

# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

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## Clinical depression or “life sorrows”?

*Distinguishing between  
grief and depression  
in pastoral care*



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*“Are you committed to putting before the world the truth of Adventist teaching, or is your mission just to let people know about interesting ideas?”*

### The cosmic conflict

In his article (“An Enemy Hath Done This: Cosmic Conflict Theodicy”—March 2015), Richard Rice articulately describes the cosmic conflict theodicy very well, giving an excellent summary with insights. I also really appreciated the findings of Dr. Boyd, someone who holds this position, and of the many books he has written on the topic.

However, on careful reading, it appears to me that Dr. Rice is not committed to this theory but only describes it. He tells of its usefulness in comforting people but does not say it is true.

Now for a scholarly journal, or magazines that are more or less nonsectarian, such lack would be acceptable. But even in those journals, the writers use persuasive language to bring a reader to a decision on the topic at hand. Rice does nothing of the sort.

Which leads me to ask, what is the mission and purpose of *Ministry*, International Journal for Pastors? Are you committed to putting before the world the truth of Adventist teaching, or is your mission just to let people know about interesting ideas?

Dr. Rice is a thoughtful theologian. But his view on this topic, as far as I can tell, is not quite the one taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He has a view different from the cosmic

conflict, one espoused by Adventists, and it was clear from the article where he stood. I don’t have a problem with diversity of thinking, but a magazine published by Adventists should promote Adventist thinking.

—Allen Shepherd, Crown Point, Indiana, United States

Richard Rice’s article was worth reading. However, if God is not a detached CEO far removed from the “rough and tumble” of the street but instead is a powerful Force going after and resisting the agents of evil, how is that supposed to be encouraging to collateral damage victims or their families? Some people stayed home, and others went shopping and were caught in an interfering crossfire while they were minding their own business.

This is not at all a challenge to the article, but another genuine attempt at “If God knew there was going to be a shooting at the mall, what kept Him from warning me on my smartphone to shop another night?” I still don’t have a response to share with someone hurting.

—Michael Deming, email

### Christ in the book of Hebrews

Norman Young’s article (“The Epistle to the Hebrews as Pastoral Encouragement”—March 2015) deeply

touched my soul and enlivened my faith. Young allowed the book of Hebrews to speak for itself without trying to interpret it from Leviticus and Daniel to determine dates and geography to affirm a predetermined understanding.

The strength of Young’s exposition was its Christ-centeredness—just as the writer of Hebrews intended. What a privilege we have, as a church, to have such a High Priest who is better in every aspect when compared with the temporal, insufficient, and done-away-with priestly ministry of the Old Testament record.

It may be that Hebrews was written just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple. If this be the case, then all the more relevant is the writer’s focus on Jesus as the abiding, unchanging, and ever-present Helper.

—Eric Winter, email

### Reflections on the January 2015 Sabbath issue

A lump came in my throat as I read Sandra Doran’s account of her dad’s contagious Sabbath keeping (“The Sabbath: A Day of Rest and Gladness”). Elijah Mvundura (“The Sabbath: A Sanctuary in Time”) highlighted the inescapable link between the Sabbath and the Advent—a crucial connection for Seventh-day Adventists. Ron du Preez forced me (gladly!) to revise my exegesis of Colossians 2:16. A summary of that article now stands in the margin of my study Bible. Kim Papaioannou gave me scholarship and footnotes for an insight I had noticed myself years ago: The New Testament names of the days of the week, in Greek, all make reference to the Sabbath, which crowns and even constitutes the “week.”

Thank you for what I consider to be a blessed feast.

—Dale Wolcott, Chinle, Arizona, United States



# Building a support network

I think you're depressed," my wife gently confronted me.

"I don't get depressed," I retorted, quickly and defensively.

My wife responded by patiently listing the symptoms of depression that she had witnessed since my health problems began. Several months earlier, I had discovered bull's-eye lesions on my body. After several visits to the dermatologist and too many biopsies, I still didn't have an accurate diagnosis. I was getting sick and tired of being sick and tired. And now I got an unsolicited comment from my wife about depression! After some moments of quiet reflection, I had to admit that she was right. I was depressed. It would have been easy to minimize my problem by asserting that my depression was not that serious, but the stressors in my life were clearly pushing me in an unhealthy direction.

We all have times in life and ministry when we face intense physical, emotional, or spiritual challenges. During those difficult times it is particularly important to have a healthy support network.

This valuable network will not create itself and is not handed to you with your first paycheck. You need to take responsibility to build your own support system. Don't wait until the storm breaks. Now is the time to recognize the value of such a group and act upon it.

What are some important points to consider when intentionally assembling a network of caring colleagues?

- Look for individuals who honor God in their personal and professional lives.
- Select group members whom you care about personally and who are not in a supervisory or supervised relationship with you.

- Avoid those who are unable to maintain confidentiality.
- Choose participants who are firm in their commitment to meet regularly.

Begin with the commitment to become the helpful and caring colleague you are seeking for yourself. The rule of Jesus applies here as in every other area of life: " 'Treat others the same way you want them to treat you' " (Luke 6:31, NASB).

Take a moment to reflect on your current support system. Does it exist? How well does it function? What changes should be made in order to make the network more effective? Have you applied the rule of Jesus to your conduct within the group? What are some ways you can affirm and nurture your valued colleagues who have covenanted to meet with you on a regular basis?

I vividly remember the day when a trusted member of my support network asked me, "How are things going between you and the Lord?" No one had ever posed that question to me before. I was both startled and blessed. Colleagues should be granted permission to move beyond superficial conversation and ask pointed questions. Since there is a commitment both to follow the rule of Jesus and also to maintain complete confidentiality, participants are free to answer any question candidly.

We should also be free to speak about our successes and failures, our joys and sorrows, since we can learn valuable lessons from the ups and downs of life and ministry. Recently, I heard a tragic story of a young pastor who got involved in an adulterous relationship. When his infidelity was exposed, he sank into a deep depression and eventually took his own life. Many families in the church were devastated, including his own.

**Take a moment to reflect on your current support system.**

Would a support group have helped him to avoid such a tragedy? No one knows for sure. But what if a trusted friend had challenged him when he started to act in inappropriate ways? What if a caring colleague had taken the risk of sending up a warning flare?

Our lead article in this issue of *Ministry* addresses the challenge of ministering to hurting people. Losses in life lead to grief and may result in clinical depression. We need to be sensitive to the needs of others, and we must also be alert and honest with ourselves, recognizing our own needs. That's where a healthy support system is so valuable.

The wise man, Solomon, reminds us that "though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccles. 4:12, NKJV). That is particularly true when two or three are seeking the will of God together and praying for guidance and direction. " 'For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them' " (Matt. 18:20, NKJV).

I'm thankful today for a loving and committed support network. It's my prayer for you to have the same experience. 🙏

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# Clinical depression or “life sorrows”? *Distinguishing between grief and depression in pastoral care*<sup>1</sup>

As psychiatrists, we are all too familiar with the suffering that accompanies clinical depression. But, as ethicists and writers on religious and spiritual matters, we are also concerned with the critical distinction between depression and ordinary grief, and we believe that this is a vitally important question worthy of the consideration of all ministers and counselors. How does the pastoral counselor distinguish ordinary grief—a normal and adaptive emotion that clergy are trained, and often best suited, to handle—from clinical depression, which often requires professional referral for psychological or, in some instances, psychiatric treatment?

## The biblical phenomenology of grief

The distinction between clinical depression and ordinary grief seems as old as recorded history. In Psalm 38, the psalmist laments his sins. He tells us that “there is no soundness in my flesh . . . no health in my bones because of my sin. . . . My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. . . .

I groan because of the tumult of my heart.”<sup>2</sup> Psychiatrists today would likely recognize in this description clinical symptoms of *major depression*, such as psychomotor slowing (“utterly bowed down”) and a severely depressed mood. The psalmist’s sense of bodily decay and self-loathing are more suggestive of clinical depression than of grief, in which the sense of self-worth is usually intact.

In contrast to Psalm 38, the same King David—after the death of his beloved friend, Jonathan—is far from “bowed down and prostrate.” Rather, after a brief period of ritualized weeping and fasting, David is moved to write a passionately stirring dirge, known as “The Lament of the Bow” (2 Sam. 1:17–27), addressed to his lost friend. “How have the mighty fallen . . . I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan, you were most dear to me” (author’s translation). Here, there is no trace of the self-loathing and bodily decay found in Psalm 38. Rather, in David’s grief for the man described as “knit to his soul” (1 Sam. 18:1) we hear the plaintive note of yearning. Also note that David’s expression of grief recalls “the good times” of the lost

relationship (“you were most dear to me”). As we will see, the ability to summon positive recollections of the deceased is one of the hallmarks of normal grief after bereavement and rarely seen in clinical depression.

## The anatomy of grief and depression

Although the boundaries between ordinary grief and clinical depression are sometimes hard to discern, there are experiential or “phenomenological” features that help us distinguish these conditions. For example, when we experience everyday grief or sorrow, we generally feel—or at least, are capable of feeling—intimately connected with others. Healthy grief is directed outward toward a far-reaching recollection of the memories of the lost loved one. In this remembering process, the compassion and company of friends, family, and clergy often help the bereaved. Through shared experience, the memory of the deceased is “enlivened” and the spirit of the bereaved “strengthened.”

In contrast, when we experience severe depression, we typically feel outcast and alone. Sorrow, to use

Martin Buber's terms, is an "I-Thou" or *relational* experience; clinical depression, a morbid preoccupation with "me." Indeed, William Styron describes depressed individuals as having "their minds turned agonizingly inward."<sup>3</sup> Severe depression consumes the self and forms a mental fortress that neither clergy nor caring loved ones can breach without clinical reinforcements.

One's subjective sense of time also differs in grief and depression. When we experience everyday sorrow, we have the sense that, someday, this sorrow will end. As Psalm 30 tells us, "Weeping may last for the night, but joy returns in

the sorrow *sub specie aeternitatis*. Thus, when Martin Luther was confronted with the imminent death of his beloved daughter, Magdalena, he is said to have uttered these words to the girl as she lay dying in his arms: "Lena dear, my little daughter, thou wilt rise again and shine like a star—yea, as the sun! I am happy in the spirit, but in the flesh I am very sorrowful."<sup>5</sup>

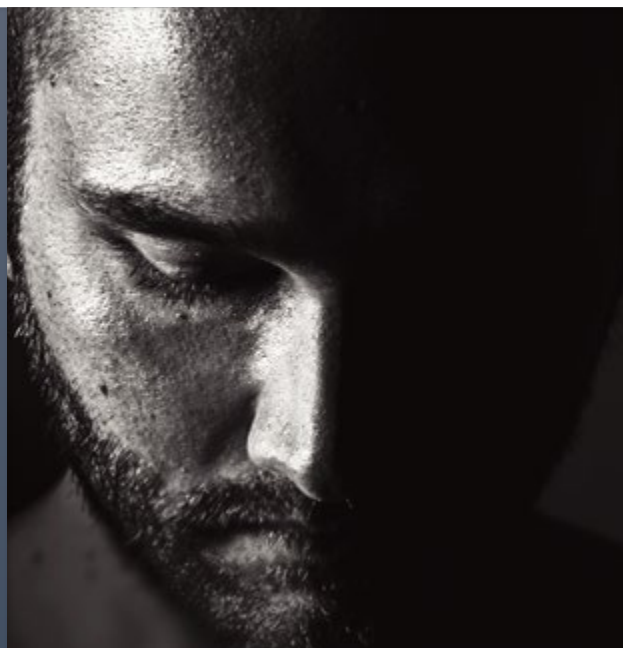
Moreover, there is an intentional dimension to grief and sorrow absent in clinical depression. In effect, we are overtaken or "invaded" by depression as a force outside ourselves, whereas we give ourselves over to sorrow. Thus, in

things that matter most. When you are going through a period of extreme loss or pain, you reflect on the people who mean the most to you instead of on personal success; and the deep design of your life, instead of distracting gadgets and entertainments."<sup>7</sup>

## The usual course of bereavement-related grief

As Dr. Katherine Shear has observed, "The universality of grief is as incontrovertible as its uniqueness. Grief is an experience shared by all humanity. It is an instinctive response

**Grief is not an experience so much as an unfolding process, and it may persist for years, or even a lifetime.**



the morning" (v. 5, author's translation). In contrast, severe depression envelops us with the sense that it will last forever. Dr. Nassir Ghaemi has called attention to the sense of temporal distortion in depression (i.e., the subjective feeling that time itself is slowed).<sup>4</sup> Sorrow has the capacity to contain joy within it or, at least, to find solace within its own essence. Sorrow, in this sense, is dialectical: it generates an inward "conversation" between hopeful possibility and hopeless despair—especially in people of faith who are able to view

his autobiographical account of depression, Andrew Solomon comments on "the terrible feeling of invasion that attends the depressive's plight."<sup>6</sup>

Finally, clinical depression is experienced as foreclosing the possibility of moving forward in life. In contrast, while grief and sorrow are often profoundly painful, they also provide opportunities for spiritual growth. This perspective is nicely elucidated by the psychotherapist and former monk Thomas Moore: "Sorrow removes your attention from the active life and focuses it on the

that we understand at an intuitive level. We naturally expect grief to progress over time, becoming reshaped and integrated as we make peace with the grim new reality. Still, we are often confused about what that transformation looks like and how long it should take."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, there is no one "correct" or predictable course for bereavement-related grief. As Dr. Sidney Zisook and Shear explain, many determinants are in play: "The intensity and duration of grief is highly variable, not only in the same individual over time or after

different losses, but also in different people dealing with ostensibly similar losses. The intensity and duration is determined by multiple forces, including, among others: the individual's preexisting personality, attachment style, genetic makeup and unique vulnerabilities; age and health; spirituality and cultural identity; supports and resources; the number of losses; [and] the nature of the relationship."<sup>9</sup>

Gender and culture can also shape the visage of grief. Thus, while stereotypes must be avoided, men in our Western culture may eschew the emotional expression that women are socially "permitted" to display. Despite these many variables, some general statements regarding the usual course of grief (sometimes called "normal" or "uncomplicated" grief) do apply. In the early days and weeks following the death of a loved one, the bereaved typically experiences *acute grief*. This may often be an intensely painful period, during which the grieving person may experience frequent bouts of tearfulness; difficulty sleeping and concentrating; reduced appetite; and diminished desire to "socialize," notwithstanding some receptivity to consolation from friends and family that is characteristically absent in depression. Typically, grief is experienced in "waves" or "pangs," rather than the unremitting gloom of depression. Often mixed with grief are pleasant recollections of the deceased.

Not uncommonly, the recently bereaved person may hear the voice or see the image of the deceased, usually very fleetingly.<sup>10</sup> Clergy can often help mental health practitioners recognize these visions as expected manifestations of acute grief rather than as symptoms of psychotic depression.

Many elements of acute grief may be mitigated by the comforting rituals of mourning, such as the seven days of "sitting *shiva*" in the Jewish faith. Conversely, social or cultural isolation may intensify acute grief. If the grieving and mourning process proceeds as expected, a subtle transition begins, usually within the first few months

after bereavement—namely, the emergence of *integrated grief*. During this phase, the pain of loss is woven into the larger fabric of the bereaved person's life. Integrated grief entails greater acceptance of the death, renewed interest and engagement in life, a predominance of positive emotions when recalling the deceased, and a reduction in preoccupation with thoughts and memories of the deceased.<sup>11</sup>

This does not mean that the loss is ever "forgotten" or "put behind" the bereaved person. Nor should the grieving person be admonished to "get over it and move on." Grief is not an experience so much as an unfolding process, and it may persist for years, or even a lifetime.

Pastoral counselors and chaplains can cooperate with mental health clinicians to help the bereaved see bereavement as a kind of transposed or transformed relationship with the deceased—one that may endure for many years. This is why the bereaved so often say, "He lives on in my memories," which is a highly spiritual concept. For some bereaved persons, extended grieving may involve periodic visits to the deceased's gravesite, where they may "speak" to the lost loved one, or participation in religious observances that honor the deceased and provide an opportunity to remember.<sup>12</sup>

Grief is not a "disorder" and requires no professional treatment. However, the grieving process is sometimes derailed or complicated in one way or another. Indeed, the term *complicated grief* (CG) is often applied when the transition from acute to integrated grief is disrupted or impaired. Clergy should be able to recognize CG because it may signal arrested progression and integration of grief, or presage the development of major depression—both of which may need and benefit from professional treatment, along with continued spiritual support. Though a full discussion of CG goes beyond the scope of this paper, Shear and others have described some characteristic features, including but not limited to the following:

- Continued difficulty accepting the death, extending beyond six months
- Persistent strong yearning for the deceased
- Anger and bitterness (e.g., over the circumstances of the death)
- Preoccupation with the deceased
- Excessive avoidance of any reminders of the deceased
- Futility about the value of ongoing life and relationships
- Impaired functioning and disability<sup>13</sup>

## A portrait of major depression

The sorrowful and the severely depressed inhabit two quite different existential realms, though the two "universes" intersect in certain experiential aspects. Both the sorrowful and the depressed person, for example, will describe sadness and loss. The severely depressed person, however, endures a unique kind of soul-killing suffering, eloquently described by the writer William Styron: "Death was now a daily presence, blowing over me in cold gusts. Mysteriously and in ways that are totally remote from normal experience, the gray drizzle of horror induced by depression takes on the quality of physical pain. . . . [The] despair, owing to some evil trick played upon the sick brain by the inhabiting psyche, comes to resemble the diabolical discomfort of being imprisoned in a fiercely overheated room . . . [thus] it is entirely natural that the victim begins to think ceaselessly of oblivion. . . . In depression the faith in deliverance, in ultimate restoration, is absent."<sup>14</sup>

As this description suggests, there are pronounced experiential differences between the grief of bereavement and clinical depression. For example, clergy and counselors should know the importance of recognizing that if the grieving person has a longing for death, this usually involves thoughts about "reunion" with loved ones that may provide some spiritual consolation. In contrast, the severely depressed patient's mood is often accompanied by thoughts or plans



of suicide and the sense that he or she “doesn’t deserve” to live.

Such suicidal ideation or plans—especially when accompanied by expressions of self-loathing and guilt—represent a true mental health emergency that requires timely referral to mental health practitioners. Unlike the normally grieving person, the severely depressed individual is usually too self-focused and emotionally isolated to appreciate the consolation of others or seek out and respond to pastoral comfort. In contrast, the grieving person usually maintains a strong emotional bond with friends, family, and, in some cases, clergy, and they often accept consolation from them. Indeed, psychologist Dr. Kay R. Jamison has observed that “the capacity to be consoled is a consequential distinction between grief and depression.”<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes, friends, family, or inexperienced clinicians may mistake ordinary grief for major depression. But, more commonly, signs of serious major depression are inappropriately dismissed as “normal” merely because they occur soon after the death of a loved one. This misperception

sometimes takes the form of what one of us (Ronald Pies) has called “the fallacy of misplaced empathy”—the mistaken notion that if we can just understand how someone came to be depressed, we have established that the person’s mood is normal.<sup>16</sup>

Spiritual and secular counselors—for whom listening, compassion, and acceptance are virtues of habit and temperament—may be especially vulnerable to this well-intended but misplaced “normalization.” In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the bereaved have a special status of reverence and recusal from responsibility, which is often ritualized. Clergy and therapists alike may find it uncomfortable to opine that the bereaved is “depressed”—but in doing so, they can help reduce the stigma of the diagnosis, which often prevents religious persons from seeking mental health treatment.

Because grief and depression are separate conditions, it follows that the two may coexist, particularly after bereavement, and may benefit most from the collaborative care of clergy and mental health practitioners. In fact, bereavement—far from “immunizing”

the person against major depression—is actually a common precipitant of the disorder.<sup>17</sup> This makes it all the more important for chaplains and pastoral counselors to recognize and respond appropriately to major depression. People of faith frequently have far more trust in their clergy than in a clinician; indeed, a priest, minister, or rabbi may be the only person able to persuade the bereaved to seek mental health attention. If major depression is suspected, referral to a mental health professional is warranted. In milder cases, psychotherapy alone often suffices as treatment; for more severe major depressive episodes, medication may be required. Even after referral, however, pastoral care is still salutary, especially for the resolution of grief and the spiritual support of the bereaved. We encourage clergy and mental health practitioners, with the patient’s consent, to work collaboratively in the service of holistic healing—thus addressing the mental, physical, and spiritual dimensions of the person.

Some of the principal differences between grief and major depression are summarized in the table below:

	Grief	Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)
<b>Definition/ concept</b>	The range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in response to death of a loved one, close friend, or family member; or to other major loss. After bereavement, grief is often accompanied by culturally based rituals of mourning.	Psychiatric illness in which distress and suffering are marked and normal function is significantly impaired; the most severe forms of MDD are “melancholic” and psychotic major depression.
<b>Characteristic mood, affect, feeling tone</b>	In acute form, profound sense of loss, intense sadness, longing, yearning for the deceased; tearfulness; feeling of “aching void” early in grief process. Anguish, anger, anxiety, loneliness are sometimes present, especially in initial period after loss.	Usually, profound and pervasive sense of despair, hopelessness, helplessness, gloom, nihilism, “time standing still.” Markedly diminished pleasure in nearly all activities.
<b>Variability of mood, feelings</b>	Changes from hour to hour and day to day; sadness, longing, tearfulness often come in “waves” or pangs in response to reminder (external or internal) of deceased; usually interspersed with periods of positive emotions, happy recollections and memories of deceased. Bereaved is usually “consolable” by friends, family.	Very little change from day to day; positive feelings diminished or absent (inability to experience positive emotions is hallmark of major depression); markedly depressed mood most days of the week for > 2 weeks. Rarely consolable by friends, family.

	Grief	Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)
<b>Sleep, appetite</b>	<p>Bereaved may have trouble falling asleep because thoughts of deceased are triggered, (e.g., if bed previously shared with deceased, or by rumination re: troubling aspects of the death).</p> <p>Awakenings may occur, but sleep physiology usually normal.</p> <p>Appetite and usual scheduling of meals may be disrupted by heightened emotionality related to reminders of the deceased. Weight loss usually minimal.</p>	<p>Early morning awakening (e.g., 4:00 A.M.) is classic finding. (Rarely: excessive sleep/hypersomnia).</p> <p>Loss of appetite often leads to significant weight loss. (Rarely: weight gain in “atypical” depression). Anorexia often severe, with substantial weight loss (&gt;10 lbs).</p>
<b>Energy, psychomotor change</b>	<p>Intense emotions may disrupt sleep and interrupt the bereaved person’s usual rhythm of daily life. In some cultures, dramatic expressions of grief resemble psychomotor agitation but are more ritualized.</p>	<p>Often marked slowing of mental processes and decreased energy; markedly decreased or increased motor activity (e.g., speech volume and output greatly diminished; marked agitation, hand-wringing, twisting hair, etc.).</p>
<b>Reality testing</b>	<p>The recently bereaved may transiently appear “lost” or confused; may briefly hear voice or see image of deceased; but is in touch with other aspects of reality (not delusional).</p>	<p>Severe MDD with psychosis may show delusions of bodily decay, “rotting away”, being “punished by God”; may experience derogatory auditory hallucinations.</p>
<b>Self-image</b>	<p>Self-esteem largely preserved though often with feelings of identity and/or role confusion; guilt or remorse is common but usually fleeting and focused on the deceased (e.g., “If only I had said or done . . .”).</p>	<p>Self-loathing, feelings of worthlessness, being an “unforgiveable” person or “terrible sinner”; profound, corrosive guilt without evident reason.</p>
<b>Thoughts of death, dying</b>	<p>Sometimes, feelings of not wanting to live without the deceased; or fantasies of “re-uniting” with deceased; usually without suicidal plans or intent.</p>	<p>Suicidal ideation and plans are common; person may feel “I don’t deserve to live.”</p>
<b>Social/vocational function</b>	<p>Early in bereavement, socializing may feel difficult, but bereaved usually desires, enjoys company of friends and family, at times. Feelings of disconnection from others may occur, but deeper emotional bonds usually preserved. Vocational function usually maintained, but person often distracted at work, preoccupied by loss.</p>	<p>Social withdrawal often profound; person feels deeply estranged from others; may isolate self in room; refuse any visitors.</p> <p>Vocational function usually significantly impaired, often with missed work days.</p>
<b>Course/Outcome</b>	<p>Typically, acute grief evolves over time, though progression is erratic; no “set” duration for acute grief. Integrated grief often lifelong, but grief is transformed such that bereaved person able to re-engage with life, with “bittersweet” acceptance of loss.</p>	<p>Variable duration, often lasting many months and sometimes years, if not adequately treated. Suicide is outcome in around 4 percent of those with major depression.</p>


## Treatment

Support, guidance, education, may be helpful, but grief is not a mental disorder and needs no professional “treatment.”

Often requires professional treatment, with either psychotherapy or medication, or both.

## Conclusion

Grief and major depression occupy different realms of human experience, even though they share some features (such as sadness, tearfulness, insomnia, etc.) and may coexist in the same individual. This coexistence may complicate diagnosis and treatment, particularly if the counselor or clinician is unfamiliar with the substantial differences between grief and depression. In the acute post-bereavement period, these discriminations are especially important because they have a direct bearing on disposition and treatment. When counseling the recently bereaved person, the pastoral counselor—as a

healing professional—should recognize and respond to the warning signs of a major depressive episode, which requires professional treatment. 

- 1 The authors wish to thank Dr. Robert Daly, Dr. Sidney Zisook, and Dr. M. Katherine Shear for their helpful references or comments for this article.
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, all scriptures quoted in this article are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
- 3 William Styron, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 47.
- 4 S. Nassir Ghaemi, “Feeling and Time: The Phenomenology of Mood Disorders, Depressive Realism, and Existential Psychotherapy,” *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 33 (2007): 122–130.
- 5 Murat Halstead, *Story of Opportunity or Character Building* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 582.
- 6 Andrew Solomon, *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression* (New York: Touchstone, 2002), 293.
- 7 Thomas Moore, *Dark Nights of the Soul: A Guide to Finding Your Way Through Life's Ordeals* (New York: Gotham, 2005), 211.
- 8 Katherine Shear, “Complicated Grief: Reframing the Way We Think

About Love and Loss,” *Pacific Standard*, June 16, 2014, [www.psmag.com/navigation/health-and-behavior/complicated-grief-reframing-way-think-love-loss-83511/](http://www.psmag.com/navigation/health-and-behavior/complicated-grief-reframing-way-think-love-loss-83511/).

- 9 Sidney Zisook and Katherine Shear, “Grief and Bereavement: What Psychiatrists Need to Know,” *World Psychiatry* 8, no. 2 (June 2009): 67–74.
- 10 Ibid.
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- 12 Ibid.
- 13 M. Katherine Shear, Angela Ghesquiere, and Kim Glickman, “Bereavement and Complicated Grief,” *Current Psychiatry Reports* 15, no. 11 (November 2013): 406.
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- 15 Kay Redfield Jamison, *Nothing Was the Same: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2009), 178.
- 16 Kristy Lamb, Ronald Pies, and Sidney Zisook, “The Bereavement Exclusion for the Diagnosis of Major Depression: To Be, or Not to Be,” *Psychiatry (Edgmont)* 7, no. 7 (July 2010): 19–25.
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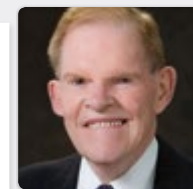
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# Feeding five or five thousand<sup>1</sup>

Jesus was a splendid communicator. Of course, as a teacher of preaching and a devout Christian, I am expected to say that. As far as I know, the Bible does not make that claim. No verse in the Bible tells us how marvelous Jesus was as a preacher. Everything we know about Jesus' ability as a preacher is left to implication and not to a direct statement.

As a case in point, look at John 6:11–17. All four of the biographers of Jesus write about this event, and I am eager to know to what the great truths point. Yet, first John tells us about a young teen who actually provided the loaves and fishes that Jesus used to feed the crowd that day. This was a miracle of sorts. When I have taken my grandsons to a ball game, the boys I know are always hungry. The first thing they want to do includes ordering a hot dog and something to drink. In fact, they would be content to spend the afternoon at the concession stand just eating. Here, the day drifts toward evening, and this youngster has not touched the lunch his mother had made for him that morning.

Perhaps he was too excited to eat. Nothing much happens in a small community; villagers take their excitement wherever they can find it. A popular young Teacher had come to the area, and reports were that He had performed miracles. He also told stories, and boys like stories. He was a happening!

Everyone wanted to hear what He would say and see what He would do. This boy did not want to miss out on anything that big. He raced to stay ahead of the crowd, to find the choice spot up front to catch everything that was going on. Maybe it was the rush and movement that kept him from eating his lunch earlier.

But that raises another question. What made that young man donate his lunch to Jesus? OK. Andrew asked him for it. But imagine that conversation: "Look, son. The people are hungry, and we have no way to feed them. Is that your lunch you have there? Would you mind letting Jesus have it? We are trying to scrape up something, anything. Your lunch might help."

Would not any normal kid have responded, "Mister, you've been out in the sun too long. All I have is five loaves and a couple of fish. Small fish. I'm getting real hungry myself. I haven't eaten anything since breakfast. The lunch won't even be enough for me. You and Jesus are crazy if you think that what I have in this bag is enough to feed this crowd." That is what I would have said, wouldn't you?

But for some reason the lad went along with it. He surrendered it to Andrew, and Andrew sheepishly turned it over to Jesus. "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish," he reported, "but how far will they go among so many?"

The answer to that question is easy: "Not far. Not far at all."

There is something else. When the disciples fed the crowd, how did they get everyone to eat the same menu? Were there not some people in the crowd who complained about the food? Were not some of them picky eaters? Fish and bread is not everybody's favorite dish. In a gathering that large, there must have been some who had eaten spoiled fish when they were growing up and could not stomach it as adults. Did everyone in the crowd realize how hungry they were or how desperately they needed something nourishing that afternoon? I know that the text says, "Everyone had enough," but is it not possible that some of the basketfuls left over came from people who did not like the menu?

Years ago when I first believed that God wanted me to go into the preaching ministry, I had several different questions. One was that I did not have much to say. I could preach a few sermons that people might find acceptable, but then what? What do you say to a congregation when you feel you have given them your best and you are required to preach again next week and the weeks following that?

And every congregation has those folks who want to challenge the preacher. How do you preach to them? How do you convey that you care?

Do you identify with Andrew? I do. As I stand behind a pulpit, I have



often wondered how anything I have prepared could feed so many. My best sermons are little more than fish and chips, and are at times a bit greasy. Is it not foolish to believe that the sermon I have in my hand could possibly meet the hungers of an entire congregation?

Let's be honest and face up to the challenge. But that might keep you out of the pulpit. Why not do something easy, like rocket science?

After you have given it your best shot, when you have done the most diligent exegesis you can do, when you have read the best commentaries and crafted your sermon with skill, then delivered it with passion, even when you have read my book on preaching and followed its counsels to the letter—

Face it: When you have done your utmost, it is simply not enough.

At best, you have two small fishes and five loaves, but you never have enough to feed the multitude.

Only Jesus through His Spirit can do that.

You must give your sermon to Him. Ultimately, preaching is His work. It's astonishing sometimes. He not only multiplies our effort but also creates in listeners a hunger for what we offer them.

I remember the first time that happened to me. I was 15 and went to the Broadway Presbyterian Church in New York on a Wednesday evening to hear my cousin, Ernest T. Campbell, preach. He had just graduated from college and was attending a seminary in New Jersey, but he had come to deliver a sermon to the people in the church where he had grown up. I attended because, as a family member, I felt I should be there.

Ernie chose as his text Ephesians 6:10: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." How much can anyone say about an exhortation such as that? I discovered that Ernie could say a good deal. By the time the sermon ended,

I asked God for His strength to live my life. I also decided to enroll in the college Ernie had attended because I wanted to preach like him. I took very seriously what I believed was a prompting by Christ to give my life and gifts to Him. That evening, I believed that the Holy Spirit broke through that crowd, singled me out, and confronted me. More than 70 years later, those decisions made as a teenager still work themselves out in my life.

Only Jesus, through His Spirit, can work in listeners' lives. He not only can give our sermons a power that they do not have on their own, but also create in listeners a hunger for what we offer them.

Every preacher knows the surprise. You get an unsigned note in the middle of the week, "Thank you for letting God use you last weekend. You will never know the difference it has made." And you wonder how or why that took place.

Or you celebrated Communion and spoke that brief word about the bread and the cup: "This is My body broken for you," and "This is My blood that was shed for you." Words you have spoken scores of times, but you learn later that a man in your congregation who had begun an affair with someone in his office broke it off because of those words about the death and resurrection of Christ. You had nothing like that in mind, but you are reminded that God can take your sermon and do with it what you never intended.


Every preacher knows the astonishment when a woman meets you in the grocery store in the middle of the week and thanks you for your most recent sermon in which you talked about apologizing to your children when you have messed up as a parent and what a difference that made in your family. You think back over your sermon and realize that you had not preached about that at all. To be sure, you listen to a recording of your sermon, but there is not a sentence about saying "I'm sorry" to anyone, and yet

that woman in the store thanked you, and she really meant it. You can be a bit bewildered about how God works in people's lives and minds.

As I think back over my years of offering a couple of fish and a few rolls to listeners who I hardly know, I realize that I did not know their needs, but Christ did. He created the hunger and had your sermon meet their need. God has a passageway into listeners' lives that you and I know little about. Give your sermon to Him.

Of course, we will not offer to God what costs us nothing. We will give Him our best. Yet there are no great preachers, but we serve a great Christ who can do great things if we put our sermons and our preaching into His hands.

William Barclay, who himself held on to faith with shaky hands, wrote about A. J. Gossip, a man "who lived closer to God than any man I have ever known." At one time, Gossip was minister of St. Matthew's in Glasgow. There was a week when he went through the seven days that every preacher experiences, and that made it impossible for him to prepare as he should. "You know the stairs up to the pulpit at St. Matthew's?" Gossip asked. "You know the bend in the stairs? Jesus Christ met me there. He looked at the sermon in my hand. 'Gossip,' He said to me, 'is that the best you could do for Me this week?' " While thinking about all the pressures of that week, Gossip could honestly say, "Yes, Lord, it is my best." Then Gossip said, "Jesus Christ took that poor thing that Sunday morning and in His hands it became a trumpet!"<sup>2</sup>

It is always so. Even on our best days we have only some small fish and a few rolls. But we serve the living Lord. Give Him your small lunch and trust Him to feed His people. 

1 Adapted from the chapter "A Final Word," from Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2001), 221–224. Used by permission.

2 William Barclay, *William Barclay: A Spiritual Autobiography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 13.

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# Adventist theology and the new anthropology:

## *Challenges and opportunities*

**Editors' note:** This manuscript merited the grand prize in the most recent Ministry Student Writing Contest.

Ever since Adolf von Harnack launched the thesis that almost everything considered Christian orthodoxy (“the Catholic element”) is, in fact, the result of “acute hellenization of Christianity,”<sup>1</sup> classic theology’s very foundation was shaken. As if to confirm this, Jürgen Moltmann coined the phrase “the Fathers baptized Aristotle.”<sup>2</sup>

Since then, Protestants, particularly Evangelicals, have begun a process of “dehellenizing” theology. What does this process of dehellenization do to theology? How is it related to Adventist theology? This article will outline the history of the process of dehellenization in Protestant and Evangelical theology in order to show how history affected the understanding of the idea of God and, consequently, the understanding of human nature. In addition, this article will attempt to demonstrate that this change in paradigm places the Seventh-day Adventist Church in an ideal position to present its doctrinal system.

### The dehellenization of God

Beginning with the understanding that theology had been built on the philosophical presuppositions of

ancient Greek Hellenism, one of the first elements to be reformulated by a minority of scholars was the fundamental presupposition of the *being of God*. If God’s timelessness had formerly been the starting point of classic theology, it would now be radically reinterpreted by a new philosophical paradigm.

As philosophers became more familiar with the underlying temporal nature of reality, they acknowledged that temporal things could be conjectured as being real. Thus, history ceased to be an illusory copy of eternal—timeless—realities, such as the one conceived by Platonic philosophy and classic theism. In his masterpiece *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time), Martin Heidegger rejected timelessness as set forth by Aristotle, Parmenides, and Thomas Aquinas and proposed: “Our provisional aim is the interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being.”<sup>3</sup> Reality was interpreted in terms of temporality.<sup>4</sup>

Following the same line of reasoning, God is not seen as a Being in which there is an absence of time but rather as a God who includes time in His Being. Oscar Cullmann rejected the presupposition of the timelessness of God’s Being because it belonged to ancient Greek

philosophy. Cullmann argued that the Hebrew mind clearly conceives that God lives in a time without limits and not in an abstract way, as if He were beyond time. In his exegetical analysis of the use of *aiôn* in the New Testament, Cullmann concludes that the biblical concept of eternity is not necessarily a timeless reality but rather an unlimited experience of time. Thus, eternity is not timelessness but rather time without end—linear time shared by both God and human beings.<sup>5</sup>

According to Norman Gulley, Fernando Canale was really able to solve the issue of God’s relationship to time. Canale suggested “that biblical ontology calls for an understanding of time as a primordial presupposition.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, he stated that, based on the biblical presupposition of God’s Being, “a new theological system will arise, which, for the first time, will be free from extra-theological conditioning.”<sup>7</sup>

### Doctrine of man: The next step

The doctrine of man was next to be challenged and reformulated by some mainstream theologians. Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas had taught that human beings were rational animals. However, in contrast to the

Greek philosopher, Aquinas held that the soul is separated from the body at death. He considered that the soul was a nonbodily, lasting entity that could exist without the body during the time between the death of a person and the general resurrection.<sup>8</sup>

One of the pioneers who attempted a reformulation of the Greek philosophical influence on anthropology was Oscar Cullmann. In an essay that was originally presented in the 1955 Ingersoll lecture at Harvard University, “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament,” Cullmann stated that the concept of the immortality of the soul is

question still has to be investigated of how, with the Greek language, a Greek philosophy has here supplanted Semitic biblical views, overwhelming them with foreign influence.”<sup>12</sup>

### Current developments in the doctrine of man

This denial of Platonic dualism in favor of an integrated vision of humans has been further developed recently. Currently, many voices from different theological lines of thought are proclaiming a similar message. Clark Pinnock—former president of the Evangelical Theological Society—for example, affirms that the “Hellenistic

based on its vision of the person as an integral entity, not as a dichotomy of mind and body.<sup>19</sup> And from a philosophy of religion perspective, based on logic as a discipline, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann have also attempted to argue against the dualistic Cartesian view of the human.”<sup>20</sup>

One of the latest developments is the so-called constitutional view; it states that human beings are *constituted* by a body but are not *identical* to the body that *constitutes* them, in the same way that a statue is constituted by bronze but is not identical to the bronze that constitutes it.<sup>21</sup> Similar to this view of the human is what is known

**As the people of the Book, we need to enter into the Christian theological arena and show that Adventism has a biblical, sound theology.**

one of the “greatest misunderstandings of Christianity.”<sup>9</sup> He also expressed that the resurrection of the dead was anchored in the teachings of Christ and that it is “incompatible with the Greek belief in immortality.”<sup>10</sup> In this sense, early Christians did not consider that the soul was intrinsically immortal but rather that the soul was immortal only through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and by faith in Him. In addition, Cullmann also denied the duality between body and soul—a concept that comes from Greek Platonism.

From an Old Testament perspective, Hans Walter Wolff also came to the conclusion that no anthropological dualism exists in the Scriptures. He stated that an erroneous translation of the anthropological terminology of the Bible had “led in the false direction of a dichotomic or trichotomic anthropology, in which body, soul and spirit are in opposition to one another.”<sup>11</sup> According to Wolff, “the

belief about human nature that has dominated Christian thinking” is “an unbiblical anthropology.”<sup>13</sup> For him, “the Bible does not teach the natural immortality of the soul; it points instead to the resurrection of the body as God’s gift to believers.”<sup>14</sup> G. C. Berkouwer argues that there is no anthropological “division” in humans<sup>15</sup> but maintains that the human exists in an intermediate state with Christ after death.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, while Helmut Thielicke states that there is “no division of the I into body and soul,” he also leans toward an intermediate state.<sup>17</sup>

Based on Luke 24:36–49, Marilyn McCord Adams states that the ideal state is not that of the disincarnate soul independent from the body, but the final objective is the resurrection of the body.<sup>18</sup> From a psychological perspective, David Myers advocates for a wholistic vision of the person. He states that the biblical vision of knowledge is

as “emergent dualism.”<sup>22</sup> This position accepts that human beings, as well as other organisms, initially consist of nothing more than common physical matter; however, the idea of emergence is added. The idea of emergence means that when elements of a certain type are organized in the right way, something new comes into existence, something that did not exist before.

William Hasker, one of the proponents of this position, draws a parallel with an electromagnet. In essence, it is only a coil of wire. But when an electric current goes through the wire, something new appears: a magnetic field. This field exerts causal powers that were not there before it was created, enabling it to activate a motor or lift something. “As a magnet generates its magnetic field, so an organism generates its field of consciousness.”<sup>23</sup> However, since Hasker does not want to be confused with Platonic dualism,

he clarifies: “So, for emergent dualism, eternal life is entirely possible, but it will come about through an amazing and miraculous act of God, not as a natural attribute of our ‘immortal souls.’”<sup>24</sup>

And the list could go on. Everything seems to indicate that the Greek dualistic view will continue to be challenged from multiple perspectives.<sup>25</sup>


## Adventists’ dehellenization

Adventist theology started as a process of deconstructing traditional theology. This process came about as a consequence of Adventism moving itself from philosophical conditionings in order to read the Bible based on its own presuppositions. Adventist pioneers’ change also began with the doctrine of God. For example, both James and Ellen White emphasized the concept of “two distinct, literal, tangible persons”<sup>26</sup> of the Godhead, in contrast to the abstract, theoretical, and impersonal God of the Greek philosophy. Jerry Moon stresses this departure of the classical understanding of God: “She [Ellen G. White] rejected at least three of the philosophical presuppositions undergirding traditional trinitarianism: (a) the radical dualism of spirit and matter, which concluded that God could not have a visible form; (b) the notion of impassibility, which held that God had no passions, feelings, or emotions, hence could have no interest in, or sympathy with, humans; and (c) the dualism of time and timelessness, which led to the notions of ‘eternal generation’ and ‘eternal procession.’ Her rejection of all these concepts constitutes a radical departure from the medieval dogma of the Trinity.”<sup>27</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, from its very beginning, has also held to a monistic view of human.<sup>28</sup> In their defense of the biblical monistic view of human beings, Adventist pioneers condemned dualistic anthropology as having its origin in Plato’s philosophy.<sup>29</sup> For them, one “element in the falling away out of which came the Beast [Rev. 13], and which was a mighty impulse in

the making of the Beast, was the adoption of pagan philosophy,” and one of the results was the belief in “the immortality of the soul.”<sup>30</sup> A. T. Jones, for example, quoting the historian Edward Gibbon, argued that the idea of the immortality of the soul came to Christianity through Plato’s dualism.<sup>31</sup> And Uriah Smith considered that the idea of an “immaterial, ever-conscious, never-dying” soul came from “the uncertain speculations of Socrates and Plato.”<sup>32</sup>

## Making a difference in the theological arena

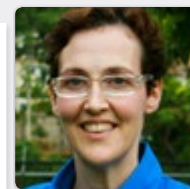
A growing number of modern Protestants and Evangelicals have come to embrace the traditional Adventist position on biblical monism: “the position according to which all expressions of the inner life depend on the whole of human nature, including the organic system.”<sup>33</sup> However, when Protestants and Evangelicals arrived at this anthropological understanding, Adventists had been there for a long time. The current theological outlook makes room for Adventist theology to play an effective theological role. Although Protestantism, in its orthodox form, has been built over Greek ontological presuppositions, some scholars disagree with Platonic dualism. Thomas Kuhn, American physicist and philosopher, indicated that these are anomalies that eventually would require a paradigm shift.<sup>34</sup> This paradigm shift already occurred in Adventist theology. As the people of the Book, we need to enter into the Christian theological arena and show that Adventism has a biblical, sound theology. 

- 1 Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Buchanan, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1902), 48–60.
- 2 See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM, 1982), 20–22.
- 3 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie, Edward Robinson (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1962), 1. For an account of Heidegger’s position, see Marcos Blanco, “Change of Paradigm in Theology and the New Anthropology,” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 15, no. 1 (2012): 106, 107.
- 4 Heidegger also explains time as the transcendental horizon of the question of being. For a definition of Dasein, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 65.
- 5 Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Wilson, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), 49.

- 6 Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, vol. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 10.
- 7 Fernando Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 399.
- 8 See Marilyn McCord Adams, “The Resurrection of the Body According to Three Medieval Aristotelians: Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William Ockham,” *Philosophical Topics* 20, no. 1 (1992): 1–33.
- 9 Oscar Cullmann, “Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead: The Witness of the New Testament,” in *Immortality and Resurrection*, ed. Krister Stendahl (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 9.
- 10 Ibid.
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- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Clark H. Pinnoch, “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 147.
- 14 Ibid., 147, 148.
- 15 G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 265.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Helmut Thielicke, *Living With Death* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 173. For more examples, see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 173–195.
- 18 Marilyn McCord Adams, “The Resurrection of the Body: Luke 24:36–49,” *The Expository Times* 117, no. 6 (2006): 252.
- 19 David Myers, *The Human Puzzle* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978), 125.
- 20 Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “An Objection to Swinburne’s Argument for Dualism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (1996): 405–412.
- 21 Kevin J. Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 65.
- 22 Here the word *dualism* must not be understood in a Platonic or Cartesian way but rather as opposed to merely material monism, which presents human beings as only animals.
- 23 William Hasker, “Philosophical Contributions Theological Anthropology,” in *For Faith and Clarity: Philosophical Contributions to Christian Theology*, ed. James K. Beilby (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 257.
- 24 Ibid., 258.
- 25 For a more comprehensive list of current anthropological positions, see Blanco, “Change of Paradigm,” 108–112.
- 26 James White, *Day-Star*, January 24, 1846, 25; Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1945), 54, 77. Ellen and James White did not doubt that “God is spirit” (John 4:24), but they insisted that God has a “literal, tangible” existence; He is neither unreal nor imaginary.
- 27 Jerry Moon, “The Quest for a Biblical Trinity: Ellen White’s ‘Heavenly Trio’ Compared to the Traditional Doctrine,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 1 (2006): 156, 157.
- 28 Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966) 646–740.
- 29 Stephen Nelson Haskell, *The Story of Daniel the Prophet* (South Lancaster, MA: Bible Training School, 1901), 229.
- 30 “The Making of the Beast,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, vol. 77, no. 17 (1900): 264. See also Alonzo Trevier Jones, *Ecclesiastical Empire* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1901), 97.
- 31 A. T. Jones, “The Third Angel’s Message—No. 12,” *Daily Bulletin of the General Conference*, vol. 5, no. 10 (February 13, 14, 1893): 261.
- 32 Uriah Smith, *Here and Hereafter, or Man in Life and Death: The Reward of the Righteous and the Destiny of the Wicked* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1897), 173.
- 33 Aecio Cairus, “The Doctrine of Man,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 212.
- 34 “Paradigm shift,” *Wikipedia*, accessed April 6, 2015, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradigm\_shift.

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# “Holy” gossiping: *Reflections on how the psalms view the misuse of the tongue*

**T**hou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Exod. 20:16). Pastors are expected to uphold this commandment.

Failure to maintain the standards of truthfulness and objectivity causes unforeseen damage, especially in cases that affect other people’s lives. Misuse of the tongue is probably a leading factor in causing disunity among the believers. The tongue counteracts many positive works in the community. Raising awareness about such misuse and seeking to prevent and solve its terrible consequences becomes an imperative for every person who serves the God of peace and truth.

Given the complexity of the issue, I believe that the Psalms’ reflections on the misuse of “tongue” inform, sharpen, and correct our understanding and practice. The Psalms are well qualified for this task, because “of all the sins in the Decalogue it is surely that of the ninth commandment which receives the fullest treatment” in the Psalms.<sup>1</sup>

## What is “holy” gossiping?

For lack of a better term, the phrase “holy” gossiping in this article is used to depict soliciting and spreading false and misleading information about other people or other faiths with the purpose of hurting them. It depicts also intentional

and unintentional misrepresenting of other persons’ or other faiths’ beliefs and stressing their perceived flaws and misconceptions on certain matters at the expense of their other qualities and contributions. The label “holy” serves here to highlight the fact that much gossip is camouflaged by pious intentions and so easily mistaken for zeal or good. However, alleged pious appearance does not make gossiping less sinful; if anything, it makes gossiping more deceitful. Such misuse of the tongue tends to make its way into our communities. Knowingly or unknowingly, most of us become purveyors or victims of “holy” gossiping—from passing easy judgments on other people to perpetuating false stereotypes about other faiths and nonbelievers.

The Psalms provide numerous descriptions of the activities of purveyors. They lie (Pss. 4:2; 5:6; 12:2; 119:69), speak cordially with their neighbor but secretly devise malice (Pss. 28:3; 55:21), spread false witness (Pss. 27:12; 35:11, 20), twist the victim’s words (Ps. 56:5), ridicule (Pss. 22:6; 35:16; 69:12; 119:51), and accuse and threaten (Ps. 7:3–5, 8; 109:25; 119:4).

## The evils of “holy” gossiping

Three metaphors in the Psalms illustrate the gruesome nature of the

purveyors of gossip. (1) The purveyors are often compared with a hostile army that attacks the helpless and surrounds them with devastating forces (Pss. 3:6; 27:3; 55:18; 56:1; 59:1–9). (2) They are compared with hunters and fishers who set traps and nets, dig hidden pits, sit in the dark, lurk and lie in wait, and shoot their deadly arrows (Pss. 7:15; 9:15; 31:4; 35:7, 8; 64:4; 140:5). (3) They are compared with ravenous beasts that suddenly spring on a person (Pss. 7:2; 22:12, 13; 27:2; 35:21).<sup>2</sup>

The psalmists often use the imagery of animals to illustrate the vicious nature of gossip. Some of those creatures are a lion (Pss. 22:21; 57:4; 58:6), dogs (Pss. 22:16, 20; 59:6, 7, 14, 15), and a serpent (Pss. 58:3–5; 140:3). These animals are noted for their deadly mouths. Their threatening roar, bark, and hiss and their awful teeth that tear and kill remind the psalmist of the slanderers’ work. “[T]he psalmists’ choice to deploy specifically animal metaphors within the rhetoric of complaint sets in stark relief the imminent danger the ‘wicked’ pose to society and the innocent individual.”<sup>3</sup>

The metaphors of hunting tell of the scheming and luring character of gossiping. The victim usually does not become aware of the danger before it is too late (Pss. 64:5; 140:5; 141:9). A

swarm of bees (Ps. 118:12), a herd of bulls (Ps. 22:12), and a pack of dogs (Ps. 22:16) highlight the collective work of the enemies. The malicious talk is compared with swords, spears, and arrows to underline its violent nature and terrible consequences (Pss. 55:21; 57:4; 58:7; 59:7; 64:2–6).

Many purveyors of gossip live in self-deception, believing that their deeds will go unpunished by God (Pss. 10:11, 13; 50:19–21; 64:5; 73:11). However, the psalms relentlessly denounce them and tell of God's impending judgment (Pss. 12:3–5, 7; 15:2, 3; 50:21, 22; 59:12, 13; 75:2).

### Unmasking “holy” gossiping

Disclosing “holy” gossiping poses a great challenge. How do the Psalms help in raising a new awareness? Consider a few examples from the Psalms.

First, “holy” gossiping usually denies any hope for the victim and

undermines the victim's experience with God. Israel's enemies readily used Israel's misfortunes as an opportunity to blaspheme God's name and to cause humiliation and pain to God's people (Pss. 73:8–11; 74:10, 22). The enemies are overjoyed to spread the word that God has forsaken the psalmist when he is in distress (Pss. 3:2; 22:8; 71:11). Though the psalmist also feels that God has made him see trouble, he trustingly reaches out to God's grace that will restore his life again (Pss. 38:1–3, 15–18, 21, 22; 41:4; 71:20, 21). The enemies, however, wish to portray the psalmist's present sorrow as beyond any repair (Pss. 35:15, 16; 38:19, 20; 41:5–9; 71:11, 13). They exaggerate the victim's fault and insinuate lies for no reason (Pss. 35:11, 19; 38:19; 69:4). Malice and jealousy drive the work of the purveyors, and they rejoice in their victim's distress (Pss. 35:19, 26, 27; 38:16).

Second, Israel's enemy asks, “Where is their God?” (Ps. 115:2).

The question is meant to undermine the power of Israel's God and drive the people into despair. It implies that the Israelite religion is false and ineffective (Ps. 94:4–7). Notice that the enemy spreads the word to others. It is “*their* God” and not “*your* God” like in a dialogue (Ps. 115:2). “Many are saying of me: ‘God will not deliver him,’ ” and not “*to me*” like in a dialogue (Ps. 3:2, NIV; emphasis supplied). Gossipers evade dialogue because they do not seek answers and reconciliation but use the opportunity to prove their point and destroy the victim's reputation (Pss. 13:4; 35:21, 25; 41:5–8). The Psalms demonstrate that malicious talk can easily escalate into violence and persecution (Pss. 31:13; 74:3–8).

A third example of the subtlety of malicious talk is the Babylonians' request of the Judean captives to sing the songs of Zion (Ps. 137:3). This case implies hidden motives and scheming. The captors' alleged desire to share in the Judean's story turns to be a plot

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to torment the people by bringing up the obvious discrepancy between the glorious Zion in Israel's hymns and the present Zion lying in ruins. The captors' request is designed to humiliate the Judeans and pronounce victory over their God. Sadly, today some opportunities for reconciliation and fellowship are spoiled by some people's plotting to humiliate other persons or other faiths and pronounce victory of their own views over theirs.

Fourth, one does not have to agree with the other in everything to refrain from malicious talk. The Psalms denounce the idols of other nations, but this is always done to acknowledge the universal character of God's reign, namely to highlight the truth that the Lord is the God of the whole earth and of all nations (Pss. 86:8–10; 96:4, 5; 97:6, 7; 115:3–15). It is never done to praise the good in the psalmists or in their community, but the good in God, who gives life to all. The Psalms never demean but always uplift others in the vision of a grand worship of the sovereign Lord of all creation (Pss. 33:8; 67:3–5; 96:7–11; 117:1, 2; 145:21; 148:11–13; 150:6). Later, we will see that the psalmists' imprecatory language against the enemies is uttered only in God's presence. The Psalms uplift God's sovereign justice that ensures the well-being of all creation (Ps. 33:5) and acknowledges that evil is ultimately self-destructive (Pss. 34:21; 35:7, 8; 37:14, 15).

One day in church, a boy spoke about his neighbors whose religious practice was different from his family's own. A girl wondered why his neighbors did not do the things the way they did. The boy replied: "It is because they do not read the Bible, like we do!" Adults often laugh at children's blunt statements, but do we not basically say the same things sometimes? Even if the neighbors' practice was not biblical, the boy's answer reflects the core of "holy" gossip. First, it supposes the neighbors' habit of not reading the Bible. Second, it praises our habit of reading the Bible, rather than promoting the goodness of God's truth. Third, it endorses the

breach between "them" and "us" ("us" being the better ones), rather than reaching out in love. These tasks are challenging even for mature believers. The Psalms caution us to speak of others with greater sensitivity and fairness and to look for better ways of sharing our opinions and beliefs. One step toward that goal is admitting and rejecting any form of "holy" gossiping.

## Dealing with "holy" gossiping

We shall not discuss here the steps that the minister and the community should take in making things right. Rather, we shall look for some answers that will help the victims. The psalmists were often victims of slander and scheming and so have much to say about one's conduct in such situations.

The first thing that we notice in the Psalms is the victims' acknowledgment of the wrong done to them. Resentment and sorrow over the situations are expressed "with perfect freedom, without disguise, without self-consciousness, without shame—as few but children would express it today."<sup>4</sup> Some modern readers are appalled at the psalmists' language (Pss. 35; 64; 109). However, "if we look at their railings we find they are usually angry not simply because these things have been done to them but because these things are manifestly wrong, are hateful to God as well as to the victim."<sup>5</sup> (The psalmists protest against injustice, violence, and abuse.) Their language is passionate because they take right and wrong more seriously than we do sometimes.

Second, the psalmists acknowledge God's sovereignty by submitting their grief and rage to Him and leaving the vengeance to Him. The psalmists' imprecatory language against the enemies is uttered only in God's presence and not before other people whom it does not concern (Ps. 39:1–4). Only God's justice can fully rectify the victims' distress (Pss. 9:8; 75:7; 94:2). However, "giving the outrage over to God does not mean giving the responsibility of the community over to God,"

but "moving past the need for human vengeance and moving on to working to make sure that the source of what brought on the imprecatory words never happens again."<sup>6</sup> In the case of gossiping, one of the ways of making sure that it never happens again is raising awareness of its many subtle forms and grave consequences. Ministers should intentionally engage in this through preaching, giving seminars, strengthening the fellowship of the community, and providing counseling for healing and reconciliation. The individuals who experienced the awful impact of slandering can become a positive force in their surroundings and help others. Psalms are prayers and so do not necessarily reveal everything about dealing with the problem. Other biblical texts provide additional practical steps (e.g., Matt. 18:15–20).

Third, in giving their hurt and resentment over to God, the psalmists experience the transformative power of divine grace (Ps. 31:20–24). The shift from lament to praise is evident in many psalms of lament (Pss. 13; 22; 73; 77). Sharing their innermost sentiments with God strengthens the psalmists' trust in divine justice and deliverance, and the psalmists are able to offer praise amidst trials. Yet, in some psalms, lament dominates to the end (Pss. 38; 74; 88). The psalmists know that one need not pretend in divine presence. "The faith expressed in the lament is nerve—it is a faith that knows that honest facing of distress can be done effectively only in dialogue with God who acts in transforming ways."<sup>7</sup> The fact that lament is spoken to God tells of active, insistent hope in divine intervention (Pss. 74:2, 22; 88:1). Hope involves patient waiting for divine vindication and healing (Pss. 5:3; 37:7–13; 38:15).

## Preventing "holy" gossiping

On the prevention of "holy" gossiping, the psalmists offer a strategy that involves at least four steps.

First, they call the sufferer to "refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not



fret,” because “it leads only to evil” (Ps. 37:8, NIV). The psalmist resolves here not to pay back the purveyors with the same measure, but shares his complaint with God (Pss. 38:13–15; 39:1–4). The acknowledgement that God is the ultimate Judge should keep everyone from doing anything that would put them in the company of the wicked (Ps. 34:12–14).

Second, the Psalms remind us that we can manage our tongue only with God’s grace. “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3, NKJV). The psalmist alludes here to the guarding of the city gates. In ancient times, the city gates protected the city (Josh. 2:5, 7; 2 Chron. 33:14). The gatekeeper had a crucial role because he was the first to detect danger and raise an alarm to the city

(2 Sam. 18:24). Taking possession of the city gates meant owning the city (Gen. 22:17). The imagery also points to the temple gates that were guarded by the Levites and prevented anything impure from entering the temple (1 Chron. 26:1–19; 2 Chron. 8:14). The psalmist prays that the words of his mouth are always pleasing to God (Ps. 19:14).

Third, “the Psalms themselves are examples of the positive use of the tongue for the praise of God. This makes its negative use to destroy other people especially reprehensible.”<sup>8</sup> The psalmists’ praise strengthened theirs and others’ faith in God, supported the fellowship of the believers, and brought honor to God (Ps. 22:22–28; 35:27, 28).

Fourth, the Psalms never take misuse of the tongue lightly. So should we,

who seek to serve the One whose words are always pure and reviving (Pss. 12:6; 119:103). ▮

- 1 Gordon J. Wenham, “The Ethics of the Psalms,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, eds. David Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 186. See, for example, Pss. 4:2; 5:6, 9; 10:7; 12:2; 15:2–4; 27:12; 28:3; 34:13; 35:11, 20; 50:19, 20; 52:2–5; 55:9–11, 21; 59:12; 64:3–5; 66:13, 14; 69:4; 73:8, 9; 101:5; 109:2; 120:2, 3; 140:3; 144:11.
- 2 Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 130, 131.
- 3 William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 141.
- 4 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958), 23.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 30.
- 6 Nancy L. deCaisse-Walford, “The Theology of the Psalms,” in *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, ed. Rolf A. Jacobson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 91, 92.
- 7 Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 69.
- 8 Wenham, “The Ethics of the Psalms,” 187.

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## Revive in us Your work

“A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs.”\*

The greatest and urgent need indeed has been the need for revival in every period of sacred history. Be it the Exodus or Josiah’s reformation or the return from captivity, be it the cradle of Bethlehem or the cross at Golgotha or Jerusalem’s empty tomb, be it the outpouring at Pentecost or the launching of the apostolic great missionary journeys, be it the sunrise of the Reformation or the flying of the three angels in the midst of heaven; God’s highway to the kingdom is marked by revival and reformation—revival of God’s Word, prayer for God’s work, and love of God’s people.

Consider the prayer of Habakkuk 3:2: “O LORD, revive your work” (NKJV). When Judah was facing its death throes and Babylon was at Judah’s doors fuming vengeance,

the prophet turned to revival as the hope of his people. Habakkuk’s prayer for revival demands an urgent plea for God’s people to accomplish three things.

First, let His people be conscious of the truth, holiness, and sovereignty of the One who revealed Himself on Mount Sinai (vv. 3, 4). Without the transcript of His character becoming the governing norm of human conduct, there can be no revival. Wholeness to God’s grace will lead to holiness of life.

Second, let His people acknowledge God’s creative activity. Let them look to the One who “stood and measured the earth” and before whom the perpetual hills bowed (v. 6), and before whom all life seem speechless and helpless (vv. 12–16). Can such a Creator God be denied, minimized, or compromised within our midst, and we dare expect revival?

Third, let His people embrace and proclaim that God is their ultimate salvation and hope. The fig tree may not blossom; the olive may fail; the fields may dry up; the flocks may be cut off (vv. 17, 18). Satanic forces may let loose every foe at their command. But the power of the Word never wanes. The joy in the Lord shall endure forever. He is our strength. He is our hope. In Him, we shall have revival, renewal, and history’s glorious culmination.

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\* Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 121.





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# Balancing a **busy** life

**M**ost pastors spend an average of 50 hours a week working, not including the main weekly church service.<sup>1</sup> Even though we are putting in the time, we may not be very focused or productive. We spend much time in meetings, visitations, and sermon preparation. But few pastors are intentional about discipling, vision casting, and creative thinking. One of the ways to find balance is through effective time management. Pastors do not find it easy to balance a busy life to fit everything in that we love and what we have to do, but here are some tips to help facilitate the process.

## Tips for finding balance

**1. Meet God every morning.** Allow at least an hour first thing in the morning for your own devotional and quiet time with God. Sermon preparation does not have the same rejuvenation properties as devotional time. To keep balance in your life, you need to keep a strong connection to Christ. Larry Moyer notes that “preachers who have fallen away from the Lord have commented to me that where they made their mistake was neglecting their quiet time with Him.”<sup>2</sup>

In my experience, I have found that waking up an hour early to spend time in reading the Bible, singing, praying, and reading other devotional books sets the tone for the rest of my day. Additionally, during prayer walks in the day, I share with God the issues on my heart and take time to listen to what He has to share with me.

**2. Take time to dream.** Picture your ideal life. Consider the following: (1) What is important to you? A relationship with God, a healthy family dynamic, sharing the message of the kingdom? (2) What are your values? (3) How do you want to spend your time? Preaching, discipling, communing with God? (4) How do you want to feel? (5) With whom do you want to interact? Church members, youth, the lost? (6) What is your passion? (7) What is your philosophy of ministry?

Write it all down. Be specific. What barriers are keeping you from fulfilling your dream? The more clearly you see your dream and are aware of the steps necessary to achieve it, the easier it will be to see yourself achieving your dream. It will help you realize what you need to do in your life, or cut out of your life, in order to bring your dream into reality. Be intentional every day about working toward your dream.

The same is true for your churches. If you do not have a dream for your church, it will stagnate. You need to see your dream clearly enough to be able to share it with the church, foster enthusiasm for the direction in which you see your church headed, and nurture participation in fulfilling the dream.

**3. Take stock of your current reality.** Make a list of your present tasks, what is needed to complete them, and the amount of time needed. Be intentional about keeping your church moving forward. Be honest about how long each item on your list will take.

Underestimating the time needed to complete a task will only cause you to be rushed or late for the next task. Remember, it takes much more effort to execute a task than it does to just think about it. Putting everything down on paper can help you get a better perspective of what you are trying to accomplish.

One of the best things in my ministry was when I took time to make a list of my strengths and weaknesses to share with my church board. Like most boards, they were already aware of where I was lacking, because of either limited time or limited ability. We found leaders willing to step in and take on some of the responsibilities for me. For example, an elder who worked in finance offered to go to all of the finance committees and report back to me with a summary. We hired a church secretary to help me get more organized and deal with some of the office work.

**4. Prioritize and make productive choices.** Develop a priority list of what you really want to do.<sup>3</sup> Pray that God will show you what the best use of your time is and how to unclutter your life. Focus on those elements that are important before they become urgent. By taking care of your most unpleasant tasks, you will not spend the rest of your day dreading them and will keep them from turning into urgent items. Once you make these choices, let go of what you cannot or choose not to do. If you have prioritized your list, it will be easier to know when you need to say

No. There may be certain tasks that, while a priority, will be better served if another leader is included. Do not be afraid to delegate. You do not have to be in every committee meeting or a part of every ministry in your church. Even Moses had to be reminded to delegate and not try to do everything himself (see Exod. 18:13–22).

When it comes to programming and ministry, keep in mind that if something is not contributing to the vision of the church, it does not necessarily need to continue. Just because you have always done something in the past does not mean that this is still productive for you or the church to do.

5. *Focus on building resources.* By

the training necessary for people to be confident and prepared for ministry and evangelism.

To avoid getting sidetracked, make sure there are people who will support you and push you forward. Have a friend or community pastor group to go to for advice and nurturing. After seminary, a group of three of us committed to meet four times a year. We discussed how to bring our dreams into reality by sharing our experiences, challenges, resources, creative ministry ideas, and critiques of each other's preaching. This was an opportunity for us to pray together and provided much needed support while we encouraged each other to pursue our dreams. This

you deal with the demands of a busy schedule. "Both job performance and satisfaction are heightened when the body is strong and capable."<sup>7</sup> Taking short five-to ten-minute walks every two to three hours gives me energy, a sense of well-being, and the ability to concentrate better.

7. *Take time for critical thinking.*

Just as you need to reevaluate your personal budget at regular intervals, you also need to make regular check-ups on how you are spending your time. Activities creep into our schedules that we really do not need or want to do. Some tasks start taking up more time than you have budgeted for, while others take less. If you regularly set aside time to look at how you spend your time, you will be better able to eliminate those unwanted activities.

I often ask myself: *What am I doing that does not need to be done by me? What am I doing that is not working? How can I better do what I am doing? What is not being done that should be? What is being done that should not be?*

Use critical thinking to help with problem solving. Brainstorm with other people to learn from their experiences and tap into their creativity. Read books on various subjects to glean insights and find better ways to interact with and inspire your members.

## Allocating your time

Spending your whole week on sermon preparation, visitation, or committee meetings will not work. If you do this, you will have no time to meet the physical and emotional needs of your congregation. You will, in effect, be neglecting your church. The goal is to find balance in your schedule. Below is one example of a balanced pastoral work-week of 45 hours. This does not include the time spent participating in the worship service or after church activities (conversations with church members, potluck, and so forth). Remember that you also

# Time management should be based on priorities rather than a specific number of hours.

looking at where you want to go, you will be able to discover what needs to be done to get there. Develop an action plan to help you realize your dream. There will be roadblocks and barriers to what you want to do. There will be occasions when you do not have the time, knowledge, or skills to get something done. Be proactive. Investigate and develop new resources. Family, friends, organizations, government services, the Internet, and libraries are all good resources that are available to you for little to no cost.

Build your resources from within. Be intentional about training new leaders. The biggest time-saver in ministry and the best way to implement both your dream and the dream of the church is to make sure that there are multiple trained leaders. Challenge people to get involved and fulfill their God-given gifts and potential. Provide

time spent in fellowship with them and other pastors was extremely beneficial to my ministry.

6. *Slow down to get ahead.* Runners perform better, run faster, and have fewer injuries when they take regular walk breaks *before* they get tired.<sup>4</sup> The same is true for pastors. Seek rest before you reach burnout. Whenever possible, limit yourself to an eight- or nine-hour workday, and leave your work behind when you go home. Spend quality time daily with your family. Play with your kids. Go on a date with your spouse. Take vacations. "Rest and watch your passion come back to life."<sup>5</sup>

Another way to avoid burnout is to include regular exercise in your schedule. "A walk, even in winter, would be more beneficial to the health than all the medicine the doctors may prescribe."<sup>6</sup> Exercise will help

need to make time for your personal devotions and family outside of work.

**1. Praying for the church: 5–7 hours a week.** Spend at least an hour a day in prayer on behalf of the church. At times you may choose to spend a whole day in prayer and perhaps have periodic fasting days. Get as many people as possible to join with you in prayer and fasting for your members and community. At one time I set aside all day Monday and an hour each day the rest of the week to pray for the church and community I was serving. During these all-day prayer sessions, I would take the membership list and pray over each name individually, calling those I could to let them know I was praying for them and ask whether there was a special need in their lives. Not long after this experience, the weekly attendance of the church grew from 40 to 500. Prayer does work wonders.

**2. Preaching/teaching preparation: 12–15 hours a week.** Budget at least ten hours a week for preparation of the upcoming week's sermon. Spend an additional three hours in reading and study for future sermons. Set aside an hour each week for Sabbath School preparation and another hour for your weekly prayer meeting or small group lesson planning.

**3. Discipleship formation: 5–10 hours a week.** Be intentional about spending time in vision casting and training people each week—not just periodically. Take an hour each week to have lunch or a church meeting with new or potential leaders to discuss vision casting for the church and where they fit in. Another two hours will likely be spent with current leaders and members for visioning, getting feedback, and training. Plan three hours each week for on-the-job training with your leaders, taking them with you on visitations and Bible study. Every visitation and Bible study should include intentional discipling that will benefit all involved. The remaining two hours of this time will be used for your


small group, which allows for modeling, training, and spiritual growth.

**4. Leadership/administration: 10–15 hours a week.** Focus on leadership by spending at least two hours each week on creative thinking in order to constantly improve on ministry, worship, and evangelism. Spend another hour sending out encouraging notes to members and leaders. Remind them of their valuable contribution to the church. Anticipate how much time you will need for office hours, allowing a cushion for dealing with all of the little unexpected items that come up. General office work—filling out reports, filing, signing documents—might average an hour a week. Returning emails and making phone calls could take about two hours. Another two hours will go to planning the worship service and bulletins. Then there are all of the meetings: staff meetings, elders' meetings, church board, school board, and so forth. The goal should be to keep these meetings from going too long; plan for two hours a week to be spent in meetings and the same amount of time for meeting preparation. Careful planning and preparation will help to keep your meetings on task. Every agenda should include prayer, ministry, and vision casting to maintain focus and ensure God's presence.

**5. Miscellaneous: approximately 5 hours a week.** There will always be miscellaneous things that take up your time. Try to make sure that they do not become "time robbers."<sup>8</sup> A phone call or an unscheduled office visit that you think is going to take ten minutes might turn into an hour if the person you are talking to gets off on a tangent. On occasion, that "tangent" may be a cry for help, and no time limit can be placed on such meetings, but it is important to distinguish between a person's genuine need and the tendency to just keep "talking." There are times when I go on social media or the Internet to check one thing and look up to see that 50 minutes have passed.

Additionally, there will occasionally be special needs requiring much time and energy that will not always be a part of your regular schedule. Some of these are church socials, weddings, funerals, and various crises.

## Conclusion

The above categories and time utilization plans are only a guide. In reality, a pastor is on call 24/7. But one still needs to be intentional with time management. You will find that the specific hours you commit to each category matters as much as the ability to find balance between them. Time management should be based on priorities rather than a specific number of hours. Remember, implementing a new strategy is a process. You will make some blunders and occasionally waste time. Keep your sense of humor, and learn from your mistakes. 

- 1 Based on an informal survey conducted in 2013, Thom Rainer notes that 87 percent of full-time pastors spend an average of 40–60 hours a week working. "How Many Hours Does a Pastor Work Each Week?" *Thom S. Rainer* (blog), July 6, 2013, accessed December 22, 2014, [thomrainer.com/2013/07/06/how-many-hours-does-a-pastor-work-each-week/](http://thomrainer.com/2013/07/06/how-many-hours-does-a-pastor-work-each-week/).
- 2 R. Larry Moyer, "5 Subtle Ways Satan Sneaks Into the Pulpit," *Church Leaders*, accessed December 22, 2014, [www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/158332-5-subtle-ways-satan-sneaks-into-the-pulpit.html/4](http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/158332-5-subtle-ways-satan-sneaks-into-the-pulpit.html/4).
- 3 For help in determining your priorities, see Stephen Covey's time management quadrants in United States Geological Survey, "Time Management Grid," 2, [www.usgs.gov/humancapital/documents/TimeManagementGrid.pdf](http://www.usgs.gov/humancapital/documents/TimeManagementGrid.pdf).
- 4 Jeff Galloway is a major contributor to the Run Walk Run method. See "Run Walk Run: It Began in 1974," Jeff Galloway Training, accessed December 22, 2014, [www.jeffgalloway.com/training/run-walk/](http://www.jeffgalloway.com/training/run-walk/).
- 5 Carson Tate, "Reignite Your Passion at Work in 5 Simple Steps," *Huffington Post*, accessed December 22, 2014, [www.huffingtonpost.com/carson-tate/staying-motivated-at-work\\_b\\_2936551.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/carson-tate/staying-motivated-at-work_b_2936551.html).
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1870), 529.
- 7 Victor Parachin, "Maintaining BALANCE in Ministry," *MinistersConnect*, accessed December 22, 2014, [ministers.ag.org/pdf/articles/BalanceinMinistry.pdf](http://ministers.ag.org/pdf/articles/BalanceinMinistry.pdf).
- 8 For more examples of time robbers and how to deal with them, see William H. Willimon, "Time Robbers and How to Stop Them," *Ministry*, September 1980, [www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1980/09/time-robbers-and-how-to-stop-them](http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1980/09/time-robbers-and-how-to-stop-them); and Heather Frame, "Time Robbers and What to Do About Them," *ActionCoach*, accessed December 22, 2014, [www.actioncoach.com/Time-Robbers-and-What-to-do-About-Them?pressid=1292](http://www.actioncoach.com/Time-Robbers-and-What-to-do-About-Them?pressid=1292).

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Larry Yeagley is a retired pastor, chaplain, and author residing in Gentry, Arkansas, United States.



# The way of a Christian leader

Pastors need effective leadership skills. Achieving them is a lifelong process. A seminary class is only a starter. Every situation provides a fresh challenge that may bring an updated model. Henri J. M. Nouwen wrote, “A whole new type of leadership is asked for in the Church of tomorrow, a leadership that is not modeled on the power games of the world, but on the servant-leader, Jesus, who came to give His life for the salvation of many. . . . The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross.”<sup>1</sup> In this article we will look at various aspects of leadership in light of Jesus’ downward mobility.

## Helping others succeed

Jesus spent long days demonstrating kingdom life for His disciples. At times they would have used the power games of the world, but Jesus patiently insisted on the way of love. He taught them, “‘Let your light shine before men *in such a way* that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven’” (Matt. 5:16, NASB).<sup>2</sup>

Matthew 10 is what I call Jesus’ manual for leadership. He taught it to the disciples, and then sent them out two by two to apply the manual. He was laying the groundwork for their success. Experienced pastors, blessed with

the responsibility of mentoring young pastors, aim to help them succeed. This requires time, teaching, trusting, sending, correcting, and affirming.

## Thoughtful and compassionate

One way to help others succeed is to be thoughtful and compassionate. I was in the middle of a baseball game at a summer camp I was working at all summer. The church conference president drove for almost an hour to give me the bad news, personally. My wife was in the hospital due to a miscarriage. He put his arm around me and said, “I want you to go home and spend a good two weeks caring for your wife. And don’t count it against your vacation.”

The same leader slipped into a back pew during my first lame attempt at public evangelism. At the close of my presentation, I invited the audience to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. He could tell that I was uncomfortable with altar calls. He met me at the door and said, “Your talk was well done. Just remember, the best decisions for the Lord are made in the homes, not in the church.” His compassion has lingered in my mind for decades. I envy that kind of leadership.

## Trying new ways

Jesus frequently found Himself coloring outside the traditional lines

of Judaism. People were excited at His fresh approach to kingdom-life teaching. He used a different way of teaching for people of different backgrounds.

My pastor told me he had a pile of manuals on how to do evangelism. He rejected all of them because he likes to use his creativity and lead people to Jesus in his own way. I commended him for coloring outside the lines.

A young adult noticed in her church that traditional methods of evangelism had been tried many times with no results. She and a dozen young adults decided to try something new. They painted the city food bank inside and outside. They volunteered to serve clients and donated food. They took roses to shopkeepers and lonely-looking people waiting for a ride at the grocery store. A blind man who was produce shopping received a rose. A customer who watched him receive the rose said, “Where is your church? That’s the kind of church I’d like to attend.” One member was so excited about going to her area that she exceeded the speed limit. The police stopped her. She apologized and gave the officer a rose with a smile. He declared he had never been given a rose. He gave her a friendly warning. She knew he had never heard of the Seventh-day Adventist Church until that day.

Effective leaders refuse to generate top-down programs. They encourage



planning at the grassroots, like that of this young-adult group.

There is a price to pay for leadership that colors outside the lines. Charges of disloyalty, rebellion, and pride may be leveled at this type of leadership. Effective leadership avoids these accusations by willingly giving a thorough explanation of different methods before implementing them.

### Out of the ivory towers

I asked the social secretary to a famous physician why his world-famous hospital failed. She immediately said, “The ivory tower.” The doctor thought

by another corporation. The ivory tower concept of leadership failed.

Effective leaders never insist that their way is the only way. They take many people into their counsel and are ready to change their minds and accept a better idea.

### Names and behind the names

George Pocock practiced a good leadership skill. Pocock built the shell and trained nine young oarsmen who won Olympic gold in rowing at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. He learned much about the hearts and souls of

heavy work. We hauled heavy wooden platforms for each family tent, then grunted and groaned as we lifted the tents in place. Through my sweat-filled eyes I saw the president of my church conference tugging at the opposite side of the tent. I appreciated seeing the leader working with his employees; it was more important than just giving orders. Getting one’s hands dirty is a quality of leadership to be cherished.

On a television program called *Undercover Boss*, the owner of a large company disguises his or her identity and works in several positions within

**Pastors who want a leader who tells them what to do and how to do it are depriving themselves of the excitement of creativity and innovation. Leaders who bow to such pressure are settling for mediocrity.**

his methods were the only way. Young doctors were not given privileges, so they organized their own hospital for the community.

The chief executive officer of another hospital, swimming in debt, was wise. He formed an administrative committee. Together they created a plan to reduce the debt. He spent time in every department gleaning ideas on cost saving. His office was always open to any employee. His openness gained confidence and cooperation. In two years the hospital was out of debt.

A few years later that hospital was taken over by a corporation. The leaders gave orders. Advisory committees were disbanded. Confidence dwindled. The hospital was purchased

the young men. He saw hope where a boy thought there was no hope, and skill where skill was obscured by ego or anxiety. He observed the fragility of confidence and the redemptive power of trust. Pocock was a real leader.<sup>3</sup>

A previous boss of mine came up to me years after I had worked for him. He knelt by my side and said, “Larry, I have been following your work over the years. I want you to know that I’m proud of you.” Be the leader who knows people’s names and looks behind the name.

### Dirty hands

Setting up and tearing down camp meeting tents was difficult for ministers who were not accustomed to

the company. The people that the owner worked with thought he or she was trying out for a job. The owner working beside a person struggling to make a living often led to higher wages and better working conditions. Walking in the shoes of an employee was a real eye-opener.

### Keep learning

A degree in leadership earned in the twentieth century may not equip you to be a leader in the twenty-first. Hudson T. Armerding wrote, “Merely living longer does not necessarily qualify an individual for leadership. . . . The effective leader is continually seeking to learn from his experiences and become even more proficient

in his work.”<sup>4</sup> Leith Anderson says a leader must maintain a “learning curve.”<sup>5</sup>

A Methodist pastor in Texas believed that a leader of ministers should go back to pastor a church every four or five years. Nothing like learning through doing, he insisted.

A church administrator was frightened at how out of touch he was becoming. Months later he resigned his leadership position and became the pastor of a big-city church. Be willing to continually learn and be led by the Holy Spirit to where God wants you to serve Him.

### Asking why

A leader who never asks questions does not deserve to be a leader. *Why am I doing this? Is this the best way to do it? Does what I am doing make a difference? Is what I do a result of my own study, or is it merely following orders from management? Am I enthusiastic*

*about what I am doing? Am I willing to be evaluated by others?*

Failure to ask questions can lead to inefficiency, blind loyalty to time-worn traditions, and waste.

Young adults in today’s church are asking important questions. Church leaders need not fear their questions. They are nothing more than doors to a growing church in a changing world.


### Conclusion

Pastors who want a leader who tells them what to do and how to do it are depriving themselves of the excitement of creativity and innovation. Leaders who bow to such pressure are settling for mediocrity.

The bright young adults in the church become enthusiastic about change, but not change for the sake of change. They live in a world where every phase of life is on the move. Some of them work for companies that invite their opinions and ideas. This creates a loyalty and enthusiasm for

the company. They desire that same openness for their church, but some leaders in the church do not share their hopes.

There appears to be a fresh interest in improving leadership in the church. There are writers within the church who are expressing the need for *downward mobility* in leadership style, a style that promises to renew interest and engagement among the young.

Nouwen spoke about a new type of leadership in the church of tomorrow. We need it in the church of today. 

1 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 45, 62.

2 Emphasis from the author.

3 Daniel James Brown, *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 48.

4 Hudson T. Armerding, *Leadership* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1981), 39, 154.

5 Leith Anderson, *Leadership That Works: Hope and Direction for Church and Parachurch Leaders in Today's Complex World* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Press, 1999).

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## Taking time to be attentive

“Don’t forget the cord, or you’ll be in trouble.” I recalled my husband’s words as I wound the Mac laptop cord and put it in my travel bag. Overseas where I was going, there would be no way to replace it, and without the cord, the battery would be dead in a couple of hours.

I finished packing and went to bed, anticipating an early flight. The following morning I rushed around with last-minute details and was finally ready to leave. My bags stood by the front door, and everything was in order. With one hand on the door handle, I bowed my head for a quick prayer, and that is when a verse I had read that morning, during my Revived

by His Word devotional, came to mind: “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker” (Ps. 95:6, NIV).

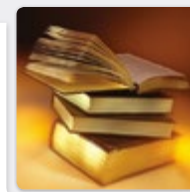
It occurred to me that I should kneel to pray. For once I was on time and had a few minutes. God could still hear me if I were standing up, but I believed from inspired counsel that whenever possible, I should kneel to pray.

So, I went back to the bedroom and knelt by my bed and had an unhurried conversation with God. My rush was gone, and when I finished, I quietly opened my eyes. It took a few moments to realize what I was seeing on the far wall, still plugged into the

socket—the computer power cord! That is when I remembered I had taken it out that morning to send a quick last-minute email. If I had not knelt to spend a few moments with God, I would have left it behind. Taking time to be attentive to God can result in unexpected blessings.

—NANCY COSTA IS THE PLANNED GIVING AND TRUST SERVICES OFFICER FOR IT IS WRITTEN AND RESIDES IN LAUREL, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES.





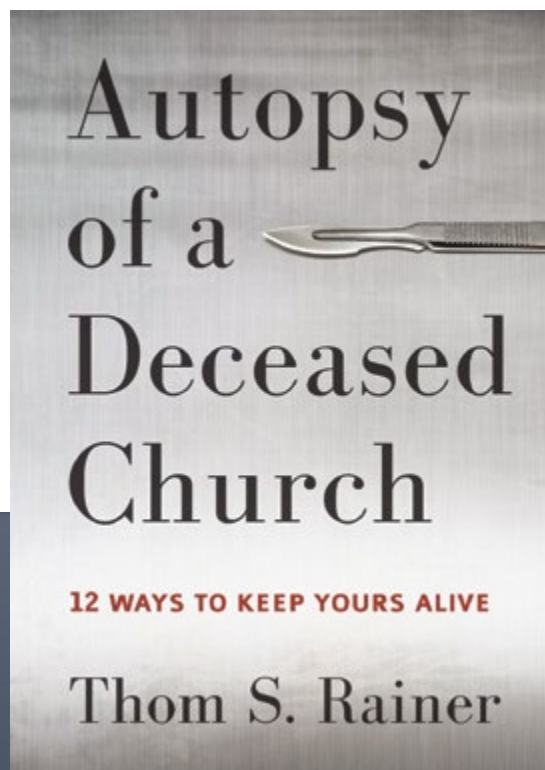
## *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*

by Thom S. Rainer, Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.

Many books come across my desk, sent by publishers with hopes that we will publish a review of them. When I first saw this short work, fewer than 100 pages, the title captured my attention and caused

my attention was particularly arrested when Rainer writes, “Members of the dying churches really didn’t want growth unless that growth met

*When I first saw this short work, . . . the title captured my attention and caused me to think about several churches that I recognize as dying a slow death.*



me to think about several churches that I recognize as dying a slow death.

Thom S. Rainer divides this work into two parts: chapters 1–11 provide the details of the autopsy; chapters 12–14 share hope and a way forward that can prevent churches from dying—if the issues are recognized and properly addressed in a timely fashion.

In the first part, Rainer analyzes 14 churches he recognizes as dead and shares ten common characteristics among them that contributed to their demise. The characteristics cover the general categories of lack of vision, misdirected budgeting and financial expenditures, and neglecting the Great Commission of Matthew 28. Concerning this third point,


their preferences and allowed them to remain comfortable” (44).

In the second part, Rainer posits that 10 percent of all churches are healthy. He then proceeds to address the other 90 percent that he claims have symptoms of sickness, are very sick, or are dying. The 12 ways to keep churches alive upon which he elaborates throughout the book “are more of a cry to God to intervene, and to create a willingness on the part of the church members to be obedient” (86).

The only two issues I had with the book were (1) what I deem to be an inaccurate exegesis of Matthew 28:19, where Rainer claims that the concept of *going* in the verse is the imperative

and making disciples is, as he puts it, a “sub-command” (41); and (2) he writes from a congregational church model, not fully recognizing or acknowledging that not all churches are founded on such a model. However, the latter of these does not greatly bother me in that the principles articulated apply across the board, regardless of denomination or church structure.

I find *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* to be a book that pastors and their church boards should study with an eye toward evaluating their congregations and planning for the future.

—Reviewed by Willie E. Hucks II, associate editor, Ministry. 



## ► Kenya's President Says Adventist Church Is Transforming Country

**Rongai, Kenya**—Kenya's president, **Uhuru Kenyatta**, has praised the Seventh-day Adventist Church for being a major force in improving the African country and donated \$22,000 toward a new health science building at the Adventist University of Africa.

President Kenyatta, speaking at a fund-raising event on February 22 for the university building in Ongata Rongai, Kenya, said he was grateful for the church's work in many education and health institutions across the country.

"You have established hospitals, educational facilities, and other socially beneficial amenities. You have uplifted communities, empowered our citizens, and built our nation," Kenyatta said, according to a statement published by the AllAfrica.com news site.

Turning his attention to the Adventist University of Africa, he expressed appreciation for the fact that it stands alone among the country's 22 public and 37 private universities in its strong focus on postgraduate studies. "This university is pan-African in scope, and it is the

only university which solely focuses on the provision of postgraduate studies," he said.

The university is also the only postgraduate institution in Africa to offer studies in public health and leadership, which university vice chancellor **Brempong Owusu-Antwi** linked to a desire by the Adventist Church to see people live healthier and happier lives.



President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya. Photo: Kenya government / Wikimedia

Kenya's president is spearheading a government drive to transform Kenya's economy, and education plays a key role in that policy. Kenyatta reminded his audience at the university that the government needs 1,000 doctoral graduates yearly for the next decade to meet the planning requirements.

The Adventist University of Africa raised more than 50 million Kenyan shillings (about US\$550,000) toward the construction of the new health science building at the fund-raising event, including 2 million Kenyan shillings (about US\$22,000) from Kenyatta. The total cost of the new building was not immediately clear.

Several African countries are looking to Adventist education to raise living standards. Earlier in February, Prime Minister **Anastase Murekezi** of Rwanda praised the church at the grand opening of a US\$2.4 million state-of-the-art facility that is expected to turn the Adventist University of Central Africa into a leading provider of information technology and communication specialists for the region. [Adventist Review staff] 

*"You have established hospitals, educational facilities, and other socially beneficial amenities. You have uplifted communities, empowered our citizens, and built our nation."*



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



# Dwindling evidence for the moderate use of alcohol

Your parishioners have undoubtedly asked you about the potential benefits of consuming moderate amounts of alcohol for their health. During the past 20 years, much scientific evidence has accumulated to suggest that people who drink moderately (usually defined as one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men) have a lower rate of overall mortality and coronary heart disease when compared with heavy drinkers or nondrinkers.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this promoting evidence in favor of moderate alcohol consumption, alcohol continues to be one of the leading causes of preventable death in the world. In the United States, alcohol is the third leading cause of

preventable death.<sup>2</sup> In 2010, the United Kingdom's Independent Scientific Committee concluded that alcohol was the world's most dangerous drug.<sup>3</sup> Alcohol is associated with financial stress, domestic violence, child abuse, and all types of crime and violence. Alcohol remains a major factor in motor vehicle accidents.

A ten-year study of eight European countries on alcohol consumption and cancer led researchers to conclude "there is no sensible limit below which the risk of cancer is decreased. . . . Thus, alcohol consumption should not be recommended to prevent cardiovascular disease or all-cause mortality."<sup>4</sup>

While the media has focused primarily on the

apparent benefits for heart health, it has largely ignored other serious negative impacts. Peter Landless and David Williams<sup>5</sup> indicate that moderate drinking is associated with a range of negative outcomes, which include the following:

1. *Risk of progression.* The National Institutes of Health suggests a "low estimate" is that 5 to 7 percent of abstainers will develop diagnosable problems if they begin using alcohol moderately.
2. *Risk of Addiction.* In the general population, 13 percent of people who regularly drink will become alcoholics. If a first-degree relative suffers from alcohol dependence,



the percentage doubles to 26 percent; and if alcohol use begins earlier than 14 years old, the percentage jumps to 40 percent or more.

3. *Binge drinking.* Evidence reveals that binge drinking once a week is more harmful than spreading out the consumption over the whole week. Yet, both moderate and heavy drinkers experience the same rate of binge drinking.

Research also demonstrates a strong association between light alco-

measure to predict health outcomes years later, thus overestimating the benefits of moderate drinking.

2. *Duration of follow-up.* The apparent benefit of moderate alcohol intake diminishes with prolonged follow-up.
3. *Potential confounding issues.* Confounding occurs when the apparent benefits of some exposure (alcohol) on health are distorted by other factors (such as genetics, context of use, psycho-

issues by removing former drinkers from comparison groups. When all the appropriate statistical controls were applied, there was *no health benefit from drinking alcohol*.<sup>7</sup> These results showed a small cardio-protective benefit to women over 65, but none for men of any age or for women under 65. The authors noted that selection bias may have influenced the slight benefits for older women and are actually skeptical there is any benefit.

For those who have never used alcohol, the evidence says: *Don't begin.*

*Accumulating evidence demonstrates that the purported benefits of light alcohol consumption do not apply across all age, ethnic, and gender variations.*

hol use and deviant behavior. Alcohol impairs the quality of decisions people make in almost every type of situation, often leading to life-destroying moral choices. Even small amounts of alcohol lower the likelihood that a person will utilize religious or cultural norms in making their decisions.

Accumulating evidence demonstrates that the purported benefits of light alcohol consumption do not apply across all age, ethnic, and gender variations. In fact, there is growing evidence that there have been serious methodological limitations to many of the earlier studies. Landless and Williams<sup>6</sup> outlined these limitations as the following:

1. *Failure to record variations in alcohol intake over time.* Almost all prospective studies used a single-baseline alcohol-consumption

logical variables). Randomization in studies tends to eliminate confounders, but because of the addictive nature of alcohol, it is unethical to conduct randomized studies. As a result, human studies are all observational, leading to high levels of residual confounding due to socioeconomic status, levels of exercise, dietary practices, or other unmeasured factors.

4. *Misclassifications of drinking categories.* In many studies, both former high-risk drinkers and people who drink infrequently were classified as nondrinkers. These biases tend to inflate the health risks of those who abstain from alcohol.

A recent longitudinal study from a large sample in Great Britain overcame some of these methodological

For those who currently drink alcohol, the same evidence says, *Stop drinking now!* God's help is available to empower both. 🙏

1 Joseph A. Hill, "In Vino Veritas: Alcohol and Heart Disease," *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 329, no. 3 (March 2005): 124–135.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Excessive Alcohol Use: Addressing a Leading Risk for Death, Chronic Disease, and Injury," *Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion*, [www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/alcohol.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/alcohol.htm).

3 David J. Nutt, Leslie A. King, and Lawrence D. Phillips, "Drug Harms in the UK: A Multicriteria Decision Analysis," *Lancet* 376, no. 9752 (November 6, 2010): 1558–1565.

4 Madlen Schütze et al., "Alcohol Attributable Burden of Incidence of Cancer in Eight European Countries Based on Results From Prospective Cohort Study," *British Medical Journal* 342 (April 7, 2011), doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.d1584>.

5 Peter N. Landless and David R. Williams, "Alcohol and Health—Sorting Through the Myths, the Dangers, and the Facts," *Journal of Adventist Education* 76, no. 2 (December 2013/January 2014), 25–32.

6 Ibid.

7 Craig Knott et al., "All Cause Mortality and the Case for Age Specific Alcohol Consumption Guidelines: Pooled Analyses of up to 10 Population Cohorts," *British Medical Journal* 350 (February 2015), doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.h384>.

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