January 1, 1990

Dear Fellow Believer:

We are living in momentous times. Marvelous changes in the political climate in a number of countries are providing opportunities for advancing the gospel on an unprecedented scale. We see everywhere God’s providence opening the way for the finishing of the work. In addition to the evidence of the movements of God’s hand in the affairs of the nations, the fulfillment of Bible prophecy in the natural, religious, social, and economic worlds reminds us that Jesus’ coming is near.

As a church, we must be awake to the breakthroughs that God is granting us; we must carry the message of salvation through the doors that are opening. But unless we are directed by the Spirit of God, we won’t see that the doors are opening—and they will surely close again if we do not respond. And unless we as a church are empowered by the Spirit of God, our witness to the world will be weak and ineffective. In either case, the loss to both the church and the world would be inestimable.

Continued on page 4
The healing rite

Thank you so much for Mark Owen's encouraging article, “Anointing: The Lost Rite” (September 1989).

Growing up in the church, somehow I developed a very negative attitude toward anointing. In a time of crisis, such strong feelings burst forth that they even took me by surprise. A serious accident sent our family's youngest son to the hospital, and the doctor told us that he probably wouldn't live through the ordeal. My husband (the pastor) decided that he would get the head elder of the church and together they would have an anointing for our son. In my great anguish I pleaded with him not to do it.

Now, many years later, after much study and many experiences in which my husband has held anointing services, I see what a beautiful rite it is. As Mark Owen says, "Even those who are not physically healed talk of a healing of their spiritual relationship with Christ."

I may this rite of healing blossom and flourish in our midst. — Mildred J. White, Bellingham, Washington.

Mark Owen underlines the spiritual blessing that always accompanies an anointing. I wonder, however, why one follows the procedure given in James 5? For the healing spoken of there, or for a spiritual blessing? What is the exact promise of God? I believe that James emphasizes the healing; the spiritual blessing comes secondary. In all my life (I am a retired minister), I have met only two church members with incurable illnesses who were miraculously healed after having followed James 5 — without medical intervention following the anointing. For me, a genuine miracle of God is an exception and not the law.

What about the ill persons and the members of their families who have trusted in the efficacy of James 5 in vain? They may lose their faith entirely.

Mark Owen gives the example of the sterile Jennifer who was anointed and then underwent surgery to correct her problem. When two years later Jennifer is a happy mother, Owen exults, "It is a miracle!" This sounds doubtful to me. Is God or is the surgeon the author of the miracle? Owen knows as well as I that thousands of sterile women are operated upon and, without the benefit of James 5, also become happy mothers. In contrast, in I Samuel 1 one year after an intense and faith-filled prayer, the sterile Hannah becomes pregnant. Here is a miracle that cannot be disputed because no human intervention was possible.

My opinion regarding James 5 is that 2,000 years ago, in a time when the practice of medicine was primitive, it was God's way of relieving the ailments His people faced. Today, in His love for humanity, God has given doctors, surgeons, chemists, etc., the skill and wisdom to develop the science of healing to a spectacular — even miraculous — degree. Millions of human miracles are wrought through these devoted human instruments for the benefit of both believers and unbelievers. Thanks be to God for revealing His love for suffering people through this new means!

Where does prayer fit into this scheme? Simple prayer that God will lead His children to live in harmony with the laws of nature, or lead them to a wise doctor in case of illness, or help them to suffer courageously should the disease prove incurable, is appropriate and beneficial.

In some cases, such as when a missionary is ill and is too far from a health institution or a doctor to be cared for, James 5 is a must. Man's necessity is God's opportunity. But why ask God to intervene miraculously when man has the solution at hand?

In conclusion, I am afraid that Mark Owen's article lacks discernment and that if we resort to James 5, mingling it with modern medicine, we will contribute to the confusion between the sacred and the profane — attributing the miracle to God instead of to men and vice versa. — Léon Liénard, Braine-l'Alleud, Belgium.

Accommodating truth to science?

In Letters (September 1989), correspondent Ron Lowe attempts to show that the earth existed for some indeterminate period before the chronology of the patriarchs began. In this case his reach exceeds his grasp.

His reasoning is as follows:

Major premise: The saved will have no need for timekeeping methods in the new earth.

Minor premise: Conditions in Eden before the Fall were the same as will exist in the new earth.

Conclusion: Therefore time was not measured in Eden before the Fall.

The major premise is demonstrably untrue, the minor premise is at least questionable, and so the conclusion is, of course, false.

The facts are that there were timekeeping means before the Fall, there will be timekeeping means in the new earth, and there is need for them in both eras.

As for Eden before the Fall, see Genesis 1:14: "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years." See also Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11.

As for the new earth, see Isaiah 66:22, 23: "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord."

So as long as the Sabbath has existed and will exist, there have been and will be timekeeping methods.

An ancillary assumption is that the (Continued on page 29)
Is it true that many Seventh-day Adventists—both leaders and laity—are forming groups to pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Pente-costal power? Our world president, Neal C. Wilson, thinks so. Read his open letter, which begins on the front cover. Whether or not there is a movement in this direction, who would deny that we need one—and now! 

David Newman, Ministry’s executive editor, and I were discussing Wilson’s appeal for Adventists to seek and pray for the Holy Spirit. Our conversation, led of the Holy Spirit I am certain, brought a simultaneous conviction to David’s heart and mine. We confessed to each other that we had allowed the pressures of work and family to keep us from spending quality time with the Lord. Some moments later we admitted that the “pressure” argument is not valid. Where are our priorities? we asked. I said that the evening before I had watched 60 Minutes, an investigative news program. Interesting? Absolutely! Necessary? Emphatically no! Had I spent 60 minutes that same day studying the life of Christ and pleading for the Holy Spirit? Unfortunately not!

David testified to a similar experience, and then he said, “Bob, I would like to be accountable to you for spending one hour a day in study and prayer, focusing on the life of Christ. Accountability will bring this experience into clearer focus. If I know I have to account for that time, I will certainly be more likely to give it priority.”

Immediately I asked David to do the same for me.

This is not some legalistic maneuver. We simply sense our need of being filled with the Holy Spirit and our need of having a fitness for communicating the gospel. We also sense both the unusual opportunities this church faces in a fast-changing world and the unfortunate problems that seem to multiply to hinder the free flow of God’s power to the world.

As I visit various churches, I sense that many people are longing for a religious experience that will satisfy the heart. To know the Lord. To live victorious over the constant assaults of temptation. To understand God’s guidance in the minutest details and decisions of life. To sense the Spirit’s presence—to enjoy the Lord—not with a rock-and-roll experience but in a quiet, confident, daily walk with Him—this is what I want.

I know that these longings will never be satisfied outside the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Let’s talk about, think about, and pray for the infilling of the Spirit.

J.R. Spangler
An open letter to our world church

Neal C. Wilson

Is the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit's power in the latter rain for sometime in the future or is it meant for us today?

Continued from cover

I must confess that in spite of progress and victories in so many areas, I have become increasingly persuaded that something is lacking. We are not fully measuring up to God's glorious expectations for each of us and for His church.

Scripture contains precious promises regarding the Holy Spirit. Zechariah said, "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field" (Zech. 10:1). And Jesus promised His followers, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

It is time for God's people to press together and earnestly seek the power of God's Spirit in the latter rain. It is this experience that will bring about the long-looked-for revival of apostolic, primitive godliness Ellen White wrote of.¹

Revivals of the past

Church leaders have called for revivals before, but their pleas have largely gone unheeded. There are several reasons for this. First, from the local church to the General Conference, church leaders have not focused seriously upon the need for a revival and the power of God in our midst. In the past the one or two who called for revival were as voices in the wilderness —heard by a few, but receiving no response.

Second, reformation must accompany revival. Although they are separate experiences, revival and reformation complement each other and must blend together.² Calls for revival will be meaningless unless the whole church is willing to admit the presence of sin among us, confess that sin before God, and turn from it.

Third, if our people do not know how to respond to the calls of revival that they hear, there will be no revival. While noting God's willingness to give the power of His Spirit, Ellen White advised, "But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing." ³

Fourth, when past calls for revival did elicit responses, there was no support system to nurture and strengthen those responses. In part, the great revivals of Old Testament times succeeded because the leaders of God's people put into place support systems to sustain the revival experience. Likewise, the apostolic church had a support system to maintain the experience of the day of Pentecost: "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Need of the church

God is blessing the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But the results are minuscule compared to what He longs to enable us to do. We have yet to see the fulfillment of Revelation 18:1: "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory."

Although we are adding nearly 1,500 new members per day to our spiritual family, God has greater things in store. Unentered countries beckon. And it is
our fervent hope that the growth that marks the experience of the church in some areas of the world will inspire those divisions that have seen little growth.

Ellen White reminded us that God is more willing to give His Spirit to His people than parents are to give good gifts to their children. If this is so, why do we not see more of the power of the Spirit in the church? She observed, “If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit. Wherever the need of the Holy Spirit is a matter little thought of, there is seen spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death. Whenever minor matters occupy the attention, the divine power that is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and that would bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though offered in infinite plentitude.

“Since this is the means by which we are to receive power, why do we not hunger and thirst for the gift of the Spirit? Why do we not talk of it, pray for it, and preach concerning it?” 4

Although the power of the latter rain will produce miracles, I do not envision an outpouring of emotional excitement accompanying it. Rather, there will be a final settling into the truth by those who receive this gift, a conviction that will lead to repentance and consecration, a pressing together in Christian love, and, of course, a surge into the church of those who respond to the final warning of the third angel before the close of probation.

Have the Spirit now

We raise one of the greatest hindrances to receiving the latter rain when we believe that God has reserved its outpouring for some time in the future. This expectation results in a lack of interest in receiving this power now. We feel no urgency to prepare our hearts for the infilling of the Spirit. But, fellow believers, we can and must have this blessing now. “The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the church is looked forward to as in the future; but it is the privilege of the church to have it now. Seek for it, pray for it, believe for it. We must have it, and Heaven is waiting to bestow it.” 5

If the power that will enable us to complete our commission of preaching the gospel to the world, the power that will prepare the bride to welcome the Bridegroom, the power that will hasten the coming of our Lord—if that power is available to us now, what prevents us from seeking it? Could it be that we still love sin in its many forms and therefore have no interest in receiving this power? We are admonished to act on the belief that we can have the Spirit now. To seek the gift actively and to pray for it. It is to this experience that I call the world church.

A call to revival

We must turn away from the sin that dwells among us, from rebellion against God’s clearly revealed will. The world—with all its greed, lust, pride, and hatred—is too much with us. We must not, we cannot, condone its lifestyle. We are God’s remnant, covenant people; we must reflect in our lives the beauty of His character and the principles of His holy law.

I exhort my fellow leaders—those who serve at the General Conference headquarters, at the divisions, the unions, the conferences, and at the local churches—to seek the outpouring of the Spirit upon your own lives and upon the world church. Keep the refreshing of the latter rain ever in your prayers—in your family devotions, in your private devotions, in your spurt-of-the-moment prayers, in group prayers with fellow believers, and in prayers during the worship service. Leaders, make the subject of preparation for the latter rain a priority item in your fields of labor. Heed the counsel given to us: “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work.” 6 Study ways in which you can encourage pastors and their congregations to seek the Spirit.

“ It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.” —Ellen G. White.

The other General Conference officers and I long to receive this outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And we realize that we cannot expect you to make the seeking of the Holy Spirit a priority if we fail to do the same. So we have decided that we will devote time at the beginning of our weekly officers’ meeting to “confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing.”

Pastors, foster prayer groups in your churches. Encourage your members to meet for prayer on a regular basis regardless of the time or the day—whether in Sabbath school, at prayer meeting, in home fellowship groups, or at other times and places. As a church and as individuals, we do not pray enough for the power that God has promised. “We are not willing enough to trouble the Lord, and to ask Him for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And the Lord wants us to trouble Him in this matter. He wants us to press our petitions to the throne.” 7

Fellow believers the world over, pray for the latter rain, seek its power in your lives, act upon your belief. And encourage your fellow members to seek a revival of spiritual power in your church. Rather than criticizing, press together, support one another. Find a colleague you can regularly pray with.

As an elected leader of God’s covenant people, I want you all to know that I commit my life to seeking the outpouring of the latter rain upon myself and upon the world church. By God’s grace I will fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to give the Holy Spirit. (I will have more to say about these conditions during the months to come.) I commit myself to being a spiritual leader among God’s people, nurturing, guiding, praying for the spiritual revival that will energize the church and prepare it for the coming of Jesus.

I invite all to join me in preparing for this experience.

3 Ibid., p. 121. (Italics supplied.)
6 Selected Messages, book 1, p. 121.
7 Loma Linda Messages (Loma Linda, Calif.: 1935), p. 408.
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The minister as a human being

Benjamin D. Schoun

Recognizing our humanness warns us of temptation, reveals our potential, frees us from the guilt that unrealistic expectations bring, and uncovers the ground that motivates and enables our mission.

According to a news item reported some time ago, the Florida Supreme Court ruled that a parsonage is not a sacred building. Apparently, a business establishment located next to a parsonage sought a liquor license. The circuit court denied the license because of the proximity of the minister. But the supreme court reversed the circuit court's decision, arguing that except for the "goodness" of its occupant, a parsonage does not differ from any other residence.

This story reflects some of the ambivalence with which people regard ministers. Are ministers in some way different from other people? Does their holy calling exempt them from the common situations of earthbound humanity?

As Paul and Barnabas ministered in the name of God, the people of Lystra attributed deity to them. The apostles, however, did not hesitate to declare who they were. Acts 14:15 says that they rushed out, shouting, "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you." Paul and Barnabas understood that they were human.

Truly, among all the things that ministers are, they are first of all human beings. So it seems appropriate to begin a series on the identity and responsibilities of a minister by establishing a clear understanding of this dimension. How does the fact that ministers are human beings affect their self-concepts, their effectiveness, the way they approach their work?

Some may feel that it is unnecessary to spend time on this topic. Is it not obvious that ministers are human? Only a few eccentrics would claim otherwise. Yet some of the pressures that weigh upon those in the ministry push them to act in ways that deny their humanness.

For instance, ministers are expected to maintain high standards of morality and Christian living. This is certainly appropriate. But in trying to live up to this expectation, ministers can come to the point of projecting goodness so constantly that they begin to deceive themselves. Compounding this problem is the mystique surrounding the calling of God and ordination that has led many to presume a wide distinction between clergy and laity. Ministers symbolize the ideals that people seek but have not yet attained. For example, ministers are expected to have the ideal family and to never experience doubt, tension, or discouragement.

As a result, ministers are placed upon a pedestal—a position that allows little room for human weaknesses. Baptist pastor and author Edward B. Bratcher says, "Many laypersons expect ministers to be 10 feet tall and able to walk on water."

Often ministers accept and even en-

This article is the first in a 10-article series that considers the most vital relationships and responsibilities for which Seventh-day Adventist ministers are accountable. Most of the articles in the series were first delivered as chapel addresses at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. If you receive Ministry on an every-other-month basis and want to have the full series, send us four stamped, self-addressed envelopes, and we will send you copies of the intervening articles as they become available.

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courage this elevated image. It tends to bring respect and authority, and the distancing from other people it produces offers an element of safety. And, as Bratcher notes, ministers may not be immune from an element of pride. He writes: "The paradox is that although the Bible teaches that pride and the desire to be like God are the sources of man's tragic fall, it is precisely at this point that we as ministers most often succumb. The serpent which entices us to believe that we can be like God is often a member of the pastor search committee, saying, 'You are just the person we are looking for. You have all the qualifications that we need to solve all of our problems.' And like Adam and Eve, we eat this enticing fruit and die—die to our humanity and become less than human."

On the other hand, Bratcher also points out that most ministers are very conscientious and sensitive. These qualities can drive them to attempt more than they are able to accomplish, to assume more responsibility than they should bear. Louis McBurney, a psychiatrist who operates a retreat for the counseling of ministers, says, "In our experience, low self-esteem is the most common problem in Christian workers. They are enslaved by chains of self-doubt and inferiority."

In the attempt to be what we are not given to be, we lose authenticity and reality. We raise a facade to maintain the outward appearance, all the while suffering inwardly. Denying our humanity only fuels our feelings of inadequacy. And as these feelings grow, they often produce depression. The mask and the pedestal also create loneliness for ministers and their families.

I certainly struggled with these issues in my own experience in ministry. The drive to supersede my limits resulted in imbalance, neglected priorities, and burnout. The matter came to a crisis and was relieved only when I came to terms with myself as a human being. And I have found that my experience is not unusual.

What does it mean for ministers to accept their humanity? What are the implications for the work of ministry? I would like to share four realities about humanness that I believe arise out of a theological understanding of Scripture.

Ministers are sinners
First of all, being human means sinfulness. That all humans are sinful is an inescapable reality, at least during this part of earth's history. This fact means that even those called of God need repentance, grace, forgiveness, cleansing, and reconciliation. It means that ministers must be penitent before they can become and while they are pillars of strength to others.

Scripture offers many illustrations of this reality. Isaiah the prophet, for instance, is an example of one who confessed that he was in the same condition as were his people. "Woe is me!" he exclaimed. "For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5, RSV). Isaiah needed the coal from the altar for cleansing and atonement.

The Balaams and Demases of Scripture—and the not infrequent current cases of fallen ministers today—reveal that God's workmen can also fall away. On the brink of the Promised Land Moses disobeyed God, striking the rock to bring water for the people (Num. 20:7-12). Although God's grace assured him of ultimate salvation, he had to suffer the penalty of his transgression. As workers for God we must not become overconfident in right living or think ourselves immune from the temptations of sin. To minister as a human being means to acknowledge continually our fallen nature and vulnerability to temptation. The apostle Paul revealed that he sensed the danger when he said, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Cor. 9:27).

Ministers need to be sensitive to the temptations to immorality that are their lot and to the pricks of healthy guilt that come from marginal dishonesty, manipulation, self-aggrandizement, and the other typical ministerial sins. One of the first steps toward salvation, we tell people, is the acknowledgement of sin. To live with a humble recognition of the ongoing sinful tendencies in our lives and with a total dependence upon God is to recognize the reality of our humanness as ministers. Again we read from Paul, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7, RSV).

A second reality of being human is godlikeness. Often we so associate being human with being sinful that we disparage our humanness. We want to get away from it, to rise above it. But we need not do that. Being human also has its very noble and elevated aspects. In many ways, to be human is to be like God—for humans were created in His image. And despite the problems sin has brought, being human continues to imply aspects of godlikeness.

What does being made in the image of God mean? Theologians have defined the image of God in several ways. Some understand it to be the possession of certain characteristics either in the physical or in the psychological/spiritual being. The ability to reason stands out as one of these characteristics. Others see the image of God as humanity's ability to enter into relationship with God and with fellow human beings. Still others understand the image of God to be something that people do rather than something that they are or experience. They participate with God in rulership; God has given them dominion over the earthly creation. Perhaps there is some truth to each of these perspectives.

It is important for us to understand how our identity as human beings functions in our relationship to God. Especially is this true of ministers, who not only seek soundness of being for themselves but also need to have the strength and insight to minister to others. Besides competency, ministers need a sense of worth, a sense of belonging. So often we are dependent for our affirmation and self-concept upon what people say about us or to us. We may find that we do much of our ministering to build up ourselves rather than for the sake of those to whom we are ministering.

But as we seek for a sense of adequacy we need not depend solely on the mercy of the winds of human approbation. Our need to belong is met as we relate to God as our Father—we are part of His family. Our need for worth is met in Jesus Christ, who takes our sin and gives us value. Our need for a sense of competence is met as we receive the Holy Spirit, who gives us the gifts that enable us to fulfill our responsibilities. Though we live with the effects of sin, we can cultivate godlikeness. We can reflect the image of God in being and in relationships.

Such godlikeness enables us to minister to others with greater freedom. We will be less likely to allow our needs for self-acceptance to influence our ministerial actions. We will be able to be more sensitive to others. We will have greater courage to stand for our convictions in spite of social pressure. We will find it easier to forgive both ourselves and others.
Godlikeness also means the capacity for a deeper relationship with God. It means continual growth—personally, professionally, and spiritually—as we allow Him to restore His image in us.

In old Palestine when olives were put into a new earthenware jar for preservation, the new container would impart a slight taste of earth to the fruit. But after the jar had seen a few seasons of continuous use, its pores would be filled with the olive oil, and it would no longer reveal of what it was made.\(^5\) This is an illustration of what can happen to us as we, being fully human, reflect more fully the image of God. His characteristics will so penetrate our lives that the fruit we bear will not be tainted with earthiness.

Ministers have limitations

Finiteness comprises a third reality of humanness. Finiteness speaks of our creatureliness. It marks the limits to our godlikeness—we are, after all, less than God. Even before sin entered, being human meant having limitations. But we must distinguish finiteness from sinfulness, although sin surely has increased the limitations to the point of serious weaknesses. Whereas finiteness speaks of our limitations, sin means disobedience toward God, and loss of eternal life.

The life of Jesus teaches us some important lessons regarding finiteness. Philippians 2 describes His self-emptying and self-limiting humanity. “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (verses 6, 7). In the wilderness Jesus was tempted to supersede His humanity by making stones into bread, by assuming instantaneous kingship, and by defying gravity.\(^6\) But He accepted the bounds of human limitations.

Sometimes ministers seem to ignore the limitations of their finiteness. Overwork, family neglect, overassumption of responsibility, and false guilt all manifest this problem. When pastors feel guilty for taking appropriate time off, when they blame themselves when people do not make decisions for the Lord or when church members do not fulfill their responsibilities, they are suffering from false guilt. One author observes that such guilt “is often the outgrowth of a need to be in control of everything or feel responsible for everything.”\(^7\) This is actually an assumption of omnipotence, a characteristic of God that is not given to humanity.

It is right for us to learn all we can and do all we can as we reach for excellence, but the goals and tasks we accept must not exceed the limits our finiteness places upon us. Limitation is not in itself bad. We must remember that after God made mankind with the limitations of creatureliness, He pronounced His creation “very good.”\(^8\) In fact, it was Eve’s unwillingness to accept her creatureliness that brought sin into the world.

Accepting our finiteness means living within our humanity and regulating our lives with balance. It means recognizing and admitting our limitations, getting help when we need it, cultivating a support system, and sharing our responsibilities.

Ellen White writes: “God is merciful, full of compassion, reasonable in His requirements. He does not ask us to pursue a course of action that will result in the loss of physical health or the enfeebling of the mental powers.” “Do not try to crowd into one day the work of two.”\(^9\) “Sometimes ministers do too much; they seek to embrace the whole work in their arms. It absorbs and dwarfs them; yet they continue to grasp it all. They seem to think that they alone are to work in the cause of God, while the members of the church stand idle. This is not God’s order at all.”\(^10\)

Of course, our finiteness is not an excuse for mediocrity or laziness. That would not be godlike. But as Ernest White writes: “When ministers can come to be at home with their own limits, they are much more likely to begin developing their potentials.”\(^11\)

Finally, being human means relatedness. There is a common bond between ourselves and other people that not only allows us to communicate with and understand them, but gives us a special interest and concern for their welfare. After all, we are all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. From a universal perspective, we have more in common with one another than we have differences. We live in a single world community. It is this aspect of humanness, our relatedness, that mandates and enables ministers in their work.

The Son of God became human so that He could minister to us. “He had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest,” says the book of Hebrews (Heb. 2:17). “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (verse 18).

Our relatedness means that ministers should not hesitate to identify with their people. It means that there should not be a wide gap between clergy and laity. We are colleagues in the work; it is merely our roles that differ. Our relatedness means that all believers ought to minister to one another as priests of God. It means that we have a special responsibility to communicate to our fellow beings through our influence and through the spoken word the truth about God.

Bratcher writes, “I think it is important for ministers to learn how to join the human race.”\(^12\) Humanness, I have suggested, means sinfulness, godlikeness, finiteness, and relatedness. As a human being, the minister will function within the balance, the limitations, and the opportunities that these realities afford.

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\(^{2}\) Ibid., p. 25.
\(^{6}\) Ernest White, Ministers Are Human,” in Anna Davis and Wade Rowatt, Jr., eds., Formation for Christian Ministry (Louisville, Ky.: Review and Expositor, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985), p. 64.
\(^{7}\) Daniel O. Aleshire, “Essentials of a Minister,” in Davis and Rowatt, p. 53.
\(^{8}\) Erickson, p. 491.
\(^{11}\) Ernest White, p. 65.
\(^{12}\) Bratcher, p. 34.
When you accommodate your needs, you can make small-town small-church ministry a satisfying, growth-enhancing experience.

Loren Seibold

It was late November when we moved into our first parsonage, located only 12 miles south of the Manitoba border. Snow had already surrounded it and was drifted high against the front door—so unlike the west coast we had just left. We shoveled the door clear and brought in our belongings. Newlyweds that we were, even with everything moved in the house was bare.

We were in for some tremendous changes. The area in which our new home was located offered Carmen, my wife, virtually no opportunities in her field of training. We had exchanged a socially rich environment of family and college friends for a church in which the 20 active members were all more than 60 years old, and city life for life in a small town 100 miles from anything even resembling a city. And the nearest pastor of our own faith was that same 100 snow-covered, windswept miles away.

The dynamic, intellectually active college that had been home gave way to a place where people were almost fearful of new ideas. Stimulating Sabbath school class discussions were replaced by classes that, no matter what the lesson topic, unfailingly deteriorated into speculations about Billy Graham's or Paul Harvey's imminent conversion to Adventism. In place of the richness of a college church liturgy, we had a worship service where the pastor not only gave the sermon but played the piano and collected the offering.

Despite all of that, we were excited about ministry. After all, the Lord had called us here; He must have something in mind for us.

One Saturday night a couple months after our arrival, Carmen and I were sitting at the folding table where we ate in our very bare kitchen. A blizzard roared outside, and all the streets were blocked.

"Say," Carmen said, "do you remember the Sabbath we spent in Seattle with Charles and Becky?"

"Yeah. Funny you should mention it. You know what I was just thinking about? Listening to the pipe organ in the college church."

A few minutes and a few memories later tears were running down our cheeks as we suddenly realized how alone we were and how greatly what we were doing differed from the dreams of pastoring that we'd cherished during our college years.

That wasn't our last lonely night in ministry in a small town, but it was the worst. Gradually we learned what we needed to do in order to maintain emotional health and intellectual and spiritual growth in a setting where ministry was needed but was not always rewarding.

During the early part of this century agriculture, mining, and other land-based industries were thriving, and rural areas attracted a rich mix of people. Towns—and churches—grew overnight. As the land-based industries have become less labor-dependent, many small towns have experienced a slow decline. Every year a few more businesses on Main Street are boarded up, and a few more of the town's young people and retired people pack up and move to the city.

As a consequence, people in declining small towns become protective of their
way of life. “If we can’t get ahead, at least we can hold onto things as they’ve always been.” Change becomes difficult. People’s church affiliations, for instance, become set in concrete—even if those people never actually darken the doors of the churches of which they are members. Too often pastors find both closed minds and closed hearts.

Small-town churches, too, become self-protective. Often they haven’t seen new members in years—and the long-time members hold at a distance those who do join. Consequently, these churches do not benefit from the new ideas that a turnover of membership brings. Often small churches seem to have the motto “We’ve always done it this way. We can’t change.” To members of such churches even the smallest changes appear to be compromises of the old standards—and they may express hostility toward pastors who suggest otherwise.

With no successful outreach, church life stagnates. Trivial jealousies lead to deep divisions. And so the pastor of a small-town small church often finds a group of Christians struggling against change and against one another, and attempting to ward off what is a very real possibility—the death of the church.

Maintain your motivation

Those who pastor in these circumstances face different problems than do those who pastor urban and suburban churches, where the clergy run themselves ragged trying to keep ahead of their parishes’ responsibilities and trying to help them fulfill their potential. Rather than the stress of a too-fast life, the small-town small-church pastor must often face the question What do I do today?

The problem is not that there’s nothing to do in the small-town small church—a pastor can always find something to do. It’s just that doing it seldom brings much of an immediate reward. The church is small and certainly needs to grow. But the town is small too, and its barriers to change batter back one’s attempts at evangelism. In the seminary the pastor was trained to study hard and preach good sermons. But it becomes apparent that the time spent studying doesn’t impress the members; they find a simple Bible study as satisfying as a sermon that took days to prepare. Church administration? Some. But the church patriarchs and matriarchs make sure the pastor knows who really leads the church. Visitation? The pastor visited everyone in the parish plus all of those on its fringes in the course of three weeks. How often can one go back without becoming a pest?

Sadly, many small-town small church pastorates are caretaking ministries. There’s always work to do; but real progress is painfully slow. Many of the needs those in such pastorates spend their days meeting would seem trivial in the wider, more aggressive world. At the end of the day the pastors come home, having done much work but feeling they’ve achieved very little—certainly nothing recognized in wider circles as marking success. When they’ve knocked themselves out to give their best, they see little lasting difference in the church and often hear no praise for a job well done. Ministry that produces so few tangible results threatens the pastor’s motivation.

Guilt accompanies the loss of motivation. “I’m being paid with people’s hard-earned money, but what am I accomplishing? I’m not baptizing anyone. I’m not bringing about a great revival in the church. I’m not growing personally. I’m not planting. There’s no one’, thank God, but in the fact that they have faithfully done their work.”

The perception that your ministry is failing will paralyze you—particularly when church members or administrators believe that heaping guilt on you will do you good reinforce this perception. The result: You do less, feel even guiltier, and so experience even greater paralysis.

How can you maintain motivation while pastoring small-town small churches?

1. Make a long-range plan and stick to it. People who plan get more done. As the old saying goes: “If you aim at nothing, you’re sure to hit it.” When small-church pastors aren’t seeing the kind of progress that makes their work rewarding, they sometimes have to continue to do the Lord’s work through sheer self-discipline. And nothing sustains discipline like good planning.

But even more important, having a plan and carrying it through is the best antidote to the paralysis guilt engenders. Finishing something that you’ve planned to do brings satisfaction and allows you to turn off that inner voice that seeks to paralyze you with its insistence that you should be out doing something. When you’ve made strong, legitimate plans for your ministry and you’ve seen those plans through, you can give yourself permission to relax, leaving the results to the Lord.

Small-town small-church pastors must learn to find their satisfaction not simply in the positive changes they see—although they will rejoice for those—but in the fact that they have faithfully done their work.

2. Take care of yourself. Often when I came home from a day of laboring in my rural parish and settled down with a good book, the thought came, Hey, isn’t this kind of selfish of you? After all, you’re being paid with tithes of money. Shouldn’t you be out ministering to ______?

The fact is that if you let guilt keep you from meeting your own mental and spiritual needs, not only will you suffer for it, but so will your family and ultimately your church. You can minister better when your own needs are met. As much as anyone, and perhaps more than most, small-town pastors need to devote time to their spiritual, emotional, and intellectual health—to relax, to read, to re-create, to spend time with their families, and to build themselves up professionally.

Intellectually-oriented pastors may have particular difficulty finding fulfillment in small-town small-church ministry. Such churches value changelessness in the world of ideas as highly as they do everywhere else. While books are always available, it takes more than reading to sustain the life of the mind in the absence of an intellectually active community of people. You can take steps toward fulfilling this need by making use of every opportunity to take classes and seminars that will challenge you intellectually. For us, doing so sometimes meant a bit of sacrifice to our schedule and budget, and occasionally even some sacrifice on the part of the church. But we believed that
Often the few years pastors stay are not enough to earn their acceptance by churches that measure length of residence in generations.

the Lord had a plan for our lives that went beyond His call to that small church. And as He takes us along the successive steps of His plan, He wants us in top shape—not intellectually and emotionally depleted.

3. Make something happen—and enjoy your success. A farmer, a sensitive Christian who was a member of my church, once said to me, "I know it's tough to pastor here, but if you just keep hammerin', you'll break through somewhere."

I've thought of that often, particularly when it seemed like my ministry had come to a halt. His words encouraged me to believe that the Lord had something He wanted me to accomplish in my small church, that if I just kept hammerin', He'd help me to break through to someone in a way that would be rewarding. And He does. Never anything earth-shaking. He just helps me to see that my ministry is having an effect. Perhaps a young person is encouraged to go to a Christian college, or someone's life is changed in some way by a sermon I preached, or a timely visit helps to restore a failing home. As I look back on my small-church ministry I can see that the Lord has been working through me—and that's rewarding.

However, it may be hard to assess your successes objectively when you're discouraged; you may have to get some help to see what you've accomplished. In one small church we pastored, the members spent most of their time praising the pastor who just left. We were frustrated. It seemed nothing we did ever measured up to the ministry of that giant of a man. Not until some time later did a conversation with our predecessor lead to the revelation that he had been as frustrated as we were—by the church's constant praise of his predecessor. We were, in reality, doing no worse than he had done.

The point is that you're not necessarily a poor pastor just because your church isn't singing your praises. An objective assessment of your work by a sensitive administrator or fellow pastor may be much more positive than what your church is communicating, and it may help you not to take your church's problems personally.

4. Widen your field of mission. Your small church needs attention—and usually it will take all it can get. But think of the needs in your larger community. Farmers are going broke and selling out. Are you ministering to them? Alcoholism is a major small-town problem. Can you do something to help? Homes are breaking up. Do you have something to say to families in trouble?

Often whole new worlds of rewarding ministry lie before pastors who are willing to reach beyond the needs of their small churches to those of their communities.

Find friends

To a large extent his or her church comprises the pastor's world. The people of the church are the people the pastor spends the most time with, the people the pastor knows the best, the people with whom the pastor shares many concerns. It's easy to assume, then, that with such a people-oriented life, the family in the parsonage is flush with friends.

But the small-church experience can be very lonely. Not only are pastors and their families often far from friends and relatives, but the time they spend with parishioners doesn't necessarily translate into satisfying friendships. While pastors have a common spiritual agenda with their parishioners, they may differ greatly in age, cultural outlook, and education. Often the few years pastors stay in one locale are not enough to earn their acceptance by churches and communities that measure length of residence in generations.

Church members may feel uncomfortable with a pastor in their everyday social life. And even in the small church where a pastor may find it possible to establish a close friendship with a member, such a friendship may be costly to the pastor's leadership—particularly when the church has some built-in divisions and jealousies.

I think Carmen and I came to our first pastorate believing that when we were doing the Lord's work we wouldn't be bothered by loneliness. That wasn't the case, of course. The Lord designed all of us to need friends. We've found that it pays to make the extra effort to reach outside of our church circle for that support network.

During the first few years in ministry our preoccupation with our denominational and pastoral identity cramped our friendships with those outside of our church. Overly self-conscious about our role as the Adventist pastor's family, we felt that we had to hold friends outside the church circle at arm's length in order to maintain our distinctive beliefs and the standards of our position. And we tended to regard nonchurch acquaintances less as friends than as objects for evangelism.

But being perfect and unapproachable is a hard burden to carry. We needed real friendships. Not self-conscious friendships—friendly faces hiding ulterior motives—but relationships in which we could reveal ourselves as real people in need of others. Often we found those outside our church circle more willing to see us as real people than our church members were. Ironically, it seems that it was when we dropped our guardedness and became more open and genuine that our friendships opened the way for witness about our faith.

We've found other pastors to be a particularly rich source of friendship and support. While some insist on seeing others as rivals, most feel the need of a sympathetic friend outside of their church circles as strongly as we do. I have been surprised to discover how much alike our ministries are. What pastors of all faiths have in common—vast areas of

We tended to regard nonchurch acquaintances less as friends than as objects for evangelism.
spiritual attitudes and understanding, of modes and methods of leadership—outweighs by far the theological differences that separate them.

My friend Tim, a Methodist pastor, and I come from quite different theological traditions. But as we’ve talked I’ve discovered that Tim holds more of the deeper spiritual attitudes I value than do many colleagues whose theology is closer to my own. Consequently, Tim and I have shared deeply about our hopes and concerns for God’s work.

Isolation isn’t the Lord’s will. Of the world? Never! In the world? With enthusiasm! Like it or not, we are part of the family of man. Encouraged by the example of a Saviour who “mingled with men as one who desired their good,” we also must mingle with men and women—and in our case, the good that comes from doing so will go both ways.

It will also pay you to make visiting and staying in touch with friends and relatives a high priority. In our first small church we felt that we ought never leave the parish. Not only did we think we always had to be at the beck and call of the members, but traveling seemed an expense we couldn’t afford. Looking back, we realize that keeping in frequent touch with friends and family was something we should have found time and money for.

**Match strengths and needs**

We once found ourselves in a pastorate where adapting drained our emotional energy. Because we believed that pastors worth their salt would fit well anywhere—which once was conventional wisdom—we questioned the genuineness of our call to the ministry. But our small-church ministry has taught us to differentiate between the challenges that are an intrinsic part of ministry and the frustrations that arise because the church’s cultural expectations, educational backgrounds, and philosophies of ministry differ too extremely from those of the pastor. Such differences, by the way, do not necessarily indicate that the church’s philosophy and vision are better or worse than those of the pastor; they may simply be different.

Certainly a dedicated pastor will minister with compassion and competence no matter what the setting. But it is not wrong to think in terms of matching a pastor’s gifts, needs, and vision with those of the church. The Lord expects us to evaluate wisely our place of ministry in light of our talents, our needs, and the needs of our spouses and families. The desire to minister where the pastor and church match well is not necessarily an unholy ambition; it may be simply a recognition of God’s plan to use churches and pastors to His greatest glory.

Be assured that the Lord is not unmindful of your desire to minister where you can find His work fulfilling. Nor is He unmindful of your desire to be where your spouse can develop a career, or where you or your family can find other opportunities you need. While you must not covet a place of status that the Lord alone can bestow, you need never be ashamed of asking God to put you on a track where you can grow to your full potential.

Never forget that you are in a small-town small church because the Lord wants you there. If it has been a frustrating experience, take comfort in the knowledge that the Lord has had some-
Organize a Spirit-filled ladies' prayer group

Crystal Earnhardt

A pastor's wife can minister to the needs of the women in the congregation in ways her husband cannot.

Leading out in a ladies' prayer group can be one of the most rewarding experiences that you can enjoy as a pastor's wife. In a ladies' prayer group you have the privilege of ministering to the needs of the women in your congregation in a way that your husband cannot. If you possess an understanding heart and a love for souls, they will be able to confide in you their most intimate problems. In turn, you are in the position to provide monthly programs that cater to their specific needs.

Lucy is a prime example of how this works. She and her husband were new members in our church. After I had become acquainted with Lucy, she tearfully confessed that she knew little about child training. I already suspected that Sabbath mornings her children competed with my husband for the congregation's attention! Her need compelled me to rent from our local conference office videos on child training by speakers such as Drs. James Dobson and Kay Kuzma. Our ladies' prayer group spent several sessions with these films. During the discussions that followed our viewing of these films, most of the women who attended, old and young alike, shared helpful hints. Lucy and her family benefited greatly—not to mention my husband, who no longer had to shout to be heard.

Getting started

Operating a ladies' prayer group is not an overly demanding task. In fact, leading one will likely require less of your time than you would have to spend to lead a children's Sabbath school class. Typically, the groups that I have led have met one night each month. The goal is to re-create, to restore, to build up—not to start something that will become a time-consuming burden. Choose a night that the majority finds convenient; usually a week night works best.

Welty the appetites of the potential participants with suggested projects and programs, choosing ideas you are sure will create an interest. Use your church bulletin and pulpit for enthusiastic announcements. Make personal phone calls or write a short letter to be duplicated and sent to those whom you wish to come. Encourage them to leave their children at home if they can. This is ladies' night out! (You may want to enlist the help of a few teenagers and offer babysitting.)

Your prayer group should encourage spiritual growth. How about offering a series on women of the Bible or one on how to improve your devotional life?

One Sabbath afternoon 17 of us floated down a river on a church member's pontoon boat. As we drifted along we sang "Nearer, My God, to Thee." Then we shared ideas on how to make Sabbaths more meaningful. One elderly lady in our group confided that she had never experienced a more Spirit-filled day.

Your group will likely appreciate some meetings devoted to practical skills. Favorite topics in my group included how to improve self-esteem and how to save money. A local beautician contributed by demonstrating how to cut and style hair. You can dedicate several months to weight control, exercise, and healthful cooking.
An elderly church member taught us how to do lap quilting. Our group made a quilt and sold it for the church building fund. Another offered to teach decoupage; and still another, crocheting. Involve your church members! Ask different ladies to share their talents or give a devotional.

Your ladies’ prayer group also should offer social activities, as well as learning opportunities. In November ask the ladies to bring a dish of their favorite holiday food with the recipe and a homemade craft with instructions. You might also arrange for your group to carpool to an outlet mall for an enjoyable Sunday afternoon of shopping. (But as a general rule, limit your group’s weekend activities to special occasions.) Social activities enable the group members to form closer, stronger friendships—a must for the growth and development of your group.

Your prayer group will be strengthened if it becomes involved in outreach activities. If your group is large enough, organize the women into several subgroups. Have each subgroup choose a leader, and then see to it that each of these leaders has a list of the names and phone numbers of her members. In the event of a death in the church family or surrounding community, ask subgroup A to prepare a meal for those who are bereaved. The next time a tragedy occurs, subgroup B takes over. You may also wish to use these subgroups, or to form others, for visitation of shut-ins and the sick or other kinds of ministries, depending on the talents available in your group.

When everyone shares the work, no one has to carry the whole burden. Best of all, many hearts will be grateful for the love demonstrated by these ladies. And all the while you are teaching your members the Caring Church concept.

After your ladies’ prayer group gets established you may want to start a secret sister society. Begin by announcing your plans to the congregation several weeks in advance. Those who wish to join must put their name, address, birthday, anniversary (if any), and favorite color on a card and drop it into a closed, slotted box that you have placed in the church foyer. As leader, you should keep a record of all who participate. Your record will prove helpful when someone loses her information card or has to drop out for some reason.

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pastors are called to do, and at worst, downright denigrates it. If the media portrays pastors at all, it makes a point of depicting them as hucksters or as inept, milquetoast persons who are either ineffectual and unnecessary or always interfering where they don't belong.

Recently I was struck again by Hollywood's avoidance of using a pastoral character in a serious role when I viewed the television version of the movie Terms of Endearment. This is a story about a young woman who is stricken with cancer and the struggles through which she goes in preparing her family and herself for death. It is a very moving story, and the deathbed scene is beautiful and touching. The way in which she says goodbye to her young children would bring tears to the eyes of even the hardest of personalities. But here is my point: Throughout her entire hospital stay, and up to the time of her death, there is no indication of any pastoral care whatsoever. You don't even see a pastor or priest near her room or roaming the hospital hallways—none at all! An oversight by Hollywood? Perhaps, but I would guess that this is just another example of how the media feels about pastors—they are not necessary.

It is not easy to be a pastor in a society that continually questions one's work and worth. Thus, I suppose, the need for affirmation that so many pastors have. But then, pastors aren't, or shouldn't be, in the ministry in order to receive affirmation.

Dr. Christ?

Jesus spoke the most revolutionary doctrine of all time when He said, "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). * This pronouncement of His purpose turned the world's understanding of leadership completely upside down. Jesus was indeed a leader. His followers called Him "Master." He was, however, a "servant leader" and a "servant master."† I have sometimes wondered whether Jesus would want to be called Dr. Christ if He were walking the earth today. Somewhere that just doesn't sound right.

Somewhere along the way before accepting the call into the ministry, the prospective pastor should learn that worldly recognition is not to be expected. Receiving such recognition should not comprise even a part of the reason one goes into the ministry. Every human being needs affirmation, but pastors should receive that affirmation from within the community of faith. And no one should expect it from either the world or the church because of a Dr. in front of his or her name.

I do not mean to say that receiving a doctorate is unimportant. But I am saying that before embarking in doctoral studies, pastors ought to evaluate carefully why they want that degree. If they are undertaking the work because they feel a need to improve their ministerial skills, then they ought to pursue it. If, however, in total honesty they see obtaining the degree as a means of improving their social position or of receiving a higher salary or of being called to a larger church, then they should question seriously which master they are choosing to serve.

"We may as well think to see without eyes or live without breath," wrote William Law, "as to live in the spirit of religion without the spirit of humility." And yet this is what so many Christian leaders are trying to do. They seem to be blind to the greatest paradox of spiritual growth, that the more we grow spiritually, the more clearly we see how far from spiritual perfection we are. The words of the apostle Paul give insight into this truth of the Christian faith: "Do not become proud, but stand in awe" (Rom. 11:20). "I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3). "Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited" (verse 16). "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord." For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends" (2 Cor. 10:17, 18).

"Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another" (Gal. 5:26). "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3).

These words directly contradict the ways of the modern world, which is immersed in an all-encompassing narcissism. The apostle does not mean that we are to browbeat ourselves. He means, instead, that as we grow toward the full stature of Jesus Christ and as we become servant leaders for the Servant, guiding others toward this full stature, we will see that all of our own self-originated or institution-invoked recognitions are as nothing under the design of the Almighty. This is the difference between negative pride, which produces, via worldly plaudits, the feeling of superiority over others, and affirmative pride, which produces the desire to become a more learned person because of the more effective ministry it enables.

Hungering for the world's plaudits

And yet so many of today's "servants of the Servant" hunger for the plaudits that the world gives to its most revered citizens. This problem has been with us a long time. The first ministers of the gospel, the twelve disciples, were the most common of men. (It is interesting to note that Jesus did not choose one priest to be a member of the chosen twelve! This fact alone should humble all persons who are engaged in professional ministry.) It did not take long, however, for the twelve to start arguing about who was the greatest, and then later to professionalize what had been an amateur operation. The Christian movement soon had its own class of religious elite who would clamor for worldly recognition of their gifts. The holy men were "pedestalized" (my term for being placed 10 feet above contradiction), and reverend (to be revered) crept into our religious language.

Today the term reverend is becoming outdated. The last thing most pastors want to be considered is quaint, and so now that the world no longer reveres reverends, they have discovered that the title Doctor can capture the world's attention.

So what?

In the end, capturing the world's attention is not the Christian's purpose. Rather, the Christian purposes to be faithful, to be a servant to the Servant. The world rejected our Master and nailed Him to a cross. In that event more than any other throughout history, we see the ultimate success of what the world calls failure, and the ultimate failure of what the world calls success. The Servant Master has turned the values of the world upside down, and we are called to minister as the "least," for only then are we great. The world does not understand these things, for its values are built upon the sandy foundations of pride, power, and prestige, all of which the Servant Master rejected. Are we not called to do likewise?

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*All Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the Revised Standard Version.
Was your sermon a success?

I really enjoyed your sermon today, Pastor.

How many times have you heard that? And how many times have you been tempted to say “But sister, it wasn’t intended to be enjoyed! Actually, I had hoped it would make you a bit uncomfortable!”

How can you know whether your sermons are effective?

I used to think that the level of the audience’s response during the sermon was a good indicator of how effective my preaching was. But responsiveness is culturally conditioned. Recently I spoke to a group that customarily responds with loud amens and other expressions to encourage the preacher. The night before I preached, this group had been worked to a fever pitch by an evangelist who knew how to push all the right buttons. But I preached a sermon that called for a different type of response. I must admit to being a bit troubled as I preached, because the amens were sparse and less enthusiastic. But in the end the silence and meditative spirit that enveloped the congregation told me that the message had hit home.

As a beginning preacher I tried passing out a sermon reaction form to find out how I was doing. But a local elder warned me that using such an instrument might tempt me to “play to the galleries” and “prophecy smooth things,” so I quit using it.

Actually there was another factor that influenced my decision to abandon the plan: people’s honesty. It was a bit unnerving to find out what they really thought of my sermons.

Few preachers have the courage to use sermon reaction forms consistently. And for good reason.

To you, the preacher, every sermon you utter is loaded with emotional baggage. After you have labored with the idea, searched for appropriate illustrations, prayed for spiritual blessing, and struggled for just the right words, you have a strong attachment to the finished product.

During and after delivery, the sermon is your baby—your own child. And although you may wish it had come across better, or may wish that it had been a bit more polished, it is still your child. The offspring of the Holy Spirit’s seed implanted in your mind.

To the people in the congregation, though, this sermon is just one child among many. They do not judge it on the basis of its lineage or upbringing, but by comparing it to all the other sermons they have ever heard. They respond to its pathos and motivation, not on the basis of how much it moved the preacher, but in the context of their own wants, needs, and inhibitions, and how sleepy they felt.

It took me only a few months of fatherhood to discover that not everyone thought my child’s antics were cute. People without emotional attachment to a child often find its behavior more irritating than amusing. The same can be true of sermons.

But a person responding on a sermon analysis form may not realize that his or her detached, practical analysis strikes the preacher just as hard as criticism of a family member. And respondents who do realize this will likely be less than candid in their critiques.

So using a sermon reaction form can be discouraging. And just accepting people’s canned congratulatory clichés at the door is hardly helpful.

How, then, can you know whether your sermon is successful?

Most books on preaching deal almost exclusively with techniques for sermon preparation and presentation, with little concern for finding out whether the sermon really was effective. But recently I read the chapter titled “Listeners in the Church” in Persuasive Preaching Today, by Ralph L. Lewis (Wilmore, Ky: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1979). After pointing out that “it takes two to make a speech—a speaker and a listener,” Dr. Lewis lists and describes keys to help a sermon communicate. Under the heading “Rapport or Common Ground,” he calls for audience awareness, audience analysis, and audience adaptation. Then he gives specific pointers for disarming the listeners’ natural distrust of the speaker and for gaining rapport and acceptance. He also points out the importance of being on common ground with the listeners—of knowing what their needs are and being able to speak in phraseology that is familiar to them.

Perhaps the best way to routinely check up on your success as a preacher is to have a personal checklist, based on an authoritative source such as Lewis’s book, against which to analyze each sermon.

To find out whether your analysis is correct, try a slight variation on the sermon reaction form. Try handing out brief reaction forms, using only one or two criteria per week, that ask listeners to respond to your effectiveness. You may need to take some time to explain the meaning of the criteria listed, but once your listeners understand what is ex-
Slanting the truth

It is difficult to create an environment in which individuals are expected on the one hand to obey orders unquestioningly and on the other to speak their minds freely.” So wrote William J. Crowe, recently retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, near the end of his Ph.D. dissertation.

When Crowe left Princeton after completing a doctorate in politics, he determined to always speak his mind. However, he soon discovered that independent thinking wasn’t always appreciated.

In 1967 Crowe headed the East Asia and Pacific Branch of O6, the U.S. Navy’s politico-military division. Asked by a senior officer to prepare a memo on why a particular Air Force position was full of holes, Crowe studied the matter and wrote a paper concluding that the Air Force argument was acceptable.

Crowe’s boss told him, “We didn’t send you up there [to Princeton] to come back with new ideas. We sent you up there to learn how to write and represent the ideas we’ve got. If we want you to do original thinking, we’ll let you know about it.”

We like to think that what we preach, write, or publish represents the whole truth about the church. Yet, like Admiral Crowe, we feel pressure always to paint the church in the best possible light. Our reports may be factual but slanted and even misleading as far as the truth is concerned. It is not always what we say that is so important, but what we leave out!

For example, a pastor has a history of making sexual advances to the women in his congregation. He may not have acted unwisely enough to warrant dismissal from the pastorate, but he certainly has worn out his welcome in that congregation. His wife is seeking a new job, and the ideal one opens up in that location. His wife’s job need is given as the reason for moving, which is certainly true. But the real reason is omitted.

No lies have been told, yet certain facts left out distort the truth. If they were given they might prevent the planned move.

An executive committee discusses a large financial item. No money can be spent until the committee authorizes it. The comments and questions of the committee members seem to indicate that if the motion is put to a vote, it will fail. The presenter finally has to admit to the group that a subcommittee has already contracted with a certain party to do the work, and therefore they are morally if not legally bound to pay the amount.

If the members had voted in favor without any questioning, no one would have known of the unauthorized action. And in the presenting of the need for the money, no lies were told. But neither was the whole truth told. The truth was slanted. Naturally the presenter felt embarrassed to admit that a mistake had been made. But how much better to have been candid from the beginning. When we slant the truth, many people wonder whether other actions taken may not be as pure as they seem either.

Ellen White, in commenting on the words of Jesus that our yea be yea, says: “Even facts may be so stated as to convey a false impression. And ‘whatsoever is more than’ truth ‘is of the evil one.’ ”

“Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight. Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan.” (Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 68).

Telling the whole truth

So how should a pastor or church executive act when faced with the question of whether to slant the truth? Admiral Crowe faced that issue many times.

Crowe was asked to write a paper for the secretary of defense concerning Geneva Accord violations arising out of the Vietnam War. He wrote what he considered a balanced paper, pointing out that while North Vietnam had certainly violated some of the accords, so had the United States.

His immediate superior reacted furiously. In fact, he was so angry that he called together all his staff and lectured them on how a junior officer had written many misconceptions about Vietnam. He ordered Crowe to submit a rewrite, leaving out any culpability on the part of the United States.

This left Crowe with a moral dilemma. He had to obey his superior officer, but he also had to tell the truth. His solution was to blur his writing. After he turned it in he never heard about it again.

We may believe that slanting the truth benefits the organization, but the end never justifies the means. Credibility is also important to an organization, its leaders, and its members. Better not to speak than to slant the truth. The whole truth must always be our goal. —J. David Newman.
reaching a sermon is like flying an airplane. Some parts of it are fairly easy. But there are two crucial moments—getting off the ground, and getting back on the ground. Broadus said it best: “The beginning and earlier progress of the sermon show good preparation, and do well. But towards the close the preacher no longer knows the way; here he wanders with a bewildered look, there he struggles and flounders. Another, feeling excited at the close, launches into general exhortation, and proceeds till body and mind are exhausted, ends with what is scattering, feeble, flat. The conclusion ought to have moved like a river, growing in volume and power, but instead of that, the discourse loses itself in some great marsh, or ends like the emptying of a pitcher, with a few poor drops and dregs.”


1. You are excited over the subject. Every grandparent telling about a new grandchild knows how easy it is to go on talking about something he’s excited over, even when he’s run out of anything worthwhile to say. The sermon is part of the preacher’s flesh and blood. If you weren’t enthusiastic over it, you wouldn’t be preaching it. Unfortunately, that enthusiasm may lead you to preach it all over again in the conclusion, when you really have nothing new to say.

2. Your congregation is not excited over the subject. You may say to yourself, “I know my people need this, and they don’t seem to have gotten it. I’ll use my conclusion to try once more to get through to them.”

In some sports the last few minutes of playing time seem to take forever. Losing coaches continually call time out hoping to come up with some desperation move that can still win the game. You may have noticed, however, that the crowd gets bored and starts to leave.

In preaching, you may sometimes drag out the last few minutes of your sermon, still hoping to accomplish what you feel you haven’t been able to do. But people get bored. You ought to quit when you’re through. And you ought to be through preaching before your people are through listening.

3. You haven’t prepared your conclusion. The conclusion, above any other part of the sermon, must come from your heart and the Holy Spirit’s moving. One reason it is often neglected in preparation is that you may feel you’ll let the Holy Spirit move when the time comes. You should. But don’t let this prevent the Spirit from moving you in your study to prepare a conclusion that can assist the Spirit in moving the congregation.

4. You haven’t prepared your final words. Charles Reynolds Brown shared his personal method: “In my own practice, while I never use a manuscript in preaching, there are five sentences in my sermon that I always write out in advance and know by heart—the first one and the last four. I like to begin, if I can, with a sentence as good as I know how to make it, so that the first ball may be pitched, if possible, right over the plate and at the proper level. And I want to have the last four sentences definitely in mind so that I may not be left circling around in the air, like some helpless crow, flying to and fro above a rail fence where the stakes have all been sharpened, seeking in vain for a suitable place to light.”

We’ve all suffered along with speakers who were feeling like that poor crow. They wanted to come down but didn’t know where to land. Landing options are almost endless: state what change you hope the sermon will make to the individual, restate your theme, read a text, use a portion of the closing hymn, give a poem, repeat your title, offer a prayer, ask for some physical response such as raising a hand, standing, or coming forward. The possible plans for an ending are almost unlimited. But do plan. Don’t ever stand up until you have some plan for how you’re going to get sat down!

Floyd Bresee is the secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association.
The front brain and the minister

Bernell E. Baldwin

A nd they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4). Man is the crowning work of creation, and the crest of that crown is the human brain. Its living tables were designed to receive God’s grace and reflect His glory—the principles, motives, and character of its Divine Designer. And the crown of the brain is the frontal lobes. Structurally and functionally, the forepart of the head is the top of the brain.

This fact is especially significant for ministers because recent scientific studies have revealed that spirituality and morality have their seat in the frontal lobes. Thus it is largely to this capital of the brain that pastors minister. So whatever helps the front of the brain helps the minister’s work. And whatever hurts this part of the brain depreciates the pastor’s influence in the individual, the home, the church, and the community. So it is important to understand the function of the brain’s frontal lobes and how to preserve and strengthen them.

The importance of this part of the brain to morality is well illustrated in the cases of those who have undergone a frontal lobotomy, a surgical procedure in which the nerve fibers connecting the frontal lobes to the rest of the brain are severed. The most dramatic story is that of Phineas Gage. In 1848 Gage, the foreman of a railroad crew, dropped his steel tamping rod into his blasting powder. The resulting explosion shot the tamping bar under his left eye, through his brain, and out the top of his head. Gage’s men helped him get to Dr. J. M. Harlow, who tended to his wounds and helped him regain his physical health.

Dr. Harlow reported to the Massachusetts Medical Society on the effects of this sudden frontal lobotomy. With his frontal lobes largely destroyed, Gage became irrevocably, irascible, and irresponsible. He manifested little deference for his fellows, was impatient of restraint or advice when it conflicted with his desires, and at times was pertinaciously obstinate, yet capricious and vacillating, devising many plans of future operation that were no sooner arranged than they were abandoned in turn for others appearing more feasible. Finally he forsook his family and wandered off to see the world, ending up in Chile.

Another significant case is that of an English woman who was an officer in the Salvation Army. She had been incapacitated for years by a sense of guilt and was convinced that she had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. Finally she had a frontal lobotomy. After the operation her psychiatrist asked, “How are you now? What about the Holy Ghost?”

“Smiling, she answered, ‘Oh, the Holy Ghost; there is no Holy Ghost.’” 1

A psychiatrist asked another English woman before lobotomy, “What is the thing to do if you lose a watch you have borrowed from a friend?” Her answer: “I expect you would have to pay for the loss of it.” Several months after the lobotomy her answer to the same question was “Borrow another watch.” 2

One Swedish girl who was quite religiously inclined and liked to attend church to hear her brother preach had a lobotomy. Afterward she said she thought that religion was humbug and often teased her brother because of his vocation.

When the frontal lobes are badly compromised, the capacity to think on the level of principle is deficient; the power and relevance of principle almost vanish. In addition, the capacity for abstract thought, mathematical understanding, generalization, classification, interpretation of proverbs, symbolic thinking, creativity, and serious reading may be impaired. Lobotomized patients become less concerned with truth and consequences, and more concerned with pleasures here and now. Though ordinary IQ performance may not decrease markedly, higher mental behaviors do suffer. A recent work dealing with the frontal lobes puts it this way: “The frontal lobe...is not the seat of intelligence, but it intervenes in all intellectual activities.” 3

The structure of the front brain

The frontal lobes make up only 3 percent of a cat’s cortex. They comprise 7 percent of a dog’s cortex, and about 15 percent of a chimpanzee’s. But up to 33 percent of the human cortex is located in the frontal lobes.

Of all the lobes of the human brain, the frontal lobes are the largest. They make take as long as 30 years to fully develop anatomically, and they extend from the eyes to the top of the head and from the back of the forehead to the ears. These prominent frontal lobes contain thousands of the largest nerve cells of the human brain, some of which send three-foot-long branches down the spine. But,
more important, the frontal lobes contain millions of tiny cells that control the big ones.

Like the steering column in a car, which includes the shaft and all the connections that give control and finesse in driving, this steering mechanism of the brain, faced with rich two-way connections to all other parts of the brain, represents the pinnacle of brain function.

Will

Judgment evaluates truth and behavior, and conscience evaluates moral rectitude, but the will is the governing power in our nature. Neurological study of World War I veterans demonstrated that shrapnel wounds of the front of the head reduce the will markedly. Similar lesions in the back of the head do not have the same effect. "Will is a term used almost exclusively in philosophy/religion at present and, as such, is given metaphysical connotations," write two contemporary neurologists. "Nevertheless, human will represents a brain activity, one that can be altered by focal damage, and appears to be strongly linked to the functions of drive and motivation. Human will appears to be a frontal function." 4

Will is built by serious, motivated work; in turn, willpower helps build character. Every rail that Abraham Lincoln split tended to build willpower and character. Modern sedentary people, young and old, need regular physical work or exercise to build strong wills as well as strong bodies.

The front brain system is vital in the execution of tasks toward fulfillment of a goal. Related behaviors are concentration, determination, and initiative. Without the front of the brain people learn little from the past. They are shallow and show little foresight. They wander in the here and now.

Human decision or action is preceded by a preparatory electrical brain wave called the contingent negative variation. It is largest over the front brain, and the larger it is, the faster is the reaction time. This first anticipatory electrical sign can be produced by semantic, pictorial, or verbal signals, and may include components correlated with volition.

Eyes that see not

In Russia Dr. A. R. Luria studied visual processing by using carefully designed pictures. People with intact functioning frontal lobes can get the big picture—the real point—quickly and clearly. People with severe frontal deficits can see many details, but the larger meaning escapes them. They have eyes, but they see not! Why? We see physically in the back of the head. And we see with memory by using the sides of the brain. But the highest interpretation of vision is an active ongoing process involving integrated attention, intention, vigilance, anticipation, selection, planning, hypothesis processing, and, most critically, higher interpretation and verification. These processes are carried on in the frontal lobes. Even the motor control of the eyes is cared for in the front brain. The eyes and other major senses are indeed "avenues to the soul."

And the electronic traffic on these avenues is two-way. True vision is active, dynamic, and personal. People tend to see what they want to see, and new brain-scanning equipment has revealed that the more interpretation, or processing, an incoming visual or auditory stimulus requires, the more the frontal and other higher cortical areas become involved.

Speech and communication

Several aspects of effective speech require the front brain. Motor speech itself is managed by Broca's area, typically on the left side at the bottom, just in front of the motor strip where other muscle groups are managed.

In front of Broca's area—in the front brain—is the area that controls self-expression. If the function of this area is disrupted, the patient loses the ability for normal self-expression. And in the absence of control by this frontal area, behaviors such as swearing can erupt to the surprise and chagrin of all.

Overall, there is a splendid hierarchy of control. Though highly involved with other parts of the brain, speech is mainly controlled from the front brain in a blended mode of management that brings richness and quality of meaning, creativity of arrangement, pleasing melodic sound, smooth phrasing, spiritual coloring and enrichment, and overall appropriateness. This helps achieve splendid speech, which is basic to a successful ministry. How important, then, that the front of the brain be cultivated with the finest of thoughts, words, ideas, and motives.

Social and health functions

People with defective frontal lobes suffer abnormal social interaction. Carelessness in personal appearance, disregard for social, ethical, and moral standards, self-absorption, and reduced social interest, skill, and capacities combine to break down social behavior. Sexual aberration is also common among patients with damaged frontal lobes.

Overall body health can also be affected by damaged frontal lobes. Weight and appetite control in an affluent society where food is abundantly available is a serious problem. Though there are several mechanisms in the body to control appetite, the highest of these are in the front brain. Crucial to control are nerve fibers from the front brain that are connected to the feeding centers in the hypothalamus, at the bottom of the brain. Thus the top of the brain can signal the bottom to control how much we eat. When the front brain is deficient, appetite control is deficient or even absent.

Effects of alcohol and drugs

The frontal lobes are the first part of the brain to be affected by alcohol and other mind-altering drugs. Alcohol's deadening of moral sensibilities is widely recognized, and even appreciated, by its partakers. The negative effects of moral numbness were aptly illustrated in a study of American GIs in Italy after World War II. It was found that more than 70 percent of the GIs who had contracted a sexually transmitted disease (STD) had been under the influence of alcohol when they contracted it.

The implications of this study for our society today are momentous. For one thing, we must come to recognize that "safe sex" propaganda cannot stop the spread of STDs in a society where the use...
An overall enrichment program causes the cortex of the brain to become thicker, heavier, and more richly endowed with enzymes.

of alcohol and mind-altering drugs is widely accepted and even promoted.

In an era when AIDS and other STDs are running rampant, it well behooves us to know how to maintain our frontal lobes in top condition, and even to strengthen their function so that they will always stand ready to control us and keep us healthy.

Protecting and improving the front brain system

The brain, especially the cortex, is plastic. Environment and other influences can have a profound effect for molding, strengthening, or on the other hand, weakening it. An animal in an old-fashioned zoo with little simulation of natural habitat can experience as much as a 25 percent decrease in the size of its brain cortex.

But an overall enrichment program causes the cortex of the brain to become thicker, heavier, and more richly endowed with enzymes. The tiny dendrites, the fingers of the mind, actually grow more branches. Therefore the brain is dynamic in structure and function. We can follow the computer principle "garbage in, garbage out," or the Bible principle "... whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

We get much of the "hardware" of the brain from our parents. But our environment and our behavior, our freewill choices, become the "software."

In the physiology of the brain, long-term memory, some learning, and habits may even, with time, become synaptic hardware. They may become permanent microstructural changes in the fabric of the outer layers of the brain. Thus some of today's choices may become tomorrow's tools—electronic tools—in your very own living personal computer.

The following suggestions will help you to preserve and strengthen your brain, including the all-important front brain.

1. Protect it from mechanical injury. Most head injuries can be prevented. Safety is not weakness; it is good sense. When working, driving, or enjoying recreational activities, remember the golden egg of your life—your head. If you must use a motorcycle—or even a bicycle—on a public road, wear a helmet. In cars use seat belts or harnesses. Children are more vulnerable than adults. Fasten them in.

2. Give it good blood. Fine health of the whole body helps make good blood. Fresh air and deep breathing help get vital oxygen into the blood. Then good circulation must deliver it to the billions of air-hungry brain cells. Almost one fifth of your oxygen consumption when you are at rest should go to the brain. Stale air means stale sermons.

3. Provide good nutrition. Of all the organs, the brain is the fussiest about its fuel and nutrition. Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains have complex carbohydrates that provide a steady supply of blood sugar—the high-octane fuel of the brain. With these, plus legumes, seeds, and nuts, your body can build the best possible blood. It needs all the vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and some of the best natural fats available.

4. Avoid certain foods. Purity of nutrition is also vital. Eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is the best way to build pure blood. But to keep it pure there are certain foods and practices you need to avoid. Byproducts and waste from animal proteins can confuse those parts of the brain that are outside of the blood brain barrier system. Tyramine and tryptamine are two of the most familiar of these toxic amines that come from proteins. Tyramine acts as a counterfeit noradrenaline; it usurps noradrenaline's duties, and confuses communication in the brain.

There are other sources of chemical static as well. Toxins are a serious problem when alcohol compromises the liver, since the liver is our main "oil filter." Poor digestion and lifestyle practices can aggravate these difficulties. Daniel's daily growing oneness with God, his life of prayer, and his advanced nutritional practices helped him to succeed. No wonder he was 10 times wiser than the competition (Dan 1:20).

5. Give it good circulation. Blood goes where the action is. Where there is no real need, the circulation becomes sluggish. If modern sedentary people need anything, it is regular physical exercise. Work integrates the whole brain to fulfill an objective.

Physical labor is great for increasing the consciousness of personal value. A fine stack of wood worth $50 to $100 is not an image—it is a fact! A new garage that a family has made is a permanent monument, if you please, to family team action. This perspective is not merely a hygienic nicety; it is a useful way to socially facilitate family fitness.

Faculties and functions of the body need a regular workout, tuned, of course, to age and overall situation. Brisk walks, especially in the morning, are a splendid way to prevent headaches so often caused by unrelieved brain work or stress. Who can think his best when he has a headache? Take exercise breaks; then your nerves can gain poise and power. Atherosclerosis and hypertension can slowly (or in the case of a stroke, suddenly) strangle the blood supply to your brain. They must be prevented or, at the very least, controlled.

6. Use it. The more pervasive and rushed our technological society gets, the more we need men and women who think. If we don't use front-brain skills, capacities, and attitudes, we will lose them. The brain thrives on meaningful challenge, on problem-solving with outcomes that are socially, personally, and eternally relevant. The law of atrophy of disuse applies to all of the body, including the brain.

7. Provide great inputs. The greatest, most enriching, ennobling, and challenging source known is the Bible. Use it faithfully as bread for the brain. It is such a charming blend of biography without bias, history without boredom, and truth without falsehood. We all need a sustained renewal of Bible study. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

The service principle

Human beings are much more than machines. We are free in Christ! But some of the same principles that apply in science can help guide us to more success, fulfillment, and happiness. For maximum efficiency an excellent machine, like a fine computer, needs the
Brisk walks, especially in the morning, are a splendid way to prevent headaches so often caused by unrelieved brain work or stress.

Best inputs, the best throughputs, and the best outputs. So with the brain. Great inputs, like the Scriptures, and splendid throughputs, like serious thought, are essential. But we all need excellence of output. Here is where real service shines. The ordained minister or the layman who enjoys unselfishly serving the needs of others and witnessing for God will be building better motives, better principles, and a better character. We don't need inflated self-wills. We need men and women who know how to team up with others, how to focus all their faculties and functions to get something practical done for God, for the church, for the community. God works in beautifully as we work out wholeheartedly. We add; He multiplies.

The Bible is not and cannot be just garnish for information (the back brain) or an annoyance and restrainer of earthly pleasure and shallow feelings (the bottom brain). Instead God's Word is an instrument for the building of Christlike character.

This character is most especially represented in the front of the brain. This is the unique most holy place in man, set apart for His way, His truth, and His life. Our personality, character, and success, as well as that of our flocks, can be markedly improved by steady, eager cooperation with a loving Lord who designed, sustains, and can glorify the front-brain system with His character. This character is not a luxury, but a necessity. Hence the whole person can be blessed. Then by His agency we can choose to become His agents. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt 24:14).

Other sources
In addition to the works cited in the references, the following were consulted in preparation of this article:
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Your canceled check is your receipt. Tickets to your seminars will be waiting in Indianapolis.
Secrets of the New Age

It is refreshing to have at last a perceptive treatment of the New Age movement from an accurately biblical standpoint. Unfortunately, many Christian writers who have produced exposés of the New Age movement hold a major illusion in common with the New Agers—a belief in the natural immortality of the soul. They thus make themselves vulnerable to the spiritualism of the very movement they condemn.

Wade's book treats the issues of the New Age movement incisively, offering a clear perspective on the issues involved in the final controversy between Christ and Satan. Wade examines carefully the roots of the New Age, those that reach into the distant past and those arising from more modern developments—particularly from the fifties and sixties. He furnishes factual detail that enables the reader to understand clearly the real nature and inner workings of the New Age. He examines its ideology, literature, institutions, and leading proponents, and looks carefully at its spiritual and prothetic implications, especially against the backdrop of Revelation 12 and 14.

Wade has researched deeply, but he has reduced his findings to a brisk, readable, well-thought-out analysis of the movement's significance and dangers. And he has done more than armchair investigation. His reports of personal meetings with key New Age figures add interest and color to the book. Also of interest in the book is the author's treatment of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, Star Trek, Sun Myung Moon, and holistic health in their relationship to the New Age movement.

The author does not attempt to offer a blow-by-blow scriptural rebuttal to New Age thinking. Such an undertaking would be cumbersome because of the diversity of beliefs held by that many-sided, protean movement. Instead, in the last chapter of the book, he sets forth a brief but comprehensive overview of its errors and prophetic implications. And he recommends appropriate sources that offer a more detailed analysis.

Wade's good writing, free from the sarcasm and superciliousness that frequently mar works that set out to expose error, enhances its usefulness. Its respectful and constructive attitude toward adherents of the New Age makes this book suitable to give to people who are open to considering the biblical perspective of true enlightenment and human progress.

The book has a good bibliography but no index. I recommend it highly.

[The book is available to Ministry readers for $3.95 postpaid from Ministry Services, Box 425, Fulton, MD 20759. Outside U.S., add $1.00 postage, or $2.00 for air mail.]

Short and Sharp and Off the Point

Subtitled "The Art of Good (and Bad) Preaching," this excellent book makes some disturbing observations. Patterson states: "When our preaching does not meet real spiritual need and fails to motivate people, a major consequence is that personal witness to Christ becomes inarticulate and eventually dries up, the desire to share in God's mission evaporates, and comfortable pew Christianity is established. That kind of fat cat religion is the opposite of the gospel and poison for the church."

The author's diagnosis is uncomfortably apparent to struggling preachers. But Patterson offers an antidote for this "poison." Encouragement, enthusiasm, and practical counsel fill the volume, giving pastors the hope that they can preach more effectively. He gives excellent advice on exegesis, communication, use of translations, body language, sermon organization, and delivery. If you have ever wondered whether you should preach from a fully written paper or just have adequate notes available, Patterson can help you decide. He also evaluates modern methods such as drama.

Patterson approaches his subject sensibly, being concerned not only with how to preach but with the results of preaching. The preacher knows his task has been accomplished when people begin to "share in the task of preaching: when they themselves begin to call to the world 'Listen to the Word of God.'"

The minister achieves results through relevant preaching. "The job of the preacher is to enable people to hear so that they can respond. To do that, he must keep himself in touch with his people and make his sermons relevant to them." The kind of intimacy that creates relevancy comes only through pastoral visitation.

This positive book addresses real-life ministry. It is not only practical but encouraging, renewing faith in preaching.

Millennium of Faith

To cover the turbulent history of Christianity in Russia from A.D. 988 to 1988 in 133 pages seems like an impossible task, but House performs it admirably. He meets the challenge by concentrating on important events and especially interesting facts, putting them together to make a fascinating and informative book.

The massive international coverage of Russian Christians in 1988 celebrating "the baptism of Rus" a thousand years ago added to the growing interest in Christian life in one of the two superpowers of the world.

The story begins a thousand years ago when the heathen ruler Prince Vladimir of Kiev wanted to strengthen the bonds between town dwellers and tribal peoples in his country. He felt that adopting a single religion would help achieve this goal.

According to a medieval legend, Vladimir sent a delegation to Constantinople to investigate the world religions of that day: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. If they recommended Christian-
ity, the question would be whether to choose Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. The beauty of the Orthodox liturgy in the magnificent church at St. Sophia so overwhelmed the delegation that “they did not know whether they were in heaven or in earth.” Whatever facts lie behind this story, the beauty of worship is still a distinctive characteristic of Russian Orthodox church life.

The book leads the reader through the varied and often violent history of the church under the Tatars, the czars, and finally the Communists. The author states what he believes are reasons for its phoenix-like resurrection from disaster and oppression. He also points out that many causes for present problems date back long before the Communist takeover in 1917. He ventures to prophesy that in the near future historians may consider the endurance and faith of Russian Christians as one of the most significant developments of the twentieth century.

Many human-interest stories woven into the text and the book’s illustrations add to its readability and attractiveness. The author includes a helpful bibliography and index. Readers who want a balanced history of religious life in the largest country in the world (only China and India have more people within their borders) will benefit from this well-researched volume. The book deals mainly with the Russian Orthodox Church, which for so long dominated Russian Christianity. Therefore, the smaller Christian churches do not get much mention.

**Addiction and Grace**


Usually addiction refers to chemical dependency problems, but this book vastly broadens one’s thinking on the subject.

As a young doctor, the author returned from military service in Vietnam and served as director of a community drug abuse clinic. He applied his best psychiatric methods to the treatment of addicts, but “none of them worked.” Because of this failure, May embarked on an informal research, talking to people who had overcome serious drug addiction. “All of them described some sort of spiritual experience,” he reports. “It had something to do with turning to God.”

His research was the beginning of an intensive study of addiction, particularly its wider aspects. This eventually led him to believe that we all have addictive inclinations. “To be alive is to be addicted, and to be alive and addicted is to stand in need of grace,” he concluded.

*What is addiction? May sees it as a deep-seated form of idolatry enslaving our will and displacing God’s love as the source of our deepest desire. He equates addiction with sin. “We are all addicts in every sense of the word,” he says. This statement agrees with the apostle Paul, who says, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

This broad idea of addiction leads May to say “As unequivocal as it is unpleasant, no addiction is good.” In explaining this seemingly harsh and extreme concept, the author makes a sharp distinction between deliberately choosing to do an act out of love and being compelled to do it out of slavery.

May describes the effect of addiction problems on our minds, bodies, and spirits. He applies the step-by-step addictive process usually ascribed to drugs to other areas of our life such as work, power, success, and relationships. The parallels leave us startled.

The author repeatedly emphasizes that the only effective way to end addictive behavior is to “stop it.” However, he acknowledges human inability to do so. “Grace is our only hope for dealing with addiction, the only power that can truly vanquish its destructiveness.” God created us for love and freedom, but addiction hinders us; grace is necessary for salvation. “Grace is the active expression of God’s love.”

May points out that the brain never completely forgets what it has learned. “The permanence of addictive memory is not funny. It stands ready to come back with only the slightest encouragement.” From a spiritual perspective, then, no matter how much grace God blesses us with, we must remain dependent upon its continuing flow. Liberation from addiction is a lifelong process—the very essence of sanctification.

**Addiction and Grace** can be a valuable aid in applying spiritual and theological principles to addiction, for too often we limit the treatment of the problem to physical and psychological methods. Anyone who carefully and prayerfully reads this book will have his or her horizons broadened to recognize that victory over life’s besetments involves both the human and the divine—divine power, but human willingness. In the author’s words, “the power of grace flows more fully when human will chooses to act in harmony with divine will.”

**Intensive Care: Helping Teenagers in Crisis**


“I wish this book never had to be written.”


The underlying premise of this readable book is simple: you can help kids and their families during times of crisis. The solutions are reality-tested because they spring from his 20 years of experience in youth ministry. He knows how unlikely and how transient the simplistic quick fixes are, and so he provides backgrounds, anecdotes, references, caveats, referral resources, and legal and ethical considerations.


For example: Question: What do you do if you have a gut feeling that a kid might be suicidal but you haven’t seen any of the obvious clues?

Answer: I’ve learned to follow my instincts. If I have any question, I simply ask...

In addition, he gives attention to developing peer counselors, providing program ideas to help parents, and showing why the vital link in crisis intervention is the family. The concluding chapter, “Crisis as Opportunity,” sings with hope.

Youth Specialties produces the best youth materials in the world. This is one of their books, and it’s a winner.

**Whistling in the Dark: An ABC Theologized**

Buechner has created an amusing series of 103 little essays that are fun to read. For example, he writes about “Algebraic Teaching” and “Zero,” essays with ideas as provocative as the titles. But why should we worry about nothing? However, he writes with elegance. For example, he writes about how animals love uncompromisingly: “When a dachshund takes a shine to you, it is not likely to be because he has thought it over ahead of time. Such as he is, he gives himself to you, the bad breath no less than the frenzied tail.”

Such turns of phrase fill the book. When Buechner notes that “born again” theology ignores suffering and doubt, he says they “appear as absent from their view of things as litter from the streets of Disneyland.”

It is with this elegance that Buechner commends himself. The work of this highly acclaimed author is useful for inspiration, to help the preacher lift the message above the mundane, to inspire excellence in sermon-crafting. The essays are not extensive treatments of timely topics, but pleasantly phrased devotions of one or two pages.

Reclaiming Inactive Church Members

The how-to outlines located at the back of this book provide helpful and practical suggestions for contacting inactive church members. This feature I found to be the prime value of this small book. The main body of the book seemed to me to be disjointed and often divergent from the central theme expressed by the title. The examples that Jones uses to illustrate attempts to reach the inactive more often than not end in failure. This lack of success demonstrates one of the author’s points that there is no magic formula for reclaiming inactive members. It takes hard work and personal interest. Resurrecting what once had life apparently proves more difficult and less satisfying than helping create that life in the first place.

Backgrounds of Early Christianity

This volume exposes the reader to the influence that Jewish, Greek, and Roman politics, environment, religious beliefs, and practices had on early Christianity. Ferguson uses his teaching expertise in the area to provide a valuable resource with breadth as well as depth concerning social issues of the time. Ferguson goes beyond the usual discussion of mystery religions to inform the reader about specific domestic and rural beliefs. He talks about Hellenistic-Roman philosophies and Jewish religious and social life.

Ferguson emphasizes the differences between Christianity and other religions but does not ignore the similarities. He neither views Christianity as a syncretistic religion of its times nor overemphasizes its uniqueness. Rather, he views it as having points of contact with other movements of the time but with a differing worldview.

Ferguson recognizes that many students come to the New Testament with little information about its Greco-Roman context. But he correctly views Judaism as the primary context of Christianity.

There are areas in which I take issue with Ferguson. Among them would be his suggestion that the Messiah concept was not prominent in the intertestamental period. My own investigation suggests that it was prominent. Developments emerging in that period to a large extent shaped the Messianic concepts of first-century Judaism. One may also question Ferguson for limiting his bibliographies to English works.

The author makes too sharp a distinction between the Greek emphasis on seeing and the Hebrew emphasis on hearing. Though Greeks dethroned hearing and enthroned seeing, they still brought the two together in the context of teaching. Furthermore the Hebrews also employed the two concepts.

On the whole this work will inform and enrich pastors and others concerning the backgrounds of early Christianity. They will find particularly valuable the general bibliographies at the beginning of each chapter and specialized ones at the end of each subsection. Ferguson achieves his goal of exposing his readers to “as many sources as possible.”
Recently noted


Christian writing can have more influence today than ever before because what people read, they become. Unlike other media, the right piece of literature can be kept and reflected upon. Wirt points out that every great movement to sweep through human history came about through writing. This helpful book for writers comes from a veteran of Christian journalism who has been lecturing and giving seminars on the subject for 20 years around the world.


A reference work listing more than 175 titles on biblical topics that have been recommended by great church leaders of today and yesterday. An excellent resource volume for pastors and Bible students.


A valuable resource book for those considering adoption, and pastors who are counseling them.


There are times when a pastor or Bible worker is tempted to wonder if human nature can really ever change. This book answers that question in the affirmative, revealing what God can do with those who have given up on Bragan’s stories of prisoners reclaimed for Jesus tell us God does and can change anyone. There are other times we are tempted to question if God can keep the human spirit from being destroyed under trying circumstances. Sentenced to prison for a crime he did not commit, Bragan’s own experience as a Christian shows us that God’s grace is indeed sufficient.

This is not a theological book in the sense of directives. It is a theological book with flesh on it, about real people and their experiences.

Letters

From page 2

Bible is silent regarding the length of time between Adam’s creation and the Fall. This can be true only if we assume that the figure of 130 years given in Genesis 5:3 dates not from Adam’s creation but from his fall, but this is the very point Lowe seeks to prove. He has provided a classic example of circular reasoning.

Such a futile exercise—to try to accommodate revealed truth to the findings of science! It has the flavor of all the attempts by churchmen in the nineteenth century to harmonize revealed truth with the speculations of Cuvier, Lyell, Darwin, et al. They achieved harmony, but it was at the cost of total capitulation. We have more important things to do.

Maranatha!—Val Periman, Summers, Arkansas.

Organize a Spirit-filled ladies’ prayer group

From page 15

When you have copied the information on the cards, let everyone who is participating draw a card. Then stress to the ladies that the idea is to remember their secret sister in thoughtful, inexpensive ways during the year—of course, doing so anonymously.

At the end of the year have a party to which each brings an inexpensive gift for her secret sister, this time with the giver’s name attached—thus revealing who has been whose secret sister through the year. Be sure to inform all the participants about this event in plenty of time so they can attend or at least send a gift. It’s embarrassing when some don’t show up and a few are left without a gift or the knowledge of who their sister is.

Once you begin your ladies’ prayer group, ideas will flow like ever-widening rivulets of water. You will be in touch with your church members’ lives. You will be supporting your husband in a team ministry, and your church will love you for it. You will feel good knowing that you an instrument in the Lord’s hand and that through you He can touch someone’s life.

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Prices subject to change without notice
Do your own pictorial church directory

Many churches use pictorial directories, but they can be expensive and, more importantly, make it difficult to add new members quickly. To resolve these two problems, we produce our own loose-leaf pictorial directory.

We use an 8½" x 5½" three-ring binder (I use National 68-859), silk-screened with the church name. We put in it a title page, our church history, a general information page (listing important telephone numbers), our current officers list, our membership list (including addresses and telephone numbers), and a family biographical section.

We devote one page of this last section to each family. The family name, a 3½" x 5" photo of the family (screened on our copy machine), a listing of the family members (keyed to the photo), a brief family history, hobbies, and a list of relatives in the local church fill this page.

During our monthly Sabbath potluck, we photograph the families to be added to the directory, giving a biographical sheet to each family to complete. The photos are not color, but with the right backdrop, screen, and photographer they look quite good. The church secretary prepares the new sheets, distributing copies to all the members to add to their directories, and keeping the masters on hand so that we can make up new directories for new members.

Every year or as necessary, we update the information pages at the beginning of the directory. And as member families mature, we update their photo pages, as well.

Our pictorial directory helps new members to get to know other church families. But more than this, by the ease with which new family biographical sheets can be inserted into the directory, it also quickly acquaints member families with those who are joining the church.

Submitted by Stan Taylor, pastor of the Healdsburg Seventh-day Adventist Church, Healdsburg, California.

Good communication

For our monthly board meeting, I prepared a report of my activities—calls, funerals, marriages, special sermons and meetings, etc. I gave a copy of the report to the secretary of the board and kept a copy for myself, which I read at the board meeting. I found this kept the leadership of the church up-to-date on my activities and that it was appreciated.

H. L. Weaver, retired United Methodist minister, Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania.

Liberty offers pastors free subscriptions

For 84 years Liberty, "A Magazine of Religious Freedom," has been acquainting judges, attorneys, educators, clergymen, and leaders on all levels of government with fundamental principles of religious liberty and church-state separation. Members of the Seventh-day Adventist churches in North America provide it to these key people as a part of their efforts to help preserve the religious liberty that we all enjoy.

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Bouquets is Concerned Communications' new devotional diary particularly designed for women to use in personal or small group settings. Each activity page (there are 100 such pages) offers a devotional scripture followed by a paraphrase focusing on the text's meaning for the worshiper personally. The page then provides a place for the worshiper to write down her own paraphrase, a place to record an experience from the past or a plan for the day relating to the devotional thought, and then a place where the worshiper may write a brief prayer of praise and/or commitment.

Bouquets costs US$6.95 individually, US$29.75 for a pack of 5 books, or US$123.75 for a pack of 25 (Arkansas residents only must also include 4 percent sales tax). Add US$3 shipping and handling for one to four books, or US$5 per book for five or more books. Enclose check with order. Write to Concerned Communications, Highway 59 North, Siloam Springs, AR 72761. (Visa or MasterCard holders may order by including their name, phone number, signature, card number, and expiration date of the card with mailed order; or they may order by phoning toll-free 1-800-447-4332.)

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