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Thanks for the book, article

I just received my complimentary copy of the book Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . and want to thank you and your church for this generous gift. I have been receiving Ministry magazine and have enjoyed many of the articles. Please know that we, as clergy, do appreciate your ministry through this medium. The recent article on the archaeological significance of the inscription found at the wadi ("Dedicated to a Furnace," September 1989) arrived at a time when I was teaching on the archaeological support of scriptural details and was a timely illustration that I was able to use.

Apart from the message that you give by your gifts to other clergy, I appreciate the whole spirit in which you make this offer. You inform, but do not pressure anyone to do anything but consider what you say. You inform, but do not expect everyone to agree. And you are open to other points of view that might enlarge your understanding, too. How long for such a spirit throughout the Christian church. —Marg Moriyama, St. Paul’s Congregational Church, Chatham, Ontario.

Thanks to the generosity of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association, we receive regularly in our office your fine journal, Ministry. I am a regular reader and, as a church administrator in charge of more than 300 Jesuit priests and brothers in ministry, find many of your articles quite valuable and helpful. It is clear that our own men face many of the issues and concerns that our brothers and sisters in the Protestant ministry face.

At the theological level we also face a lot of the same issues. This was brought home to me quite clearly through the article by Rex Edwards in your most recent issue (November 1989). Defining the difference between the priesthood of believers and ministerial priest—hood is an issue that, from different directions, we both very much struggle with and seek to define more clearly.


Pantheistic principles?

As presented in Daniel Lazich’s “How Science Discovered God" (May 1989), the strong anthropic principle seemed to me to be expressing pantheistic and spiritualistic sentiments, so I decided to examine the author’s sources. Lazich quoted the following from Tony Rothman’s article in Discover: “Even as I write these words my pen balks, because as a twentieth-century physicist, I know that the last step is a leap of faith, not a logical conclusion.” The next words in Rothman’s article were: “Then I reflect: Is it inconceivable that a future civilization will meet God face to face? Will He intentionally reveal Himself? Or will our descendants become God? That is, after all, what the FAP [final anthropic principle] prophesies.”

On page 96 of his article, Rothman defines the FAP as: “Once life is created, it will endure forever, become infinitely knowledgeable, and ultimately mold the universe to its will. At the end of time—a final state that the Jesuit philosopher and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called the Omega Point—observers will have brought everything into existence. Thus man—or Life—will be not only the measure of all things but their creator as well.”

Stephen Hawking’s book, to which Lazich also refers, talks a lot about God, but it is not the God we know. Hawking’s God, if there is one, is an impersonal deity. His God started the process billions of years ago and ever since has allowed “the universe to evolve according to a set of laws and does not intervene to break these laws” (pp. 140, 141).

Lazich quotes Hawking’s statement that the new developments in physics suggest a universe without boundaries or singularities and that these developments have produced “profound implications for the role of God as Creator.” But he does not quote the profound implications that Hawking lays out in the next paragraph: “If the no boundary proposal is correct, He [God] had no freedom at all to choose the initial conditions. He would, of course, still have had the freedom to choose the laws that the universe obeyed. This, however, may not really have been all that much of a choice, there may well be only one, or a small number,” of possible sets of laws that could produce life like ours (p. 174). I believe that these new developments in physics are doing much to help prepare the world for Satan’s “masterpiece of deception,” a deception involving pantheistic spiritualism and a supposed millennium of peace. “The whole world will be swept into the ranks of this delusion” (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911], p. 562; see also pp. 560, 561, 589). —Bob Pickle, pastor, Brookhaven, McComb, and Natchez, Mississippi, Seventh-day Adventist churches.

The point of the article is not to tout the theology of the sources Lazich cites. Rather, it is simply to demonstrate that last scientists are admitting that their discoveries seem to be demanding the existence of an intelligent designer behind Creation. Lazich’s use of sources is similar to that of a systematic theologian who begins his discussion by citing Aquinas’s evidences for the existence of God. Such citations would not compel the theologian to accept all of Aquinas’s conclusions about the nature of God. —Editors.

If you’re receiving Ministry bimonthly without having paid for a subscription, it’s not a mistake. Since 1928 Ministry has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers, but we believe the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share with you our aspirations and faith in a way that we trust will provide inspiration and help to you too. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulders, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you cannot use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead.
The articles in this issue provide an interesting mix that we hope you will find makes a well-balanced meal. Take, for instance, the article on fasting. Now, if you read only that article, you might want to stop eating altogether. But then you need only to turn back a few pages to find an article on diet and the brain. Here you'll learn how important proper nutrition is to the brain and how to get all the right nutrients to the brain while avoiding foods that inhibit good thinking.

Add David Jarnes’s editorial to the above mix, and you’ll find that more than good food is needed to promote good health. Religion has a lot to do with how well our bodies function.

But how does one maintain a positive religious experience? Robert M. Johnston’s article, “The Minister as a Believer,” provides inspiration and direction for maintaining a holy life in the midst of a holy calling. And while he speaks of the importance of maintaining a strong devotional life through devotional reading of the Bible, Maylan Schurch gives good pointers on how to get the most out of Bible reading through revitalizing your understanding of Greek.

Neal C. Wilson’s lead article continues the theme of our need of revival and reformation, and William J. McCall’s article spurs us on toward the type of unity that genuine revival and reformation will bring about.

As you can see, we’ve tried to provide a rich, varied diet for you this month. We trust that it will leave you feeling refreshed and strengthened physically, spiritually, and emotionally.
Our first work

Neal C. Wilson

What does the church really need today? Have we been seeking for the wrong things?

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

What I am about to share with you could easily be misunderstood. This is a risk I feel compelled to take, though, in order to convey what I believe to be both an important and positive message. Please try to grasp my concern and join me in doing something about it.

As I review the history of our church over the past several decades, I question whether our emphasis may have been wrongly placed. We wish to see the work of God finished on the earth, and this desire drives us on to do that in which we excel—create new programs and develop new promotional devices. We often introduce a new program as the answer to our needs. We proclaim that if the whole church would only get behind the program and support it, push it, the gospel would be preached throughout the world and the end would come. We must not minimize the fact that we need carefully planned programs to keep our work organized, but my question is Are we lacking the divine unction that would make the programs efficient?

Nearly 100 years ago Adventists were challenged by this same question. In 1893 Ellen White expressed her concern in these words: “There is altogether too little made of the work of the Holy Spirit’s influence upon the church. Altogether too much dependence is placed upon the individual human agencies to bring success into the church. Where there is genuine piety in a church there will be a genuine faith in the manifestations of the Holy Spirit’s efficiency. It is the depending so largely upon man and his supposed capabilities and his education and his knowledge that eclipses the Lord God. . . . [Man] must rely upon the Word of God with unwavering confidence, and not be continually making the arm of flesh his dependence and his trust.”

She put her finger right on our problem, didn’t she? We still put too much trust in the genius of men and ignore the role of the Holy Spirit. Is it not time for this to change?

Opportunities in a changing world

We are witnessing changes in our world that are leaving us absolutely breathless. How often have we told ourselves that the last movements in human history will be rapid ones? News commentators and political analysts admit that the recent developments in Eastern Europe appear to be catapulted along by an unseen power. They even speak in terms of these events being out of human control. Political changes are rushing way ahead of the time schedule anticipated by international peace and power-brokers. Leaders of the most powerful countries on earth find it virtually impossible to keep up, to say nothing about bringing these events under control.

But the majority of news commentators are totally unaware of the guiding hand of God in human history. A passage from the book Prophets and Kings seems especially relevant to what we see happening: “In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of
will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the Word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-mighty, One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.\(^2\)

Let me share my appraisal of what is happening. God is opening up a window of opportunity for His church. If we move through this window under His power, it is possible for us to see the gospel work completed on earth within a very short period of time. Christians have had opportunities like this before, but have failed to make good these opportunities. If, at those times, the leaders of God's church had courageously followed His leading, the Holy Spirit could have done a mighty work in the world.

Now in our day we see the hand of God adjusting the affairs of nations so that the gospel can go forth unhindered to all the earth. News analysts and historians do not understand the implications of what is happening, but we should. Time is not on our side. Satan will endeavor to use this new spirit of democratization as a means of creating a religiopolitical system that will close doors and bring about a restriction of religious liberty. Such events are all part of the final events in the great controversy between Christ and Satan, as foretold in Scripture.

What are we going to do about the window of opportunity that God is opening for us? Are we going to take ourselves in hand, do the work of spiritual preparation that God calls for, and allow Him to use us to finish His work on earth? Or are we going to let this golden opportunity slip through our fingers and find ourselves and our children here in this sinful world for another 50 or 60 years? A decision will be made by the church and its leaders, either by conscious choice or by default.

Fellow believers, I call upon all, laypersons, pastors, and administrative leaders alike, to consider what is happening in our world, and to take hold of the opportunity that God is giving us. Let us, to a person, arise, confess our sins and mistakes, turn to God in repentance, and seek the power and the efficiency that His Spirit will bring in the latter rain experience. We must not squander this opportunity.

The church gives little import to the influence of the Holy Spirit. This must change. It is time for the church to admit that it is "not by might, nor by power," but by the Spirit of the Lord (Zech. 4:6).

Our greatest need today

In Seventh-day Adventist history the 1888 General Conference session stands out as a watershed. For approximately 18 months before that meeting in Minneapolis, Ellen White used the pages of the Advent Review and Sabbath Herald to plead with church members to prepare themselves for this meeting by going to God, confessing their sins, and seeking the power of the Spirit for the finishing of the work of spreading the gospel to all the world. The urgency she felt for this preparation shouts to us from the pages she wrote: "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."\(^3\)

This revival of true godliness is still the greatest and most urgent of our needs. I must confess, however, that while we have given lip service to God's appeal, it has not always been a priority item on our agendas. All facets of our church endeavor are important, and each makes a contribution to the whole work of a worldwide church. But no objective or program is more important than seeking the power of God's Spirit in latter rain measure. All else that is done in and by the church is to be secondary.

I am happy to say that some church leaders are giving the work of seeking the latter rain of the Spirit number one priority on their agendas. For example, I have learned that in one conference the emphasis given at workers' meetings has been changed. Previously, approximately 30 minutes had been given to a devotional thought and prayer, and the rest of the meeting was given to conducting conference business. Now they give 30 minutes to conference business and devote the rest of the time to prayer, to the study of God's Word and the counsels we have received through the years, and to sharing ideas with each other on how the instruction can be implemented. Their change of emphasis does not seem to have hurt the work of the conference. For example, although they may have given only 10 minutes to the promotion of the annual Ingathering fund-raising program at a workers' meeting, this conference was second in per capita in the North American Division in Ingathering in 1989. Our pastors and people have done Ingathering before; they know what it is all about, and can educate new members for this work. The leaders of this conference believe that it is much more effective to spend 10 minutes on the promotion of Ingathering and then take an hour or two in prayer and study, seeking to prepare for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Let me draw another illustration from the same conference. The conference president spends one day a month meeting with the pastors in each of the six regions. They spend their time together studying, praying, and discussing how to implement the instruction we have for preparing ourselves to receive the Holy Spirit's outpouring of power. When asked how he can afford to spend six days every month out of the office, the president will tell you, "There is nothing that I do as president of this conference that is more important than seeking to know the will of God and getting down on my knees with my pastors seeking the Holy Spirit to fill our lives."

In the book Acts of the Apostles I read that "the lapse of time has wrought no change in Christ's parting promise to send the Holy Spirit as His representative. It is not because of any restriction on the part of God that the riches of His grace do not flow earthward to men. If the fulfillment of the promise is not seen as it might be, it is because the promise is
not appreciated as it should be. 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 which is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and which would bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though offered in infinite plenitude.”

When we seek the Holy Spirit with a sincere heart, growth and spiritual prosperity will result. It is clear that the power of the Holy Spirit is the answer to spiritual stagnation. But to receive this power, we must be willing to follow the instructions God has given to us.

I believe that God wants to pour out His Spirit upon us. The Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for it than parents are to give good gifts to their children (Luke 11:13). We must give the work of seeking this outpouring first priority. We must learn to hunger and thirst after the righteousness His Spirit would impart to us. We must talk of it, pray for it, preach concerning it.

As I said in an earlier article, I am making the seeking of the promised gift of the Spirit and a revival of true godliness the subject of intense study in my personal devotions so that I can understand what God’s plan is for me and for His church. The reception of the latter rain has become the major subject of my prayers.

I ask you, my fellow Christians: Is it not time for God’s people to seek actively this one gift that will bring all other blessings in its train? I appeal to my fellow leaders to make the subject of the latter rain prominent in your preaching. Let the youth see you as a spiritual leader. Let the church members see that you mean business. Encourage them to follow your example.

This, my dear sisters and brothers, “should be our first work.”

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1 Ellen G. White manuscript 93, 1893.
3 “The Church’s Greatest Need,” Review and Herald, Mar. 22, 1887, p. 177.
Luke 5:33-35; 18:12; and Acts 13:2, 3. Both nestēa and nestēwo are used for voluntary fasting. 1

Colin Brown says nestēo means having an empty stomach, or abstaining from any kind of food for a limited period of time. 2 Leon-Dufour gives a synopsis of what fasting is and what it is not. He states, "In Judaism, unlike other religions, fasting was not an ascetical exploit—is it not food a gift of God? It was the equivalent of humbling one's soul, an attitude, of dependence on God, to make lamentation, or to implore some favor." 3

By simple definition fasting is a voluntary abstinence from any kind of food for a limited period of time for a sacred or holy purpose.

The Old Testament speaks of fasting as afflicting one's soul. Once a year Mo·ses called the children of Israel to afflict their souls. This was a time when no food was eaten, no work was done, when the children of Israel would reflect on their sinfulness. 4 It was a time of humbling themselves before God ( Lev. 16:29-31; Num. 29:7). In the book of Joel we discover that Judah was called to a national fast in the face of an impending disaster ( Joel 2:12). These examples demonstrate that in the Old Testament fasting referred to a cessation of eating for a limited period of time for the express purpose of humbling oneself before God or pleading for mercy. It was a cessation from eating in the hope of averting God's wrath. It was used as a means of worship, but never as a means of earning the favor of God. Fasting played an important part in the life of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. Have the passing centuries diminished our need for it?

**Fasting and weight control**

Weight control is a real problem among preachers. Their eating habits and sedentary lifestyle can leave them in desperate need of girth control. Perhaps obesity is the greatest destroyer of physical health among ministers. Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other diseases that plague today's preachers are often caused or exacerbated by obesity. 5

And there is a direct relationship between the physical, mental, and spiritual health. John implied this harmony when he wrote, "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well" (3 John 2). 6 Any pastor who suffers from any of these diseases would do well to consider anew the discipline of fasting. James Morrison states, "There are multitudes of diseases which have their origin in fullness, and might have their end in fasting." 6 If the minister would seriously practice the discipline of fasting, which in effect teaches self-control, he or she would witness a change not only in eating habits, but in health and weight. In fact, after three days of fasting, it is possible to begin losing up to two pounds a day.

During a prolonged fast the body begins to act like an incinerator, burning up the waste and decaying tissues. This process brings about considerable weight loss because fat and waste make up a large percentage of the body weight in overweight people. With the decline in body weight and the cleansing and healing that has taken place during the fast, the minister should be able to leap from the car with renewed energy to carry forth his or her mission to the world. Walls describes this renewal as a cleansing process that "usually produces, after a prolonged fast, a brightness of the eye, pure breath, clear skin, and a sense of physical well-being. The digestive system should become like new. A Christian worker after only a five-day fast declared, 'I feel as though I've got a brand-new stomach.' A digestive weakness he had had for years had disappeared." 7 A healthy body helps to make a sound mind.

**Fasting and dependence**

But fasting is needed for more than just physical and mental health. Today's ministers face many dangers. For those living in an affluent society the greatest danger is self-sufficiency. God warned the children of Israel, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord. . . . Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God" ( Deut. 8:10, 11). There is no conflict between God and food. But when temporal needs are met there is the tendency to forget God.

Self-sufficient ministers pervade our world. Puffed up with the helium of pride, they proclaim, "Is not this [church] the great Babylon, I have built?" (Dan. 4:30). No one who is proud can approach God, let alone work for God. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18). Every minister must learn the lessons of meekness and humility that Christ taught.

Fasting can help a minister learn humility. Fasting itself does not humble a person, but it does prepare the vessel for the humbling work of the Holy Spirit.
If our sinless Saviour felt the need to fast, how much more should feeble, sinful ministers feel the need of fasting?

them off" (Acts 13:2, 3).

I cannot help believing that the experience of fasting provided such fellowship with the Holy Spirit that a better environment for understanding the will of God was created. No, fasting does not guarantee spiritual guidance. But by fasting we place ourselves in a situation that allows the Holy Spirit to have easier access to us. The stomach is closely related to the brain, and when the stomach is full, the body diverts energy from the brain to aid the digestive organs. When no food is in the stomach this energy is available for the brain to use. "A clogged stomach means a clogged brain." 9

When Daniel, the prophet of God, used this discipline, God revealed to him the future of his people (Dan. 9:2, 3, 21, 22). Today’s ministers should follow Daniel’s example. We need to know God’s plan for this world and its people. The cry is still heard, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jer. 37:17). Fasting will give the minister the environment needed to receive the unadulterated word of God and to pass it on to a hungry world.

Still we must be careful not to take fasting to an extreme. There is the danger of coming to regard fasting as a meritorious act — of using fasting as a means of earning favor with God. Some Christians believe they can earn merit by mortification of the body. 10 Some of these Christians view fasting as a good way of working themselves into the favor of God. Such a view misunderstands the place of human effort in the divine plan for our salvation. Paul explains, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). It is our need that commends us to God, not our fasting. The latter is just an outward indication that says we recognize our true condition, sinners in need of the Saviour.

But to be sure, no outward act is acceptable to God if there is no inward change, no humility of heart. This is why the prophet Joel told the people to rend their hearts and not their garments (Joel 2:13). The most important part of fasting is the condition of the heart. Have we truly humbled ourselves before God, or are we just putting on a show of piety? Jesus told His disciples, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matt. 6:16-18). Fasting is a secret discipline done not to make one acceptable to God, but simply to show the desire of the heart for a closer relationship with God.

Jesus’ example

Jesus, our perfect example, illustrated in His life the need and benefits of fasting. At the very beginning of His ministry He chose to go 40 days and 40 nights without food (Matt. 4:2). He was concerned that nothing would interfere with the communication between Himself and His Father. Through fasting and prayer He gained strength for the battle, insight into the word, and a determination to carry out His mission. But this was not the only time that our Lord fasted. "When Christ was the most fiercely beset by temptation, He was not hungry." 11 If our sinless Saviour felt the need to fast, how much more should feeble, sinful ministers feel the need of fasting!

Finally, those ministers whose eschatological view of Scripture points to the imminent day of the Lord ought to be particularly aware of their need of fasting. Joel and the people of Judah fasted because the day of the Lord was at hand. The people of Nineveh fasted because the wrath of God was soon to be poured out on them. Daniel fasted because he saw what God was about to do to Israel. But Daniel saw even more. He saw what would come to pass at the very end of this earth’s history — and this revelation prostrated him in fasting.

One day the disciples asked Jesus, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered, "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning birth pains’" (Matt. 24:3-8).

The books of Daniel and Revelation reveal that the day of the Lord is at hand. We can see that the signs Matthew wrote of are all around us. Now, more than ever before, we need to fast. God will soon pour out His wrath on this world, and many precious souls are doomed unless we can help them. If there ever was a time that we as ministers needed to humble ourselves by fasting and prayer, it is now. If there ever was a time that we needed the guidance of God in directing His people, it is now. If there ever was a time when we needed to be physically fit to carry out such an urgent, decisive mission, it is now.

So ministers, continue your praying and almsgiving, but add to your Christian practices the much-needed discipline of fasting.

8 All Bible texts in this article are from the New International Version.


10 Ibid., p. 28.

The minister as a believer

Robert M. Johnston

Only ministers who know God can supply what people come to church to receive.


And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).*

We give many reasons for going to church—fellowship, inspiration, service. But all of these things are empty by themselves. What people really long for in their inmost souls is to meet God there. Whether they find Him there depends a great deal upon the minister, for to a great degree it is the minister who determines the spirituality of the service. Blessed is the minister and the church that can make visitors say after the service what Jacob said at Bethel: “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it. . . . How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:16, 17). Unfortunately, people cannot always say this about our services. Running a program is all very well, but it is no substitute for the pastor’s “being thick with the Almighty,” as an old Scottish woman described her dominie.

There is such a thing as the atheism of technique—the belief that we can hasten the kingdom by using the right methods, trying some new gimmicks, and working our heads off. We read books like Six Steps to Revival or Five Simple Techniques for a Growing Church or How to Achieve Translation in Seven Minutes a Day. A skeptic might be forgiven for suggesting that the church could be successfully accomplishing all that it is now doing even if there were no God and no Holy Spirit.

More than anything else, we need God. How can we introduce others to One whom we do not know? We must be able to say what John said: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3).

Can a minister really not be a believer? Can a minister really not know God? Robertson of Brighton warned of “the hardening influence of spiritual things.” James Stewart explained it this way: “It might indeed be supposed that the very nature of the preacher’s calling would guarantee an invincible fidelity and consecration. But all sacred things are double-edged; and if the tasks of the ministry may be a safeguard and a panoply they have also their peculiar perils, and they exact vengeance from those who

This article is the second 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.
handle them with undue familiarity. . . . For the prophetic awe and wonder in presence of the revelation of God can all too easily deteriorate into a mere mechanical trafficking with the ordinances of religion. 21

There is a great and hungry demand for reality. All around us, in the media, in entertainment, in literature, in the arts, people see tinselly phoniness. They have become so accustomed to it that they seem willing to settle for it even in religion. If reality unexpectedly bursts upon them, they are startled and fascinated.

Stewart wrote, “You do not need to be eloquent, or clever, or sensational, or skilled in dialectic; you must be real. To fail there is to fail abysmally and tragically. It is to damage incalculably the cause you represent.” 2

As one of my colleagues has put it, a painted fire warms nobody. You must be real. You must really know God.

Getting to know God

Perhaps what I have said has smitten some of you. Perhaps you are wondering, “How can I know God? I do not remember hearing His voice, or seeing Him, or touching, or tasting. I do not know whether I know Him.”

John wrote his first Epistle to answer such questions. “I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). That Epistle gives us certain tests that we can apply to our experience to determine whether it is genuine. I commend that little letter to you.

How do you come to experience God? Jesus said: “All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out” (John 6:37). If He doesn’t cast us out, what does He do? He takes us in. And when does He take us in? When we come to Him. And why do we come to Him? Because the Father has given us to Him.

God has as many mysterious ways to draw us to Himself as there are individuals—and the Holy Spirit is in each of them. But I will give you my own testimony.

It was my second year in an Adventist college. I had been educated in secular schools through the first year of university, though I had been baptized into the church before entering high school. Neither of my parents were Christians; my father was an atheist. I had heard the doctrines from the evangelist who baptized me, and I tried to be obedient to them, though there had been some lapses. It seems to me now that though I knew a little doctrine and a little law, I did not know God.

At the college I joined what they called the Personal Evangelism Crusade; we went out every Sabbath and handed out tracts door-to-door. I also took Bible classes. And I even took Greek—mostly because I was interested in languages. In addition, there were the Weeks of Prayer—week-long revivals.

Somewhere, for the first time in my life, I was led to begin reading the Bible through for myself and not as a class assignment. Beginning with Genesis, I got past the “so-and-so begat so-and-so’s” and came to the patriarchs and to Moses. The fact that these men talked to God, and He answered them impressed me. That was something I had never experienced. I wanted to know if God talks to people in that way now.

During a meeting of the prayer band to which I belonged, I blurted out the question “I have any of you ever had God talk to you?” The question seemed to strike the others dumb, though they were good men. Later I learned that my question so fed the doubts of one of those prayer band members that he went off into unbelief. That night another member of the prayer band put a scrap of paper on my desk telling me to read John 4:11. Its message, “If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us,” was helpful—but it wasn’t quite what I had in mind.

Then the teacher of the Bible class I was taking assigned us to write out our understanding of righteousness by faith. The more I thought about that subject, the more I was stumped. I didn’t know what faith was. I didn’t hand in the assignment when it was due. Instead, I asked the teacher to let me work on it during the Christmas vacation.

I didn’t go home for Christmas. I was still alone in my room on the third floor of the dormitory, Newton Hall. Outside the window the night was crystal-clear, and there were stars all over the place. The air was fresh, and everything was quiet.

I began to study faith. I used a concordance to find what the Bible had to say about this element of the Christian life. And it seemed that the Lord was directing my study, for each text prepared me for the next. Eventually my search brought me to page 53 in the old edition of Ellen G. White’s book Steps to Christ, the first page of the chapter entitled “Faith and Acceptance.” As I began reading that page, something told me, "This is the recipe you have been looking for. Read it slowly, and don’t move on to the next sentence until you have done what the sentence you’re reading says.

I read, “As your conscience has been quickened by the Holy Spirit, you have seen something of the evil of sin, of its power, its guilt, its woe; and you look upon it with abhorrence.”

Sure enough, that described my feeling just then.

“You feel that sin has separated you from God, that you are in bondage to the power of evil.”

As a matter of fact, I felt out of sync with the universe.

“The more you struggle to escape, the more you realize your helplessness.”

I was especially afflicted with procrastination, and these words applied.

“Your motives are impure; your heart is unclean.”

Those were hard words, but they came from the Doctor.

“You see that your life has been filled with selfishness and sin. You long to be forgiven, to be cleansed, to be set free. Harmony with God, likeness to Him—what can you do to obtain it?”

Yes, that was what I wanted to know.

“It is peace that you need—Heaven’s forgiveness and peace and love in the soul. Money cannot buy it, intellect cannot procure it, wisdom cannot attain to it; you can never hope, by your own effort, to secure it. But God offers it to you as a gift, ‘without money and without price.’ It is yours, if you will but reach out your hand and grasp it.”

I was getting excited. I knew something great was about to happen.

“The Lord says, ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’ A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.’”

When I came to the next paragraph, I knew that the moment of truth had arrived: “You have confessed your sins, and in heart put them away.”

I hadn’t yet, but I did it right then and there.

“You have resolved to give yourself to God.”

I did it. But I didn’t feel any different.

“Now go to Him, and ask that He will wash away your sins, and give you a new heart.”

I did that, but I still didn’t feel any different.

“Then believe that He does this be-
cause He has promised.”

Then it happened. It was like a warm glow passing through my body from head to toe, cleansing me. It was as though I was bathed in a pure light.

That was the way God spoke to me. And when He did, I was satisfied. I no longer envied Abraham. I no longer doubted. God was real.

I tried to continue reading, but it was no use. My soul was so happy, I could not sit down. I went through the dormitory looking for someone to whom I could tell what had happened. I saw no one on the third floor or the second floor, but on the first floor I came upon Ben, who, as “chance” would have it, was standing in his open doorway—just sort of leaning against the doorjamb. Ben was the prayer band member whose faith had been shaken by the question I had blurted out. When I gave him my testimony, he told me what had happened to him. God moves in a mysterious way.

Your beginning with God may be different. That doesn’t matter. The important thing is that there must be a beginning.

Renewing your experience

Joseph and Mary took Jesus with them to Jerusalem for the Passover when Jesus was 12. There, because of the excitement of travel, while they were participating in a religious gathering and were fellowshipping with other people of God, they lost track of Him—they forgot Jesus. Ellen White comments, “By one day’s neglect they lost the Saviour; but it cost them three days of anxious search to find Him.” Then she draws a lesson: “So with us; by idle talk, evil speaking, or neglect of prayer, we may in one day lose the Saviour’s presence, and it may take many days of sorrowful search to find Him, and regain the peace that we have lost.”

We must come to know the Lord. But that is not enough. We must keep up the friendship. The relationship must be nurtured. Yesterday’s fire will not warm us today.

Perhaps I need not remind you of the spiritual disciplines—devotional reading of Scripture, prayer, and meditation. But perhaps I do need to. Some may actually think that all the biblical and theological study they do obviates the need for “extracurricular” religion. In an interview Charles Swindoll told why his private devotions are important to him. He said the first reason was “to help guard against a textbook mentality when I approach the Scriptures. I want to keep my heart warm, and break down the cynicism that easily grows out of a strictly academic kind of Bible study. The devotional time really helps that to happen.”

Yet it would be a huge mistake to think that your converse with God has to be suspended while you do your professional study. Don’t think that after you touch base with God in the morning you have to tell Him, “So long for now, Lord—I’ve got to prepare a sermon on Galatians. See you tomorrow!” Keep in touch with God all day long, and the study of the Scriptures you do in preparing for sermons and Bible studies can enhance your knowledge of Him, not interrupt your relationship. Make your very study an act of worship. Make Paul’s admonition to slaves your motto: “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23, 24).

Whether in season or out of season, whether in your study, your church, your car, or your home, practice the presence of God. Keep talking to Him. Whatever you undertake, say, “Lord, I cannot do this unless Thou enablest me.” When you do everything that you do because you love Him, you will have joy—deep joy. Even drudgery will give you happiness, for you will have God for company. And if you do whatever you do for Him, He will help you, and He will accept you and your service.

But we are clay. Like Joseph and Mary, we forget. If this happens to you, what then?

If you were once warm and have become cold, remember what made you warm and do it again. Genesis 13:3, 4 tells us what Abraham did just after suffering a spiritual defeat in Egypt. We read that he “journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.”

The process of Abraham’s recovery included his returning to Bethel, a place where he had enjoyed warm fellowship with the Lord.

Every Christian has his Bethel. It may be the crowning of a cock. It may be the hearing of some long-forgotten gospel song. It may be a heavily underlined book. It may be a hilltop. It may be a seminary chapel. For me it’s Newton Hall. The Lord brings back to my mind the memory of that clear night, and the memory of it warms me. And it begins to revive me.

Whatever or wherever it is, go back to your Bethel. Go back whenever you need to. Know the Lord. And continue on to know the Lord.

And if you experience that dark night of the soul that now and again comes to every saint; if, in spite of all, you experience a time of dryness—this need not separate you from God. This is the time when faith counts most. Hold on by faith, not by sight. When you have heard the voice of God, you can endure His silences. Those silences may be necessary to remind you of your dependence upon Him.

When you aren’t sure that you still know Jesus, have the faith to realize that He knows you. Don’t pray only when you feel like it; pray until you feel like it. Sometimes you can only go through the motions of your devotions. Never mind. The Lord accepts it. Feelings are God’s to give; faith is yours to exercise. The righteous shall live by faith, not by feeling.

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (KJV).

*Unless otherwise noted, Bible texts in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.

2 Ibid., p. 32.
Can we accept the gospel without accepting our brothers and sisters of different classes, castes, or colors?

Ever since the Tower of Babel, confusion in faith has led to division in fellowship. Around the world, society is divided into factions of rich and poor, Black and White, male and female, according to distinctions of race, class, gender, and social status. It doesn't take a theologian to recognize that this was never God's will for the church; nor does it take a historian to know that the church has not been immune to the disease of discrimination.

It is said that the young Gandhi was impressed by the teachings of Jesus and went to a church in hopes of learning more about the Carpenter of Nazareth. But he was met at the door and informed that the church was for Whites only. At this point he turned his back forever, not only on that church but upon a profession of Christianity. Whether or not this incident actually took place, the story illustrates a very real historical problem in the Christian church. The Christ with a seamless robe has seen His body fragmented by a thousand petty distinctions. Though Paul taught that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal. 3:28), it has become a proverb in the United States that the 11:00 worship hour is the most segregated hour of the week. Unfortunately, God's people have often been the "tail" and not the "head"—a reflection of society rather than an agent for change.

Part of the problem might be our misunderstanding of justification by faith. Popular preaching often neglects to point out the social context in which Paul preached his message, and thus fails to bring home the practical implications for human fellowship. Whereas for Paul the gospel was the breaking down of the "dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14) between peoples and bringing them together to form a living temple (an object lesson of God's grace), modern preaching emphasizes almost entirely the "vertical" and personal aspects of the gospel, leaving out entirely its social ramifications.

The crux of Paul's gospel

In Paul Among Jews and Gentiles Kris ter Stendahl points out that Western theology from Augustine to Luther has interpreted justification by faith in terms of a crisis in conscience. Paul, however, directed his preaching to a crisis in community: tension between Jew and Gentile. Both Romans and Galatians, the key New Testament works on this subject, reflect this tension. For Paul, justification by faith was not just a theory for contemplation or a balm for a guilty conscience; it was the constitution of a community.

After its terse, emotional introduction, the book of Galatians does not move into an objective account of Paul's theology, but a personal account of Paul's testimony. This short autobiography climaxes in the event that sets the tone for the entire letter: his confrontation with Peter (Gal. 2:11-14). Paul's dispute with Peter is crucial to our understanding of this Epistle, and even, to a great extent, our appreciation of justification by faith. Peter had not preached a false gospel, yet his actions were tantamount to just that. Peter's sin was that he
“drew back” and “separated himself” (verse 12), fearing the circumcision faction. Jews had strict rules to regulate their association with Gentiles, and maybe Peter did not want to appear as if he was lowering the standard. (He must have forgotten that one of the charges leveled against Christ was that He “receives sinners and eats with them” [Luke 15:2].) Paul accused Peter of hypocrisy, for his actions were motivated not by conviction but by coercion.

This incident sets the stage for the rest of the Epistle. Paul’s gospel is not delivered as an objective theoretical discourse, but in the context of the drama of human relationships. “But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners [i.e., behaving like Gentiles], is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor” (verses 17, 18). The real sin, Paul says, is building “up again those things which I tore down,” or in other words, building the “dividing wall of hostility” between people for whom Christ died (cf. Eph. 2:13). Orthodoxy should not be measured by words alone. Peter’s actions spoke louder than his words, and his doctrine was measured by his deeds.

The central issue in the rest of the book of Galatians revolves around circumcision—the mark of distinction between Jew and Gentile. Circumcision is no longer relevant because “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Abraham’s offspring are spiritually defined, by faith in Christ (verse 29). Paul summarizes his message in chapter 6 by saying, “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God” (verses 15, 16). Often the term “new creation” is applied to individual believers as preachers emphasize the new birth. I believe Paul had a broader application for this term as it is used in the context of his Epistle. The Israel of God is the new creation: “all who walk by this rule.”

The book of Romans can also be looked upon as Paul’s defense of the Gentiles as coheirs of Abraham. In a book with few obvious literary divisions, the most obvious break occurs at the end of chapter 11, which ends with a “doxology” and an “Amen.” Chapter 12 begins with “I appeal to you therefore . . .” and goes on to give the practical applications of Paul’s gospel. Chapters 9 to 11, in which Paul discusses the spiritual nature of Israel, the human manifestation of God’s saving acts in Christ, are the climax of the book.

Had more attention been paid to the corporate concerns of Paul, church history would have been radically different. For instance, the discussions of election and predestination that divided the church for centuries would have been far different had they been based less upon a Greek philosophical mind-set and focused more upon the general context in which Paul speaks. Whenever Paul speaks of election and predestination, he is thinking of God’s purpose for His people, and a destiny that cannot be thwarted by the stubborn willfulness of individuals. Thus, though God’s people have failed (Rom. 2:23, 24), the Word of God hasn’t (Rom. 9:6). God’s purpose is being worked out by a remnant, chosen by grace, that includes both Jews and Gentiles.

The corporate context

For Seventh-day Adventists the implications of the corporate context within which Paul preached his message of justification by faith cannot be overstated. We believe that justification by faith is the third angel’s message in victory, or in other words, central to our message and mission to the world. If Jesus’ statement that our love for one another reveals the genuineness of our discipleship (John 13:35) was not enough, Paul’s confrontation with Peter should remind us that our practice speaks louder than our preaching. If the purpose of Paul’s preaching was to break down the walls of hostility among human castes and to raise up a living temple, a flesh-and-blood object lesson of God’s grace (Eph. 2:13-18), then we would do well to focus on practical, human relations questions as much as or more than on theological debates.

For instance, to what extent does my local congregation “receive sinners and eat with them”? If imputed righteousness, when stripped of theological jargon, means that God accepts me just as I am for Christ’s sake, and we are to “welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed us” (Rom. 15:7), can we say that we have accepted Paul’s message if we fail to be accepting of others? Many people, especially those who work with troubled people, have told me in dismay that the church is not a place to bring sinners. Is churchgoing an exercise to reaffirm our sense of superior piety, or are we actively reaching out to the social lepers around us?

If in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek,” how long can we be content with a White church on one side of the town and a Black church of like believers on the other side? Church growth theorists like to stress the pragmatic value of missions based upon cultural identities. And language barriers also make cultural churches a necessity. Yet these churches should be regarded as missions: a means and not an end. When we institutionalize ourselves (sometimes up to the conference level) along racial lines, we create a permanent cleavage in the body of Christ. Our practical value as an object lesson of God’s grace is lost, and the spirituality of our people suffers. The broader the range of diversity among the people with whom we associate, the lower the probability that our perception of the gospel will be influenced by one particular cultural bias. And the greater the chance of a richer and fuller spiritual life.

To what extent are we, and our local congregations, breaking down the walls of social barriers and reaching out to all castes and clans? If we are not actively breaking down social barriers, we are, by our complicity, building up that which Christ tore down. These factors may be a more reliable litmus test of our understanding of justification by faith than any theological shibboleth.

I don’t think we are sensitive enough to the miracle of Christ among us and what that means for our mission to the world. As the song says, what the world needs now is love. A demonstration of brotherly love among church members, one that knows no barriers or boundaries, is an irrefutable argument for what we preach. It may not be all that we have to say to the world, but it is the only way that Christ ordained to say it.

I’ve been fortunate enough to look out from the pulpit and see obvious miracles of God’s grace. Where else could we see old and young, rich and poor, Black and White, come together in such intimate fellowship as in the church of God? For without Christ we have nothing in common; yet with Christ we are a family.

*Bible texts in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.
How to brush up on your Greek

Maylan Schurch

With a couple helpful tools it’s not as hard as you think.

Breathes there a Rev. with soul so weak
Who never to himself did speak:
“I’ve got to brush up on my Greek”?
I came to the ministry from another career, and my only exposure to Greek was a 20-week seminar crash course for those who, like me, hadn’t already taken a two-year dose of the language while getting a degree in theology.

It was a good class. My professor was a first-rate linguist and teacher. Though I’m certainly no scholar, by the time I finished her five-month “intensive” I could—at least in the Gospels—hold my own pretty well with my maroon Greek New Testament, and I knew how to use the study tools to ferret out what I didn’t know.

But then came my first church assignment—and what with the weekly scramble for a sermon topic, the phone calls, the visiting, the Bible study groups and prayer meetings, I began to descend the slippery slope down which most Greek students eventually slide. And when I arrived at the bottom I gazed back regretfully at the modest heights I’d reached while in school, when I still knew what kai and de and luo meant.

The idea of scrambling back up that slope didn’t appeal to me—because I thought there were only two routes to the top, and I didn’t like either of them. I assumed that either I had to rely on my interlinear and hope that George Ricker Berry or Alfred Marshall or Jay P. Green always translated correctly, or I had to pry my maroon Greek New Testament and my Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon loose from the shelf behind my desk, blow off the dust, and wearily get to work writing out word-for-word translations.

I was wrong.

There’s a third route—a vastly easier one—you can travel to brush up on your Greek. I warn you, it’s unconventional and it might cause a bit of uneasiness among the purists. But it has brought me to the point where Greek is not only fairly familiar again—it’s actually injecting bright shocks of life into my sermons.

What I’m suggesting works best if at the beginning of the week you already know the basic topic or passage you’ll be preaching on the following weekend. I found that getting back to the Greek was a lot harder when I faced the additional trauma of having to select a passage sometime during the same week I planned to preach it. The further ahead I know my Scripture passage, the more relaxed I am about taking the time for Greek. I’ve gotten into the habit of planning the basic schedule of my sermons a year in advance.

Now, let me tell you what has worked for me as I have tried to brush up on my Greek.

Invest in a couple books

First, I invested in a couple “tools.”

Nobody gives me a sales commission on the Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament (NAGENT), but I firmly assert that this book can be the key to recapturing your Greek. The NAGENT costs around $15, maybe a bit more in some bookstores, but it’s a treasure. It is a small volume, measuring the same dimensions as the Nestle Novum Testa-
mendment Graece but twice as thick. On half its pages it contains the text and apparatus of the twenty-sixth (latest) edition of Nestle, and on the facing pages the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of 1971 with an apparatus containing variants taken from the King James Version (KJV), the English Revised Version (1881), the American Standard Version (1901), the RSV of 1946, and the Catholic edition of the RSV.

So why should you spend $15 on this book?

Picture yourself in bed Sunday night. You've chosen next week's sermon passage, and you want to read yourself to sleep with it. You take your NAGENT and begin to study the RSV.

A word catches your eye. It seems unfamiliar, and you suspect it was translated differently in the KJV. But instead of reaching over and pawing through the books on your nightstand for a KJV, you simply glance at the bottom of the page. Sure enough, you see that the KJV shows a different, perhaps more archaic, word.

All right, what was this word in the original? Again, no need to trek out to your study to get your Greek New Testament. Simply glance across to the facing page of NAGENT. With a little guesswork, together with a shrewd elimination of kai's and honi's and autou's, there's a good chance you'll hit on the word that corresponds to the English.

Do you see how priceless such a tool is? It's not only perfect for bed reading, but delightfully portable for carrying with you in your car.

Now that you've found your Greek word, or at least narrowed it down to two or three possibilities, what do you do for an accurate translation? Do you rear yourself out of bed, pad into your study, wrestle your Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich down from the shelf, and take it back to bed?

Not if you're willing to spend a bit more cash.

If you don't already have one, get a good manual lexicon. (Manual means you can actually hold it in your hand without straining your wrist tendons.) One classic that has been reprinted recently is Abbott-Smith's Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament. It's light and easy to hold, and not only gives you an accurate English translation, but it takes an educated guess at the risky business of tracing word roots. It also informs you—in case you're interested—whether the Greek word you're seeking was used in the Septuagint, and if so, which Hebrew word it was translated from.


Photocopy the Greek text

Next I began the practice of photocopying the Greek text of my sermon passage to make notes on. I use the ma-roon American Bible Society's Greek New Testament for this because the print is larger. After photocopying the page that contains my passage, I tear off the dark edges of the copy and make several more copies of the torn square alone. That way I end up with the Greek passage squarely in the center of a white sheet of paper, with plenty of space on all sides for taking notes. Using the NAGENT and Abbott-Smith, I familiarize myself with the Greek. And when I make an interesting discovery in the text, I circle the Greek word or phrase and make a note in the margin.

For the next several days I continue

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing

When I was in my teens the little Midwestern church I attended met in a schoolhouse, which meant that there was a blackboard at the front of the room. Our pastor must have been fresh out of Greek class, because at a particularly passionate point in one of his sermons he suddenly whirled around, snatched up a piece of chalk, and wrote a word in Greek letters on the board. Gesturing toward the word's ending, he vehemently stressed some truth that I have totally forgotten.

The incident left an unpleasant taste in my mouth. Even though the preacher probably didn't mean it that way, he had given the impression of vaunting his superior knowledge over the rest of us. So I've always been very careful about mentioning Greek in my sermons. I do mention Greek once in a while—but only in passing, and only to add luster to a word or a truth that is already expressed in Scripture. And above all, I do my best to avoid implying that in order to really know what the Bible says one must know Greek.
offers you an opportunity not only to explain the language to your parishioners but to demonstrate how our denomination's beliefs accord with the original Greek. And teaching such a class assures your parishioners and others that just as their surgeons and dentists and lawyers know their subjects on a far deeper level than the layperson, you too have plumbed the depths of our discipline.

Finally, as you instruct your classes, you'll rejoice with them as together you share the tremendous confidence today's Christian can have in the Holy Scriptures, which God has protected so carefully down through the centuries.

I don't think I was ever obsessive about brushing up on my Greek. I didn't forsake my other ministerial duties to concentrate on it. Using the tools I've mentioned, I just let it happen. And it really has come back to me.

1 For bibliographical data, see the box below.
2 This is the lexicon printed in the back of some editions of the maroon American Bible Society's Greek New Testament. It's good, and while it doesn't tell you all that Abbott-Smith does, you might find it a bit easier to use at first. Or you may want the shorter edition of Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich.
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Those lucky PKs

Elaine Cunningham

Parsonage life holds many challenges. But it provides unique privileges as well.

Boy, are we lucky to be preacher's kids," said 13-year-old John and 12-year-old Ruth when we returned from a two-week vacation. The sign on our door said "Welcome back. We love you!"

Fresh-cut flowers on the table; counters loaded with canned goods, homemade bread, and pie; and an overflowing refrigerator were a heartwarming sight.

My children have not always been that enthusiastic about parsonage life. There were times when they didn't want to attend church, but they went. There were times when they didn't want to leave their friends and move to a new pastor, but they moved. And there were even times when they rebelled against authority, but they obeyed. Most of the time, however, they appreciated the privilege of living in a parsonage. I've talked with many ministers' wives and children, and I am convinced that parsonage kids are special. They really are lucky to be preachers' kids.

Special houses

Living in different parsonages is exciting for PKs. We have lived in a variety of houses in our 36 years of being in pastoral ministry.

The first parsonage in which our children lived was an old schoolhouse. The first floor was a chapel, the second our home. When we arrived, the slate chalkboards were still on the walls, but after much remodeling we enjoyed a livable apartment.

One time during the worship service I took my baby upstairs to her crib and found another baby sleeping there. Along with the advantage of not having to bundle up to go to church came the disadvantage of sharing the bed.

At our Florida parsonage we began a practice that we have continued through the years. Since there was no shade around the cement-block house, we decided to plant a tree. Our toddlers helped tramp the dirt around the newly planted seedling. Fifteen years later we drove past the parsonage. What a thrill to discover that our little seedling had become a huge tree that towered over the house, providing much-needed shade.

Since that time we have planted something permanent in each parsonage yard: more trees, rosebushes, tulip bulbs, shrubs, and other perennials. Our children have enjoyed providing beauty for the benefit of future clergy families.

The Lake Placid parsonage was located on a steep hillside above the church. We made a toboggan slide from our house down to the church. John and Ruth fondly remember the speedy trips they took on their way to services. Learning to ice-skate on the nearby lake, they wobbled on double runners while Olympic-bound athletes did their practice routines beside them.

In New Hampshire we lived in an apartment attached to the rear of the church. When I put a roast in the oven it provided tempting aromas in the sanctuary. My husband tried to complete his sermon before people started thinking about their hunger pangs.

From New Hampshire we moved to a five-bedroom, high-ceilinged parsonage...
in Quincy, Massachusetts. Living in close proximity to the Adams mansion, the John Quincy Adams homestead, and all the historic sites in Boston helped our children learn their history lessons.

From Quincy we made the long move to a ranch-style parsonage in Indiana with church fellowship hall beneath. Our children enjoyed the leftovers from potlucks and ate royally for the nine years that we lived there.

Now our kids are gone and the two of us rattle around in a big parsonage near the foothills of the Cascade Mountains. They would love it here. How privileged our children have been. Who else but a preacher’s kid could learn to ice-skate at Lake Placid, learn to ski in New Hampshire, and learn his history firsthand in Massachusetts?

**Learning to serve**

Many opportunities to serve await the preacher’s child. Our children visited shut-ins, cut our patterns for Vacation Bible School, sang in the choir, helped in the nursery, folded bulletins, picked up hymnals, gave up their bedrooms for guest speakers, and helped in many other ways. If we show our children that God’s work is a joy, they will usually feel the same way about it. Perhaps that is why our son is a missionary in Africa today and our daughter is actively serving in her church.

Living in a parsonage seems to develop a good sense of humor in both PKs and their parents.

One day after services our 10-year-old son locked the church door by bolting it on the outside. Walking home to the parsonage up the street, he left us inside visiting with a few people who lingered after the service. When we tried to leave we found ourselves locked inside the church. The only other exit was through a small coal chute in the cellar. Fortunately we were able to get the attention of a man walking past the church. He unlocked the door and released us.

Another time when this same PK was 5 years old, he looked intently at a lady visitor who had a rather conspicuous mustache and loudly announced, “I thought only men had whiskers.” I tried to act like I didn’t know the child.

In a song service that included the hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers,” Ruth sang “leans against the phone” instead of “leads against the foe.” I wondered if she had been brainwashed from living in a parsonage where her mother spent quite a bit of time leaning against the phone.

Yes, PKs are fun to live with. They are lucky when they have parents who have a good sense of humor too.

**Special memories**

In his book Laughter in the Walls Bob Benson poignantly reminds us that after the children are gone our homes will still be crowded with memories. I asked my children to share their childhood memories, especially those related to the fact that they were preacher’s kids.

My daughter reminded me of how much she enjoyed helping to entertain evangelists and missionaries in our home. Sitting around the table with a missionary telling his stories is unforgettable. She also recalled the Christmas gifts we received from our congregations and how we divided gifts of money equally among us.

Ruth also remembers how much she enjoyed Sundays, which we tried to make very special days in the parsonage. After the evening service we regularly relaxed together, enjoying popcorn and table games. Our children looked forward to this family time together.

Camp meetings, conventions, and assemblies were highlights in the lives of our children. They enjoyed meeting other PKs at camp. They participated in Bible quizzing and all the teen activities.

John remembers going for ice-cream cones after Wednesday evening prayer meetings. He recalls our family altar when each one of us took a turn being in charge of devotions for the evening.

I will confess that tears rolled down my cheeks when I read the letters my children wrote. Sometimes I have grumbled about life in the parsonage. Many times I have failed in my role as a pastor’s wife, and I have not always been the ideal mother. But memories my son and daughter shared in their letters erased any small regrets I had about marrying a minister and all my failures. They really feel that they were lucky to be preacher’s kids.

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Religion promotes health

Two articles in the October 1989 Psychology Today reminded me again of the strong link between one's mental state and one's physical health.

The first says that "scientific evidence is beginning to support the biblical axiom that 'a merry heart doeth good like a medicine.'" 1 Adapted from Norman Cousins' book Head First: The Biology of Hope, this article cites research showing that laughter increases the activity of disease-fighting cells and may decrease pain by stimulating the production within the body of endorphins, the body's own morphine.

In effect, "laughter helps the body to provide its own medications."

The second article that caught my eye in this regard links one's spiritual state to one's mental and physical health. It reports, "People high in spirituality ... turned out to score high in psychological health. They also have fewer stress-related symptoms." And it goes so far as to say, "People who feel themselves in touch with God are less likely to get sick — and better able to cope when they do." 2

This article reports the continuing research of Herbert Benson, a Harvard cardiologist. Benson and physiologist Robert Keith Wallace had discovered that transcendental meditation helped people reduce their stress levels.

Suspecting that the Eastern form of meditation that transcendental meditation promoted was not the only way of reducing tension, Benson checked the results of prayer among Christians and Jews — and found that it worked just as well. Simple, repetitive prayers produce what he calls the relaxation response, bringing benefits by reducing hypertension, headaches, and other pain. And prayer offered a significant advantage. The article notes that whereas those who meditated upon a single word or simple phrase tended to drop out because of boredom, "people who used [actual] prayers rather than meaningless phrases ... stayed with the method."

These articles added to the evidence that our religion does more than prepare us for eternal life in a better world than this one. Our religion also offers many benefits to the life we live now — among them, the state of mind most conducive to physical health.

Other biblical directives, if heeded, would contribute to our health also. Paul wrote, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph. 4:26, RSV). When we practice this counsel, we are not only dealing with sin in the proper way, we are improving the psychological environment in which we must live — a factor that affects our physical health.

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Paul also wrote, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" (Rom. 13:8, RSV). Optimum health depends upon the freedom from anxiety that comes from having one's financial situation under control. But Paul's advice probably takes in more than merely monetary matters. Luke records Paul's declaration to Felix, "I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men" (Acts 24:16, RSV). What peace would be ours individually, personally, if we always had a clear conscience, if we owed no one anything in terms of apologies, confessions, or other spiritual, moral, or social obligations!

Jesus' statement that we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven points in this direction as well. The image His words raise speaks of simple lives; of living in the present rather than the future. It speaks of openness; of relationships aboveboard, with problems handled immediately. It speaks of forgiveness freely given; of hurts forgotten. It speaks of the trust, the peace, the security, children feel when they rest themselves in parents who care for them and can provide all their needs.

Full physical restoration will be ours only when the kingdom of glory is established on this earth. But the kingdom of grace is here now. And even now we can know the joy of the more abundant life physically and mentally as well as spiritually. — David C. Jarnes.

2 Stephen Kiesling and T. George Harris, "The Prayer War," Psychology Today, October 1989, pp. 65, 66. This issue of Psychology Today is particularly rich. It contains another article every minister should read – Peter Rutter’s "Sex in the Forbidden Zone" (pp. 34-40).
Where have all the visiting pastors gone?

When I agreed several years ago to conduct a question-and-answer column in the Adventist Review, I expected that I would have a unique window on Adventism via the letters I would receive. I have not been disappointed. Letters on every conceivable subject have come to my desk, and I have found myself seeking solutions to problems complex enough to baffle King Solomon. I feel like a physician with his hand on the pulse of a patient who is sometimes quite ill and at other times in robust health. At least I always hear what "the patient" is thinking—usually expressed in no uncertain terms.

I was prepared for some negativism, since that’s simply the way human beings are—some will always see the worm rather than the apple, and all one can do is speak soothingly to them. I was also prepared for valid criticisms of our church, and I took a solemn vow that I would never evade or fail to be honest with questioners. In general, I have had only one troublesome surprise, a surprise that has left me insecure and baffled. This surprise has come in the form of comments about our pastors.

Over and over, letters come to me telling the same story. This is a typical excerpt: “Our church is literally dying on the vine because the only time we see our pastor is on Sabbath morning. I do not know of one member he has ever visited. My husband was incapacitated for several months last year, and though prayer was offered for him at church services (sometimes by the pastor), not once did the pastor take the time and trouble to visit us. We were discouraged. What a joy it would have been if he had come and read the Bible with us and had a little season of prayer just for us. Am I asking too much? Didn’t the pastors of yesteryear visit the members? If so, what has happened?”

Another correspondent wrote that ‘our pastor’s wife works full-time outside the home and he is the baby-sitter. He makes no secret of this fact; he seems to regard it as a mark of his good fatherhood. But since he is being paid by the church for his full-time services, is it honest for him to take this approach? Laymen in his congregation pay very high babysitting rates. Can you imagine any employer other than the church who would allow a husband to stay home with the children and still pay his salary? He seems to feel that if he fulfills his Sabbath morning duties he is entitled to the rest of the week off.” Unfortunately, this is not an isolated problem. I receive many letters in this vein.

Many people write about their pastor’s dedication to health preservation: “Our last two pastors have shared one strong idea—they are determined to get plenty of exercise via tennis, golf, swimming, and other sports. I would say their health is just about the best protected I have ever known, since neither pastor has ever visited any of the members or taken part in anything but Sabbath morning services.”

The elderly who live in nursing homes or board and care homes, and who either are childless or have children who pay no attention to them, are especially in need of a pastoral visit. The church is the life-line to which they cling. One lady writes: “I have not been able to attend church for several years, and how I long to participate in a Communion service. My heart is hungry for just one brief visit from my pastor. I’d like to talk over with him the great truths of this message, which are so precious to me. But I have given up hope. The only ray of light is the faithful Baptist minister who comes regularly once a month and never fails to speak to every person here in the home regardless of the person’s church affiliation. He assures each one of us of God’s love. The weather is never too inclement for his visit, and he never begs off because he is ‘too busy.’ Why can’t my pastor (whom I have never met) be like that? I should mention that I send in my tithe and offerings through the mail—and at Ingathering time I receive a card reminding me to send my share. Sometimes I don’t feel much like sending it.”

Probably these samples are sufficient. Do you know that not once in the years I have had the column have I received a letter stating that “my pastor visits constantly and keeps the church feeling unified”? I keep hoping I will open an envelope and find that message, but I never do. Perhaps you will say that people who are happy with their pastor don’t take the time to write, but this is not true in other areas of concern. Many people write joyful letters and share with me their happiness over various activities of the church and their appreciation of certain leaders.

And so I must ask you this: Where have all the visiting pastors gone? Has the Seventh-day Adventist ministry become exclusively a platform ministry? If we were talking about only one pastor for an extremely large church, I would understand that the exigencies of time make visiting impossible. But I receive letters from members who belong to churches with a whole staff of pastors, and still no visitation is done. As one correspondent put it: “The pastoral staff are in meetings all the time, as far as I can discover.” Certainly staff meetings are vital to the carrying forward of church work. But should they usurp all the visiting time?

I’m prepared for an avalanche of defensive mail from pastors, but remember, if you know that you put in a reasonable amount of time visiting, you’re not the one I’m writing for. If you’re not a visiting pastor, though, will you think about becoming one? And if any layman happens to read this, and your church has a faithful visiting pastor, will you make my day and send me a letter telling me about him or her? Surely the visiting pastors haven’t completely disappeared from the face of the earth.—Miriam Wood. Mrs. Wood writes the “Dear Miriam” question-and-answer column for the Adventist Review.
A sermon is like a love affair—it’s easier to start one than to end one.

The conclusion of the sermon is usually the hardest part of the sermon to prepare. However, it is also the most important part of the sermon. The lawyer knows that no matter how eloquently he argues his case, if his closing arguments don’t draw forth a positive verdict, he fails. The salesman is well aware that no matter how fluent his presentation, if he doesn’t know how to “close” so as to make a sale, he starves.

We preachers must learn the same lesson. It’s important that the sermon introduction grasp the congregation’s attention. It’s important that the sermon body bring instruction and inspiration. But it’s even more important that the sermon conclusion help listeners decide what action they’re going to take. We must “close” for Christ; we must concentrate on the verdict.

This most important part of the sermon is also the most neglected. Perhaps it’s because we tend to run out of preparation time. Or perhaps we expect the heat of the moment to create the conclusion as we preach it. The Spirit seldom over-rides indolence.

No hard and fast rules

It’s both dangerous and presumptuous to lay down hard and fast rules for preparing effective conclusions. In the first place, there’s room here for individuality. Second, we must not bore our congregations by concluding the same way every time.

Watch the fisherman. If the fish don’t bite on one bait, he tries another. Sometimes he uses a worm and sometimes a fly—it depends on where he’s fishing and what he’s trying to catch. He doesn’t bait his hook with what he happens to like best or is most used to; rather, he uses whatever lands the most fish. We must be as wise in preparing sermon conclusions, varying our techniques when “catching” men and women for Christ.

There are, however, two basic parts that we should quite invariably include, and they should be in their right order. The first part of the conclusion should be a summary of the sermon. The last part ought to be a call to action.

Prepare a summary

If the basic sermon theme and divisions have been thought-provoking, repeating them constitutes a fair summary. But the ideal summary presents the sermon’s basic thoughts in a new way; the congregation gets bored if we re-preach the sermon in the summary. The most interesting summary is a detailed example that illustrates the sermon’s emphasis.

Don’t present any new arguments in the conclusion. To do so is to go contrary to its purpose, which is to recapitulate and apply the arguments or ideas already given. Thus, you will generally need only a few sentences in the summary portion of the conclusion.

Solomon didn’t have preaching directly in mind, but he gave excellent homiletical advice when he said, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter” (Eccl. 12:13). Too many conclusions unintentionally summarize only the last portion of the sermon body. You can drive your point deeper home if your summary pulls together your whole sermon.

Let’s liken the sermon to a landscape painting and each division of the sermon body to an object in the painting—the tree, the cloud, the road, the horizon. When you stand up to preach, you have the entire picture in mind. You begin, in word pictures, to paint it for your congregation. To you the picture seems so clear, so simple. Surely everybody must see it. But many don’t. You are most fortunate if the majority see the separate parts—the tree, cloud, road, and horizon. In your summary, often for the first time, worshipers see how the individual parts of the sermon fit together. Only as you summarize do they see the full picture. And that’s why a well-prepared summary is so essential!

Include a call to action

The sermon summary reviews and informs. The call to action challenges each listener to act on that information. The summary instructs the mind. The call to action confronts the will. A discourse is not really a sermon at all unless it does both.

Ring Lardner, describing life in a certain expensive hotel, noted, “Everybody puts on their evening clothes like something was going to happen, but it don’t.” Too many worship services, too many sermons, put on all the external trappings as though something was really going to happen—but it doesn’t.

Let’s always preach so that people will not only believe something—let’s preach so that when they believe, they will do something. Let’s always call for action!
Diet and the brain

Bernell E. Baldwin

The human brain used to be regarded as a black box—an isolated organ hiding in a protective bony cage. Now it is known as a user-friendly, living computer.

Among the many inputs that can alter this living computer is diet. In regions of the world where babies don’t get enough to eat, the number of cells in the brain is decreased and the amount of brain DNA can be deficient as a result of diet deficiencies either before birth or during lactation or childhood.

Nor is that all. From cellular biology we know that brain cells synthesize RNA from DNA patterns. Part of this process is called transcription. The capacity for transcription is permanently damaged when the diet is deficient during early development. Early malnutrition diminishes the number of brain cells permanently. Later malnutrition cuts down the size of brain cells.

And the so-called developed world is not immune to this terrible handicap. It can be seen in the ghetto, in children of alcoholic mothers, and in other more isolated settings. Nutrition makes a difference in building the brain.

Malnourished children often suffer from a broad range of deficiency. They demonstrate poor motor control, they are lethargic, and they do not even play normally. Some are difficult to arouse.

Frequently they are withdrawn, and their social responsiveness is low. Severe malnourishment also hinders the development of language abilities. Unfortunately, malnourished children may not catch up to normal children; rather, in time they may fall farther and farther behind.

Fortunately, most malnourished babies respond well—even if they do not reach the heights of achievement they could have without this developmental trauma—if they are cared for early with a program of nutrition and emotional, social, and spiritual nurturance. One of the earliest signs of hope is the child’s emergence from apathy, when he or she becomes interested in his or her environment.

Nutrition and brain function

The human brain is so active that about 18 percent of the oxygen we use at rest is needed just to keep it going. Not only is the brain busy; it is very fussy about its fuel. Other parts of the body, including the heart, can burn fat, protein, and carbohydrate. But the brain requires carbohydrate almost exclusively—and plenty of it, delivered steadily by open arteries.

Of all the organs in the body, the brain is most vulnerable to glucose deficiency. The ideal way to get this energy fuel is from fruits, whole grains, and vegetables—from complex carbohydrate, as it is called. But large amounts of sugar in the diet can cause problems for the brain.

When 46 five-year-old boys were studied for sustained attention, the boys whose diets contained relatively little sugar focused their attention longer and responded more accurately than those who ate more sugar. On the average the high-sugar group obtained 26 percent of their daily calories from sugar; the low-sugar group averaged 12 percent. Protein and fat consumption were the same. The average IQ of the two groups was the same (116), and the parents came from similar backgrounds—all having completed more than two years of college.

The differences in the boys’ performance in sustained attention and ability to distinguish pictures of similar and different animals were statistically significant and corresponded to about one letter grade in school performance.

Too much sugar seems to shoot the blood sugar too high, then nosedive it too low, too soon. This makes for an unreliable fuel supply for the brain, something like having a problem with the fuel pump in a car. Thus it leads to unreliable performance.

Diet and maintenance of the brain

All body parts are dynamic, and the brain is no exception. It needs a balanced variety of vitamins, minerals, proteins, fats, and carbohydrates to perform optimally. Moderation in supply and appropriate care in food quality can make a difference. Neurotransmitters are chemicals that carry messages across the synapse, the tiny gap between nerve cells. The brain synthesizes many essential neurotransmitter substances out of amino acids. If these raw materials are missing, the brain may lack some of these important trigger molecules.

Excess saturated fat is almost as hard on our body’s computer as it is on our hearts. Vital membranes of the brain, including those at the synapses, become too stiff and rigid. Unsaturated fat, as from vegetables, seeds, nuts, and greens, brings a desirable fluidity to nerve cells.
Secondhand foods (animal as opposed to vegetable products) tend to depress the function of the top of the brain.

This could help the circuits of the brain to be more flexible and "teachable."

Too much cholesterol can also be a problem. Fish oils are not as valuable as previously thought in alleviating this problem because their cholesterols contain cholesterols, diverse chemicals, and possibly viruses. Unfortunately they also create a tendency toward more bleeding problems, as is seen in Eskimos.

There is also a breakdown product of fish oil called malondialdehyde, a cancer-forming substance noticeably higher in people on a fish- or marine-oil diet. This may help explain the elevated cancer incidence in some maritime populations. It is wiser to get the omega-3 fat from vegetable sources like greens, walnuts, soy oil, and oil of flax, instead of secondhand from fish.

The problem of false neurotransmitters

Normal neurotransmitters save much electrical energy of the brain and body. False or counterfeit neurotransmitters confuse the cells by making chemical static, or noise, which can make discrimination almost impossible.

Some people using certain mood-elevating drugs can accumulate a lot of tryptamine, one of these false neurotransmitters, when they consume meats, certain cheeses, wines, or rich foods, because the drug blocks the destruction of tryptamine. This buildup can result in a life-threatening crisis of high blood pressure. Large, rich meals, especially late at night, can generate too much tryptamine. Since tryptamine is a counterfeiter noradrenaline, it can occupy the receptors for the normal neurotransmitter, and hence exaggerate noradrenaline effects anywhere in the body, including the brain.9

Another false neurotransmitter is tryptamine. It can be produced in the bowel by the untimely alteration of a normal amino acid, tryptophan. This false neurotransmitter is counterfeit serotonin, which has been implicated in bad dreams, abnormal vision, and imperception.

Another influence of diet on the brain is highlighted by Russian research on dogs.7 One meal of meat markedly increases the ketosteroids (stress hormones) compared to a comparable diet of bread or milk. The blood-brain-barrier system of the brain, which prevents passage of large molecules to the higher centers of the brain, does not protect the endocrine glands of the brain or the fluid-secreting choroid plexus. Thus, dietary and body chemicals, such as by-products from meat, can get a chemical beachhead in the brain. The Russian experiments help explain why many people claim that a big steak stimulates them. Unfortunately this is a false chemical stimulus. It occurs in the bottom of the brain, gaining access to the lower centers because the blood-brain-barrier system does not afford protection.

The functions of the brain are organized with the highest mental and spiritual functions centralized in the top of the brain (the cortex) and the lowest or animal functions concentrated in the bottom of the brain. The bottom gets the brunt of irritation, both directly by chemicals and indirectly via the nerves from the stomach and internal organs.

Blood bathes the brain continuously. If this perfusing blood is contaminated by irritating chemicals from meat, especially highly seasoned meat, the balance of power in the brain can be shifted to the bottom, or to the animal nature.

Another problem of secondhand foods (animal as opposed to vegetable products) is that they tend to depress the function of the top of the brain. One of the most widely studied neurotransmitters is acetylcholine. Breakdown products of proteins slow the synthesis of acetylcholine in the brain.8 Adenosine, a breakdown product of DNA, can decrease the firing of cortical nerve cells. At higher concentrations the firing almost stops.9

Arachidonic acid, a fatty acid that is common in meat and rich diets, can deplete acetylcholine from nerve cells in the cortex of the brain.10 This fatty acid inhibits the synthesis and storage of this nerve neurotransmitter, so important for the best function of the cortex of the brain.

The original diet

When we survey brain chemistry,11 our minds are drawn to the diet God originally gave to our first ancestors. God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food." ... "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen. 1:29-31). After our first parents left the garden, further direction was given: "And you will eat the plants of the field" (Gen. 3:18). This is the diet originally given to man—fruits, grains, nuts, and vegetables in primal profusion.

No wonder Daniel thrived on it. From the very beginning of his long career in Babylon he requested, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink" (Dan. 1:12). He had a neurochemical advantage. When this was combined with total cooperation with the Holy Spirit, the results were to be wondered at.

When the children of Israel were in that great field school in the desert, God gave them manna, "bread from heaven," to eat. This food was well designed to foster mental superiority and spiritual excellence. But they rebelled. "They soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel. In the desert they gave in to their cravings; in the wasteland they put God to the test. So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them" (Ps. 106:13-15).

A meat diet would tend toward insubordination. God guided His people to a land flowing with milk and honey, well designed for an excellent environment and a splendid diet. Instead of following God, His people followed the nations around them—and the result was "a wasting disease."

It may be observed that the original diet is the best for the heart, best for the arteries, best for preventing cancer, and best for the brain. Paul reminds us, "Now these things occurred as examples, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did" (1 Cor. 10:6).

How to change

Wherever we live, we should grow step by step into using the best of the foods available to us, foods that will nourish a better life for our hearts, our bodies, and our brains.
Start now to eat a diet more like that of Eden. This will overcome evil with good. Your cholesterol level will come down. If you move gradually into a vegetarian diet, you can prevent the letdown. Exercise will help you make and maintain a new start of the rest of your life will multiply the buoyancy you feel.

Soon your understanding of God’s Word will sharpen. Your attitudes will be easier to mold. Your prayers will become easier to mold. Your prayers will become more frequent. And drinking plenty of water and breathing fresh air deeply as you stride out into a new start of the rest of your life will multiply the buoyancy you feel.

Soon your understanding of God’s Word will sharpen. Your attitudes will be easier to mold. Your prayers will become less formal and more effective. Your creativity will increase. After all, didn’t the Creator and Designer of the human brain know its best fuel, its best food?


New program on Flood evidence available

The Geoscience Research Institute (GRI) at Loma Linda University has released through the Ministerial Supply Center a new slide-and-script program providing evidence that supports the biblical account of the Flood.

Evolutionistic scientists had depicted the petrified “forests” found in various places around the world as indicating that life has been on the earth much longer than the biblical account allows for. The layers of upright stumps had seemed to indicate that enough time was needed for a forest to grow to maturity, then be destroyed, and buried, and another forest to develop, be destroyed, and buried, and so forth. The new GRI program details how observation of the aftermath of the volcanic explosion of Mount St. Helens in 1980 has allowed scientists to develop another, more satisfactory account of the formation of these petrified “forests” — an account that doesn’t require long periods of time.

The program, which sells for US$14.50 plus US$2.50 for shipping, consists of fifty 35-millimeter color slides and a script that explains the slides and their implications. Order this program, MSC 4300—"Mount St. Helens and Spirit Lake," from the General Conference Central Departmental Services, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600. Individuals ordering should include a check for the program and the slides. Institutions may order with a purchase order, in which case the cost of shipping will be added to the total. If ordering more than one program, please inquire as to postage; call (301) 680-6508.

Biblio File

From page 29
human tradition replaces even one of them. True freedom is being in harmony with God and His law.

Hart acknowledges destructive compromise in the early church when he points out that the church lost its identity because it lost its mission. It became fashionable to be a Christian, and when that became true the church took on the practices of the pagan world.

In chapter 4 Hart says, “The church handed down laws to barbarian kingdoms and was a tremendous defender of the dignity of the individual.” That may have been the case at times, but history clearly shows the greatest failing of the organized church was its lack of regard for human dignity and freedom. One need only read such historical volumes as Foxe’s Book of Martyrs to see the fallacy in his statement. True Christianity will enhance and uplift the lives of those who accept it. But the church of the Dark Ages was no defender of dignity and freedom.

Hart correctly attributes the increase in government power and the erosion of personal liberty directly to the decline of religion’s moral influence in American society. But while Hart sees clearly the danger of the state being involved in the church, he does not see the danger of the church being involved in government. Power tends to corrupt whether it is in the hands of government or the church. God save us from both!

Whether one totally agrees with Hart or not, this book is well worth reading.
Baker's Textual and Topical Filing System
Neal Punt, Northland Books, Box 42756, Chicago, Illinois, 1989, $49.50, leather bound. Used and recommended by members of the Ministry staff.

Pastors, Bible students, and teachers have been using Baker's Filing System since 1960. In 1989 it is still valued for its simplicity, flexibility, portability, and convenience in quickly locating information. The textual and topical indexes organize all the resource material in your library and filing cabinets. The system is set up and ready to receive your first entry. Those on the Ministry staff who use it find the system invaluable in preparing various kinds of presentations and even for writing articles and papers. The filing system can also be useful in keeping track of personal items such as insurance policies, correspondence, and valuable papers.

The volume is now available in a textured leather cover that makes it pliable, tear resistant, and durable. We recommend Baker's Textual and Topical Filing System for a well-organized ministry. It also makes an especially nice gift.

Abingdon Marriage Manual

More weddings are planned in spring than at any other time of the year. Pastors who like to use a book in conducting wedding services may do so directly from this manual. The last third of the volume contains 50 pages of wedding services for all denominations. The book's quality binding and paper and small size (4 x 6) make it convenient for pulpits.

The first two thirds of the manual offers help for planning a wedding. The contemporary writing recognizes that pastors can be male or female and that couples may request nontraditional vows and other creative features in their services. Biddle does voice his own prejudices against certain wedding practices. He does not recommend the traditional wedding march and recessional because of their original secular use. He does not like secular music, feeling that wedding music should be God-centered and not human-centered. The author suggests making a wedding a complete service of worship with congregational singing, sermon, and even Communion. This helpful manual provides recommendations on many wedding-related subjects and includes a bibliography. Even though I have been marrying couples for nearly 30 years, I liked a number of the suggestions so well that I am going to incorporate them into future weddings.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Meditating on the Word

"Because I am a Christian, therefore, every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God's word in Holy Scripture is a lost day for me. I can only move forward with certainty upon the firm ground of the Word of God. And, as a Christian, I learn to know the Holy Scripture in no other way than by hearing the Word preached and by prayerful meditation," states Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a chapter entitled "Instructions on Daily Meditation." And rare is the person who can speak so experientially on the subject as this famous Christian. He believed that we must read, meditate, and pray to realize the presence and promises of God.

Though published in 1986, this volume is still popular in bookstores. It contains a translation of Bonhoeffer's final, unfinished work—a meditative commentary on Psalm 119. Its depth and beauty is best understood in the context of the author's part in World War II. It was his underground resistance to the Nazi regime that put him into prison and finally to death. One feels the intense importance of the Word to Bonhoeffer in all circumstances.

Gracie does impose some personal commentary on his translation. He attempts to draw parallels between some modern political crises and Bonhoeffer's Germany, but it does not quite come off. There are, of course, innumerable complex modern parallels and one cannot afford to be selective. It is difficult to equate them with the horrible intensity of the Holocaust of which Bonhoeffer was a victim. Bonhoeffer was not a social activist in the contemporary sense.

The volume concludes with an afterward by John Vannordsall, which states appropriately, "Laypeople have long known that theological discourse is not deeply satisfying. They have long known that the Bible is a meeting place. Clergy, who are under the pressure of preaching regularly, will read them for that purpose—in spite of Bonhoeffer's insistence that this is not the same as meditation. And perhaps it is clergy who are more fearful of meeting the God about whom they so often speak."

Organizing Your Youth Ministry

Borthwick's experience in youth ministry makes his work credible and valuable. The material is not just for youth pastors but applicable to any pastor.

There are four major sections: "Getting Organized," "Organizing Youth Ministry—Philosophical Foundations," "Organizing Ministry—Nuts and Bolts," and "Evaluation." The introduction is straightforward in stating, "This book won't solve all your youth ministry problems, but it will raise questions and offer answers that should help increase your effectiveness as a youth minister."

Two useful appendices—"Mission Teams as a Tool for Discipling" and "Sunday School Curriculum Sources"—conclude the book.

Confessions of a Preacher's Wife

This diary of a minister's wife covers 32 years of parsonage memories. Spray starts
with her first move and ends with her last into retirement. The reader feels with the author as Spray graphically relates her experiences. Her courage and trust in God will inspire and encourage women in ministry.

A quotation by Emmelyn Helsei summarizes the book well: “With them we review God’s workings in our past. From that heritage we gain fresh courage and greater faith to believe that whatever the future holds God will see us through.”

The Minister’s Annual Manual Nineteen Eighty-Nine to Nineteen Ninety: Preaching and Worship Planning
Compiled and edited by Lois and Manfred Holck, Jr., Church Management, Inc., P.O. Box 162527, Austin, Texas, 1989, 482 pages, $14.95. Reviewed by Steve Wilsey, pastor, Capital Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church, Washington, D.C.

Most pastors of so-called free churches rarely discover the freedom of lectionary preaching. I decided to try it out with the 1989-1990 Minister’s Annual Manual. I discovered that rather than stifling creativity, it opened opportunities I had never before experienced. The lectionary provides coordinated Old Testament and New Testament passages and a gospel lesson repeated on a three-year cycle. The pastor is free to concentrate on the sermon rather than spend hours deciding on a text. You can set your schedule a year or more in advance and give your musicians time to plan music that will suit your themes.

The Manual provides help for the worship service, including a sermon kernel built around the lectionary selections for the day. A children’s story uses the same theme as the sermon. I have particularly found these stories fun, and plan to keep using them.

The weekly helps contain the call to worship, numerous prayer selections, hymns (including the story behind the hymn), and a sermon title. I envy pastors who can create titles that compel even the most wary to attend church. My titles would not catch anyone’s attention. This manual is worth its small price for the titles alone! The manual also contains sermons contributed by dozens of pastors, including illustrations easily adaptable to your own outline and style.

I would suggest you not ignore the lectionary and the Annual Manual even if your tradition is “free.” You don’t need to follow the prepared texts all year. You might want to use them just between Advent and Easter. For myself, the manual has given me a freedom I’ve not known before.

It’s Always Too Soon to Quit

Almost all pastors and lay members come to a point in their church relationship when they feel like giving up. Timberlake says, “It’s always too soon to quit!”

Timberlake’s “two truths to live by” — “It’s always too soon to quit!” and “Failure is never final”—are the theme of this volume. It is not failure that causes despair, but how we fail. A five-part recipe describing how to fail gives some valuable advice. Stories illustrate the author’s concepts. Many of the stories are about prominent people with whom readers will identify.

Pastors can use this book well for personal motivation. It is also an excellent source for sermon ideas and stories that will appeal to youth.

Zig Zigler, a well-known master at motivation, highly recommends It’s Always Too Soon to Quit! I fully agree with his glowing evaluation. I use the book frequently for personal encouragement and inspiration.

Is Your God Real?
Timothy E. Crosby, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland, 1988, 143 pages, $6.95, paper. Reviewed by Mel H. M. Matinji, former evangelist and now a theology student at Solusi College, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Africa.

Can we prove God’s existence through laboratory experiments? If not, then why do we believe He exists? In light of the increasingly secular mind-set of contemporary society, Crosby attempts to demonstrate the reasonableness of belief in God and His Word and provide answers to objections to Christianity.

There are 10 chapters with provocative titles such as “God’s Nature: What Is He Like?” and “God’s Plan: How Could a Good God Allow Evil?”

The author discusses various opinions advanced by agnostics and atheists about God’s existence. He also mentions philosophies that offer inadequate proof. Other chapters talk about God’s righteousness, law, theodicy, and the existence of evil.

What about the Bible? How can it be a reliable revelation of God when critics find errors in its narratives? In answering these troubling questions, Crosby summons both scriptural and historical evidence to show the reliability of the Word.

The last half of the book deals with inspiration, a topic of importance to Adventists, other Christians, and secularists. How should a prophet operate? How about Adventism’s Ellen White? Crosby makes comparisons between the work of the Old and New Testament prophets and that of Ellen White.

Is Your God Real? inspires faith in God and His Word. It is written clearly and simply and will interest both theologians and laypersons. It is good news to the perplexed.

Faith and Freedom: The Christian Roots of American Liberty

Hart is currently with the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., where he is director of lectures and seminars. Hart believes that America is in an identity crisis because “its past is being obliterated by revisionist historians and modern prejudices.” Why? He feels that educators are promoting the “myth that religious faith—and Christianity in particular—is incompatible with freedom for all people.” He strives to show that faith and freedom must go together for either to survive.

Hart shows how many of the benefits we enjoy are of Puritan origin. Some of these benefits are “written constitutions, regular elections, the secret ballot, and even separation of church and state.”

Hart brings out the importance of the Ten Commandments; but in doing so, he points to the “Christian Sabbath” as playing a role in government. Obviously there is no new “Christian Sabbath” mentioned in the Ten Commandments. One wonders if there would be a higher level of faith and freedom today if the Sabbath commandment as given by God Himself had been kept. All divine commandments are underlined when (Continued on page 27)
Wedding ideas

Finally it's here! During the past year we have asked our readers to contribute their ideas on the wedding service—special touches they add, ways of handling difficult situations, etc. We've sorted through the submissions we received and selected some that we think are of particular interest. Hope you find some ideas you can use!

Helping the couple plan

Some couples who come asking to be married do not have any ideas as to what they want in the service. If you or your church has a computer, keep a complete service (or several) in a file on a floppy disk. It is quite easy to use the "Find and Replace" feature of your word processor to substitute the names of the couple and their attendants for those in the original service. Then you can give the couple a printout of everything that will be said and done at the service. They can take it home, study it, and later give you any changes they desire. (I include my sermon with this—the couple knows what I will say and are not worried that I will unduly embarrass them with something!)

Knowing in advance everything that is going to take place often removes needless anxiety from the two most important people at the service—not to mention from the pastor!—J.R.L. Astleford, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

At the practice

Thrusting human beings into unaccustomed roles under emotional tension increases the likelihood of the unexpected happening—particularly if small children are involved. Such happenings can be very embarrassing at the moment. If the wedding party is not prepared for such eventualities, anger, frustration, or confusion can result. Brides can be reduced to tears. At the rehearsal, I always tell the wedding party that such things can occur, urging them to go right on with the ceremony despite the unexpected. Even though these unplanned events may be embar- rassing at the moment, such events will be the very things they will laugh about and tell their friends in the days ahead.

Case in point: I had a formal wedding in a small church 35 miles from Omaha, Nebraska. Less than an hour before the wedding the five men who were to be dressed in tuxedos found that the rental shop had failed to include shirt studs with any of the suits. Each outfit required seven studs. The only answer—I used my office stapler to staple each man into his tux. Yes, it was embarrassing at the time. But after 25 years the couple still roars with laughter as they tell of their wedding with the men stapled securely into their suits.—Lloyd Taylor, retired minister, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Edmond, Oklahoma.

Married by marrieds

A few weeks ago we performed our first wedding. Since we wanted it to be remembered and very personal for the couple getting married, we thought it would be nice for us to participate in the service side by side. We entered the sanctuary from the back, walked down the aisle, and waited for the groom and then the bride to enter. During the sermon both of us addressed the couple, Denis speaking to the groom and Kris to the bride. We alternated our comments throughout the sermon, modeling our approach on marriage enrichment seminars in which a husband-and-wife team shares speaking to the participating couples.

All the feedback we received was very positive. People expressed delight over the uniqueness and appropriateness of this joint approach of the ministerial couple to a wedding service. —Denis and Kris Fortin, Quebec City Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ste-Brigitte-de-Laval, Quebec, Canada.

Personalizing the sermon

To personalize a wedding service, I ask the soon-to-be bride and groom individually to write down their responses to three items. I request a list of 10 indications that this is the time to marry. This list helps the couple recall the growth of their relationship and provides the basis for the wedding message. Next I ask for 12 reasons why this is the person to marry. This list affirms the prospective partner and leads to creative wedding vows. These vows stress the qualities each most admires in the other. Finally, I want to know how they want their service to be remembered by those in attendance. This alerts me to any special impressions the couple desires to leave with their particular families and friends. —Gregory Clark, pastor, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Mira Loma, California.

■ In a recent wedding I planned a special "surprise gift" for the bride and groom. It was a surprise in that they did not know about it until it actually happened. The gift was a collection of memories submitted by close family members.

Well in advance of the wedding I asked family members to write a brief paragraph about some incident that demonstrated what made the bride and/or groom special people to them. When I had collected these "testimonies," I sorted and edited them. My reading of these intangible gifts of love to the couple just before the wedding meditation provided a touching moment in the ceremony. During the reception I presented the testimonies to the couple in printed form.—Hans Varner, Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Variations on "giving" the bride

When the couple getting married and their parents are willing, I have both sets of parents "give away" both the bride and groom. The bride's father escorts the bride to the altar. Then he returns to his wife, and they and the other parents walk to the altar together. At this point I ask, "Who gives this couple away?" Upon their response of "We do," I ask, "Do you promise to release your children and pray for them as they establish a new home?" After they again say, "We do," they return to their seats and we proceed with the cer-
emony as usual. —Larry Pillow, pastor, Second Baptist Church, Conway, Arkansas.

With the following procedure I eliminate the frequently used giving away of the bride: After the father escorts the bride down the aisle, he is seated with his wife. Before the exchange of marriage vows the minister asks the parents of the bride to stand and then asks, "Will you accept ______ (groom) into your family fellowship and love him as one of your own?" Then the minister asks the parents of the groom to stand and respond to the same question. The bride and groom can then go to their parents and exchange appropriate greetings. —Merle Silvis, retired United Methodist minister, Williamsburg, Virginia.

After my premarital counseling sessions, most of the couples who have come to me to be wed have decided that rather than having the parents "give" someone away, they want them to add a blessing to their marriage. In place of "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" I use the following questions:

Minister: "From whose home does ______ (bride's name) come to join in this marriage?"

Bride's parents (or other family members): "From our home."

Minister: "You, her parents, have nurtured her in her infancy and guided her in her youth. Your love has surrounded her and your prayers have sustained her. It has been your highest joy to prepare her to step from your home to her own. Giving thanks to God for your daughter, do you add your blessing to her marriage and pray that God may dwell in her home?"

Bride's parents: "We do."

I then turn to the groom's parents and ask the identical questions. —Dan Tohline, United Methodist minister, Jonesboro, Louisiana.

Involving the congregation

Unless some form of the Lord's Prayer has already been used in the ceremony, immediately following the pastoral prayer and preceding the benediction I invite all present to join in saying that prayer together. This practice allows everyone to "bless" the couple. —Bob McIntyre, pastor, United Methodist Church, Hendersonville, North Carolina.

To involve all who attend, you may use a hymn or a printed prayer. —Merle Silvis, retired United Methodist minister, Williamsburg, Virginia.

When there are children

In the event that either the bride or the groom has children who will become part of the new home, I include them in the wedding service. Addressing the family, I say, "We are here to witness, encourage, and support the marriage of ______ and ______, but we are also here to witness the creation of a new family. We are here to affirm and to support the desire of these two people to provide a home for ______ (names of children); to provide a place where ______ (children) might find security, warmth, love, and the challenges that will help them grow and mature. Do you take this newly created family as your own, loving and caring for them?" Response: "We do!" You may have the bride, groom, and children form a circle as or after they respond. —Edward Kolbe, First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Corvallis, Oregon.

Mementos of the service

The computer wizards in my church have the wedding ceremony I use in their system. When there is to be a wedding, I call them and give them the names of the bride and groom and the wedding date. They then print out the ceremony, complete with the proper names, and spiral-bind it. We give it to the couple after the wedding. —Max R. Hickerson, Community Christian Church, Sunnyvale, California.

To provide the bride and groom with mementos they will cherish from their wedding day, you might insert a blank slip of paper with a pretty border into the program. Either on the paper or on the program make the following suggestion: "We invite you to share a word of encouragement, helpful advice, or a special Bible verse with the bride and groom as they begin their new home together. Please place in the baskets provided at the back of the church." The newlyweds can read these love notes from all their friends for years afterward—perhaps on every anniversary. —Gerita Liebelt, Alexandria, Indiana.

After the wedding

A recurring frustration at weddings involves the receiving line. Most people want to congratulate the bride and groom, but feel uneasy at best greeting the bridesmaids and grooms—whom they seldom know. At a recent wedding I saw a unique change that I found delightful. Rather than having ushers direct people's exit, the bridal couple did it themselves. This allowed everyone to congratulate them without going through the entire receiving line. The guests, of course, were free to visit with those members of the bridal party they knew. —Gary E. Russell, pastor, Dowagiak Seventh-day Adventist Church, Dowagiak, Michigan.

I sometimes send a popular translation of the Bible and a daily devotional guide with my thank-you for the honorarium. This has gone over very well. —Harold Brown, Lely Presbyterian Church, Naples, Florida.

For those on a tight budget

To provide a nice but inexpensive wedding, I once made the ceremony a part of the regular 11:00 church service. We followed the regular order of service through the sermon, which I preached on the Christian home. At the close of the sermon I told the congregation that we were going to witness the beginning of a new home. While appropriate music was played, the bride, groom, and two attendants came to the platform. There I conducted a brief wedding service. After the ceremony, the wedding party left by the center aisle, remaining in the entry hall for the receiving line. We had a potluck for the church members, and the bride and groom furnished the wedding cake and drink. They had also furnished flowers for the church service and for the reception table. The only announcements they sent were to those relatives and friends who were not members of that church.

Not only did this ceremony provide an inexpensive wedding for the couple, but the congregation enjoyed it as well. —George Gainer, Sr., retired Seventh-day Adventist minister, New Market, Virginia.

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This itinerary includes 8 hours of class instruction and the equivalent of 6 full days of touring. It offers 4 units of continuing education credit.

Actually live in the heart of Jerusalem, minutes from the Ancient Wall and Gethsemane—comfortable accommodations in the newly refurbished Jerusalem Center Hostel—advantages of a small group with participants limited to 30.

Cost includes instruction, housing, meals, excursions (fares and entry fees), and transfers. Excludes airfares in and out of Israel.

18-DAY ITINERARY
September 9-27, 1990
Do all of what is included in the 10-day itinerary plus—
- Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments and the pyramids at Giza.
- Walk from Bethany over the Mount of Olives to Gethsemane.
- Visit the Shrine of the Book, the Hebrew University and Rockefeller museums.
- See Ophel, the City of David, the Jebusite waterworks, and the Pool of Siloam.
- Climb the slopes of Mount Tabor, see Mount Hermon and walk over Mount Carmel.
- Visit the monument to the Holocaust and see Chagall's stained-glass windows.
- See all the coastal regions from Ashkelon in the south to Acre in the north.

COST: $975
This itinerary includes 18 hours of class instruction and the equivalent of 13 days of touring. It offers 7 units of continuing education credit.

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