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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

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Published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Read by clergy of all faiths.

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MINISTRY®

International Journal for Pastors
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subscriptions@ministrymagazine.org

+1 301-680-6511

+1 301-680-6502 (fax)

COVER

316 Creative

LAYOUT

316 Creative

SUBSCRIPTIONS

12 issues: United States US\$32.99; Canada and overseas US\$47.00. To order: send name, address, and payment to Ministry® Subscriptions, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 U.S.A. www.ministrymagazine.org/subscribe.

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MINISTRY® has been published monthly since 1928 by the Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Ministry is a peer-reviewed journal.

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www.ministerialassociation.com

PRINTER Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1350 N. Kings Rd., Nampa, ID 83687

Standard mail postage paid at Nampa, Idaho. (ISSN 0026-5314)

Member of Associated Church Press.

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Vol. 88 Number 1 © 2016

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

www.ministrymagazine.org



“His work is a model of careful scholarship and notwithstanding, his writing is a pleasure to read. There is comfortable progression in the development of his thesis and a suitable resolution as the lesson ends.”

The salvation of Israel

I have subscribed to *Ministry* for years. I have believed in and kept the Sabbath for 40 years of my now 52 years of continuous ministry.

I just finished reading Kim Papaioannou’s article “‘All Israel Will Be Saved’: Establishing a Basis for a Valid Interpretation” (November 2015). As a student of the Holy Scriptures, I was concerned and appalled at the slick hermeneutical maneuvering that did nothing more than perpetuate the blatant anti-Semitism of Martin Luther and John Calvin.

The apostle Paul taught that we were grafted into Israel, not the other way around (Rom. 9, 10, 11; Eph. 2). One of the greatest signs of the “second advent” of Jesus the Messiah is the regathering of Israel, Abraham’s children according to the flesh, as well as the Spirit.

Just one pastor’s opinion and deep concern over your openly declared “supercessionism” and/or “replacement” theology.

— John A. Looper, email

I greatly appreciate the articles by Kim Papaioannou, including the most recent one of his that you published, dealing with the salvation of Israel. His work is a model of careful scholarship

and notwithstanding, his writing is a pleasure to read. There is comfortable progression in the development of his thesis and a suitable resolution as the lesson ends. He makes no missteps.

— Ernest Stevenson, Orlando, Florida, United States

I found the article by Kim Papaioannou to be excellent and well written. This issue is so important today. Unfortunately, many fail to understand the correspondence of “Israel” in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus was the consummate “Israel”—a light unto the nations (Luke 2:32; Isa. 42:6; 49:6). And through Him, the church, as the author so well argues, is the continuation of the “Israel”—a light unto the nations (Acts 13:47).

The implications of this are profound. First, it is central to how we are to read the Scriptures. Secondly, the mission of the church today is to fulfill the mission of “Israel” as a light unto the nation (or as Peter says, “to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you” [1 Pet. 2:9]). The church has, for some reason, come to accept a theology that we are recipients of salvation for our own sakes. Finally, the implications for the contemporary conflict in the Holy Land are immense. We are to love the Jewish people. As Dr. Papaioannou says, anti-Semitism has no place in the Church! But, we are to

equally love the Palestinians. And we are to advocate for peace!

— Rob Dalrymple, email

Interim ministry

Thank you for Drexel Rankin’s article (“Interim Ministry: What It Is, What It Can Accomplish”—November 2015). It states what hundreds of us in pastoral leadership have learned and practiced since Roy Oswald of the former Alban Institute in 1980.

I am in my 33rd interim pastoral assignment—this as interim senior pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church, Stillwater, Minnesota, United States. I have had the privilege of serving mostly program and corporate-size congregations in 14 different states, working alongside 17 different ELCA Bishops who manifested various levels of understanding of the need for and value of intentional interim ministry. Truly, this is a teaching ministry, and the focus is essentially on adaptive leadership practiced in an emotional field characterized by heightened anxiety.

Over the past 37 years, intentional interim ministry has been my internal call affirmed by the parishioners I have served. I am grateful to God for the privilege of having been, and yet being, a permanent “temporary shepherd.”

— Paul N. Svinger, email

I wanted to offer my thanks for the well-written article on interim ministry by Drexel Rankin. I found it to be well written and accessible for those who may be less familiar with intentional interim work.

While I am currently in a long-term congregational ministry within the Church of the Brethren, I committed approximately five years of ministry to doing intentional interim ministry, primarily with conflicted congregations. During that time, I served one congregation in the aftermath of a split

Continued on page 26





Back surgery and balance

In early 2010, I underwent back surgery. My surgeon assured me that after six weeks of rest and recuperation, followed by a prescribed regimen of physical therapy, I would be as good as new.

When I started the physical therapy, something I previously never had to endure, I found it mentally and physically grueling. I was making progress, but that progress lured me into a false sense of security—that everything was back to normal and I didn't need to complete the full course of treatment. I felt good.

But the passing of time has revealed things that I didn't see right away. I can't jump as high as I once could. I struggle to walk in a straight line. While standing to pray, I have to either keep my eyes open when I bow my head or touch something if closing my eyes. Why? Because I have balance issues.

In ministry, so-called success has occasionally lured me into a false sense of security—causing me to believe that everything is as it should be. But as I start this new year, I find myself analyzing whether or not my life and ministry are balanced. What must I do to either regain or maintain balance?¹

Nurture my relationship with my wife

Everything that my wife and I do seems to revolve around our two adult children's growth and development. But to what degree do we take time for each other? To what degree do I constantly remind her that she is my queen?

The need to balance home and professional life does not exclusively reside in the realm of ministry. Even as I write these words, my wife is working on lesson plans for her students. Yet, I still need to remind myself that the ever-pressing demands of my calling must occasionally yield to the higher calling of actively demonstrating to my wife that she is the most important person in my life.

Read a book each month

Recently, I packed a book in my suitcase—with hopes of reading it while on a short trip to visit my parents. Unfortunately, I fell short of my goal. There seemed not to be enough time to spend with my parents and tend to other responsibilities.

As pastors, we owe it to our church members and others to be informed and conversant about various issues. More than that, we owe it to ourselves and our families to exercise our minds, providing appropriate mental stimulation that potentially wards off debilitating diseases.²

Exercise several times each week

My work schedule has always created unexpected obstacles to regular, consistent exercise. I find it easy to relegate physical activity to the *back burner*.

I have discovered that regularly taking my 40-minute walk a minimum of four times per week leaves me feeling less stressed and more refreshed. And as an added bonus, it provides more time with my wife—because we usually walk together. I struggle with consistency; but laboring for that

balance pays tremendous dividends both mentally and physically.

Remain in touch with the community

During that aforementioned recent visit with my parents, I drove them around as they ran errands. While doing so, I could not help but notice the changing demographics of the neighborhood in which I was raised. Suddenly, I realized that I spend so much time doing the work of the church that I don't spend nearly as much time as I once did assessing and addressing the needs of those in my community who need to see Jesus.

A key element of professional balance is to spend time with the often unacknowledged church members and the disenfranchised residents in our communities. My ministry should not be defined by adherence to programs; rather, it should be recognized by attention to people.

My vow for 2016

God has created us as wholistic beings—a wonderful blend of spiritual, mental, social, emotional, and physical. And, because He wants me to reflect the fullness of His intentions for me, I must strive for that equilibrium in every aspect of my life.

Will you join me in making this vow?

¹ I list and elaborate upon four items in this editorial. However, there is a fifth one, revolving around prayer and Bible study, that I addressed in an editorial several years ago. See "Seven Goals for the New Year," *Ministry* (January 2012), 5.

² See "Risk Factors," *alz.org*, accessed November 8, 2015, www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_causes_risk_factors.asp.

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Mark LaFollette, DVM, MDiv, serves as lead pastor, Riverwood Church, Cannon Falls, Minnesota, United States.

The pastor's PTSD:

When you cannot bounce back after the conflict is over

While flipping through the newspaper, she spotted an article about women who have served in war and come home broken, suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD.) As she read their stories of struggling through chronic fear, she thought, *This is me*. Only she has never experienced a rocket attack or an improvised explosive device blast. She's my wife, and I am a pastor.

My wife, Judy, and I know what it is like to live through a season of church conflict and not be OK, even after the trouble subsides. And we have found the idea of PTSD to be a helpful analogy to understand what we have been through.

One defining feature of PTSD is that the fear lingers long after the painful event has passed. And this has parallels for us and our families. After a conflict, we can ask ourselves, *Why haven't we snapped out of it yet?* But why should we expect to get over it as soon as the conflict burns out? I do not know anyone who believes in instant discipleship. So why should we expect instant spiritual maturity after a painful conflict?

The good news is that, just as spiritual maturity of any kind comes

in the process of time, so can healing come after church-related trauma.

PTSD and the pastor

First, let us take a closer look at pastoral pain. When I compare a pastor's pain with PTSD, I am not equating church stresses with the terrors of war. But when you get inside the causes and symptoms of PTSD, you can find parallels.

By current diagnostic standards, people diagnosed with PTSD include those who have experienced physical violence, severe physical trauma, or the threat of physical violence. But what about the "nonviolent" conflicts that can go on in church life? Here are three common sets of symptoms described by the National Center for PTSD. Pastors and pastoral spouses may find that these sound familiar.

Constant alert: One Iraq war veteran tells of having lived through weeks of random rocket attacks on her base; along with facing repeated hurtful comments from her male counterparts. Years later, after having been at home and reunited with her family, she was still thinking, "I keep waiting for the next bad thing to happen."¹

Like random rocket attacks, repetitive incidents can happen in the midst of a church conflict. One

church member uses an adult class in church as a platform to critique the pastor's character; another may broadcast insults on social media; someone else works the perimeter of the church board looking for a leader who might side with him or her. In that kind of environment, it can be easy to slip into a nerve-fraying exhaustion of constant alert and wariness leading to PTSD—like fear and fatigue that leave you and your spouse thinking, *When's the next crisis?*

Avoidance and self-protection: Years after being out the service, a Vietnam War veteran sat with his back to the wall at restaurants, fearing that someone was after him.² As with this veteran, many with PTSD get stuck continually protecting themselves against threats that are no longer imminent. But church crises involve real people who are usually still in the church. So avoidance and self-protection can easily become a means of trying to cope. Who wants to spend time with people who are hurting you? Yet, you see them down the hall in church or at the next island over as you are pumping gas. It becomes common to try to create distance.

Dreams and flashbacks: A war veteran who survived a roadside bomb explosion was later haunted

by nightmares and panic attacks as the horrible images of the explosion played over in her mind.³ In a similar way, past church trauma can find its way into a pastor's or family members' dreams at night. Memories can play like a video loop in the mind. An average day can be filled with reminders that take the mind back to the painful experience.

The fatigue and wear and tear of deep, long-standing conflicts can leave you exhausted and unhappy, and make it hard to minister.

For all eternity, they try to convince themselves of how good their lives could have been if not for the hateful, incompetent people around them. They relive events and reargue their cases, seeking comfort and vindication. The trouble? No one is listening.

Much of what I offer amounts to making intentional steps out of the deep grey and into a place of healing and growth. One important step may be to seek help from a skilled Christian counselor or therapist. According to the National Center for PTSD,⁵ if you

Learn to lament. For me, one of my most significant growth experiences in recent years has been to take a fresh look at the Hebrew lament tradition. Lamenting is very different from the unproductive thinking that we do in the deep grey. To lament is to speak directly to God about all the pain, confusion, and frustration you feel toward people, and even toward God. The feelings are there. What do you gain by trying to hide them?

Psalm 44 is a striking example of a lament. The psalmist candidly writes

When you suffer in His service, there is a mysterious and powerful identification that you have with Him that has implications far beyond the troubles and fears of this moment.



What to do

What can we do to begin stepping out of the darkness? In his book *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis imagines hell as a world of charcoal-grey skies like the darkness before the dawn.⁴ The sun never rises, and those who live there are alone in their thoughts, their minds continually churning over every sad happening and unrealized dream.

have had symptoms for more than three months, like those mentioned above, and they are causing distress or disruption to your work or home life, you should seek help. In addition to receiving supportive care for your emotional healing, you and your spouse may need couples counseling.

Here are also a few other steps to consider.

about how he feels toward God; he goes as far as accusing God of being asleep (Ps. 44:23–26). We all have moments, maybe even seasons, when our feelings do not line up with our theology. And one of the healthiest steps toward aligning feelings with truth would be to lay the feelings out there for God to deal with. So lament prayer, perhaps with journaling, is a

beautiful way to engage God in the growth of your soul.

Forgiveness. Once, when she was recounting a past hurt, my wife told me, “The past distracts me from the future.” One of our biggest distractions can be the ongoing raw-nerve feelings we have toward those who have hurt us. And the obvious thing to say to the raw nerve is, “You need to forgive.” But when it comes to forgiveness, it is one thing to lay down your hostility toward someone, but another to be in that person’s presence and no longer on guard. You need to come to a place where memories of the events are no longer replaying in your mind, especially when attempts to resolve the conflict have been less than successful. There have been times when I have forgiven someone before God, acknowledging my own sin in the process, and yet have had pain resurface when something brings back the memory. I

have had this happen just before I get up to preach. And I need to forgive, again. It is as if my first act of forgiving was a necessary step, but not the last one. Again, spiritual maturation is a process, not an event. And to forgive is to take a step toward an undistracted future.

Patience. Do you have realistic expectations of yourself and your spouse? Spiritual growth happens along a continuum that does not serve our time expectations. Carrying unrealistic expectations of your spouse could be putting strain on your marriage. Patience is the key. As I heard a family counselor once say: “We need to accept that we’re all going to be a little crazy part of the time.” So part of what you may need to do is cut both yourself and your spouse a little slack and realize that, while all this has been going on in church, you are on an inner spiritual journey filled with challenges and discoveries.

Friendship. Finding and building life-giving friendships often does not come easily in ministry. But they are worth having. Nothing compares with a friend who knows you and understands what you are going through. Friendships with other pastors, particularly those outside your denominational circles, can provide objective help.

Recently the elders in my church created pastoral support teams, which have been very helpful. A group of three elders meets with me monthly. Most of our meeting time involves them asking me how they can be praying for me and my family, as well as for the church.

Sabbatical, solitude, and retreat. Other parts of my lifeline have been solitude time, retreats, and a sabbatical that I took four years ago. Times of solitude and prayer are to the soul what breathing is to the body. The time does not have to be heroic in



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length. Thirty minutes of good hearty lament time can be a great sanity builder for the aching pastor.

Judy and I have also found times of retreat to be life-giving. You may find pastoral retreat centers and ministries near you that are free or at a low cost. A well-structured pastoral retreat ministry allows you a substantial amount of nonstructured time on your own, while it also provides opportunities to talk and pray with people who understand the challenges of the ministry.

Although it can be a challenge to arrange, a well-planned sabbatical can be a significant help. After Judy and I returned from our sabbatical, someone said to me, “I don’t know what you did while you were gone, but since you’ve been back, you’re preaching with a fire you didn’t have before.”

Reengage. Sometimes the defenses that we build to get through

a long-term crisis become part of our problem. One of those defenses can be distancing ourselves from our congregations. As pastors, we may withdraw to study or conduct other elements of our work that put us in a kind of unhealthy retreat if sustained for too long. And the best thing you can do is to decide to put people first and before your own feelings. If you have been a long time in a wounded prisoner mode, you need to decide how to structure your time in ways that get you around the people who need you in your church and community. In giving comfort, I receive comfort.

The privilege

When the apostles Paul and Peter talk about the suffering of God’s people, they call it *fellowship* with Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:12, 13). When you suffer in His service, there is a mysterious and powerful

identification that you have with Him that has implications far beyond the troubles and fears of this moment (Matt. 5:11, 12). Too often I take my communion with Jesus in His suffering too lightly. While it does not feel at all good at the time, there is a privilege in it, not only to believe in Jesus Christ but to know Him and suffer for His sake.

So when you encounter a PTSD-like season, remember that spiritual maturity is a process, not an event. This takes time. And God is faithful to see you through it. 

- 1 Barry Yeoman, “Women Vets: A Battle all Their Own,” *Parade Magazine*, November 10, 2013, 8–12.
- 2 National Center for PTSD, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “Understanding PTSD,” www.ptsd.va.gov/public/understanding_ptsd/booklet.pdf (August 2013), 5.
- 3 National Center for PTSD, “Understanding PTSD,” 4.
- 4 C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperCollins, 1946, renewed 1973).
- 5 National Center for PTSD, “Understanding PTSD,” 3.

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Where the people are

In April 1908, Walter Ising, a young German Adventist—just turned 27—and his wife, Frieda, arrived in the bustling port city of Beirut, then part of the Ottoman Empire. Sent to lead Adventist mission in the Middle East, Walter faced a huge task. At that time, there were only 29 Adventists in Arabic-speaking countries, and most of these countries had no Adventist presence.

Hardly had Walter and Frieda arrived when both contracted typhoid fever. At the advice of other Westerners, they were moved out of Beirut into the hills. Left prostrate, Walter could no longer dream about how to transform the work; instead he devoted himself to prayer and

reflection. He earnestly asked God to help them “find His people among the inhabitants of this land.”

Convicted that they needed to be where the people were, Walter and Frieda moved back to Beirut, where he started offering Bible classes. In 1909, he baptized a group of men. Several were from the Ottoman province of Mesopotamia—today’s country of Iraq—where, at the time, there were no Adventist workers. Thus, Ising had planted the seeds of the church in both Lebanon and Iraq.

All this happened because Walter Ising, on his sick bed, turned from his own planning to closer communion with Jesus. And, this in turn, prompted him to

go into the city of Beirut, to live among the people. As Adventists today strive to tell billions of urbanites about Jesus, Ising’s experience reminds us that revival is a foundation for successful mission to big cities.

—David Trim, PhD, serves as director, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, General Conference, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

Revival
and **REFORMATION**
YOU, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR CHURCH, YOUR COMMUNITY

Roy E. Gane, PhD, is professor of Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern languages, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



Old Testament principles *relevant to consensual* homoerotic activity

—Part 3 of 3

This, the third part of a three-part study, identifies principles in the Old Testament relevant to the relationship between God’s community of faith and individuals who engage in some forms of sexual activity outside heterosexual marriage. My primary focus is on mutually consensual homoerotic activity as practiced by people within the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) spectrum.

What the Old Testament does not say

There are some subtopics of homoerotic activity or related topics that the Old Testament does not address. First, the Old Testament does not refer, even in a descriptive narrative, to same-sex marriage or any equivalent to it, such as exclusive, committed, same-sex cohabitation. Does this mean that such an arrangement, outside the scope of possibilities covered by the Old Testament, is therefore permissible for Christians? Such a conclusion would overlook the comprehensive nature of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, which categorically forbids homosexual practice without any exceptions. If

marriage is a relationship that includes sexual relations, and if God prohibits sexual relations between members of the same gender, no room exists for discussion of the possible legitimacy of same-sex marriage, at least according to God.

Second, the Old Testament does not explicitly refer to female same-sex (lesbian) activity.¹ Later, during New Testament times in the Greco-Roman world, Paul explicitly addressed lesbian sex (Rom. 1:26, 27).

Third, the Old Testament does not contain a requirement for everyone to marry. In divine law regarding Israelites in general, remaining single was not a moral fault or impediment to fulfilling a position of leadership.

Fourth, the Old Testament does not distinguish between same-sex orientation and behavior, in the sense of specifying a person’s inherent sexual attraction to other individuals of the same gender, whether or not he or she acts upon this tendency. The only concern is the homosexual activity itself, regardless of orientation, with the assumption that voluntary actions reflect desires. However, this does not mean that the Old Testament is ignorant of the distinction between

sexual desire and corresponding action. Some passages describe steps in a process that begins with sexual desire and climaxes with action (e.g., 2 Sam. 11, 13; cf. Song of Solomon). The movement from desire to action is not inevitable but can be interrupted by choice, including firm moral resolve (Job 31:1—“I have made a covenant with my eyes . . .”).

Although some Old Testament laws regulate attitudes (Exod. 20:17; Lev. 19:17, 18) for which one is accountable to God, there is not a word against a person with same-sex tendencies who does not act on them. By itself, experiencing temptation is never a sin.² An individual attracted to the same gender, who did not act upon that attraction, would be entitled to full protection under Israelite law, including laws against murder and assault (Lev. 24:17, 19, 20), and there is no legal reason that he or she should be subjected to stigma or barred from exercising leadership.

The fact that the Old Testament perspective did not separate sexual and romantic orientation from behavior, as does modern science, should not be taken to signal the obsolescence of biblical principles. The Creator has

always known more about human beings than science ever will, no matter how modern or sophisticated (cf. Ps. 139). He was the one who gave the biblical laws, and He did not see fit to make legal distinctions that take orientation into account. Instead, He drew the line at the level of actual same-sex activity. By doing so, He avoided laying an additional burden on a faithful person who struggles with same-sex orientation but does not act on it.

orientation, even when this is disharmonious with reproductive organs. Orientation that science shows to be inherent is viewed as natural, and therefore, acting on it is viewed as morally right.

Sixth, again out of harmony with modern culture, the Bible indicates nowhere that emotional and/or sexual fulfillment is an inalienable right. The fact that God provided Eve as an archetypal “helper fit for” Adam (Gen. 2:18) does not mean that everyone is

bounds of biblical marriage, which is permanently defined as a relationship between a man and a woman, according to the physical nature of their complementary sexual organs. Obviously, definitions are crucial here, so it is not surprising that much of the current debate revolves around these definitions.

Many people today, especially young people, are watching the church to see whether it will demonstrate the sensitivity, compassion,

Many people today, especially young people, are watching the church to see whether it will demonstrate the sensitivity, compassion, and consistency of Christ.

Fifth, the Old Testament never identifies genders apart from reproductive organs, including external genitalia and internal organs.³ There are only male and female, without reference to exceptional varieties of crossover or in-between categories. In the Bible, only biological organs determine whether one is male or female and permitted to engage in corresponding activity with the opposite sex within marriage. This accords with the natural complementarity between the form and function of the male and female reproductive organs, which are clearly made for each other. This complementarity is a permanent physiological fact.

Contemporary culture challenges the definition of genders based exclusively on physical form, insisting that other factors count too. Modern people insist on emotional fulfillment in accord with sexual and romantic

entitled to a “helper fit for” them, in the sense of fitting their sexual orientation, even if it is same-sex orientation. Even though the struggles and challenges can seem unsurmountable at times, what really matters in this life is not emotional and sexual fulfillment, but faithfulness to God. Some biblical characters who were closest to God and most faithful to Him enjoyed little emotional satisfaction and, in some cases, no sexual fulfillment.⁴ God’s people may be lonely and unfulfilled during the present age, but they live by faith that He will give them a better eternal life (Heb. 11).

Application to the community of faith

The Old Testament evidence is consistent regarding homoerotic activity: God does not allow or condone it, even if mutually consensual, because it is outside the

and consistency of Christ. Many have difficulty accepting that a good and just Creator would condemn people for expressing their sexuality in harmony with the way that He has created them. Prompted by contemporary culture, including “political correctness,” they argue that marriage should be an equal opportunity institution, also open to those whose inherent sexual attraction is to the same gender. This kind of theodicy argument misses the fact that our problems are not caused by God, but by the corporate fallout of human rebellion against Him, which does not affect everyone equally. God is fair, but life is not, because it is under the shadow of the great controversy between good and evil.

Like ancient Israel, our church is responsible for cooperating with God’s saving work in the world through our faithfulness to His principles, which are

in harmony with His just and merciful character (Exod. 34:6, 7), and for our positive influence on others, especially by our example. While our faith community can seek to influence society through appropriate channels, it is not responsible for policing the morality of outsiders or forcing them to conform to its standards.⁵

In a secular state, “legal” and “right in God’s sight” are two different things, based on different authorities. “Legal” is based on human reasoning, which can involve social “political correctness.” On the other hand, “right in God’s sight” is communicated by the plain sense of the Bible, properly understood according to its own guidelines for interpreting it. Christians should be careful not to imbibe the secular worldview by making “political correctness” their moral authority in place of the Bible, but should treat all people with respect and comply with secular laws insofar as they do not conflict with divine principles (Acts 5:27–29; Rom. 13:1–7).

Although emotional fulfillment is not guaranteed for the followers of God in this life, Isaiah conveyed special encouragement for loyal members of God’s family who were not able to enjoy married family life: “For thus says the LORD: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off’ ” (Isa. 56:4, 5, ESV).

In harmony with His character and treatment of human beings (Deut. 10:17–19), God commanded His Old Testament people to love their neighbors and resident aliens as themselves (Lev. 19:18, 34) and also to protect, care for, and include those who were socially disadvantaged (Exod. 22:21–24; Lev. 19:9, 10; Deut. 10:18, 19; 16:11, 14; 24:19–21, etc.). Similarly, the Christian community is responsible for seeking to ease the burdens of those within and around

it. “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2, ESV).

For a person who wants to follow the Lord, few burdens are as heavy as inherent same-sex orientation in a cultural environment of emotional and sexual entitlement.⁶ The basic longing for a partner is powerful because it has a God-given origin and was natural in the beginning (Gen. 2:18–20). The Fall did not remove this hardwired sense of need but has bent it in a same-sex direction that was not intended by the Creator.⁷ If LGBTQ people did not feel the need for companionship, celibacy would be relatively easy. But they do feel it, so celibacy is a struggle. Compounding the difficulty, society now accepts some alternative partnership directions as natural and therefore right, which puts even greater pressure on an LGBTQ individual to overlook divine disapproval in pursuit of perceived fulfillment.

Full commitment to God is especially hard for those who have already experienced homosexual activity. Nevertheless, the Lord calls them to forsake their way and thoughts (although their inherent orientation may not change) and receive His compassion and abundant, transforming forgiveness (Isa. 55:7; cf. Ps. 51; 1 Cor. 6:9–11). He says that His commands are not impossible to keep (Deut. 30:11–14) because He provides a way of escape from temptation (1 Cor. 10:13) and is able to keep people from falling (Jude 24).

Church members are responsible for working with God to help provide ways of escape through acceptable social alternatives that are deeper and more frequent than casual encounters at church potlucks. In this way, such members can fulfill the law of Christ by sensitively and respectfully assisting the journeys of LGBTQ people as they seek to walk with Him, rather than being overcome by temptation, alienation, or despair that often leads to suicide. By welcoming and interacting with them, hearing their stories, and receiving the benefits of their talents, God’s community will be enriched,

strengthened, and blessed (cf. Isa. 58:6–12).

To help LGBTQ persons, Christians need to overcome some barriers: (1) The assumption that they are necessarily LGBTQ by choice, (2) the assumption that any LGBTQ person can become heterosexual, (3) the assumption that all LGBTQ individuals are sexually active or even promiscuous, and (4) disgust and fear of some kind of “contamination” from those who are regarded as engaging in an abomination.

Perhaps at least part of the reason why some LGBTQ people report failure to overcome same-sex activity, in spite of repeated attempts at victory through sincere and agonizing prayer, is because of lack of support from the faith community, who often prefer to maintain a safe distance, even if they do not reject or even ignore them. Such distance can reflect lack of faith in Christ’s ability to preserve the purity and holiness of His followers while they serve as representatives of His transforming ministry in a broken world (Matt. 28:19, 20; John 17:15–19).

Jesus has shown us the way. Mary Magdalene was not immune from danger of relapse after He delivered her from demonic possession (cf. Matt. 12:43–45). Yet He adopted her into His circle of friends (Luke 8:2) and was honored when she anointed Him (John 12:3–8; cf. Matt. 26:6–13; Luke 7:37–50). Similarly, the ancient Israelites adopted Rahab, the recent prostitute and new believer in the true God (Josh. 6:25; cf. chap. 2), who was honored by becoming one of Christ’s ancestors (Matt. 1:5). If Jesus and the ancient honor-shame society of Israel, which was under direct theocratic rule, could show such acceptance of people with problematic pasts who wanted to follow the Lord, there is no reason for God’s modern people not to go and do likewise.

Conclusion

This study has identified an Old Testament principle regarding sexuality that is nonnegotiable for a

Christian church that claims to follow all of Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17): God sanctions sexual activity only when it takes place within marriage between a man and a woman. However, there is another nonnegotiable Old Testament principle that is just as relevant to our treatment of LGBTQ people: “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18; cf. v. 34).⁸ The topic of this discussion is not merely their issue, but our issue. If they are being tested, so are we, and it appears that we have plenty of room for improvement. May God help us balance our application of His principles in accordance with His love, which includes both justice and mercy!⁹ 📌

1 Contrast the prohibition of male homosexual activity in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 with 18:23 and

20:15, 16, which prohibit female as well as male humans from engaging in bestiality. However, Richard M. Davidson argues that “the prohibition of lesbian relationships is probably implicit in the general Levitical injunction against following the abominable practices of the Egyptians or the Canaanites, as recognized in rabbinic interpretation” (*Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007], 150). He suggests “that the reason that both man and woman are mentioned only with regard to bestiality in Lev 18 and 20 may simply be because in the case of bestiality the gender-inclusive masculine language does not include the animals and thus is not implicitly reversible (applicable to the other gender) in describing human-animal relations like it is with sexual relationships involving only humans” (150, n. 75).

- 2 But lustful intent is sin (Rom. 1:27; cf. Matt. 5:28).
- 3 E.g., Deuteronomy 23:1 (in the Hebrew it is v. 2)—male testicles and penis; Genesis 20:18—womb/uterus. The term for female, *neqebah*, refers to the vagina.
- 4 For example, Jeremiah and Jesus never married, and they suffered alienation and profound sorrow.

5 At certain times, God did commission ancient Israel as His instrument to execute corporate capital punishment on groups of people who were chronic violators of basic morality (e.g., Deut. 7:1–5, 16, 24–26; 20:16–18; Josh. 7; cf. Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004], 771–73). However, this was divine retribution under theocratic control, not exercise of inherent responsibility by the community of God’s people. The present faith community is comprised of a Christian church rather than a theocratic state, so maintenance of our boundaries is restricted to noncorporeal measures, of which expulsion from fellowship comes as the most extreme (cf. 1 Cor. 5).

- 6 Single life for anyone, whether “straight” or LGBTQ, is not just about abstinence from sex. It involves lack of constant, intimate companionship with fulfillment of intense, intimate love and loyalty.
- 7 Evelyn Tollerton, personal communication.
- 8 This principle is reiterated numerous times in the New Testament, e.g., Matthew 22:39; John 13:34; 15:12; Romans 13:8–10; Galatians 5:14; 1 John 4:20.
- 9 Cf. Psalm 85:10 (in the Hebrew it is v. 11).

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Homosexuality:

One pastor's reflection

Homosexuality is both a divisive and an awkward topic. When someone “comes out,” there is a natural inclination to want to keep them, and the topic, in the closet. Yet, if we are serious about ministry, that will include ministering to gay¹ people within and outside the church—but especially within. And that must include ministry to the often-forgotten families of gay people.

As evangelical Christians, we take the Bible seriously. We want to take it literally where possible—as it reads in our various translations. Read in this way, the Bible is seen to condemn homosexuality. Of course, some argue that there are alternative interpretations of the biblical texts, and among them individuals whose scholarship I respect. However, I am not convinced by their arguments.

But what position you take on the texts does not really matter when the majority of people in our churches take the biblical texts as they find them, which means the predominant attitude is condemnation. How then do we, as pastors and churches, give pastoral care to gay people and their families?

Three learning experiences

More than 20 years ago I learned firsthand, and for the first time, something about the pain gay Adventists

suffer. As the then editor of the South Pacific Division's *Record*, we published an extensive article on homosexuality. This was a significant and balanced article that had first appeared in *Insight* magazine.²

I was surprised to receive several responses from Adventist gay people and discovered something of the pain they felt. They contacted me to tell their story and of their struggles. One of them was a pastor who wondered whether he could continue in ministry with this burden.³ My contact with them lasted for only a brief time, but I still feel the sadness they had in their lives.

About five years ago, as pastor of Avondale College Church, my pastoral staff and I promised our congregation we would preach on the top ten topics they came up with. Homosexuality was one of them. I struggled with how to approach the topic, but decided to preach on how we as a church should respond to gay people. That seemed a more pressing issue than to enter into things like the nurture-nature debate or to review the biblical texts again. Besides, preaching for action is always better than preaching to give information.

I also decided that I would talk to a few gay people and their families to get a real picture of what was happening. Almost all of the Adventist gay people I found had given up on church, and most were suspicious of my intentions. Only a

couple would talk to me. They felt their church had rejected them. They were in pain, and so were their families.

Two years ago (at another church) I found we had six mothers of gay children in my church of about 250 attendees. Each of them thought they were the only ones living with this situation. From my Avondale College Church experience, I had discovered that the mothers, more than fathers, wanted to talk about their experience, so I invited them home one Sabbath afternoon to meet each other. Any of them could pull out at the last minute without the others knowing who they were. None of them knew who else would be there until they arrived.

There was this fascinating moment of surprise and recognition as they met each other. Each one told their story. There was pain, but also sympathy and understanding. There were tears, but for the first time others in their situation wept with them.

Storying the pain

The pain and confusion of individuals struggling with their sexual identity is well documented, but it becomes real when you meet pain and confusion up close. Several gay people have told me about suicidal thoughts as they battled with the feelings they had while coming to terms with their orientation and the fact that they could find no way to be rid of it.

I talked to a former Avondale College student who had been one of the most active and involved individuals in my time on campus. He had passion and enthusiasm for his Christianity and Adventism, and his witness was strong. He was often featured leading devotional programs, but no one knew that he was falling apart inside as he battled with his homosexuality.

His desperate prayers for release had not been answered, and his life was becoming more confusing and chaotic. He not only contemplated suicide, he rigged his dorm room ready for the act. He was about to put his plan into action when a fellow student knocked on his door. Both of them still sense that God had arranged the visit at that time, on that day—the other student had not planned to stop by until “prompted by God.” It saved this gay man his life.

A couple returned home after church one Sabbath to find that their son, in his late teens, had shredded his Bible into small pieces and scattered them through every room of the house. He had also been agonizing with God to take away his gay tendencies.

When his parents asked why he did it, he replied, “If God won’t listen to me, why should I listen to Him?”

When I talked to another couple about their gay daughter, there was a moment when there was a pause, and then, in that silence, the mother said, “I wish she had never been born.”

The pain and the trauma are real. Here we have lives at risk, lives in need of love. In need of compassion.

A Jesus example?

We know Jesus had a heart for people and targeted those with deep issues in their lives, including demon possession. Unfortunately, no record of Him ministering to gay people exists that could serve as a model. However, His interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well provides a helpful guide.

The first thing to notice in this encounter is their religious differences. As a Samaritan, the woman used a different “Bible” than Jesus did (the five

books of Moses only). She sacrificed in a different temple (on Mount Gerizim, not on Mount Zion). And she waited for a different messiah from the One who stood before her (one like Moses, not one in the line of David).

All this was instructional in itself, but the big thing? She had a messed-up life. She had had five husbands. And she was currently, as we used to phrase it, “living in sin.”

Jesus demonstrated respect for her. Much more respect than she could expect from any other Jew, and probably more than she had from fellow Samaritans. He demonstrated care, concern, and compassion.

Jesus came to rescue people, not to condemn them (see John 3:17). He reserved His serious criticism for religious hypocrites (see, for instance, Matthew 23). He set the example.

What can we do?

We need to be aware of the probability that we will have people who are gay or, even more likely, have family members of a gay person in our congregation. You will never be able to minister to them at a deep level if you hold a negative attitude or use harsh language against gay people or homosexuality. They will think you do not understand the pain and cannot be trusted with theirs.

Ask yourself whether you want your congregation to be a support for individuals who are struggling with their sexual identity and of their families. There are other people whom gay people will find who will listen and talk to them. A pastor friend of mine once gave it forceful clarity by saying, “What we’re asking is: do we want them in our church or in the gay bars?”

These are discussions to have with the key players in your church, especially elders and ministry leaders. If they are not on board, they may cause you grief.

We pastors need to have a sympathetic ear when a gay person comes out to us. They do not find it easy to do this, and it shows a great deal of trust on their part. Confidentiality is important. If they

are suicidal, this must be addressed immediately. The suicide rate among young gay people is estimated at four times higher than among those who are straight, and nine times higher if their families reject them.⁴ Keeping them alive is a first priority.

Connecting mothers (or parents) is really helpful for them. They no longer feel alone with the sense that they are the only ones going through this. However, discovering who they are is not easy. Do not force it, though. Some need time to be ready for something like this.

When the time is right, it might be helpful for the parents to talk to selected church groups about their experience. Until the church understands the realities and trauma that happens in the family and with the gay individual, they will not know that support is needed. It becomes real when one of their own shares their experience. They will be given a sympathetic hearing. I suggest parents, because it may be too confronting for the gay person or the church members first up—and it could lead to a negative result. Encourage friends to continue their friendship with the one who has come out as gay. He or she will need them and their support.

Some may feel they are lowering their “standards” or ignoring a biblical injunction if they reach out. Not so. We will be known as disciples of Jesus as we show love for each other (see John 13:35)—including our gay people.

The broad church has and needs to have policies on many issues, including homosexuality. These policies give a big-picture approach. However, it is at the local church where the flesh-and-blood application is worked out. This is where the challenge comes to applying them in a loving and caring way that demonstrates Christlikeness.

A pastoral and church response

I am a pastor, not an expert in this field, and my involvement in this kind of ministry has been limited and sporadic. As a pastor, though, when one of my

people hurts, I want to be there for them. That is one of our God-given responsibilities.

I remember being told of an older, retired pastor who was at a wedding reception when someone pointed out a young woman on the other side of the hall who had been a member in one of his congregations. She was struggling after having recently come out as gay. Having heard that, he immediately crossed the hall and hugged her. I do not know what he said, but the hug signaled that she was loved.

I want to be that kind of pastor.

I am proud of a couple in one of my churches that discovered another couple struggling after their son had

come out as gay. Not knowing what else to do, they invited this couple and their son home for Sabbath lunch—every Sabbath for more than a year. This gave these parents the opportunity to talk, vent, and, occasionally, weep with someone who cared.

I want my church filled with this kind of people.

I will give the last word to mothers. So many of them told me something like: I know what the Bible says, but I still love my son or daughter. So they should.

And so should we. Knowing what the Bible says, we should also love their sons and daughters. That is bottom-line Christianity. That is where the compassion of Christ begins. 

- 1 I use this term for simplicity, following Inge Anderson's comment, "Secular people generally just refer to themselves as 'gay,'" in "Good News for Adventists Attracted to Their Own Sex," in Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson, eds., *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 442.
- 2 Christopher Blake, "Redeeming Our Sad Gay Situation," *Record*, March 27, 1993, 7–14. It received a mixed reaction—applauded and condemned—among the letters published in response.
- 3 He was celibate.
- 4 It is difficult to know the exact rate of suicide because it is thought that some suicides may be of individuals who are gay but have not "come out" and are not included in the statistics. The *suicide.org* Web site estimates that gay youth are four times as likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers. Those who are rejected by their families are *nine* times more likely to attempt suicide.

Lessons learned along the way

- The nature or nurture (born with or learned) argument of the origins of homosexuality—and any of the other numerous theories—may make for good intellectual discussion and debate, but it really has little value when an individual is struggling with their sexual identity. They really do not care about the origins; they simply want it to go away.¹
 - Gay people will often tell you that this is the way God made them. No argument will change that. To them the statement "God loves the sinner, but not the sin" is quite offensive because you are saying that God made a mistake when He made them.²
 - Celibacy is as hard for gay people as for heterosexuals.
 - We are harsher on gay than heterosexual misdemeanors.
 - Adventist parents are hoping against hope that their gay child can continue to stay church-connected in some way. So few do.
 - It is incredibly difficult for most individuals to change their gay orientation. This does not underestimate the power of God but is a warning that God does not always intervene to take away this cross. The public apologies to gay people from the well-known "change ministry" should be a warning that change is not easy.³
 - Occasionally there are those who claim victory over their homosexuality. Let us rejoice with them and pray for their continued success; but let us also not expect their story to be everyone's story.
- Gay people feel alienated from and by the church. For many, the conflict seems overwhelming, and they have the sense that the church's official views leave them with nowhere to go.
 - Gay people mostly do not make big demands on their church when they come out. They tend to understand the difficulties their situation places on the church. But they would like to know they are welcome. They want friendships to continue.

- 1 I was talking to the mother of the boy who shredded his Bible about the nature-nurture debate when she stopped me and said, "What does it matter? This is who he is."
- 2 Micah J. Murray, a Christian, says it this way: "I can't look my gay brother in the eye anymore and say, 'I love the sinner but hate the sin' because that labels him 'Sinner.'" See "Why I Can't Say 'Love the Sinner/Hate the Sin' Anymore," *Huff Post Religion, The Blog*, December 31, 2013, huffingtonpost.com/micah-j-murray/why-i-cant-say-love-the-sinner-hate-the-sin-anymore_b_4521519.html.
- 3 Alan Chambers, the Exodus International president, made a public apology to gay people that included: "I am sorry for the pain and hurt that many of you have experienced. I am sorry some of you spent years working through the shame and guilt when your attractions didn't change." "Exodus Int'l President to the Gay Community: 'We're Sorry,'" Alan Chambers, June 19, 2013, alanchambers.org/exodus-intl-president-to-the-gay-community-were-sorry. Dr. Robert L. Spitzer wrote a letter of apology published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* where his research results had been published in 2003: "I believe I owe the gay community an apology for my study making unproven claims of the efficacy of reparative therapy" (<http://www.truthwinsout.org/news/2012/04/24542/>).

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How does spiritual life grow?—Part 1

Life in all aspects—physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual—develops in stages, and each stage, successfully negotiated, affects subsequent ones. Signs of growth from one stage to another are clearly observable. This article deals with spiritual development and its observable stages.

The ultimate goal of spiritual development is spiritual maturity—when we “attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).^{*} That growing up, Paul further states, is to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (4:15). Peter challenges us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” and “like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation” (2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Pet. 2:2, 3).

We often talk about how spiritual growth occurs in our lives but rarely identify the process in detail. When a person fails to progress beyond a stage in spiritual life, he or she freezes at a particular stage of spiritual development. This arrested development leads to spiritual atrophy and eventually spiritual death.

What does the spiritual growth process look like? How can one determine where one is in the process? A Christian’s spiritual maturation may be seen as taking place in six stages. Understanding these stages helps us be aware of where we are in the onward

journey of spiritual growth and strive to move toward the fullness of maturity that the New Testament speaks about.

Stage one: Seek reward, avoid punishment

As followers of Christ, we all begin at the first baby stage. Just like baby children, baby Christians begin their spiritual journey focused mainly on themselves. Their focus in this infant stage of development is obedience: “How can I avoid punishment?” Their predominant theme is the direct negative consequences of their actions or attitudes on themselves. They measure the degree of good or bad by the amount of reward or punishment that follows what they do. They defer to those of superior power, prestige, or experience when defining right and wrong.

Because the focus is on avoiding punishment, people at this important beginning stage of spiritual life see everything in black and white. People at this stage tend to draw up lists of rules delineating what is acceptable and what is not for a Christian, and their Bible knowledge consists mainly of proof texts to defend their positions.

In this stage, people are inclined to “create God in their own image,” and define what God wants or likes in terms of their own likes and dislikes, their own definition of what is right and wrong, or areas where they have been victorious and areas where they have not. When it comes to God, they relate to Him primarily on the basis of

how He will react to their obedience or disobedience: they are concerned with reward or punishment.

Commonly, those in the baby stage define themselves by what they are against as opposed to what they are for. The moment Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they slipped back to this elementary stage in their walk with God. Suddenly they were most concerned about getting punished for their transgression and hid themselves, afraid of God’s reaction to their rebellion.

While this first stage is a common starting place—“the fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10, emphasis added; see also Prov. 1:7)—those who fail to grow beyond this point remain severely stunted in their spiritual development. As long as they remain at this level of development, their spiritual life will be a burden—an obligation, not a joy and a pleasure—something they do because they have to or are afraid not to, not because they desire to.

Stage two: What’s in it for me?

The second stage in the development of a person’s spiritual maturation also revolves around the external consequences of their actions, but now the question is, “What’s in it for me?” Persons at this stage feel little or no interest in the needs or interests of others, and they focus on their own needs and interests. There is very little patience with those whose interests or development differ from their own.

While stage one is characterized by fear, stage two is built on greed. The emphasis is on what is mine or what will be mine. An analogy would be a toddler who obeys because Mom promises him or her a cookie if the child does or does not do something. But at play the child wants the toys, all of them he or she can get, and is not terribly interested in what others want.

To people at this stage of spiritual development, God is somewhat like a spiritual “favorite grandfather” who will reward their good behavior. The only time they are really interested in the opinions or needs of others is when

If stage one is focused on the “lake of fire,” stage two is focused on heaven when it comes to the motivation for spiritual actions and attitudes.

Here comes the first major transition in spiritual maturation. While stage one and stage two followers of Christ are focused on themselves, stages three and four are more identified with the group. People at this stage of spiritual maturation judge the morality of their actions by comparing them to the church’s—corporate or local—views and expectations. They define right and wrong by what the important group, in this case the church they identify with, thinks is right

wrongness based on the approval or disapproval of those in the particular church or denomination in which they are members. Their definition of a good follower of Jesus is how well they fit into the church’s expectations. The relative morality of what a person does is evaluated by how this morality will affect the person’s relationships with the rest of the group; in other words, seeking to meet the group’s expectations and obtaining their respect.

Stage three followers of Jesus want to be liked and well thought of by other members of their church. They recognize that not conforming to or living

Tragically, many churches prefer to keep their members in the early stages of spiritual maturation because they are easier to influence, channel, and control at this stage.

it might further their own interests or support their own position; otherwise, respect for others and their interests does not exist.

People at this stage have very little empathy or concern for the struggles of others. They are impatient with those whose spiritual development or interests may be different from their own. Their understanding of spirituality is lockstep: *Everyone should like the same cookies that I like; all should see or do things just like me. If not, you are wrong or at least in some way spiritually inferior.* They know what it takes to get to heaven, and they are certain that they are going to make it because of what they do or do not do.

Where stage one focuses on the consequences of sin, stage two focuses on the rewards of being good/obedient.

or wrong. Rather than being concerned with the consequences to themselves for obedience or disobedience, they are concerned with what the group will think of them and how the group defines right and wrong; in other words, whether they are orthodox or not in their beliefs and actions. Doctrines, statements of beliefs and/or creeds, and rules are adhered to rigidly with little thought of whether they make sense or are fair or appropriate.

Again, morality is predominantly dictated by some earthly authority or force outside of the individual.

Stage three: Seeking to meet group’s expectations

In stage three, the position as a church member becomes very important, and people judge rightness or

up to the group’s expectations affects how others feel about or accept them. This, in turn, determines the place they find themselves in the hierarchy of the group—hence the need to conform to their particular church’s ideas and norms.

As long as the individual is seen as meaning well and desiring to conform to the group’s expectations, he or she is generally accepted. So appearances and appearing to be sincerely trying to conform, even when a person struggles, are very important to a stage three Christian.

Stage four: Group becomes more important than the individual

In the fourth stage of spiritual maturation, the group, or in this case

the church, does not just influence the person, it becomes more important than the individual. Obeying God's commands as understood by the church, the traditions developed by the church, creeds and statements of belief, extrabiblical authorities, and church leadership become the predominant motivating force. The "good of the church" and conforming to the good and the mission of the larger group becomes the defining purpose of the life of the individual—thus a person becomes subservient to the group's needs and good. Statements of belief, creeds, and traditions and church policy prescribe what is right or wrong. An individual's response, behavior, and action must comply with what is defined by the church, and that response is essential to protect and preserve the church. Violation of the church's norms becomes "right"

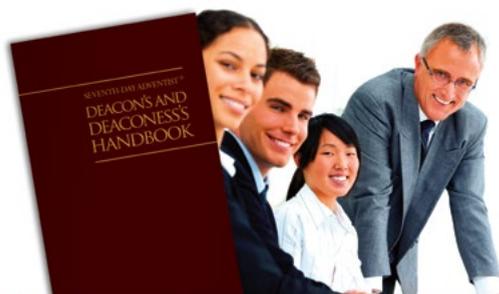
or "wrong" rather than a matter of preference, and people are labeled as "bad" or "good" accordingly.

Tragically, many churches prefer to keep their members in the early stages of spiritual maturation because they are easier to influence, channel, and control at this stage. Rather than encouraging, sustaining, promoting, and protecting the individual's personal relationship with God, the tendency, for a whole plethora of reasons, is to keep them beholden and subservient to the group.

Many, if not most, people who call themselves followers of Jesus never grow beyond the fourth level of spiritual maturity in their walk with God. In part 2 of

this series we will consider stage 5 and stage 6 of spiritual maturity, which can lead to a place of joy, peace, and closeness with God that transcend anything we have ever imagined or experienced. ❏

* Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture is quoted from the English Standard Version (ESV).



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Should I move?

Nine factors to consider before making the change

Why do pastors move?

In many parts of the world field, the conference initiates the move and pastors may not have a choice. But when they do have a choice, why do they move? Leaving a church is not easy. It can be painful and filled with mixed emotions, lingering doubts, self-criticisms, the pain of unfulfilled dreams, varying opinions, and even spiritual doubts.

However, the fact remains that pastors do move and will continue to move. They move for various reasons, such as the conviction that God has called them to go somewhere else, their desire to pastor a larger or smaller church, or for family reasons.

How do you decide whether leaving a church is really the right thing to do? First, pray earnestly. There is no substitute for asking God's counsel. If you pray without ceasing, God will reveal His will to you. Second, early on, seek the counsel of those you trust most: your spouse, trusted friends, fellow elders, and other key church leaders. Third, be clear on why you want to leave and what constitutes a sufficient reason to leave.

Having done all this, a question may still linger: are there some practical considerations? An interview with 15 experienced pastors on what factors

Reasons Why Pastors Leave¹

Reason	% of Total Responses
Desire to serve in a different type of community or area of the country	27%
Getting promoted to a higher position	20%
Wanting to pastor a larger church	16%
Leaving to start a new church	15%
Being transferred by their denomination	15%
Being called by God to another church	12%
Better pay and/or benefits	11%
Fired or asked to leave	10%
Switching to a different denomination	9%
Wanted to pastor a smaller church	4%
Church closed	2%
Other (family needs, job frustration, new challenge, etc.)	18%

Respondents were allowed to identify more than one reason.

influenced their decision to leave or stay revealed nine such considerations.

1. The call: Is God calling me to a new place of ministry?

Even if things are going well and the church where you are currently ministering is growing, pay attention when God tugs at your heart to leave. Seek counsel before deciding. "Victory comes with many counselors" (Prov.

24:6, HCSB). When your family, friends, and colleagues confirm your sense of calling, God may be leading you to a new place of service.

2. Circumstances: Do conditions in my current church make a move prudent?

Family problems, special educational needs of your children, financial necessities, a toxic

environment in your current church, and a better life for your family may suggest that you make a move. However, be careful not to use circumstances as an excuse to do what you choose to do. If there are extenuating circumstances

be hindering God's work. Then seek out what you can do to help your church. Some time ago, one of the churches I was pastoring began to show a decline in both membership and attendance. I got discouraged and wanted to move

Assuming that the pastor is well cared for, the pastor should not move simply to acquire more of the treasures of this world.

However, if the pastor is thinking of a move because his or her energy,

Remember, deciding to leave never comes easily, and once the decision is made, the process of relocating may be difficult.



and you know it is God's will that you stay, be confident that He will give you the strength and guidance you need to deal with difficulties.

3. Competencies: Am I still equipped and competent to lead my church?

You may have outgrown the church. If you stay put, stagnation may bother you. In such circumstances, leaving is good stewardship of your competency skills and opportunities. Additionally, if your church has grown beyond your ability to serve effectively and you are a hindrance to the future growth and ministry of the church, it may be time to step aside. If the church is flat or declining, the attendance is stagnant, and the congregation has reached a low morale, maybe the time has come for you to leave. However, this could also be a sign that you need to stay and work to develop more knowledge and skills in order to continue serving where God has placed you.

Sometimes the church might be struggling because of you. Examine yourself and find out what is in you, spiritually or professionally, that might

or quit. However, some self-reflection revealed that I was not relying sufficiently on God and seemed to have taken for granted church growth and maturity. Soon, I was on my knees more often and pleaded with God to work His will and way—not my way—in our congregation. Church members also joined in this quest for revival. Before long the church experienced miraculous growth both spiritually and numerically. I was filled with joy, as was the congregation. I am glad I stayed.

4. Depletion: Am I depleted financially, emotionally, and spiritually, and might a new church be the thing I need to start over?

Financial need is more often an issue with lay and bivocational pastors but may also affect full-time pastors and their families. If the church cannot provide for a decent livelihood, then you must either leave or enter bivocational ministry. Caring for your family involves a high biblical priority (see 1 Tim. 5:8). A church should free the pastor from worrying over how to meet the basic needs of the family.

focus, enthusiasm, vision, and joy have waned, then the pastor needs to address the situation. Instead of leaving the church permanently when you are burned out, a leave of absence for recovery and renewal may be the solution. Some conferences do allow their pastors a sabbatical to recharge and restore their emotional, professional, and spiritual health.

5. Conflict: Are conflicts in the church beyond resolution and need someone else to take care of them?

When conflicts over your ministry and leadership are dividing, damaging, and destroying the fellowship and mission of the church, leaving becomes an option. Regardless of who is at fault, relational damage can make it hard to revive a positive ministry. A pathologically dysfunctional church can damage you and your family.

Consider whether conflicts are really unresolvable or you are just too tired to face them. Remember the reassuring promise, "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do

not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (Deut. 31:8, NIV).

6. Credibility: Do I still have credibility to lead this church effectively?

Credibility is that factor that increases the confidence of the community of faith in the pastor who leads that community. It is built over the years through a ministry of love and responsible stewardship, identifiable through various factors: increase in attendance, baptisms, increase of faithfulness in giving, involvement in evangelism and community outreach, and an overall good feeling in the church.

Credibility can be squandered or lost. Pastors who spend much time in nonproductive activities outside the church may begin to see credibility trickle away. A breakdown in morality may bankrupt the credibility account. When an ethical violation, such as lying, cheating, stealing, or sexual misconduct, has destroyed people’s trust and support, the wise decision would be to leave and to think carefully whether ministry is still an option when the issue puts the church to disrepute. Both the minister and church need time for recovery and healing.

Credibility may also be lost through poor decisions. One pastor led his church into a fund-raising program with an outside firm. The firm ran off with close to \$250,000. While the loss was not strictly the pastor’s fault, he had recommended employing the firm. Following the incident, church members began questioning his leadership in other areas. Such pastors whose credibility is nearly bankrupt should consider a fresh start.

While maintaining credibility is a lifelong endeavor, losing credibility could be the work of a moment. When credibility is damaged or lost, regaining it takes much more time, effort, and humility. Where necessary, sincerely apologize and work diligently with an action plan to correct

any problems that may have been caused along the way. Reasonable parishioners do realize that pastors are human, too, and they will be willing to give you a second chance.

7. Tenure: Have I stayed long enough to be effective or too long and become ineffective?

A survey of general Baptist pastors revealed that, while long tenure does not guarantee church growth, shorter pastoral tenures (fewer than 5 years) tend to result in lack of growth.² Indeed, churches with short pastoral turnover usually tend to decline. It seems to take between 5 to 7 years for a pastor to really be accepted by the congregation. And about that same amount of time is needed for churches to grow numerically. Ironically, as in marriage, the most likely times for divorce from the congregation is at the 5-to-7-year mark. Several pastors who stayed in one church for 25 years or more said this general remark: “The first ten years were great; the second ten years were good; I should have left in year twenty!”³

Sometimes the length of a pastor’s stay can reach a point of diminishing returns. When vision, enthusiasm, and zeal begin to wane—be it with you or with the church you are pastoring—that may be the time to consider a relocation. If your leadership is no longer being followed, membership is eroding, and your redoubling efforts fail to produce the desired results, a fresh start in another parish may give you renewed quality in your ministry.

While it may be true that the longer you hang in there, the better it will be for you, your family, and the church, the tenure of your ministry should zero in on not what is good for you but what God can do in you and for your congregation. Meanwhile, give your church small victories and a steady assurance of God’s care, and not a steady diet of criticism from the pulpit. Small victories lay the groundwork for bigger things to come.

No pastor should expect to be in the same church forever. Change will come. Meanwhile, what matters is that the pastor should continue to grow in grace and transmit that grace through service when times are tough or easy. The patterns you set in the ups and downs of ministry will guide you for the rest of your ministry.

8. Philosophy: Is my philosophy of ministry compatible with my church?

Philosophy of ministry includes elements such as worship style, primary ministry goals, where you fall on the conservative-liberal spectrum, leadership style, utilization of spiritual gifts, and the role of the church in the community. Every pastor and church has a philosophy of ministry, though it may not be explicitly defined or clearly articulated.

When you consider moving to a new church or think of accepting a call from another church, it may be good to sit down with the board of that church, talk about your ministerial philosophy, and explore whether there is philosophic compatibility between your stand and the church’s expectations. The key question should be: “Does my philosophy of ministry match that of the new church?” Some areas of incompatibility may be easy to handle and can be overcome. Some may be fundamentally irreconcilable. Your decision to move, not to move, or to consider a different church may depend on how the philosophic issues are settled.



One pastor I know had this philosophic struggle some time ago as he was considering a move to a new church. That church had two factions. One group was basically nurture oriented; they expected the pastor to visit every member at least once or twice a year. Shepherding the flock was the pastor's sole responsibility. The other group was committed to evangelism-oriented ministry. These people were deeply involved in outreach ministries and wanted the pastor's main emphasis to be visiting prospective members. The church was a disaster waiting to happen. The pastor confided to me that he felt as if horses were tied to each arm and pulling in opposite directions. Fortunately, a review of the philosophic orientation of the two groups helped the pastor decide correctly whether he should move or not.

9. Dreaming: Do I still have a dream for this church?

Are you excited about the possible future of your church? Can you clearly see where your church is going? As you contemplate a move, ask yourself, "Do I have a dream for the church? Have I shared it with anyone? Have I helped that church define its dream? Do I get excited about that dream? Do I wake up eager to see where the Lord leads in the fulfillment of my dream?"

Healthy churches have a dream of what God wants to do through them. And the pastor should be the chief dreamer. If God does not spark you with His dreams for your current church, it is unlikely that your church will grow or that you are the one to lead it. In that case, you may wish to think of a move with a dream for a new church. But if you have a clear vision for the future of your present church, maybe you should stay to see it become a reality.

Conclusion

No one of these factors, taken alone, should cause you to leave a place where God has called you to serve. The Holy Spirit may overrule every suggestion provided here and instruct

you to stay just where you are. Do your best to prayerfully determine the will of God and follow His plan.

The quiet leading of the Holy Spirit is certainly not to be neglected. God delights to work His miracles in difficult situations. There are plenty of examples of churches around the country where He does just that.

Remember, deciding to leave never comes easily, and once the decision is made, the process of relocating may be difficult. But an honest appraisal of the factors and questions presented previously can allow God to use you in the place and time that will ultimately bring greatest benefit to His kingdom.

Questions to ask before leaving or resigning

These questions fall into four types: theological, philosophical, practical, and personal.

1. Is my work here really finished?
2. Am I simply depressed about a temporary situation?
3. Is this a "cycle of life"—do I want to move every four or five years?
4. Is this church the problem, or am I the problem?
5. Am I running away from something I will eventually face elsewhere?
6. How much have I prayed—really prayed—about this?
7. How much has "better opportunity" influenced my restlessness?
8. Have I had an increasing uneasiness here?
9. Is the thought of moving constantly on my mind?
10. Am I willing to stay? How willing?
11. What would it take to persuade me to stay?
12. Is my own spiritual dryness the real issue?
13. Does my family tend to confirm it is time to go?
14. What bothers me most about this church?
15. Why did God send me here in the first place?
16. What are the pros in staying here? The cons?

17. What do the leaders of my church think?
18. Have I stayed at least five years?
19. What might I do differently here if I do stay?
20. Do my spiritual gifts match the present needs of my position and church?

Questions to ask about the new church

These questions fall into four types: theological, philosophical, practical, and personal.

1. How do their priorities match mine?
2. Is the leadership basically positive or negative?
3. What would I have to concentrate on during the first year?
4. Does my spouse fit their expectations?
5. What is the church's self-image?
6. Are they given to legalism? Antinomianism?
7. Do we agree on the role of the church in the community?
8. How much authority do they grant the pastor?
9. Will these board members serve for life, or do they rotate?
10. Who really has the power in this church? Can I work with him or her?
11. What do others say about this church?
12. Is this a soul-winning church?
13. Will my style of leadership fit here?
14. Will my social style be a fit?
15. What are the ten best strengths of this church?
16. What are five weaknesses?
17. How would I change this church?
18. How might they change me?
19. If I were at that church now, would my present church look good?
20. How much have I prayed and listened to God about this? 

1 Charles Arn, "Pastoral Longevity and Church Growth (Charles Arn)," 11/4/2012, wesleyconnectionline.com/pastoral-longevity-and-church-growth-charles-arn/.

2 See Franklin Dumond, "Eight Point Eight Two: How Long Do Pastors Stay in One Church?" *For Every Man*, June 26, 2014, www.gbjournal.org/8-82/.

3 Ibid.

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Breaking down the different walls of partition: *Our urgent twenty-first century challenge*

The world is divided on racial, regional, cultural, tribal, and social status issues. Unfortunately, these divisions are found in the Christian church as well. This sad fact should not surprise us because the enemy of souls specializes in dividing people.

No doubt, the mission of our Lord suffers when those He has called to represent Him fail to demonstrate the unity for which He prayed. Sin has divided us on different lines, but the Cross was planted between heaven and earth, to unite us first to our Creator and then to one another. We are divided in Adam because of sin but united in Christ by His Cross. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). We can join Paul and say, in Christ, that *we Christians are one*.

Oneness is a biblical idea, but what we see in reality differs—division along tribal and ethnic lines. How, then, can we break the walls that divide us? How can we experience the unity that Christ envisioned for His church?

The unity of the Cross

Though Christ objectively broke down the wall of partition among us, we are still divided because many have not truly believed what God did through Christ: “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” (Eph. 2:14). The Cross, by which Christ broke down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, is the same Cross by which He broke down the wall of partition between the people groups of today.

For the different ethnic groups in our church to live, worship, and work together, individuals must experience the power of Christ at a personal level by believing that Christ died as their Substitute. The Cross is God’s power to salvation to those who believe (1 Cor. 1:18), and salvation is a package that contains everything needed to unite different people groups. Through Christ we are reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18–20).

There is no way we can claim to be saved and, at the same time, see our brothers or sisters from other tribal or ethnic groupings as inferior. The Bible tells us that we have one parentage in Adam (Acts 17:26). Adam ruined us. But

we can go beyond Adam and say that we have one parentage in God (Gen. 1:26–28). Going beyond Adam helps us appreciate what God did through Christ. The same God who created us by Christ (John 1:1–3) is the same God who has saved us (Eph. 2:4–9) through Christ. We are new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10). If we are new creatures in Christ, then we are all equal in Him, regardless of which culture or tribe we come from.

Christ makes the difference in the lives of people. Unity based on political compromise has failed in the world today because it is of human origin. And any attempt on unity that originates with humankind will fail, to which the tower of Babel testifies (Gen. 11:1–9). But the unity that Christ envisioned has to work because Christ is the Truth (John 14:6), and that which He says is true. He made a claim that, by being lifted up from the earth, He would draw all peoples to Himself (John 12:32). Those who, with the eye of faith, behold Christ dying on the cross are drawn to Him. They experience a change of heart. They learn to love the way Christ loves (John 13:34, 35), and this includes loving enemies too (Matt. 5:43–48).

If all this is true, which we know it is, where have we failed? Why are there still different walls of partition in our church today? Could it be because ministers of the gospel have not done much to help the different people groups experience Christ personally? Most of the people comprising the different people groups in our church have not yet received an experiential knowledge of the good news of salvation through Christ. Perhaps many of us have not yet had a personal relational experience with God, which Christ said is the foundation of true unity (John 17:3, 17)?

Ministers of the gospel are agents of reconciliation and unity. This task should be our priority. The following

them wrong. “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32).

Many bad things have happened to different people groups that have caused deep rifts in relationships. It is hard to forgive people who have treated us badly. Christ, nevertheless, forgave the people who gave Him the worst treatment. He prayed: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Having saved us, Christ becomes our Example. We can forgive those who have given us the worst treatment. Christ can do it through us.

Help parishioners understand cultural differences. Before we can

for whose salvation they labored. We need to help parishioners understand the cultures of the other people in order that they may interact with them. Understanding why different people groups do things the way they do will help us appreciate and minister to them. In the end, we will grow to appreciate one another as God’s children.

Follow Christ’s approach in moving beyond man-made barriers. Jews and Samaritans did not accept each other. Christ was a Jew. However, His being Jewish did not prevent Him from ministering to Samaritans (John 4:1–42). At the same time, He did not deny His Jewish identity, but He taught that there was something greater

Christ was the unifying factor among the twelve disciples. He wants to unite us today.

points can help us to bring about unity in the church of God today.

Preach Christ. If the different walls of partition that divide us are to be broken down, God’s ministers must preach Christ, and Him crucified. Preaching Christ is not optional for ministers, but an imperative. Ellen G. White wrote: “The exaltation of Christ is the great truth that all who labor in word and doctrine are to reveal.”¹ Christ saves us. Christ unites us. Sister White notes that “the secret of unity is found in the equality of believers in Christ. The reason for all division, discord, and difference is found in separation from Christ.”²

Preach forgiveness. Ministers, as agents of reconciliation, must preach about the power of forgiveness. They should preach that those who experience Christ experience God’s forgiveness of sin. And those who experience God’s forgiveness learn to forgive the people who have done

think about being God’s agents in the great assignment of dismantling the walls that divide people, we need to understand the differences in our cultures. Paul was raised in the Jewish culture, but he understood Roman culture also, being a Roman by citizenship. No doubt Paul understood Greek culture also. This made the great apostle relevant to different people groups. Leslie Pollard argues, “We must come to terms with our own personal identity and history, and learn to speak the cultural ‘language’ of our people of origin.”³ We need to know what is good as well as what is bad in our own culture.

A person who does not understand his or her own culture cannot appreciate the other person’s culture. That person will see diversity as being evil. And yet the unity that Christ prayed for does not suggest the elimination of diversity.

At the same time, both Jesus and Paul understood the people’s culture

than being Jewish or Samaritan (John 4:21–24). His approach should be our approach.

The story of the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21–28) teaches a lot about prejudice. Christ demonstrated that He was a Savior of all people and not just of the Jews.

We should not tolerate hypocrisy in the church today. Those of us who hold responsible positions should preach against the different walls that divide us and come up with deliberate plans to eradicate those divisions. Perhaps a seminary class on how to understand people of all cultures, and Christ’s way of reaching them, would do. Consistent implementation of policies and fairness in training and hiring would go a long way in bringing about the much-desired unity. We need to identify potential leaders in the different people groups that comprise our church and train them to ably minister across cultural diversities.

Teach and preach about the power of prayer. We cannot overemphasize the power of prayer. Ministers should teach and preach about it. The power of prayer should not just be an appendix of what we teach and preach about. Sermons preached about Christ without prayer will be devoid of power. As we pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we need to particularly ask God to break the different walls of partition. The Holy Spirit will not be poured out in full measure if we do not take deliberate steps to ask God to deal with our pride manifested in the walls that divide us. When we pray, revival will result. There will be healing of our wounds. Our ideas, habits, and way of looking at things will change.

Conclusion

The walls that divide us are condemned by those who understand the

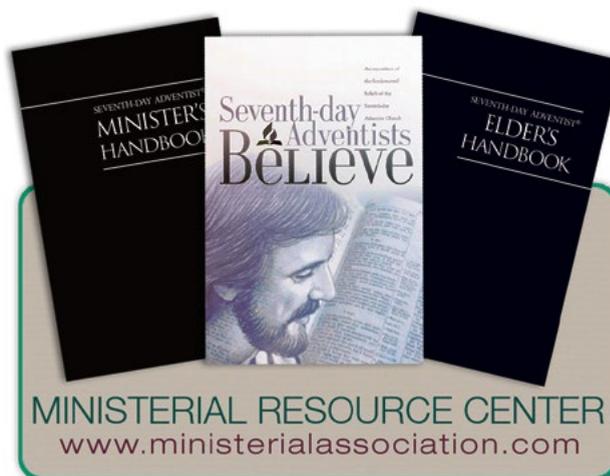
common origin of the human race. Christians should lead in the fight against these walls because we preach the everlasting gospel—Christ and Him crucified. The everlasting gospel goes to different people groups (Rev. 14:6, 7). And the different people groups who learn to coexist as one will stand before the Lamb in heaven (Rev. 7:9–17). Christ was the unifying factor among the twelve disciples. He wants to unite us today (John 17:17–23).¹

1 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*,

bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 155.

2. *Ibid.*, 259.

3. Leslie N. Pollard, ed., *Embracing Diversity: How to Understand and Reach People of All Cultures* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 20, 21.



LETTERS

Continued from page 4



(19 months) and a second in the midst of serious conflict (24 months). Both were powerful experiences.

I want to add one aspect that I believe is quite critical. Once a long-term pastor is called, I believe that it is essential for the intentional interim to have opportunity to share insights from the interim period. In particular, I believe it is helpful for the new person to grasp what strategies and processes were implemented during the interim period. At the conclusion of my first intentional interim, I found the new pastor unreceptive to that review. He was confident that he had the skills to navigate the new terrain and could discern for himself what was going on. Unfortunately, the result was more brokenness and a resulting short-term ministry. From that point on, I insisted that any call require the new pastor to sit down with the interim pastor and review the work that had been done.

—Del Keeney, *Mechanicsburg Church of the Brethren, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, United States*

The church and homosexuality

Perhaps I should wait until I read all three installments of Roy Gane's article, "Old Testament Principles Relevant to Consensual Homoerotic Activity" (September, November, January), before I register an opinion. But I offer an observation that may be useful in helping Adventist clergy grapple with this issue.

There is no doubt that homosexual activity is prohibited in Leviticus, just as circumcision is described as an "everlasting covenant" in Genesis 17. At a certain point, Christians decided that circumcision was an unnecessary part of what it means to be a Christian.

Now, in the twenty-first century, we have to decide how to interpret the Levitical prohibition regarding homosexual activity. For example, suppose I have homosexual neighbors (which I do). What is my obligation as a Christian? Is it not to love them unconditionally, as God loves me?

What if I have Adventist friends who are in homosexual relationships (which I do)? Do I say, "Sorry, your behavior is an abomination. For me to accept you, you have to stop being a practicing homosexual"? I wouldn't say that to my friends.

As society becomes increasingly secular, it seems that more than simply quoting Scriptures that condemn homosexuality as an "abomination" (along with lying), our job is to interpret Scripture in such a way as to reflect a God who is "altogether lovely."

One thing more: I well remember 40 or 50 years ago when being divorced was akin to committing the unpardonable sin. There were trials and declarations of innocence or guilt. Those days are thankfully gone (although the texts that inspired them aren't). Perhaps we'll live long enough to see homosexual couples receive just as much grace as we now show divorced couples. We can only hope.

—An ordained minister, email



► Moscow conference highlights rising religious extremism

Moscow, Russia—The Third International Forum on Religion and Peace, held October 29, 2015, was jointly organized by Russia’s Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations and Moscow’s department of National Policy, Inter-Regional Relations, and Tourism. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was represented by **Ganoune Diop**, director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) department for the General Conference, and **Oleg Goncharov**, PARL director for the Adventist Church’s Euro-Asia Division.

In his address to the assembly, Diop focused on the foundational place of religious freedom within the pantheon of human rights. He emphasized that this is a God-given right, not one subject to political agendas, and he urged all

those present to work together to preserve and extend this “first freedom.” On the day before the forum, Diop and Goncharov visited the State Duma, or legislature, to meet with various public officials responsible for church-state relations in Russia. They also met with **Alexander Kudryavtsev**, who heads one of Russia’s most active public organizations focused on religious liberty, the Russian Association for the Protection of Religious Freedoms (RARF).

At the conclusion of the forum, the participants adopted a resolution expressing deep concern about rising religious extremism.

They also urged greater action on the part of the international community in stemming the continued destruction of Christian communities in the Middle East and Africa, and expressed solidarity with all those suffering persecution for their faith. [ESD PARL/Bettina Krause]



[Photo by Euro-Asia Division Public Affairs and Religious Liberty]

► Adventists join vigil for justice in Australia

Canberra, New South Wales, Australia—Nearly 200 Christians from around Australia came together to worship, pray, and lobby their local federal politicians to increase Australia’s foreign aid to help end global poverty. Among the participants, 12 representatives from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia attended Voices for Justice,

a four-day advocacy event held in Canberra October 10–13, 2015.

Attendees of Voices for Justice received training through workshops and political forums on how to speak out for a world of justice and compassion. The annual event was organized by Micah Australia, a coalition of church and Christian organizations—including ADRA Australia—whose mission is to inspire and empower Australian Christians to raise a powerful voice for global justice.

For the first time, five Avondale College of Higher Education students attended Voices for Justice. They were accompanied by international development studies senior lecturer **Brad Watson**, who described Voices as a “fantastic way to engage with Australia’s elected leaders. It was a humbling experience to meet with Christians from around

Australia, to worship together, and meet with members of the upper and lower houses to humbly and prayerfully ask the Australian government to reverse the cuts to the aid budget.”

Voices for Justice culminated in a candlelight vigil on the lawns of the Parliament House with church leaders from various denominations praying for the nation’s leaders. Micah’s national coordinator, **Ben Thurley**, said prayer was a central focus of the event. “If we define advocacy as speaking to the powerful on behalf of the powerless, then prayer itself is a form of advocacy as we cry out from the depths of our hearts to the God of grace and justice.” Thurley said prayer “sends a powerful message to politicians—we hold them to their highest calling, which is to work for the common good and to protect the rights of the poor and needy both within our borders and beyond them.” [Josh Dye, *Record Magazine*/ANN Staff]



[Photo by ADRA Australia]

The Love of God: A Canonical Model

by John C. Peckham, Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, 2015

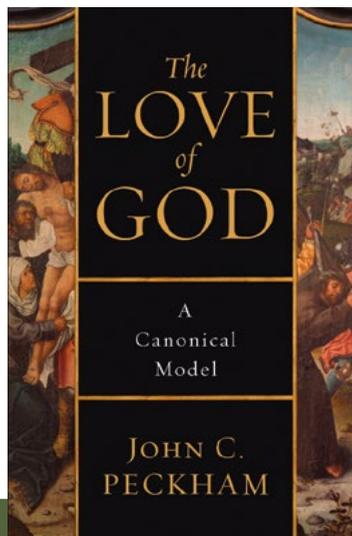
In *The Love of God: A Canonical Model*, John Peckham, associate professor of theology and Christian philosophy at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, focuses on the center of Christian theology and the doctrine of God, and explores what, for most Christians, is the central attribute of God, namely, love. The product of extensive research, the work compares two sharply opposed models of divine love and offers a constructive alternative to both.

The “transcendent-voluntarist model” emphasizes the radical separation between God and the world. For its many proponents, such as Carl F. H. Henry, God is entirely self-sufficient, and His love for the world is purely voluntary.

essentially related to the world. For those who hold this view, such as Charles Hartshorne, a “process panentheist,” God’s very being requires

on divine love derived directly from the “canonical data,” a view he calls “the foreconditional-reciprocal model.” According to this model, God’s love for the world is “voluntary,” but not “exclusively volitional” (90). That is to say, while God does not depend on a creaturely world for His existence, and the world exists solely as the result of God’s decision to create, He is not responsible for everything that happens in the world, yet God is genuinely affected by it. To unpack this, Peckham describes God’s love as having five important aspects—volitional, evaluative, emotional, “foreconditional” (his novel expression), and reciprocal—and he devotes a chapter to each of them.

God’s love for the world is volitional in the sense that creating a



Considering these two views of divine love, Peckham argues, we face an impasse. They are mutually exclusive, and neither does justice to the biblical portrayal of God.

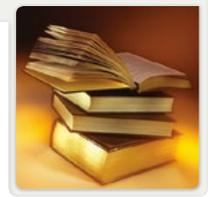
God does not need this world, or any creaturely world, and His relation to the world contributes nothing to His experience. So, God’s love for the world is entirely voluntary and unconditional—unconditioned by anything outside God.

In sharp contrast, the “immanent-experientialist model” embraces a view of God as both intimately and

the existence of beings other than God, and the divine experience includes God’s relations to all non-divine reality.

Considering these two views of divine love, Peckham argues, we face an impasse. They are mutually exclusive, and neither does justice to the biblical portrayal of God. As an alternative to both, Peckham offers a perspective

world was a choice God made rather than something He was required by nature to do. But this is not exclusively volitional, because within God’s general commitment to, and care for, the world, He occasionally acts in specific ways. Divine election, for example, involves particular people, and while it rests on God’s loving choice, divine election



also requires a human response. Love between God and the creatures presupposes freedom on both sides.

Other aspects of God's love clarify and amplify its volitional character. God's love, as evaluative, is that God not only bestows value on the creatures, He receives value from them. "The joy of others is integral to God's own joy" (145). God's love also indicates that His response to human behavior is not one of mere undifferentiated "sympathy." Good and evil are real to God, and His responses to them are different.

Similarly, the Bible portrays God as emotionally responsive to and genuinely affected by human decisions and actions. Numerous passages, from Hosea to the parables of Jesus, attribute compassion and joy to God as well as pain, disappointment, and even "wrath." He has also been described as *changing His mind in response to human decisions and actions*. While human emotions are only analogically applicable to God, it is impossible to do justice to the biblical accounts of divine experience without attributing emotions to Him.

To the volitional, evaluative, and emotional aspects of God's love, Peckham adds "foreconditional" and reciprocal aspects—the features he uses to identify his position. There is a sense in which God's love is unconditional, he states, but not exclusively so. Divine love is not universally experienced, not because God arbitrarily withholds it or withdraws it but because His creatures have the freedom to reject divine love and thereby forfeit its benefits. While God's *subjective* love—God's love for all—is unconditional, God's *objective* love is not. Whether the reciprocity of God's love is realized depends on the specific way in which people respond to God. His love for those who respond to Him has unique qualities; God's love is "special and intimate" (242).

Peckham's concluding chapter raises a number of questions for further discussion, such as *divine determinism*,

which he rejects, and *exhaustive divine foreknowledge*, which he accepts, although he acknowledges that his concept of God's love does not require it.

By any account, Peckham's project is a significant achievement. Extensively researched, meticulously documented—the footnotes are invaluable—it is expansive in its coverage of an important and complex topic, yet clearly and accessibly developed.

An informed and well-developed argument will always stimulate discussion, and this one will certainly do that. Even though he limits his inquiry to "divine love in the context of the God-world relationship" (60), it seems curious that Peckham declines to explore the Trinitarian dimensions of love. His statement that "love between the persons of the Trinity . . . models the ideal nature of all love relationships" (228) echoes the conviction of many contemporary theologians that the love evident in God's relation to the creaturely world both reflects and expresses the love that constitutes the divine life itself. I would like to have heard more from Peckham on this topic.

I am also puzzled by the relative lack of attention that open theism receives in this discussion. Like Peckham, those who advocate the openness of God seek a biblically informed alternative to unacceptable views of divine independence from, and divine dependence on, the world. Peckham is clearly aware of the work of open theists—and cites it from time to time—yet his discussion proceeds without giving it much attention. Although he mentions Thomas J. Oord here and there, he might have considered the work of Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory A. Boyd, all of whom address a number of Peckham's central concerns from a perspective similar to his.

In discussing thinkers who exemplify the immanent-experientialist model, Peckham cites Charles Hartshorne, a well-known process thinker. But

Hartshorne was a philosopher, not a theologian. He might also have considered the work of Christian theologians who employ process thought, such as John B. Cobb Jr., Schubert M. Ogden, Daniel Day Lewis, David Griffin, and Marjorie Suchocki.

Given the prominence Peckham gives it, one topic that will no doubt receive considerable attention is his "canonical" theological model—a perspective that takes the contents of the Bible as a unity constituted by divine authority and authorship and excludes attempts to go behind the biblical documents as we have them in order to reconstruct their history or development. (Peckham regards such endeavors as "speculative" and irrelevant to his purposes.)

A growing interest in the scholarly world exists to move beyond historical criticism, with its preoccupation with the composition of the biblical documents. After all, these documents have functioned as a unity for centuries within communities of faith and may still do so. Nevertheless, one may affirm the unity and divine authority of the biblical writings without ignoring or disregarding the history behind them. As Peckham himself notes, one can embrace a "canonical horizon" from a literary perspective and treat the final form of the canon as a unified document (57, f.n. 40). So, it seems, one need not agree with his views on historical and canonical criticism in order to appreciate the book's insights into the biblical accounts of divine love.

Whether or not one chooses to pursue all the questions that *The Love of God* raises, the wealth of information it contains; the clarity of its presentations; and, above all, the lofty theme it pursues will prove valuable to a wide variety of readers.

—Reviewed by Richard Rice, PhD, a professor of religion in the areas of theology and philosophy of religion at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California, United States. 

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Is your church physically literate?

Many members of our worldwide church pride themselves on what they know about good nutrition. Indeed, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been a leader for more than 100 years in communicating the simple principles of a wholesome and nutritious diet. Modern research continues to validate the benefits of these principles.

Yet health is more than what we eat—although to listen to some members you might be led to think otherwise! Physical fitness is a keystone to good health. From time to time I hear some ask the question, “Which is more important, exercise or diet?” An attempt to answer this question leads me to ask another, “Would you rather live without your heart, or brain?” Obviously, we need both! The same is true of physical fitness and nutrition—they are equally important.

In a world becoming increasingly sedentary, our churches should begin to focus attention on the importance of physical fitness at all ages. It is easy to relate literacy to reading and writing—skills essential to success in life. Similarly, the importance of *physical literacy* is relatively new and includes the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engaging in purposeful physical activities for life.¹

Physical literacy training best begins in childhood with the development of basic motor skills such as running, jumping, hopping, skipping, and galloping, along with kicking, catching, and striking appropriate objects. When young people learn to move, this provides them with the ability to be active for life.

How does the elementary or high school associated with your church

do in teaching physical literacy to your young people? Providing opportunities for children to practice movement skills in both structured and unstructured play is critical. Young people need the opportunity to develop confidence in their skills. When they get this, they are far more likely to lead a more active lifestyle as adults.

The benefits of physical literacy extend to many areas of life. Ellen White explains, “Sound health lies at the very foundation of the student’s success. Without it, he can never see the fruition of his ambitions and his hopes. Hence a knowledge of the laws by which health is secured and preserved is of preeminent importance. The human body may be compared to nicely adjusted machinery, which needs care to keep it in running order. One part should not be subjected to constant wear and pressure, while another part is rusting from inaction. While the mind is taxed, the muscles also should have their proportion of exercise. Every young person should learn how to regulate his dietetic habits,—what to eat, when to eat, and how to eat. He should also learn how many hours may be spent in study, and how much time should be given to physical exercise.”²

Government agencies and health organizations today recommend 60 minutes of physical activity per day for good health. Yet it is well documented that most youth and adults do not meet these current recommendations. Are you meeting this goal daily?

Many years ago God gave our church important council on this topic that was ahead of its time. “All who can possibly do so ought to walk in the open air every day, summer and winter. But the clothing should be suitable for the exercise, and the feet should be

well protected. A walk, even in winter, would be more beneficial to the health than all the medicine the doctors may prescribe.”³

You will find that it is not difficult to incorporate more physical activity into your church program. Here are some very practical ideas:

- Set a good example: take a walk after a meal, with your family if possible.
- Go to a park and play, hike, or swim.
- Turn off the electronic screens for at least an hour a day to engage in some wholesome physical activity.
- Go to the grade school and join the kids in recess outside.
- Invite your church board or committee to stand instead of sit.
- When someone wants to counsel with you, invite them for a walk while you and they talk.
- Plan church activities that involve physical activities such as camping, hiking, and movement games.
- Organize community fun runs followed by a wholesome breakfast and fellowship.
- Encourage your members and the community to participate in physical activity campaigns such as Adventists InStep for Life.⁴
- Organize regular physical fitness classes for your community.

These simple activities can go a long way to improving the physical literacy of your church members and community. 📌

1 Wikipedia, s.v. “Physical Literacy,” last modified October 10, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physical_Literacy.
 2 Ellen G. White, “Right Methods in Education,” *Signs of the Times*, August 26, 1886, 513.
 3 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1948), 529.
 4 Adventists InStep for Life, <http://www.adventistsinstepforlife.org>.

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TOUCH A HEART, REACH MY WORLD



“We have different gifts,
according to the grace
given us...”

Romans 12:6, NIV

Nurture

Reach Up with God



Outreach

Reach Out with God



Empower

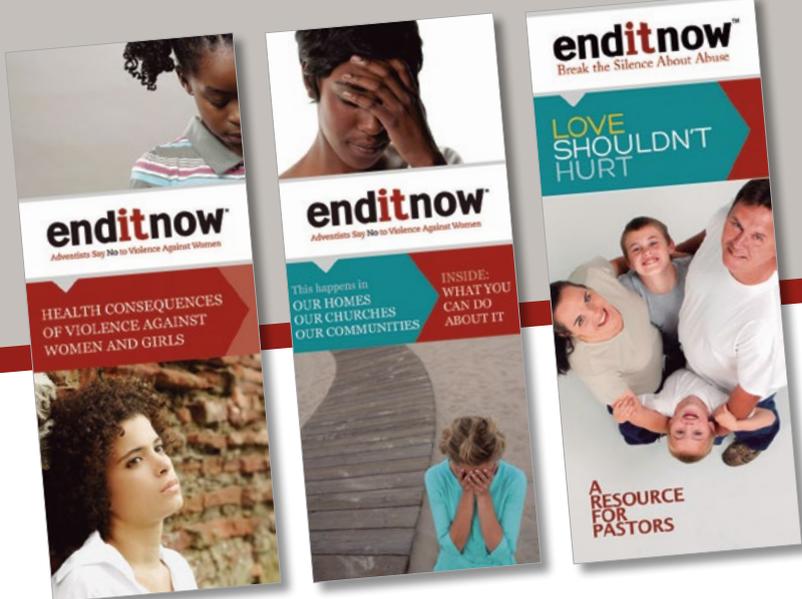
Reach In with God



Resources for local church leaders



www.adventistwomensministries.org



enditnowTM
Adventists Say No to Violence

The UN estimates that globally,
at least one in three women
experiences physical and/or sexual
violence in her lifetime.

—New Internationalist, November 2010

Resources for Pastors

www.enditnow.org

www.adventistwomensministries.org

“Defend the cause of the weak and
fatherless; rescue the weak and needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

Psalms 82:3,4, NIV



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