear that our past, present, and future are gifts from the hand of the Creator. Any heart attuned to God is a heart filled with gratitude.

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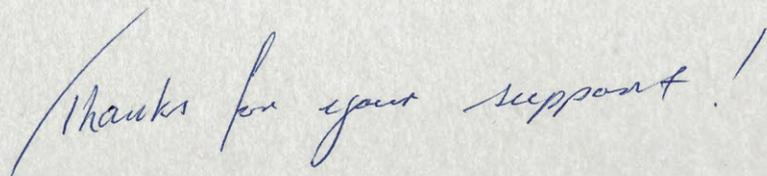
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# Legal substitution *and* experiential transformation in the typology of **Leviticus**: Part 1<sup>1</sup>

Some Christians emphasize the idea that Christ's sacrifice accomplished a legal substitution, but they largely overlook the effect of experiential transformation. Others do the opposite, emphasizing a change of experience resulting from Christ's sacrifice, but downplaying the concept that Christ served as our Substitute.

The present research demonstrates that in the typology of the book of Leviticus, which serves as a background to the explanation of Christ's sacrifice in the book of Hebrews, both legal substitution and experiential transformation are clearly present and fully necessary. In part 1 of this two-part article, we will examine the evidence for legal substitution in Leviticus and identify some references to this dynamic in Hebrews. In part 2, we will explore experiential transformation in Leviticus and point out this element in Hebrews.

## Background

*Legal* in this context does not mean "legalistic." Rather, *legal* has to do with a person's relationship to God as this relationship is affected by a failure to follow principles that are in harmony with His character of love (1 John 4:8), as expressed in His law. Such legal problems caused by illegal activities,

which we call sin, are objective in the sense that when they are already done, they cannot be changed because they are historical events. The penalty for committing sin is death (Rom. 6:23) because sin is transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), which is unselfish love (Matt. 22:37-40). Love is the only principle on the basis of which intelligent beings with free choice can live in harmony and not destroy each other.<sup>2</sup> So, preservation of the society requires that those who violate love must cease to exist. However, the very same love of God that condemns sinners motivates Him to want to save us. "For God so loved the world," that is, all lost inhabitants of planet Earth (John 3:16). On what basis can He extend mercy and at the same time preserve His justice, which is the other side of His love (Exod. 34:6, 7; Ps. 85:10)?

Sinners are already condemned, so there is nothing that they can offer to God to justify their deliverance from destruction (Ps. 49:7-9). Neither can the human race be spared by simply destroying the sinners among us, as Phinehas "purged" Israel by spearing Zimri and his Midianite girlfriend (Num. 25). The Hebrew verb for "purged" here is *kipper* (Pi'el of *kpr*), which is usually translated as "make atonement" (v. 13). This purging spared the community

from a divine plague (vv. 7, 8, 11). It was *kipper* in the basic sense of removing a problem between two parties, in this case between Israel and God, in order to allow for the possibility of reconciliation, which defines the English word *atonement* (at-one-ment).<sup>3</sup> If God applied the approach of Phinehas to the whole human race, this world would have become extinct long ago because "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23).

To save us, God needs a solution that removes our blame for sin, which gets in the way of our relationship to Him, the only One who can sustain our lives (e.g., Dan. 5:23). But ordinary *kipper* will not work because that would wipe out the entire human race. So, He uses a special kind of *kipper* strategy: ransom through legal substitution. The Lord illustrated this ransom in sacrifices performed at the ancient Israelite sanctuary. He appointed priests to officiate the sacrifices of the Israelites for them, thereby showing that they could not gain ransom on their own. While they participated in some parts of the sacrifices that they offered as individuals (Lev. 1-4, etc.), only the priests performed the sacrifices that were on behalf of the entire community, such as the morning and evening burnt offerings and additional sacrifices on Sabbaths, new

moons, and festival occasions (Lev. 16, 23; Num. 28, 29).

The following sections first investigate ransom through legal substitution in the sanctuary system of Leviticus and related passages, and then look at Christ's greater substitution as argued in the book of Hebrews.

## Ransom

In Exodus 30, the Lord required Israelites to give Him half a shekel of silver each when a military census counted them. The half-shekel tax served as a ransom (*koper*) for the life (*nepesh*) of each one who paid it, "that there may be no plague among them when you number them" (v. 12, NKJV). This ransom for life was to spare Israelite men from death (cf. Num. 16:49; 25:9; 2 Sam. 24:15). The Hebrew word for "ransom" is the noun *koper* from the same root as the verb *kipper*. Exodus 30 also uses the verb to express the lifesaving function of the half-shekel tax: "to ransom (*kipper*) your lives (plural of *nepesh*)" (vv. 15, 16).<sup>4</sup>

By itself, the verb *kipper* refers to expiation, that is, removal (*ex-*) of something that gets in the way of the divine-human relationship in order to make forgiveness possible (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, etc.).<sup>5</sup> However, when *kipper* is on behalf of human life (*nepesh*), the expiation removes something that threatens the life.<sup>6</sup> Without removal of this threat by payment of a ransom (*koper*), the human life would die. So, in this context, the meaning of *kipper* goes beyond "expiate" and includes the idea "to ransom."

A ransom is a payment that removes an obstacle to someone's freedom. If it is a ransom for life, the deliverance is from death.<sup>7</sup> William Gilders points out that ransom for life is not necessarily by substitution. The half shekel of silver served as a ransom to free a person from harm, but it did not take the place of the person to suffer that harm.<sup>8</sup>

## Substitution

Leviticus 17:11 explains that the blood of an animal sacrifice ransoms human life: "For the life (*nepesh*) of

a creature is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you on the altar to ransom (*kipper*) your lives (plural of *nepesh*), for the blood ransoms (*kipper*) by means of the life (*nepesh*)."<sup>9</sup> In its context, this verse supplies the reason for the permanent prohibition against eating the meat of any animal from which the blood is not drained out when the animal is slaughtered (vv. 10, 12).<sup>10</sup> There are two reasons why God forbids people to eat meat with the blood still in it. First, the blood contains the life in the sense that blood sustains life. Second, God has given the lifeblood of sacrificial animals the function of ransoming the lives of the humans on whose behalf they are offered.<sup>11</sup> This function is a gift of God to His people.<sup>12</sup>

The two reasons are not separate. Logically, the second depends upon the first. Because the life is in the blood, God has provided it as the means of ransoming human life. Therefore, the life of the sacrificial victim ransoms the life of the human offerer. Lest there is any doubt, the last part of the verse adds, "for the blood ransoms by means of the life" (v. 11). That is, it is not simply the blood that ransoms; the life in the blood is the means of ransom. The exchange is animal life (*nepesh*) for human life (*nepesh*).

Here the blood ransom for life is not only a payment that delivers from harm like the half shekel of silver in Exodus 30. Nor is it only a payment of damages that makes reconciliation possible and prevents punishment, as when an individual gives something he owns to another person whom he has wronged (e.g., Gen. 32:13–20; Exod. 21:22, 32–36). Rather, there is a substitution of one life for another. The animal suffers death in place of the human who would otherwise die. This is ransom through substitution, as William Gilders has recognized.<sup>13</sup>

## The death from which human life is ransomed

If an Israelite was caught committing a crime that was punishable by death, he could not escape execution by offering an animal sacrifice.<sup>14</sup> So,

how could sacrifices be regarded as ransoming life when they did not really ransom life? Ransom for life implies that the offerer should die unless the animal dies instead. However, an Israelite who was eligible to offer a sacrifice was not a person who deserved execution—at least not according to the system of penalties that were to be carried out by the community. Nevertheless, fully obeying God's covenant requirements is a life-and-death matter. The Israelites acknowledged that when they heard the Book of the Covenant, they pledged to obey all that the Lord had spoken, and then allowed Moses to toss the blood of the covenant sacrifice on them (Exod. 24:7, 8). So, forgiveness for violating God's commands required ransom for life through the blood of a sacrifice at His covenant headquarters where He resided and where the record of His covenant requirements was kept (Exod. 40).<sup>15</sup>

Since the Fall (Gen. 3), all human beings are faulty, even when they have no present need of forgiveness for particular acts of sin. Therefore, Israelites needed application of sacrificial blood to the altar on their behalf even when they approached the holy, immortal Deity through well-being offerings (so-called peace or fellowship offerings) for happy motivations of thanksgiving, fulfillment of vows, or voluntary expressions of devotion (Lev. 7:11, 12, 16).<sup>16</sup> Human faultiness leads to death. This concept was reinforced by sacrifices that expiated for Israelites to purify them from physical ritual impurities (Lev. 12). These impurities were not sinful actions for which they needed forgiveness (e.g., Lev. 12:7; 14:19, 20; 15:15, 30). Rather, they emphasized the birth-to-death cycle of mortality that has resulted from sin (cf. Rom. 6:23).<sup>17</sup>

## Animal life inadequate to ransom human life

How can the life of an animal, represented by its lifeblood, ransom the life of a human being? Israelites did not regard the life of an animal as equivalent to that of a human, and neither did divine law. For example,

Leviticus 24:21 states, “One who kills an animal shall make restitution for it; but one who kills a human being shall be put to death” (NRSV). Because the life of an animal is worth less than that of a human, it is actually impossible for animal blood to ransom human life, as Hebrews 10:4 recognizes.

Psalm 49:7–9 goes a logical step further: “Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should

assigned this function to animal blood applied to His altar. The ransom is through a substitute, but not a substitute of equivalent worth. It is only a token ransom.

Token ransom does not satisfy the claim of justice. This kind of ransom is radically tilted in the direction of mercy. Therefore, God, as Judge, bears an accumulating burden of responsibility for forgiving sinners, which a judge is not supposed to do (Deut. 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32). This burden accumulates

offering (so-called sin offering) on behalf of the community: “Why didn’t you eat the purification offering in the holy area? For it is most holy, and it was assigned to you for bearing (*nasa*) the blame leading to punishment (*awon*) of the community, by making expiation on their behalf before the Lord?”<sup>20</sup>

Outside Leviticus, there are other passages in which the high priest or all the priests bear blame leading to punishment that the people of their community would otherwise bear

*How can the life of an animal, represented by its lifeblood, ransom the life of a human being? Israelites did not regard the life of an animal as equivalent to that of a human, and neither did divine law.*



live on forever and never see the pit” (ESV). When it comes to eternal life, ransom for a person cannot be obtained at the cost of a human being, let alone property such as an animal or even many herds of animals (cf. Mic. 6:7). The closest the Israelite ritual system comes to human sacrifice is the burning of a Nazirite’s shaved hair in the fire under a well-being offering (Num. 6:18). But the hair offering accompanies a group of animal sacrifices (vv. 14–17, 19, 20); it does not replace them.

While it is true that Leviticus 17:11 speaks of animal sacrifice in language referring to ransom for human life, it is also true that such a sacrifice costs the offerer something: his or her animal (see 2 Sam. 24:24). However, the ransom occurs only because God has

until the Day of Atonement, Israel’s Judgment Day, when it is removed from God, as represented by purification of His sanctuary headquarters (Lev. 16).<sup>18</sup>

### Priestly substitution

In Leviticus 5:1, a person who sins bears (*nasa*) his own blame that leads to punishment (*awon*).<sup>19</sup> However, that condemnation is removed if God forgives the sin (v. 6), and then God bears it (Exod. 34:7; also *nasa*’ *awon*, usually translated “forgiving iniquity”). As God’s representatives, Israelite priests represented His role by bearing the blame of the people when they ate the meat of their sacrifices. Leviticus 10:17 refers to this kind of substitution when Moses asks the newly consecrated priests about the inaugural purification

(Exod. 28:38; Num. 18:1).<sup>21</sup> However, the priests do not actually suffer punishment as a result.<sup>22</sup> So substitution by human priests, like substitution by animals, does not fulfill the full claims of justice.

Numbers 35:28 provides a hint as to what full justice would look like: an Israelite who has accidentally killed someone must remain in a city of refuge until the high priest dies, at which time he may return home. So the death of the high priest has a kind of ransoming function, which is confirmed by verse 32: “And you shall accept no ransom [*koper*] for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the high priest” (ESV). This verse sees, but prohibits, the possibility that a ransom

could be paid to free the manslayer from confinement in the city of refuge. Nevertheless, the death of the high priest accomplishes the goal of such a ransom. This is not human sacrifice because the high priest dies a natural death. However, there is a kind of substitution here: the life of the high priest, rather than the life of the manslayer, for the life of the slain person (cf. v. 33).

## Adequate substitution through Christ in Hebrews

In Leviticus and related biblical literature, we have found legal substitutions by animal victims and priests. These substitutions provided merciful freedom from condemnation, but they were not able to fulfill the needs of justice. There was a need for a more valuable kind of victim and for a kind of priest who would actually suffer the results of the blame that he bore on behalf of others. Passages such as Psalms 40 and 110, Isaiah 53, and Daniel 9 point to a Messianic Victim and Priest, but in the New Testament book of Hebrews we find full expression of the greater victimhood and priesthood of the Divine Christ.

Most crucial for our study is the connection in Hebrews between Christ's roles as Priest and Victim: "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:11, 12, ESV; cf. vv. 24–26). Here Christ is qualified for His unique priesthood on our behalf because He has also served as our sacrificial Victim (see also Heb. 7:26, 27). As Aaron and his priestly descendants bore the blame of their people (Lev. 10:17), Christ has borne our blame. However, unlike those Israelite priests, Christ died as a result of the blame that He has carried for others.

Hebrews 9:28 expresses this concept: "so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many . . ." (ESV; cf. vv. 24–26; Isa. 53:4–12).

Christ meets the needs as a Victim of adequate value and as a Priest who actually suffers the punishment resulting from the blame that He bears for sinful human beings. The fact that He has borne our sins as our Priest and then died for those sins as our Victim proves beyond all question that He is our Substitute. His ransom lavishly fulfills God's need for justice, which is necessary to maintain His character of uncompromising love (Exod. 34:6, 7; Ps. 85:10). 

*(Part 2 will appear in the January 2014 issue.)*

- 1 This essay is adapted from a paper presented April 20, 2013, at the "Atonement Symposium," sponsored by the Adventist Theological Society and held at the Campus Hill Church, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.
- 2 Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, MI: Diadem, 1999), 269, 270.
- 3 See Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 194, 195, regarding *kipper* as prerequisite to reconciliation.
- 4 Translation by the author. For a similar use of *kipper* with *nepesh*, see Num. 31:50, where Israelite military officers gave an offering of booty to God to ransom their lives before the Lord because they had not lost any soldiers during the battle with the Midianites. In this way, they acknowledged and gave thanks for divine power to preserve life.
- 5 Gane, *Cult and Character*, 106, 194, 195.
- 6 For *nepesh* as "life," see Gen. 9:5; 19:17; 1 Sam. 20:1; 2 Sam. 14:7; Ezek. 22:27, etc.
- 7 The ransom metaphor is not intended to imply that God demands ransom as a kidnapper would.
- 8 William Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 175.
- 9 Draft translation by Roy Gane and William Gilders for the Common English Bible (CEB) with transliteration of Hebrew words in parentheses. Having undergone revision by editors, the published CEB translation of this verse loses the crucial idea of ransom by incorrectly rendering *kipper* as "make reconciliation" or "reconciles."
- 10 Cf. Gen. 9:4 for all humans and Acts 15:20, 29 as a membership requirement for Gentile Christians. Why is this not a membership requirement for Seventh-day Adventist Christians? Good question. See also Ellen G. White, "As a family, you are far from being free from disease. You have used the fat of animals, which God in His word expressly forbids: 'It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood.' Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even that soul shall be cut off from his people." *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 2:61.
- 11 This was a unique aspect of Israelite sacrifices, by comparison with other ancient Near Eastern sacrifices.

- 12 Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 169.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 175, 176.
- 14 Purification offerings (so-called sin offerings) and reparation offerings (so-called guilt offerings) expiated for sins that were inadvertent (Lev. 4), involved forgetfulness (Lev. 5:2–4), or in some cases were deliberate but not defiant (Lev. 5:1; 6:1–6). There was no sacrificial remedy for defiant ("high-handed") sins that incurred the terminal divinely administered penalty of "cutting off" (Num. 15:30, 31). Neither was there an opportunity for deliverance from execution by the human community for capital crimes, such as murder. Numbers 35:31 states, "Moreover, you shall accept no ransom [koper] for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death" (ESV). When King David was guilty of murder and adultery, he understood that not even a burnt offering could save him from the consequences of justice (Ps. 51:16). The burnt offering was the original all-purpose sacrifice (Gen. 8:20; 22:2, 3, 6–8, 13; Job 1:5; 42:8), which presumably could cover areas of expiation outside the scope of the specialized purification and reparation offerings that were introduced when the Israelite sanctuary was established. However, burnt offerings were not alternatives to capital punishment.
- 15 This was true even if the sin was one for which the sinner could make material restitution, as in cases covered by the reparation offering (Lev. 5:14–16; 6:1–7). The restitution was necessary, but it could not remove the objective, historical fact that God's covenant law had been violated.
- 16 Ellen G. White recognized this principle: "The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor, who is at God's right hand, presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censor of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censor the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ's propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned." *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 344.
- 17 Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 49; cf. 31, 32, 48, 50, 207, 208.
- 18 Gane, *Cult and Character*, 267–333; *Altar Call*, 185–222, 230–246. See also Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 277–288, 293–295.
- 19 Baruch Schwartz has shown that the expression *nasa' awon* metaphorically refers to legal guilt in terms of carrying it as though it is an object that is hauled around as a burden. When persons bear their own *awon*, usually translated "iniquity," the idea is "culpability," which means that the sinners deserve and may suffer any consequences. "The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 8–15.
- 20 Translation by the author.
- 21 Cf. Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 145–147.
- 22 Priests would suffer punishment if they did not adequately guard the sanctuary, but this would be a failure on their part (Num. 18:1–7). See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 145, 146.

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# The *katartismos* pastor

A few years ago, I went through a serious spell of “Lone Ranger” ministry. I was active in evangelism in the city of Auckland, conducting one program after another. I had the privilege of conducting a series of felt-need programs for different communities across the city. While the program was rewarding, the follow-up programs were time consuming. After conducting three programs, one after the other, I branched out to a series of meetings in a neighboring city. This ministry meant traveling to and fro for about a month, leaving home around 4:30 P.M., conducting the meetings, and arriving home after 10 P.M.

Even with all this work, I attempted to spend time with my wife and young children. My wife never complained about my workload, recognizing that I was “working for the Lord.” However, I became so engrossed in ministry that my time with them did suffer, I began to experience exhaustion, and my moods were not the best. As that year began to wind down, one day my wife and I took an inventory of our lives in a casual conversation that opened our eyes. Time with our family and loved ones really mattered to us, but we had not seen our extended family that whole year because I had been so busy. I did not even take my wife on a date that year.

Pastors often take on the role of “Lone Ranger.” They think that the church will not go on unless they reside at the helm, at every committee, at every function, at every meeting. Though surrounded by people, we minister

in isolation. Not only does the church become dependent on the pastor, but so often pastors are dependent on the church for their sense of work fulfillment. I failed that year in my role as equipper.

Indeed, an important role and function of the pastor includes that of “equipper” (*katartismos*). This Greek word, found only in Ephesians 4:12, is variously translated as “equip” (RSV), “perfect” (KJV), or “prepare” (NIV).<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:11–13 reads, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare [*katartismos*] God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (NIV).<sup>2</sup> We will look at the use of this word in Scripture in order to understand its meaning more fully and then draw out the implications for the pastor.

## Biblical mandate

The verb *katartizō*, found 17 times in the LXX, can mean “to establish” (Ps. 74:16); “to equip or restore” (Ps. 68:9); and “to complete and finish” (Ezra 4:12, 13). The word appears 13 times in the New Testament and can mean “to restore or mend” fishing nets (Matt. 4:21); “to restore a fallen brother” (Gal. 6:1); “to prepare” (Rom. 9:22; Heb. 10:5); and “to put into proper order, complete, furnish” (1 Thess. 3:10; 1 Cor. 1:10). The

word suggests making something work the way it was designed to, to bring something from a place of ineffectiveness to effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

The deep and complex concept of *katartismos* strongly suggests that pastors are unable to *solely* carry out all that is required to fulfill this core function. The whole church needs to fulfill this ideal, but the pastor must lead, motivate, demonstrate, and empower the congregation in initiating, developing, and growing an equipping ministry in the local church.<sup>4</sup> When the pastor fulfills the role of equipper, the body of Christ is mobilized through the power of the Spirit, and the church itself becomes an equipping agency.

The pastor, who is the chief agent for change under the guidance of the Spirit, needs to be a leader who has a vision of what God can do in and through the local church. The pastor should not work like a Lone Ranger or manager but, rather, like a shepherd equipper. The pastor, working with a Lone Ranger or manager model of ministry, will not be able to cope or provide the vision and leadership to grow and lead the local church. The *katartismos* model takes its basis not just from the ministry practices of Jesus and Paul but also from the Exodus 18 story of Moses assigning leaders to groups of 10, 100, and 1,000. The idea behind this concept is simple: shepherds care for individual sheep, while shepherd equippers care for those who are caring for the sheep.<sup>5</sup> While this holds true, we must remember that Jesus did

participate in one-on-one ministry without the presence of His disciples. Thus, there will be occasions where the pastor will be engaged in one-on-one ministry. However, the prevailing mind-set in many churches is that the pastor must perform the duties of ministry, especially visitation and Bible studies. The expectation that the pastor is the only soul winner in the church is unbiblical and counterproductive. Yet this mentality is deeply ingrained. While the shepherd takes care of the sheep and leads them to green pastures, the sheep bear other sheep. As the pastor equips members, the church becomes a training center for ministry.<sup>6</sup> Pastors equip the members when they are effective in the body of Christ, utilizing their spiritual gifts and leading them into maturity (Eph. 4:14), spirituality (v. 15), and unity (v. 16).

## Implications for pastoral and evangelistic ministry

The vision, ministry capacity, and evangelistic effectiveness of a congregation rise and fall on leadership. Ineffective leaders equal ineffective ministries. In two of the churches to which my wife and I ministered, there were elders who had been in leadership for a number of years. These were good men who had run out of ideas. I still trusted and valued their leadership but knew I needed to develop future leaders. Through the nominating committee, I had two new associate elders appointed. These were younger men who loved the Lord and His work. I met with them over a period of some months during which I trained and then assigned them roles where they could care for new developing ministries.<sup>7</sup>

## Seek to multiply ministry by investing in a few

The Bible should be both a “message book” and a “method book.”<sup>8</sup> By investing His life in His 12 disciples, especially in the three (Peter, James,

and John), Jesus gives us the method of how to engage in fruitful ministry.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, *katartismos* pastors will gather a few people around them and teach and train them for one year to be effective workers for the Lord. The pastor may then have a leadership group and a discipleship group that he or she trains. The pastor prayerfully selects the discipleship group after consultation with the elders and the church board, many of whom may be part of the discipleship-training group. The pastor meets weekly with the group to pray, study the Word, fellowship, and clearly articulate a vision of discipleship for the group. After one year, each person in the group prayerfully connects with two other people to form a discipleship triad. After two years, those who were trained continue establishing discipleship triads. The pastor oversees all the triads; continues meeting with the original group, perhaps once a quarter; and then enlarges the group as the discipleship triad moves into the third and fourth years.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of these discipleship triads or groups is for the church to become an effective equipping agency and point to the genius of Jesus in challenging the church to “‘go and make disciples’” (Matt. 28:19, NIV).

Furthermore, within these discipleship structures both the Great Commission and the Great Charter will be fulfilled. The Great Commission is the mandate of Christ to go and make disciples (vv. 19, 20), while the Great Charter is the mandate of Christ to take care of His sheep (John 21:16). The one calls on the local church to make disciples; the other, to care for those disciples.<sup>11</sup> Both the commission and the charter continue to be conducted in the context of living, experiencing, and proclaiming the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6–12).

## Conclusion

We reap what we sow. If we only sow methods that result in education but not transformation, we will see poor outcomes in our people. Equipping is far more than Sabbath

preaching and midweek Bible teaching; it has to include application and transformation in our lives and in the lives of the people to whom we minister. Pastors must continue giving ministry away, for ministry belongs to the whole people of God! 

- 1 Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 128.
- 2 According to Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, Anchor Bible 34A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 478, it is a *locus classicus*, pointing out the coherence of the church's origin, order, and destiny. Ephesians 4:12 reads, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (NRSV). Scholars that support the NIV and NRSV include Barth, *Ephesians*, 478–481; E. Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 395–399; and H. W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 547–551.
- 3 Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 550. In summary, we find three primary ways in which the word *katartizō* is used in Scripture:
  1. Mend/restore (Ezra 4:12, 16; 5:3, 9; Ps. 68:9; Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 3:10)
  2. Establish/lay foundations (Exod. 15:17; Ps. 8:2; 17:5; 74:16; 89:37; Heb. 11:5)
  3. Prepare/train (Luke 6:40; Rom. 9:23; Eph. 4:12; Heb. 10:5)
- 4 This corporate reading of Ephesians suggests that the whole church must become an equipping agency. Martin Kitchen states, “The whole of the epistle focuses upon the corporate nature of Christian origin, existence and behaviour.” *Ephesians*, New Testament Readings (London: Routledge, 1994), 119. See also Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2002).
- 5 Joel Comiskey, *Leadership Explosion* (Houston: Touch Publications, 2000), 106.
- 6 Russell Burrill, *Revolution in the Church: Unleashing the Awesome Power of Lay Ministry* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993), 29.
- 7 Greg Ogden states, “The manner in which the Lord works is incarnational: life rubs up against life. We pass on Christlikeness through intimate modeling.” *Discipleship Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 21. (See 1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:6.)
- 8 Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 60.
- 9 Robert Coleman states, “The best work is always done with a few. Better to give a year or so to one or two men who learn what it means to conquer for Christ than to spend a lifetime with a congregation just keeping the program going.” *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1963), 117.
- 10 See the outstanding book by Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*.
- 11 Melvin J. Steinbron, *The Lay Driven Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997), 67. For further insights on equipping, see R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, *The Equipping Pastor* (New York: Alban Institute, 1993), 128–130. They state that pastors ought to (1) work with the whole church and with individuals as required. Also let the group equip others. (2) Cultivate healthy interdependence among members. Equipping is a relational ministry and not a program. It involves building people's lives and families. And (3) lead the process of discipleship and not just the people.

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# Size by design: *The elusive growth of the local church*

While browsing Facebook recently, I came across a picture of a worship service in a church I attended as a teenager. More than 45 years have passed, and the congregation is much as I remembered—a few different faces, perhaps a little more gray hair, some added technology, but essentially the same.

The picture revealed about 50 in attendance—the same as I remember years ago. Why was this church not growing? What size could the church have been if it had maintained just 4 percent growth rate each year? The first year they would have added two people. This seems like a simple, realistic goal for 50 people. If the 4 percent growth rate was maintained for 45 years, there would be almost 300 in attendance today; the growth goal would be 12 for this year.

A few years ago, I attended a pastors' meeting in which we listened to a pastor who was brought in as an expert speaker. Under his leadership, his church had grown in attendance from 50 to 300 in about four years—an annual growth rate of 56 percent. The pastor shared a suggested program, and the conference president advocated that all of our churches could grow at this rate. A few years later, the churches have remained about the same as they were at the time of the presentation.

## Why are churches not growing?

What is causing our churches to plateau in attendance? We keep adding to the church membership list, but there does not seem to be a correlating rise in attendance.

Some may argue that pastors are not spiritual enough. They say pastors need to spend more time in prayer. Some have even prescribed that pastors should spend 40 days on their knees in repentance and prayer. Others suggest that pastors are not working as hard as their counterparts of earlier years.

Others defend pastors but say today's church members are too secular minded. They claim that the world has neutralized the mission spirit of the people in the church.

Still others suggest that the time is not right for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and that we should simply maintain as we are until the end times.

Thus, the lack of growth in church attendance is an alarming, ongoing issue. Churches tend to grow to a certain size, then plateau. We can send a new pastor, pour money into evangelism, try to duplicate programs that have had success elsewhere, but they stay the same size, which tends to be small. Lyle Schaller notes, "The normative size of a Protestant congregation in the North American culture probably varies between twenty and sixty at the principal weekly worship service."<sup>1</sup>

A majority of Protestant churches have reached a predictable plateau that can be called a "church growth barrier." I define a church growth barrier as an attendance level where adding members to the church books is no longer followed by a corresponding rise in attendance. Attendance tends to plateau in spite of continued evangelism. These barriers happen at predictable levels regardless of infrastructure, community demographics, or location.

I believe God wants churches to grow through these barriers. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18–20, NASB).

I agree with Bob Moorehead who wrote, "I am convinced when the 20th century church [or the twenty-first century church] resumes 'normal' behavior, the kind we read about in Acts, we will see 'normal' results again (which the watching community would surely call abnormal!)"<sup>2</sup>

One author states that we should give up on growing our churches and only plant churches: "First, acknowledge that all churches eventually plateau. And that the plateau factor will continue to frustrate our efforts to grow existing

churches. . . . We have made repeated, vigorous, and well-meaning attempts to make existing churches larger only to find that no matter what pastor we assign, how much money we spend, or what evangelist conducts the series, the church remains at its plateau.”<sup>3</sup>

I do not believe this is the only answer. We should be planting many new churches, but we should also be growing the ones we have. I believe God wants both.

### The simple truth of why churches plateau

What might be the problem? Why are so many churches plateaued? Why do they remain the same size year after year, decade after decade? The answer is simple.

Churches are the size they are designed and structured to be.

I am not talking about the size of the building, the number of seats for worshipers, or even if the church family has a building of its own. These are important considerations, but they are secondary to the real issue. A church is restricted to a certain size of attendance, and that is largely determined by its organizational design and structure.

In my experience of pastoral ministry, I have seen how size relates to the structure and culture of the local church. In several churches, we successfully changed the structure and culture, and the churches grew to the next level.

Consider the M&M illustration. Imagine this: I line up four containers of different sizes and designs on a desk. The first one is only capable of holding 15–20 M&M candies. As I pour more M&Ms in, they do not stay in the container but fall on the desk. If I want to hold more M&Ms, I must change the type and design or structure of the container. So, I change to the next size and shape. We can now hold around 100 M&Ms, but again, if we continue to add more, they end up on the table. And so we go to the next structure that holds around 200; and then with a different design and structure, we can hold around 500 M&Ms.

The point? A small church structure will never grow beyond a certain size of

its design, structure, and holding capacity. Strong emphasis on evangelism may add names to the church books but will not have a corresponding effect on the number in worship.

Bill Sullivan explains the concept this way, “A small church is not a microcosm of a large church but a totally different kind of organization.”<sup>4</sup> If you want your church to grow through an attendance barrier, you will need to change its design and structure. Your church must become a different kind of organization.

Another way to understand this is to think of the different organizational designs and structures as caring for pets.

When my children were small, they wanted a pet. We settled on a hamster. We created its home in a fish aquarium with a screen over the top. We placed

change in the structure and design, so we build a small barn behind the house. We find some nice alfalfa hay for her to eat. We buy straw to place around the cow. With the radical change in structure and design, we now have a happy cow.

That’s just an illustration. Likewise, different sizes of churches must be cared for differently to be healthy and growing. Each church will need to have a different design and structure to be able to care for the different needs of people—for example, differences in age, spiritual development, emotional support, cultural milieu—and then we will see growing churches. A caring church is a growing church.

If you are the pastor of a hamster church and you believe God is asking your church to become a cat-sized church, you have to anticipate and

**Changing the culture of the local church means creating room enough and an inclusive atmosphere to care for the varying needs of the congregation.**

wood shavings on the bottom of the cage, food, water, and a wheel for exercise, and the hamster was very happy.

But what would happen if we came home one day and instead of a hamster there was a cat in that cage? We would have to house and feed the cat in a very different way. The few wood shavings would not work as cat litter. The hamster was always ready to just sit in a shirt pocket, but the cat would scratch if we restricted it too much. What we have is an entirely different animal, needing a completely different design and structure to keep it healthy and happy.

What if we left the cat in the kitchen one day, and when we came home there was a cow in our kitchen? Now what should we do? We need some serious

begin the necessary design and structure changes before you get to the cat size. And so it is with moving to each different type of design and structure.

If a church is designed for 50–100 people from the same milieu, we can expect the church will not likely become much larger unless there are changes in the organizational structure and design. As a growth strategy, only holding evangelism events and adding names to the books is not satisfactory. We not only want to connect people to Jesus, we want to keep them connected to God and His family.

### Suggestions for growth

You may ask how does a pastor lead his or her church to real growth? How

does a pastor revise the structure for the next level of church attendance? Here are several suggestions:

1. Prayer is the most powerful spiritual tool for beginning the process of change in the church. Both pastor and congregation need to pray to God for guidance and vision for what God wishes the church to become.

2. In order to successfully restructure a church for growth, you need a church that is basically healthy. If the church is at war with the pastor or itself, this must be dealt with first.

3. Leadership style is important. The pastor will need to move beyond simple management of the church to truly leading it into the future. Different sizes of churches need different leadership models for the pastor. In my personal experience, I have found it best to lead through a team. A pastor by himself or herself may be able to move the church from very small to the next level, but he or she will not be able to move the church to greater levels of size without building a team of leaders.

4. The church family needs to have a sense of a special calling from God to become much more than they are and a willingness to obey as God may direct. In my experience, this process may take six months to a year to instill in the congregation. When I become a pastor of a new church, my first order of business consists of creating within that church a sense of calling and belonging to God. Through preaching, visitation, teaching,

letters, all modes possible, the focus is all about this sense of the extraordinary.

What we are talking about is changing the culture of the church. Changing the organizational design and structure will need a change in the local church culture if this change will stick. Changing the culture of the local church means creating room enough and an inclusive atmosphere to care for the varying needs of the congregation. This may be uncomfortable. The congregation may be fearful or rebel, but the members must move forward.

5. We must change the posture of the church to a discipleship and mission focus. The pastor and his or her team must lead the congregation to understand more fully what being a disciple of Jesus in our modern world means. A church with healthy relationships is a powerful force for evangelism as long as the relationships are inclusive, not exclusive.

6. Understanding the governance structure necessary for different sizes of churches will assist the pastor and leaders to develop what is needed to support the size of congregation that God has asked the church to become. How this change will take place depends on what the next level of church size, design, and structure needs for success. A small church of 25 will not operate successfully with a governance structure needed for 500, nor will the congregation of 500 operate well with the governance structure that is most successful for 25.

7. Discover, communicate, and implement God's mission and vision for your particular local church. Your mission and vision tell you where to aim the church, and this also allows everyone to know where to place the resources, financial and personnel, of the church to accomplish what God has asked. The mission and vision are discovered and maintained somewhat differently depending on the size of the congregation.

## Conclusion

Moving churches from one size to the next is often difficult work for the pastor. This may, at times, seem too difficult and even impossible, but we must remember that we have a big and powerful God. If we partner with Him, our leadership will make a difference and the churches we pastor can move to the next level.

Remember this good counsel given long ago by Ellen White, "As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings."<sup>5</sup> 

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- 1 Lyle E. Schaller, *Growing Plans* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 18.
  - 2 Bob Moorehead, *The Growth Factor* (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1988), 9, 10.
  - 3 Ron Gladden, "Evangelism and Church Planting," *Ministry* 72, no. 10 (October 1999): 7.
  - 4 Bill M. Sullivan, *Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier: A Church Growth Strategy* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 14.
  - 5 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 333.

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## LETTERS

Continued from page 4



It does us well to project Christ in a loving fashion when we present and attempt to live the health message (Eph. 4:15).

—Ishaya Chullu, email

### Sharing Ministry

As of late, I've been going through my stack of *Ministry* magazines that

have accumulated, and I have found a treasure trove of material that has stimulated my present and future preaching. I very much appreciate those articles, especially the ones that I feel raise my IQ without being overly scholarly.

Thank you for your Web site and archiving the magazines along with

social media integration. Now I can email myself the link to the articles I especially appreciate and have that on file, thus creating space in my office. Best of all, I am now sharing my favorite articles with my pastor friends.

—Jason Belyeu, email

## *As I Follow Christ: 20 Essentials Every Leader Should Know*

By Dwain N. Esmond, editor, Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2013.

Jesus of Nazareth was the greatest Leader in the history of the world. But something set Him apart from all other leaders. Someone once said that, “If Alexander the Great or Charlemagne or Napoleon were to come into a room, we would all stand up in respect. If Jesus Christ walked in, we would fall on our faces in adoration.” That is the difference.

But that is not the difference *As I Follow Christ* is designed to explore. However, in a book with such an inviting title and featuring 20 authors, heightened expectations do exist that, at the very least, one chapter in this symposium would clearly define leadership, compare leadership styles, and address and pass on to us some of the quintessential marks of leadership to be found in Jesus.

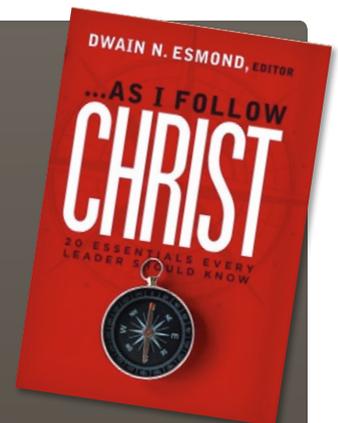
Noting that there was neither a definition of leadership nor a chapter where leadership styles were differentiated, I was further alarmed by a premise expressed by several authors that “if you are a Christian, you are a leader.” And the authors further suggested that everyone is a leader. In this case, leadership is falsely equated with influence. All exert influence, and one cannot conceive of a leader without it; but does influence make a leader? One of the authors rightly asserts that the distinguishing mark of a leader centers on the fact that he or she has followers. But, if all Christians are leaders, then there would be no followers. Such false propositions not only degrade leadership but also deny the Pauline differentiation of gifts.

What are the different aspects of leadership that Jesus modeled? Many of the scandals in Christian leadership have occurred precisely because church leaders have not made Jesus their example in this matter.

calls for it. The integrity of the leaders lives on and ministry demands it.

Cindy Tutsch in her chapter “The Leader God Seeks,” Ella Simmons in “The Leader’s Character,” and Ted N. C. Wilson in “The Leader’s Spiritual Life” prescribe what is necessary to maintain the spiritual glow. They take seriously the capacity of leaders to suffer a terrifying dullness of spirit, defeating God’s call. These chapters offer ideas for a gradual rediscovery of spiritual vitality.

**More than ever,**  
*church leaders need*  
**moral wisdom and**  
**strength. Jesus**  
*calls for it. The*  
*integrity of the leaders lives on*  
**and ministry demands it.**



Notwithstanding, Delbert Baker’s chapter, “The Leader’s Pitfalls and Successes,” offers more than management advice about how to avoid these difficulties, but he suggests that we speak candidly and compassionately by offering practical help and spiritual insight for gaining personal victory. More than ever, church leaders need moral wisdom and strength. Jesus

Lowell Cooper in “The Leader’s Priorities” sets forth five leadership priorities that focus on character, a balanced life, building trust, teamwork, and developing people. Dan Jackson in “The Purposeful Leader,” Gordon Bietz in “The Leader’s First Steps,” Jim Gilley in “The Leader’s Courage,” and Gerry Karst in “The Competent Leader,” all balance the basic elements—institutional,

intellectual, and experiential—in a sound approach by drawing from personal experience as they examine ministry in all of its functions from a spiritual perspective.

All present principles leaders might use to address various leadership concerns without being purely theoretical or highly program oriented. They agree that how what they *do* affects their spirituality. Willie and Elaine Oliver in “The Leader’s Family” provide valuable insights on how to manage our families and further

explain that “positional leadership” is not an inoculation against the rigors embedded in family life.

With the delicacy of a tightrope walker, Prudence LaBeach Pollard affirms the uniqueness of women in ministry without broaching “the current foment concerning women’s ordination” (45). We can learn much from the differentiation she makes between male and female leadership styles.

How do they lead? How should they lead? Sung Kwon in “The Leader as Servant,” David Penner in “The

Relational Leader,” Pardon Mwansa in “The Humble Leader,” and Ivan Leigh Warden in “The Accountable Leader,” all illustrate that genuine leaders are to embody principles that are visibly set forth before the eyes of those they seek to lead.

As I reflected on Leslie Pollard’s excellent chapter on “The Leader’s Vision,” in which he elaborates on the seven characteristics of a visionary and the six elements that comprise a vision statement, I was left with three questions: (1) Who initiates vision? God,

## DATELINE

### ► German Adventist hospital opens center to treat FGM victims

**Berlin, Germany**—Partnering with a foundation established by a former supermodel, a Seventh-day Adventist hospital in Berlin opened a new center in September 2013 to help restore victims of female genital mutilation (FGM), a cultural ritual practiced in parts of Africa and Asia.

The Krankenhaus Waldfriede (Berlin Hospital) opened the Desert Flower Center in cooperation with the Desert Flower Foundation, based in Vienna, Austria. The foundation was launched in 2002 by Somali model **Waris Dirie**. Dirie, herself a victim of FGM at the age of five, is an international activist and established the foundation to raise awareness of the ritual.

“How many little girls are victims of such suffering,” Dirie said at the ceremony. “Even with all these tears, I’m truly happy to sit here. When I see this sign ‘Desert Flower Center,’ I do believe in truth.”

FGM is practiced in nearly 30 countries in Africa and Asia. Young girls are subjected to the removal or slicing of some of their sexual organs as a coming-of-age cultural tradition. FGM is sometimes viewed as a status symbol, and some practitioners say it controls sexuality and promotes chastity. Its effects often include infection, chronic pain, and infertility. The United Nations banned the practice in 2012. The World Health Organization

estimates that 140 million women are victims.

The Desert Flower Center at Berlin Adventist Hospital is expected to serve between 50 and 100 women each year. Dirie, 48, said her foundation is planning to establish other Desert Flower Centers worldwide, especially in Africa.

Another speaker at the event was **Pierre Foldès**, the French physician who partnered with Dr. **Jean-Antoine Robein** to invent a surgical technique to

repair damage caused by FGM. To date, he has operated on 4,000 women.

**Gabriele Halder**, a gynecologist, said more awareness about FGM is needed even in countries where it is not practiced. Women from such cultures are still treated with traditions of their homeland while living in Western countries. “Women, after the death of their husbands, are often mutilated again so they can remarry,” Halder said. “This needs to be



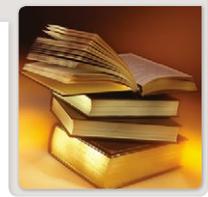
Waris Dirie addresses the audience at the opening ceremony of the Desert Flower Center. [Photo: Corrado Cozzi]

humans, or both? (2) We never read of Jesus having grand plans, schemes, and designs like those with entrepreneurial skills. Was He really a visionary? If so, how did He create, articulate, and communicate a compelling vision? He certainly modeled a visionary as one who saw extraordinary things that no human eye has ever seen and brought new perspectives to commonplace things. (3) How do the Scriptures use the word *vision*? These questions could prove helpful in a discussion group. In fact, each of the chapters could have

concluded with relevant questions to provide for a continuing learning experience.

Overall, *As I Follow Christ* sets forth a primer that will not only benefit the ministerial intern but those who are seasoned in leadership. Wise are those who absorb and personify the excellence in leadership set forth in Charles Bradford's closing chapter "Legacy: What Leaders Leave" while remembering the words of Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher, "A leader is best when people barely know he exists,

when his work is done, his aim is fulfilled, they will say: 'We did this ourselves.'"<sup>\*</sup> That is a legacy prize that any leader would treasure!



*Reviewed by Rex D. Edwards, DD, retired, who currently volunteers as a research assistant for the Biblical Research Institute, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States. *

<sup>\*</sup> "Lao Tsu" Quotes, ThinkExist, Thinkexist.com/quotation/a\_leader\_is\_best\_when\_people\_barely\_know\_he/214091.html

stopped here in Europe too." **Denise Hochstrasser**, Women's Ministries director for the Adventist Church's Inter-European Division, based in Berne, Switzerland, said the new center will help restore victims to how God created them. "When women have lost parts of their body through misunderstanding,

tradition, incomprehensible practices, crime and abuse in the past, then, if we can, it is our duty to give them back whatever we can so they can live a normal life, as God has meant it to be from the beginning," Hochstrasser said.

"We are happy that an Adventist hospital has taken this step to help on

a topic that in so many countries remains silent," she said. "We have to speak up for these women; we have to inform wherever we can." [*Corrado Cozzi/ANN staff*]



## ► Mob burns Adventist church building

**Cairo, Egypt**—The burning of a Seventh-day Adventist Church in the city of Assiut during rioting on August 14 was not part of a wider, organized political movement, local church officials said.

The Assiut Seventh-day Adventist Church, located approximately 220 miles south of Cairo, was attacked by a mob and heavily damaged after it was set on fire. The pastor and his wife hid in their upstairs apartment and were not found by the attackers. The pastor and his wife were rescued from the burning building by Muslim neighbors. "This was a small group of people bent on doing harm. This event was not representative of Egypt or the people of Egypt," said **Llewellyn R. Edwards**, president of the Adventist

Church's Egypt-Sudan Field, based in Heliopolis. He continued, "As Adventists, we want our relationships to be strong with Egyptians of all faiths in the country."

Muslim neighbors rescuing the Adventist couple showed "the true picture of most people in Egypt," Edwards said.

Several other Christian churches were also attacked in Assiut as well as the shop of the Egypt Bible Society. According to Edwards, the government has announced it will pay for the rebuilding of all churches destroyed during rioting in several cities.

The Adventist Church operates two schools in Egypt—Nile Union Academy northeast of Cairo, and Zeitoun Adventist School. Both institutions



have positive relationships with their communities. [*tedNEWS*] 



**Jay Sloop, MD**, a retired obstetrician-gynecologist, was, at the time of this writing, Health Ministries director of the Upper Columbia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, headquartered in Spokane, Washington, United States.

## Real empowerment

**W**onderful love relationships exist that enrich our lives. Yet, only a few of these are powerful enough to alter our behaviors permanently. The love between a parent and child is a powerful bond that begins with the unique connection between a mother and her unborn child, then extends to the father after birth. Episodes from these parent-child relationships replay in our heads for a lifetime and profoundly affect how we make and change our lifestyle choices.

I was talking with my friend, Randy, about the rocky relationship he was having with the church he attends. He's

They decided to return to church. Then Randy's painful "father image" got even worse.

At church, he heard about a heavenly Father who loves and saves sinners. However, in the next breath, he was also told that the same Person leaves sinners burning in hell forever. He could not understand the love in all this.

In AA, the "Higher Power"—whatever we might conceive Him to be—was at least able to help Randy maintain sobriety. The Divine Being discussed at church was at that very minute taking terrible vengeance out on those who

believe them. Without knowing what the Bible teaches about this topic, many easily conclude, "If that's what our Divine Parent is like, we are better off keeping our distance."

All the while, God keeps reaching out, hoping we will fall in love with Him and the truth of His love and integrity. When Randy learned what the Bible teaches about God's plan to end all pain, suffering, and sin, he realized that God was Someone he could relate to, trust, and love.

How are Randy and Gail doing today? Even in the heat of a Texas summer, they can be found walking each evening. They are making amazing progress, including consuming many more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. What an answer to prayer! Tobacco, alcohol, a sedentary lifestyle, and poor nutrition are all issues they are giving to God.

They still face challenges in these changes and in their spiritual growth as well. But as Randy says, "God continues to bless and open my understanding day by day. I have learned by experience that faith moves mountains—even mustard-seed faith, and this is a matter of where we place what faith we have. I have learned to place my faith in my heavenly Father. I have learned there are difficulties that come 'not out but by prayer and fasting'" (Matt. 17:21).

What about you? Are you finding unhealthy habits hard to conquer? Could you use some genuine help? When we trust our heavenly Father, as is our privilege, He will reveal to us the truth of who He really is and who we really are. A love relationship with Jesus empowers like nothing else on earth. This is motivation like no other, and it remains continuous as long as we prize this precious relationship. 

*Our heavenly Father longs for the closest kind of connection with each of us, but He faces huge challenges. He has many enemies who believe they are His friends.*

been doing a lot of thinking about this. Randy's father was an evangelist and alcoholic. When Randy was 13 years old, his dad abandoned the family. His late teen and early adult years were turbulent ones in which he, too, became an alcoholic.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) finally helped Randy attain sobriety and, for many years, AA became his church. His wife, Gail, recognized a need for important changes in key aspects of their lives, including their spiritual needs and a faith they could share.

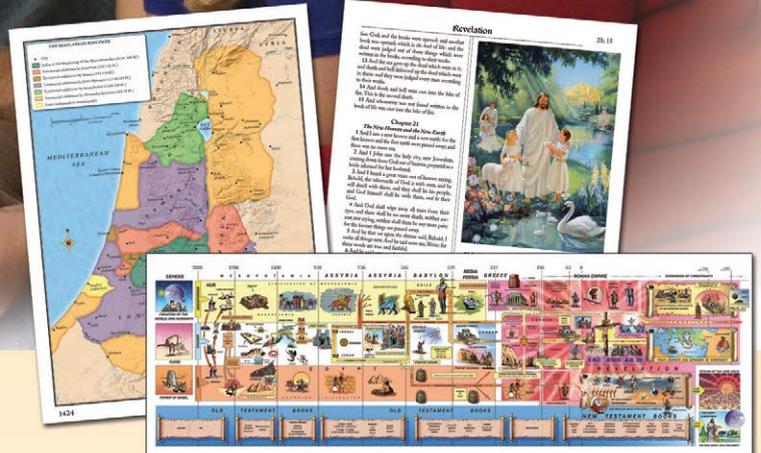
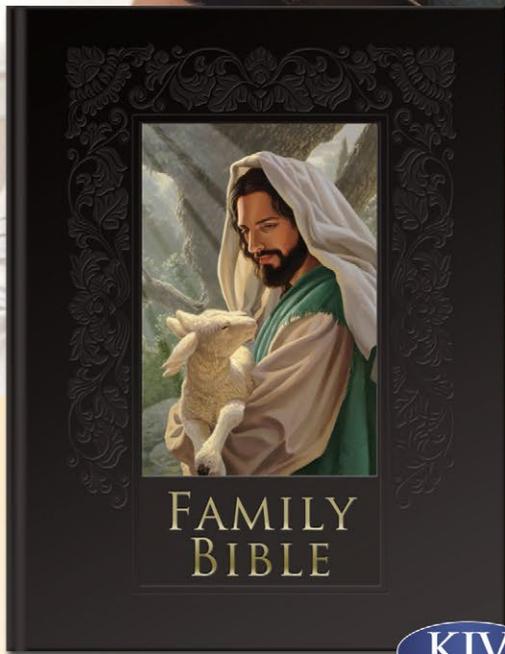
had made the wrong choices. The human picture of Randy's biological father (in spite of its flaws) and the church's picture of the heavenly Father were in conflict and were anything but helpful to his peace of mind.

Our heavenly Father longs for the closest kind of connection with each of us, but He faces huge challenges. He has many enemies who believe they are His friends. Their understanding of Scripture portrays God to be an awful tyrant. As they spread their misunderstanding about God's character, many

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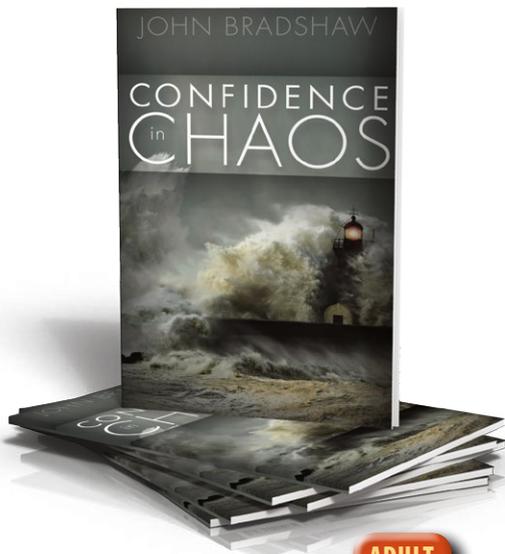
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