**Youth ministry**

Sandra Doran ("Youth Ministry in the Nineties," March 1994) quotes Rod Robertson, "Peer influence is the largest factor shaping our kids' lives today." I agree. The church supports this trend and deliberately follows the world by putting children and youth in peer groups just as the school systems do. These groups are totally unnatural. God puts people into families. The family is the best group to belong to so that one grows into a mature individual. By contrast, peer grouping produces peer dependency because peers don't develop individual responsibility, only group mentality. Parents and other family adults have the capacity to produce mature adults.

In my spiritual growth as a child and youth I was affected most positively by mature adult and older Christians, not by my peers, who in fact affected me negatively. (None are Christians today.) We had a very effective youth ministry in our church that followed Doran's 10 points.

For the problems youth face today, youth groups are not the answer. Youth incorporated into the life of the body of Christ is the way to minister to youth. Doran's 10 principles have to do with the priesthood of all believers. Apply them to the family, and God will have the freedom and we will have His grace to develop mature adults. Apply them to the youth group, and you will produce peer dependency.—Gregory Brien, Bungendore, New South Wales, Australia.

**Preach with power**

Leslie Pollard's call to "preach with power" (March 1994) pricked my consciousness about my preparation and delivery of sermons.

One of the reasons a preacher has difficulty preaching with power is that the congregation has become so incredulous of the pulpit that the message and the messenger have become inseparable. When members discover very human foibles in the person, the preacher experiences a power failure. There may be nothing wrong with the source (God and the preacher) or the medium of conductivity (Holy Spirit). Yet the receivers (congregation) cut back on the current before feeling the full impact of the surge, in a large part because they reduce the pastor to flesh and bones. Both lose.

Preachers must realize that they are not at liberty to exhibit a quick temper, fly off the handle, or speak before thinking carefully. The case of Moses striking the rock and its consequence show that a higher standard still exists for leadership.

Beyond being faithful to one's word, beyond demonstrating love through family relationship, beyond being fair to all, beyond being attentive to personal appearance, preachers must ensure that members have a positive perception of them, if they are to preach with power.—Danny R. Chandler, Madison, Mississippi.

**Ministry and church growth**

Eugene Durand's review of John MacArthur's book *Ashamed of the Gospel* (June 1994) refers to the church growth movement and certain ministries associated with it. If these men had visited the churches they inveigh against, their stance would be moderated.

One illustration is the statement that the church growth movement is committed to "give them what they want." They contend that, the "goal is becoming church attendance . . . rather than a transformed life." Quite to the contrary, one megachurch has a weekend attendance of 20,000-plus but an actual book membership of around 25 percent of that. In this church, membership requirements are too high for the curiosity seeker. They include evidence of regeneration, a commitment of time to the ministry of the church, and a requirement to return both tithes and offerings. Members must "rejoin" every 12 months through a signed covenant. Such demands are not made of practicing Adventists!

Indeed, the requirements for active membership in some megachurches far exceed those of our churches.

Would Durand suggest we make our churches more "user-unfriendly"? This attitude is already widespread among many North American churches. Hurt members are leaving at unprecedented rates, and our evangelistic growth is minuscule.

*Ashamed of the Gospel* is a book well worth reading by ministers attempting to implement church growth theories in any denomination. MacArthur has produced a valuable critique. But Durand need not fear that Adventism will adopt church growth principles. The bulk of our members are too busy arguing pet theological theories and maintaining a club atmosphere. We have fallen into the satanic trap of living for ourselves and talking to ourselves while the world beyond is about to perish.—Eoin Giller, Tri-City Ministries, Albany, New York.

**When life goes up and down**

Kristen Ingram (March 1994) echoes the attitude I so often see in fellow ministers: too much to do; no time for self; too much pressure; oh, for retirement.

I have been in the ministry for 50 years. My wife and I have had to work at least two jobs each to keep our kids in Adventist schools. Talk about pressure!

Only since retiring have I been able to minister "full-time." I still preach and speak at seminars. Jesus did not promise His disciples an easy life. Quite the opposite. He promised a demanding, trying life.—Felix A. Lorenz, Jr., Northville, Michigan.

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 minister's shortcomings simply cannot be concealed. Even the most trivial got known... However trifling offenses, these little things seem great to others, since everyone measures sin, not by the size of the offense, but by the standing of the sinner." This quotation is not from any recent article on pastoral ethics in a minister's journal or from a minister's manual, but rather from John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407), who as pastor and bishop of Constantinople often spoke against any loosening of standards among the clergy.

In no area is the minister's life so carefully watched as in the area of relationship with the opposite sex. Ministry this month deals with the theme, "Ministry and sexuality." Len McMillan's (p. 17) statistics and arguments make a compelling case.

We also present other issues related to the problem. David Reid (p. 6), a Baptist pastor, writes candidly of his own failed marriage. Robert Johnston (p. 14) explores the meaning of "unfaithfulness to the marriage vow" and draws some vital conclusions for the personal and the professional responsibilities of an Adventist pastor. Marie Dickson (p. 20) writes movingly on the cost of unfaithfulness. There are more.

The series on preaching continues with Ingo Sorke's sparkling exposition (p. 24) on walking with the Shepherd who after all can keep us from falling until that final day.
Outdoing in showing honor

Esther F. Ramharacksingh Knott

Experience had taught me to call ahead. The telephone rang two times. “Hello, Brady* here.” We had never met. His wife had made the appointment.

“Hello, Mr. Brady, this is Esther Ramharacksingh* from Sligo church. I’m calling to confirm our appointment for this evening. I’ll be there in 10 minutes.”

“A pastor is coming over.”

“Yes, and I’ll be there in 10 minutes.”

Oh, good. Mrs. Brady had told her husband, and they were expecting me.

“A pastor is coming over.”

“That’s right, and I’m about 10 minutes away.”

This repetitious dialogue, in varied forms, continued a few more times, each time with his increasing emphasis on the word “pastor.” Then it dawned on me what was going on. It must have dawned on Mr. Brady about the same time, because his phone hit something hard. And then I heard him loudly prophesying, “No woman pastor is going to visit this house! No woman pastor is coming here!”

After a brief pause Mrs. Brady came to the phone. “My husband isn’t feeling well. Perhaps you could come at another time.” With a cheerful voice and a sad heart I promised to call back to reschedule. I wished I hadn’t called ahead.

O Lord, when will the barriers be broken? How can I reach this family for You? What can I do?

Upon arriving, I realized their building had a security door at the entrance. It was the kind with no buzzers. Someone had to know you were coming. Great! How was I going to get in? I tried the handle. By a miracle of God’s grace the lock hadn’t caught when the last person left. Thank You, Lord. That’s one hurdle down. One more big one to go.

A deep breath, a sigh, and then a firm, confident knock. Mr. Brady opened the door.

“Hello. I’m Esther Ramharacksingh, a pastor at Sligo church. I was supposed to visit your home last night, but your wife said you weren’t feeling well. So I brought you these flowers just to let you know I care.” There, I said it, and all in one breath.

I couldn’t read his strange expression. Maybe I had spoken too fast and he didn’t understand me. But then Mr. Brady smiled. He invited me into his home. That was more than I had prayed for. Inside, I had a wonderful time of fellowship with the family. Mrs. Brady beamed. And when we made a circle and knelt for prayer, Mr. Brady accepted my outstretched hand. I said goodbye with a cheerful voice and a happy heart.

I was glad I had called ahead.

So, what’s the moral of the story? It’s about breaking down barriers and “outdoing one another in showing honor” (see Rom. 12:10, RSV). As a woman working in what has traditionally been a man’s profession, I occasionally face

Comings and Goings

Nancy Canwell, special assistant editor for Ministry, has “retired” from pastoring to raise a family. We thank her for all the excellent counsel she gave us. Taking her place is Esther F. Ramharacksingh Knott, associate pastor of the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland. Esther comes with a rich background in pastoral work and we welcome her to our pages. Her specific role is to help meet the needs of the women pastors in our church.

We also introduce a new editorial assistant for Ministry. Ella Rydzewski who served us so faithfully for 10 years has taken a similar position with the Adventist Review. Julia W. Norcott is our new editorial assistant. Julia comes with much experience in print media. She served as associate editor of ASI News for 10 years and practically put out the whole magazine, including editing, designing, and layout. She is active in her local church serving as a local elder. We welcome Julia and the gifts she brings to her work.

Julia W. Norcott
Peter’s pastoral ethic

John M. Fowler

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3). *

The risen Jesus thrice commanded Peter to feed His sheep (see John 21:15-17). The apostle in turn passed the command on to the elders in the church of every generation, including ours. As a pastor I find in this charge a prudent delineation of a ministerial ethic that defines the pastor’s calling, commission, motivation, and leadership style.

The calling

Peter’s charge is given to the elders. Elder is a title of honor with a history that goes back to Moses. When the burdens of leading Israel became too heavy, Moses appointed 70 elders upon whom God placed His Spirit (see Num. 11:16-30). In the life of the covenant people, we find elders as friends of the prophets (see 2 Kings 6:32), counselors to the kings (see 1 Kings 20:8), dispensers of justice at the city gate (see Deut. 25:7), and later leaders of the synagogue and overseers of community discipline. The apostolic church used the term to describe church leadership (see Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5). The book of Revelation places 24 elders around the heavenly throne.

A word with such a rich history, when used to identify the Christian minister, underscores the gravity and responsibility of the position of the pastor, both lay and ordained. Whether the term elder was used to denote the leader of a local congregation or one with a wider and global responsibility, wherever the term appears in the New Testament there is a spirit of seriousness and solemnity. Even though the appointment may come from human hands, the office is to be perceived as proceeding from a divine calling. As if to emphasize the divine nature of the call to ministry, Peter anchors his eldership to history and hope. The anchor in history is that he “was a witness of the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 5:1). Even though that witness was marred by a threefold denial, the apostle affirms that the grace of Christ was exceedingly good and powerful not only to forgive him but to call him as an elder to feed His lambs. A pastor is made of clay, but has the opportunity to transcend that clay and be molded into an instrument of divine ministry to sinful mortals.

If the historic anchor of the cross gave Peter the call to be a minister, the anchor of hope provided him the momentum to press forward with his flock to that soon coming day when the Chief Shepherd Himself will place “the unfading crown of glory” (verse 4) on His faithful servants. Thus the sacredness and the seriousness of the call to ministry arise from an encounter with Jesus of Calvary and a commitment to await His return.

The commission

The call to ministry is meaningless without its accompanying commission: “tend the flock of God that is your charge.” The flock is God’s, and not the shepherd’s. Therefore, fellow shepherds, let us beware! It is not given for the shepherds from their vantage point of power and position to manipulate, to violate, to use the sheep under their charge. How often ministry suffers public shame and ridicule because pastors assume such a role and exploit their members in areas in which members are so easily vulnerable: money, sex, and intellectual, spiritual, or emotional areas of dependency.

The metaphor of a shepherd and a sheep is not intended to convey the image of wisdom over stupidity, power over weakness, order over chaos, certainty over helplessness; for in the arena of the flock of God, both shepherd and sheep are made of the same substance, and therefore it behooves the shepherd to watch out against the perils of abusive power. The metaphor is meant to urge a relationship of love and care that the shepherd is to have toward the sheep: to nourish with proper diet, to protect from enemies with adequate security, to heal the hurting, to lead them all toward the final home, and to love with the risk of the ultimate cost.

To be an undershepherd, to function as the representative of the One who said, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11), is, therefore, no mean task. It demands our utmost love for the sheep within the fold, for the sheep without a Shepherd, and for those all too many sheep that insist on also being their own shepherd while grazing in the prodigal land.

The motivation

But Christian shepherdins insists on its own motivation and high standards. The big fisherman understood that and * (Continued on page 30)
Autopsy of an ex-marriage

David Wesley Reid

A pastor’s gripping self-examination

What on earth am I doing here? That question hammered me as I sat motionless on a long oak bench in the lobby of the county courthouse. “Dear God, I’m a loving husband, father, and pastor. Yet here I am—in divorce court!”

Never in a million years would I have envisioned myself in this situation. Every marriage on earth might come unglued, but not mine. It can’t be happening!

But it was. No matter how much I mentally pinched myself to awaken from a bad dream, the scene was real. My wife wanted out of the marriage.

I sat next to my attorney for what seemed an eternity, fear and confusion churning in my stomach. Around me the lobby was bustling with activity. Lawyers with briefcases scurried about. Court personnel toting official-looking documents whisked past me. Uniformed security guards checked every person and package that came through the door. Across the cavernous lobby a cart vendor slumped against the wall, seeming annoyed anytime someone had the audacity to order coffee or a doughnut. In the midst of it all were the hurting people, dozens and dozens of them, wearing sad faces. They fidgeted nervously in their seats or flitted about like flies, anxiously awaiting their “day in court.”

I was one of them. It all seemed surreal, like a Dali painting.

As I surveyed this courthouse scene, my gaze was drawn to my wife. She too was seated on a large bench, facing me, about 30 feet away. A stern and determined look furrowed her brow. Frequently she leaned over and whispered to her attorney, as if afraid that I would overhear their “strategy.” Occasionally she cast furtive glances in my direction, perhaps evaluating how I was handling the pressure.

Concerned about me? Not anymore. She was on a mission “to become a whole person.” Somehow that involved leaving me out of her life.

Was this the same woman I’d met in college 25 years earlier? Back then, after just a few dates, we both knew that love was in the air. Two years later we were married. Now here we were, many miles down the road, staring at each other across a tile-floored legal battlefield.

“How could this be?” I pondered in my pain. This is the woman I love, the mother of my three boys. My friend. My wife! How could she do this?

She loves me not

That courthouse experience, difficult though it was, represented a welcome end to the strenuous 18 months that preceded it, when hopes of reconciliation rose and fell like a roller coaster. “Strap yourself in good and tight, David,” a friend had advised me. “You’re in for quite a ride!” So it was, leaving me emotionally and physically exhausted. The fall of the judge’s gavel signaled legal closure on the agonizing ordeal of “she loves me, she loves me not.”

It was on my oldest son’s four-
teenth birthday that I first heard the bad news. Our family party was in full swing when I noticed that my wife was missing. I found her in our bedroom, curled up on our double bed.

“What’s wrong?” I inquired. Her reply shook me to the core of my soul. I had no clue that what she was about to divulge had been percolating in her mind for a long time.

“David, I don’t know how to tell you this, but I don’t think I love you anymore.”

“What did you say!” I gasped.

“I feel like I don’t love you anymore!” she repeated.

There had been no warning, no revealing change in behavior, no verbal clues, no hint even in the most intimate areas of our married life, that she was struggling. Had I been dense for not knowing about the storm brewing in her soul?

I implored her to reconsider or at least go with me to counseling. No. Nothing and no one could dissuade her from divorce. Many tried.

Too busy too much

One of the most destructive temptations during the divorce process involves playing the “blame game.” In me it represented a passive-aggressive attempt to chastise my former wife for divorcing me without recourse. But it also served as a thinly disguised bid to avoid looking at the part I may have played.

“David,” a friend advised, “if you are going to deal with this constructively, think about how you may have contributed to the demise of the relationship. Blaming her serves no purpose.”

Godly counsel. It started me on a retrospective journey. I realized that I had been too busy too much of the time. Many pastors reading this can relate all too well. So many members in so much need! So many meetings. Weddings. Funerals. Keeping up with it all is a massive challenge, not one that I always handled well. By the time I finished emptying my reservoir of emotional energy for the flock, not much was left for my wife.

I loved her dearly and often communicated it in words. Too often those words weren’t supported by actions.

My wife had always assured me bravely: “God has called me to support you, David. That is my ministry.” She verbalized regularly and convincingly, and I believed her. What’s more, she believed herself. But in the end it turned out that we both had been deceiving ourselves. Meanwhile, I continued to do my pastoral “thing,” rejoicing every day that the Lord had favored me with such a loving and loyal wife. Often I reminded myself: “Surely, no pastor is more blessed than I.”

Her own emotional issues, unresolved from childhood, surely were a factor in her eruption of resentment that suddenly blew apart the marriage. Nevertheless, my overinvestment in pastoral work contributed to the collapse of the relationship.

Other women

I learned other things in my retrospective analysis of our failed marriage. For example, I realized how blinded I had been to my wife’s jealousy over the attention I gave to other women. Being their pastor, women frequently approach me for crisis support. Phone calls, counseling sessions, and muted conversations in a quiet corner of the supermarket are common occurrences. All part of the pastoral calling. No big deal!

Not for me, perhaps, but very much for my wife. She was feeling emotionally neglected, and the attention I granted other women gave volcanic rise to molten feelings of jealousy. She often assured me: “I don’t have a jealous bone in my body.” The opposite was true. Her feelings of consternation and jealousy were so intense that she forced herself to deny them, even to herself. Not helpful were such frequent remarks from church women as “David’s so sensitive to feelings.” My wife sweetly smiled at such expressions, but inside her blood boiled. “He pays attention to other women, not for me, perhaps, but very much for my wife.”

Ill-advised nightlife

My autopsy of our dead marriage also revealed that I allowed too many scheduled church activities to serve as our “nights out” together.

“David, who’s sitting for us?” was my wife’s standard end-of-the-week inquiry. Every weekend we shared at least one evening activity without children. There was no lack of going out together. The problem was that most activities were related to church work, providing an enjoyable evening out but little opportunity for marriage nurture.

We always were with other people—people associated with my work. Going out on a date, just the two of us, seemed like a great idea, but three factors usually prevented that from happening. First, we were both tired from a demanding workweek. Second, we hated to turn the children over to a sitter on yet another night. And third, it was costly. So the years rolled on, and our marriage calcified.

No loving relationship can move forward without the wheels of intimacy being lubricated frequently, particularly a marriage relationship. This requires deliberate, intentional effort. I knew that in theory. In practice, I simply deluded myself into thinking that our marriage was so strong it didn’t need frequent maintenance. A sad mistake!

Her own identity

Beyond all of the above, I had failed to help my wife develop her own identity. Essentially our modus operandi was: “A wife’s responsibility is to build up her husband. The husband’s responsibility is to savor it graciously.” This felt wonderful for me, but it was devastating for my wife. While I labored through five years of graduate school, she dutifully “brought home the bacon,” typed my papers, and generally did what was necessary to help me. When I finally emerged into full-time ministry, the dynamic continued. Push, push, push! Make my husband look good. Help him up the ladder of success. Such is the calling of a godly wife. This seemed to be her thinking, and mine as well. It may have worked for our parents, but it was wrong for us.
Diligence is not enough

My retrospective journey back into the marriage culminated with the discovery that as dearly as I loved my wife, I had not loved her “as Christ also loved the church” (Eph. 5:25). A sobering thought, especially since I had preached with deep conviction on this text so many times. Was it deliberate hypocrisy? No, it was a subtle, unwitting negligence.

Shortly before learning that my wife wanted out of the marriage, I remember whispering in her ear late one night, “What would you like me to pray for in your life?” Her response surprised me. Expecting a short grocery list of concerns, I instead, “David, what a beautiful question to ask me.” Tears flowed quietly in both of us. I sensed, without articulating it, that the question had exposed a deep void in our relationship. How dutifully we had loved one another! How diligent we had been in managing our marriage responsibilities! But something was missing. I believe it was the living Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Integrity compels me to acknowledge that too often I did not love my wife as Christ loved the church. Too often I fell into bed at night, weeping to consider if I had loved my sacrificially that day. Too often I neglected to consider if I had loved my wife’s spirit in my moments of quiet intercessory prayer. Too often I neglected to consider areas of suffering, and to lay my down in a loving attempt to rescue them. I now know that this is what it means to love a wife as Christ loves the church. I only regret lessons of such great import are often fashioned from the ashes of broken dreams.

Perhaps nothing I could have done would have prevented my divorce. Even had I been the ideal husband, maybe my wife was on a collision course with a shattered covenant. I never know. But this one thing I do know. God is a great and loving God and the brokenness of failure, no matter the kind or the cause, need never have the last word. I celebrate the fact that in my life it has not.

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Reflections on an affair

Anthony Allen

The self-deception of an emotional affair—when it feels so right, how can it be so wrong?

It was after a particularly good sermon that Pastor Bob first noticed her. Even though she was better looking than average, he had no improper thoughts toward her. But his heart skipped a beat as she shook his hand that day. He felt a tenderness in her touch. The look in her eyes revealed a woman in need.

Several days later he received a handwritten note: “I just wanted you to know how much your sermon last week meant to me. I’ve felt a bitterness toward God for some time, and your words made me long for a renewed relationship.” Signed: “With appreciation, Beverly Bower.”

Here was a sheep that had wandered from the fold, and it was Bob’s mission to bring her gently back. He thought he had a God-given responsibility to invite her to his office and study with him. Then he remembered something he had read years before about how a man should not counsel a woman. But he wasn’t counseling her; he was meeting her spiritual need. And that’s what he was trained to do.

That advice is meant for weaker pastors, Bob thought. I’ve talked with women before, and nothing’s happened. He was sure he could handle this situation. After all, here was a child of God in need of his help and counsel. He didn’t foresee a temptation. He knew his own heart, and his marriage was the best it had ever been. Not that it was perfect, but just recently Karen and he had discussed how blessed they were to have a “better than average” marriage. They had suffered some rough times, but after 15 years together had settled into a comfortable relationship. Attending several marriage seminars had taught them how to communicate.

The next Wednesday evening after prayer meeting Beverly showed up at the door of Bob’s private study, down the hall from the church lobby. She shared her story of how the anger she once felt toward her husband was now directed at God. “My husband made some bad financial decisions,” she confided, “but I figured that since I had to live with him, I couldn’t continue to feel bitter. Then I transferred that bitterness to God, because He could have prevented us from losing our home.”

After Beverly finished her story, Bob spoke of his own spiritual walk and shared several key texts and encouraging quotations that would enable her to reach out to God again. Bob went home that night feeling a real sense of accomplishment. Beverly had soaked in every word he had shared, and seemed to be reconnecting. Without question this was a mission from God, and he was a true shepherd. Bob’s heart was filled with compassion and sympathy for this bruised sheep he was carrying back to the fold of Jesus.

In following weeks the counseling sessions with Beverly became regular Wednesday evening events. She began building a bridge back to God. She also continued to share about the lack of nurture she was receiving from her husband. Bob found himself drawn to this woman who needed him so much. For the first time in many
months he really felt he was helping someone with a significant need. She appreciated all his counsel. His altruistic feelings toward her weren't inappropriate, were they? He was doing only what he was ordained to do, restoring a lost sheep through spiritual nurturing.

**Behind the scenes**

If the curtains of human perception could be parted at this moment, Pastor Bob might hear Screwtape say to his conniving nephew: "Good job, Wormwood; I couldn't have done it better if I had masterminded this one myself. You chose your victim wisely. He's a natural to be caught in the web of adultery. It will be only a matter of time until he gives up the Enemy and is completely on our side by committing the unpardonable sin as far as church work is concerned.

"I remember him in seminary. I tried to trip him up then. He was such a good speaker and so admired, I thought maybe pride might do it, or arrogance—but he was too close to the Enemy. That's why I gave him to you. I knew it would take a while, but what's 15 years if you finally score a winner so big that in one fell swoop we can destroy a man's career, and family, and shake up the faith of an entire congregation! Ha! Ha! Ha!

"Let's review this case and define the personality profile most at risk for violating the Enemy's seventh commandment. Remember what attracted him to the girl he married? Yes, she too was a spiritually needy soul at the time, and he was quite a prize—the Enemy's religious leader on campus. He was a perfectionistic helper, not satisfied with doing things half well. In this girl he saw someone who really needed him. He invested many hours in soul communication, gazing into her eyes and soaking up her admiration. Ah! What a magnificent deception! While meeting his need to help someone spiritually, this soul communication met her need for someone who would listen and nurture her. She literally drank in all his advice and willingly conformed to his ideal.

"Then marriage and work: he, with his perfectionism, always did a first-class job for his boss, our Enemy, which he rationalized required not only his days but most evenings and weekends. His wife became her own person and no longer thirsted for his words of wisdom. The children came along. She became overcommitted to them, and he felt somewhat ineffective. Not finding his helper instinct appreciated on the home front, he threw himself even more enthusiastically into his work, helping to rescue the lost sheep. The years ticked by: ordination, bigger church, more time helping the helpless—and now we've almost got him.

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**Praying together each time they met was what he looked forward to. How could anything be wrong with that?**

"Now, listen: keep his mind centered on how much this beautiful lost sheep needs him; how helpless she is without his counsel. By all means keep him ignorant of the bonding process. He's learned the importance of looking a person in the eyes. Make sure this good advice is acted upon to hasten his demise. As she gazes at him in awe and admiration, make sure his eyes linger on hers. These Enemy workers have been warned about inappropriate touches, so he'll not fall here, at least not at first; but they're ignorant that the eye is the window to the soul. A lingering look can say more than words. Ha! And Pastor Bob thinks extended eye-to-eye contact is good counseling practice. The Enemy's parish workers have just enough counseling theory to make it dangerous.

"Next, Wormwood, try to increase their opportunities for communication—private communication. She's already written him a note. That's good. Very good! Notice he keeps it in his desk to read when things get tough. Work to increase his stack of keepsakes. Above all, let her communications get to him without the interference of her wife or secretary. Secrecy is on our side! Be sure he sets up the counseling appointments himself and have him shut the door when their talks get sensitive. Give her car an occasional breakdown so he's forced to give her a ride home after their meetings. If you get her appointed to a church committee, there will be a legitimate excuse for them to meet for lunch.

"Then we've got to get Bob to think that self-disclosure will really draw out this lost sheep and thus provide the safe environment for her to be more open in sharing negative emotions. Get him to share things about his own marriage. He'll be guarded at first, but once he sees her interest rise and feels her empathetic response feeding his own emotions, he'll get more and more personal to continue eliciting the same intensity of response. The more intimate their talk, the more bonding. And they think touch is the only culprit! Ha!

"She's sure to respond with explicit details about her sad life, and the more they talk, the more they'll find in common—and the more they'll begin depending on each other. Imagine all this wrapped in the cloak of spirituality. We're close to nailing him on the first commandment. Now, let's go for the gold and get them to violate the seventh. The repercussion among the Enemy's flock is always much greater with that one.

"To make things appear proper, he'll need to persuade his wife to have her over for dinner. That'll give him opportunity to compare the two. Once he sees the difference between a wife who no longer needs him and the overwhelming 'I can't get along without you' response from our temptress, he's almost ready to commit the seventh. Then let his wife get a little
Jealous so he’ll get defensive. Have his wife withdraw, and he’ll feel the need for someone who understands him. At the following session, when he shares his own hurt, add a sympathetic, lingering touch, and let an innocent ‘I love you’ slip out as his dear sheep now attempts to comfort him. Then victory is ours!”

The story continues

With every passing day Bob noticed that his thoughts were continually drawn to Beverly in one way or another. Something he’d see, hear, or read would bring her to mind. Even during private devotions he found himself thinking about sharing with Beverly. Throughout the day he mentioned her name in prayer. His own spiritual life seemed to take on a deeper meaning as it centered on Beverly and her spiritual needs.

Weekly he would share his new spiritual insights and feelings with Beverly. She in turn was developing a fervent walk with God and would share from her expanding personal devotions. It seemed they never had enough time to talk during the brief weekly visit, so Bob suggested they write their thoughts in a journal and exchange journals every week. Beverly eagerly agreed.

Bob soon realized he was communicating feelings and innermost thoughts with Beverly that he’d never shared with his wife. Again his mind flashed with the warning he had dismissed earlier, but once more Bob reasoned that he felt nothing immoral toward Beverly. He admitted being somewhat attracted to her—she was a good-looking woman—but he was more attracted to her mind, her spirituality. Certainly this attraction wasn’t lust; he had no immoral physical intentions. They were just friends, that’s all—just friends! Friends who had discovered a lot in common, with the key element being a mutually deep desire to reach out to God. Praying together each time they met was what he looked forward to. How could anything be wrong with that?

Then his mind raced back to the previous month when Beverly had been crying in his office. He had come over and gently placed a comforting arm around her shoulder as he handed her a tissue. But what was wrong with that? People touch each other all the time, even in church. Just because two people touch doesn’t mean they’re involved in adultery. There, Bob’s mind had used the “evil” word. Adultery? No way! Adultery is when two people go to a motel room and do what the Bible specifically states is reserved for married partners. No, Bob had definitely not committed adultery. Counseling Beverly and others like her was his assigned ministry! He was helping someone find the Lord. What difference did it make that she happened to be a woman?

Yet the thought of adultery continued to plague him. Bob decided to check out his unsettling thoughts with Beverly. The following Wednesday evening they discussed their feelings.

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for each other and decided they had no intention of breaking up their homes. They weren’t involved in an immoral relationship. Beverly agreed, they were just friends, that’s all. Friends who somehow sensed between them what Jesus and Mary Magdalene must have felt for each other—a spiritual rather than human love. That night they vowed their friendship would not reach the boundary of adultery. Their relationship would remain on a nonphysical level.

For a year Bob and Beverly continued their “friendship.” In sharing thoughts, feelings, and their spiritual selves, they bonded emotionally, even though they never physically transgressed the seventh commandment. But the damage was nevertheless just as real. The “friendship” grew to the point where others, especially their spouses, began to notice the “electricity” in the air whenever Bob and Beverly were in the same room at a social function or church meeting. It was hard not to notice the light dancing in their eyes. One of the elders in the church even came to Bob one day and expressed his concern.

The following day Bob noticed a text that drove the point home: “The heart is deceitful above all things” (Jer. 17:9).* Had he been living in denial? Was his “talking” with Beverly indeed wrong, and had he been rationalizing it into something religiously right? Must he give up their friendship? But how could he abandon the lost sheep God had brought him? How could he neglect this mission from God, especially when they felt so close now, he and Beverly—and God? Another text seared his mind: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov. 14:12).

Bob continued to read. In fact, the first seven chapters of Proverbs felt like a jackhammer working in the depths of his soul. He finally decided to look up the quotation that kept plaguing him.

“In the battle with inward corruptions and outward temptations, even the wise and powerful Solomon was vanquished. It is not safe to permit the least departure from the strictest in-

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**How to protect your ministry from an affair**

Just this week we lost another one. A super-effective, caring pastor gave it all up for an affair of the heart. How can we stop this tragic loss to the cause of God? Implement this 10-point plan and don’t deviate from it.

1. Men, don’t counsel women without someone else present, preferably your wife. Keep your office door open. Encourage women’s ministries to start a peer counseling program for women.

2. Never go anywhere alone with a woman. Talk is cheap. An accusation is as good as the truth as far as “Screwtape” is concerned. Both are deadly as far as your effectiveness in ministry.

3. Don’t allow lingering eye contact. This is the beginning of bonding.

4. Never touch a woman if you find yourself alone with her. Avoid a lingering touch in public.

5. Don’t meet a woman outside regular business hours when you are unaccompanied by a visitation pastor. Don’t visit her home without your wife.

6. Never disclose private details about your life or marriage.

7. Don’t keep appreciation notes from women to read when life gets tough. Have your wife write you a few, so your thoughts go to her for comfort, not another.

8. When a woman comes on to you, stop her immediately. Don’t flirt with danger because you enjoy her admiration.

9. Establish an accountability group of two or three co-professionals. Share honestly any questionable behavior and take their counsel.

10. Talk to your wife intimately for at least 15 minutes a day.

**Suggested Reading List:**


*The Tempting of Audra Grey*, by Tricia Padgett (Pacific Press).

*The Snare*, by Lois Mowday (Navpress).

*Inside Out*, by Larry Crab (Navpress).

*Hedges*, by Jerry B. Jenkins (Wolgemuth & Hyatt).


**Ellen G. White references:**

*Testimony to Ministers*, pp. 434, 435.

*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, pp. 124-126.

tegrity. 'Abstain from all appearance of evil.' When a woman relates her family troubles, or complains of her husband, to another man, she violates her marriage vows; she dishonors her husband and breaks down the wall erected to preserve the sanctity of the marriage relation; she throws wide open the door and invites Satan to enter with his insidious temptations. This is just as Satan would have it. If a woman comes to a Christian brother with a tale of her woes, her disappointments and trials, he should ever advise her, if she must confide her troubles to someone, to select sisters for her confidants, and then there will be no appearance of evil whereby the cause of God may suffer reproach."3

Resolution

Bob knew he must talk to someone about his "friendship." He decided to see a professional counselor. After several weeks of counseling, Bob determined to cut off his relationship with Beverly—totally. Intellectually he knew this was right, but it felt like the cruelest thing he'd ever done. And living without being able to share with Beverly, when they'd been intimate "soul mates," felt like emotional suicide. In actuality this relationship had changed Bob's entire emotional, mental, and spiritual focus. He realized he'd essentially turned his relationship with God into a relationship with another human. She came to occupy the place in his heart that had previously been reserved for God Himself. His thoughts, attention, and affection became hers.

With agony Bob came to the conclusion that in trying to keep from breaking the seventh commandment he had radically violated the first. He believed it was mutual—that Beverly experienced the same "soul connectedness" that came when she placed Bob on God's pedestal in her heart. That's what made the bond between them more difficult to abandon than if it had just been a physical union. By cutting off their friendship, they felt as if they were destroying their relationship with God. How could something that felt so right turn out to be so wrong?

For two years Bob struggled to erase Beverly from his memory. Every time he opened his Bible he'd think of her. Every time he tried to pray, thoughts of her flooded his mind. He wept over his sin, confessing it again and again, then trying to hear God speak to his soul. It was difficult erasing Beverly's form and voice from his heart and replacing it with God's. It was a slow and painful road back to where it was just God and Bob once again. The scars from that affair will always be present. Forgiveness is possible, but forgetting is not within the realm of human capacity. You can't erase a human mind in the way you can reformat a computer disk.

Forgiveness was needed not only from God but also from his wife, Karen. Bob learned that a spiritual or emotional affair can be more damaging to a spouse than a physical one. To share one's body may be less devastating to a wife than having her husband share his intimate soul with another woman.

In time Bob and Karen's marriage went through a healing process. More than once they questioned whether it was worth struggling for what was left from Beverly. But in spite of their feelings, they knew God's will for their lives. For keeping them together, Bob credits Karen's unfailing love and support. If he'd been married to someone not as strong in the Lord or as committed as Karen, they would probably have divorced. Fortunately she saw in him something worth fighting for.

Beverly and her husband were not as fortunate, however. They divorced shortly after the "friendship" ended. Bob says he can't help feeling responsible and prays that both of them find healing somehow. He hopes she's not seeing another pastor now.

* All scriptures in this article are from the New International Version.

1 Names in this article have been changed. Anthony Allen works for a Christian publisher. This article is based on the forthcoming book It Isn't Adultery if It's Not Physical, Is It?
2 With apologies to C. S. Lewis.
Unfaithfulness to the marriage vow

Robert M. Johnston

What does the Church Manual mean?

The Seventh-day Adventist position regarding divorce and remarriage takes as its first and basic starting point the following statement from the Church Manual: "In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie, except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow" (Matt. 5:32; see also Matt. 19:9).

“When Jesus said, ‘Let not man put asunder,’ He established a rule of conduct for the church under the dispensation of grace which must transcend forever all civil enactments which would go beyond His interpretation of the divine law governing the marriage relation. He here gives a rule to His followers, who should adhere to it whether or not the state or prevailing custom allows larger liberty.”

The main problem with this statement concerns meaning. How is meaning of a statement determined—by the intention of its author or by the understanding of its readers? Is meaning extracted, or imported, or produced by an interaction between the two? When a statement has multiple authors, as in the case of the product of a committee, do they all have the same intention? Are there intentional ambiguities introduced to permit consensus? Is the meaning of a word in the statement determined by its background only, or can the meaning evolve? Must exegesis be limited to the probable original intention, or can there be such a thing as a sensus plenior that allows later readers and later generations to find dimensions of meaning that were never imagined by the original author or authors? These are the issues that face us when interpreting even such a short and seemingly straightforward statement as the one before us.

“Unfaithfulness” in the Church Manual

The Church Manual states that the marriage tie is indissoluble except for “unfaithfulness to the marriage vow,” and that this is a rule established by Jesus that transcends civil law and social custom. Three observations are important to make here.

First, the rule admits of an exception to the prohibition of dissolution: “unfaithfulness to the marriage vow.”

Second, the statement appears to use the language of the indissolubility doctrine. In the early development of Catholic canon law, Augustine’s view that marriage is a sacrament led him to speak of it as indissoluble, but by this he meant that marriage should not be dissolved. Medieval scholasticism, however, went a step further and said that marriage cannot be dissolved. This meant that two people who divorced were still married in God’s sight, and this was why they could not remarry without committing perpetual adultery. The apparent meaning of the authors of the Church Manual is more in line with the original Augustinian intention than with
the later scholastic intensification, or else the exception phrase would not apply.

Third, and most important, the rule is given in the form of a direct quotation from Ellen G. White. This fact throws us back to the meaning of her statement, and thence into a diachronic study of the meaning of “unfaithfulness to the marriage vow.”

Ellen White’s concept of “unfaithfulness”

The quotation reads: “In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie, except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow.” Two features in this statement draw our attention.

First is the reference to “the marriage vow.” Beyond reasonable doubt Ellen White had in mind the traditional vow that formed a part of the wedding service in her day and that, with some modification (replacement of “obey” by “cherish” in the bride’s vow), is still found in manuals for ministers. The usual form now runs something like this: “Wilt thou have this man/woman to be thy wedded husband/wife, to live together after God’s ordinance in the sacred estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love, honor, and cherish him/her in sickness and in health, in prosperity or adversity; and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him/her, so long as ye both shall live? Dost thou so declare?” To which both parties respond, “I do.” This was the “marriage vow,” and upon its being made the minister formally declared the couple to be husband and wife, adding, “What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”

The key words are “forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him/her so long as ye both shall live.” It is the violation of this part of the vow that has been traditionally understood to be grounds for divorce. If porneia was used in this way, then its meaning was much broader than the corresponding phrase in Jesus’ teaching. The rabbis could not agree on the meaning of porneia in Deuteronomy 24:1, which states, “If a man shall take another man’s wife, it is an indecency to her” (RSV; the Hebrew reads, “servant woman”). If porneia includes any sexual deviation, including adultery, in late Judaism it came to mean any sexual deviation, including adultery. In early Greek sources it originally meant prostitution by female slaves, but it came to mean any sexual deviation, including adultery. In late Judaism the word was sometimes applied to intercourse in marriage that was contrary to Jewish law, such as marriage with a Gentile before she converted, or marriage within the degrees forbidden in Leviticus 18.

Many scholars have seen the Matthean exception phrase as a reference to the cause of divorce mentioned in Deuteronomy 24:1, which speaks of a man giving his wife a bill of divorcement and sending her out of his house because “he has found some indecency in her” (RSV; the Hebrew for “some indecency in her” is bāh ervat dabar). The logos porneias could very well be a literal translation of ervat dabar. If this is correct, then we are thrown back to Deuteronomy 24:1.

The indecency in Deuteronomy 24:1

The meaning and correct translation of ervat dabar in Deuteronomy 24:1 is less sure and even more debated than the logos porneias in Matthew. The only other place in the Old Testament where ervat dabar occurs is in the preceding chapter, in Deuteronomy 23:14 (verse 15 in the Hebrew Bible). There it refers to fecal matter, which could hardly be the meaning in Deuteronomy 24:1.

As is well known, in the time of Jesus the rabbis could not agree on the meaning. The debate between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel is summarized in the Mishnah Gittin 9:10. Beth Shammai limited ervat dabar to unchastity, but Beth Hillel applied it to almost anything that displeased the husband.

It is evident from Jesus’ teaching that He would reject the teaching and the spirit of Beth Hillel in this particular matter. But the exception phrase in Matthew is only a little less ambiguous than the corresponding phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1. Matthew’s phrase would seem, however, to refer broadly to offenses of a sexual nature and not merely to things like burning the toast.

Does ambiguity make room for a sensus plenior?

Traditionally the porneia of Matthew’s exception clauses and the “unfaithfulness to the marriage vow” spoken of by Ellen White have been understood to refer to adultery only, but both expressions are sufficiently ambiguous to permit a broader understanding, an understanding that may or may not have been envisioned by Matthew and Ellen White.

If porneia includes any sexual deviation in general, could it also include brutality, frigidity, or abandonment of the marriage bed, for example? If such a broader interpretation is admissible, then the “Pauline
The “marriage vow” referred to by Ellen White contained more items than just the promise to limit oneself to one sexual partner. Could violation of any part of the vow also be porneia and ground for divorce? For example, in accord with the traditional vow, could one legitimate a divorce by arguing that a spouse had ceased to love, honor, and cherish him/her? If so, the formulation of the marriage vow becomes crucial.

The language of the authoritative texts we have been examining seems to leave room for such an application; on the other hand, the preponderance of teaching in both Scripture and the writings of Ellen White militates against easy divorce, and against divorce prompted only by transitory or even chronic emotional hurt.8

We have limited our discussion narrowly to the meaning of the phrase “unfaithfulness to the marriage vow,” in the Church Manual and the successive antecedents from which it was derived—the passage cited from Ellen White’s Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, the Gospel of Matthew, and Deuteronomy 24. We have seen that all these antecedent sources make use of key terms that are sufficiently ambiguous to leave room for some latitude of interpretation. These terms are “unfaithfulness to the marriage vow,” logos porneias, and ervat dabar. It cannot now be known whether that ambiguity was intended by the human authors, but since it exists we must concede that the Holy Spirit intended it.

This places on the church the responsibility of deciding what principles or specific rules are appropriate to our society and our times, operating within the room left by the ambiguity of the authoritative documents.  

2 Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990), p. 172.
3 Indeed, in categorical statements Ellen White plainly limits the grounds for divorce to adultery: “There is only one sin, which is adultery, which can place the husband or wife in a position where they can be free from the marriage vow in the sight of God” (The Adventist Home, p. 344). “Nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow . . . . God gave only one cause why a wife should leave her husband, or the husband leave his wife, which was adultery. Let this ground be prayerfully considered” (ibid., pp. 341, 342). “I would say that there is only one thing for which a husband may lawfully separate from his wife or a wife from her husband, and that is adultery” (ibid., p. 345).
4 Robert H. Stein shows conclusively that Matthew 19:9 and Mark 10:11, 12 are reporting exactly the same occasion and the same saying. See his article “Is It Lawful for a Man to Divorce His Wife?” Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society 23 (1979): 115-121. The same would probably be true of Luke 16:18, though Luke does not preserve the narrative context. The earliest quotation of Jesus’ saying on divorce is that preserved by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11. This Epistle was written between A.D. 55 and 57.
5 It is true, however, that the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) translates ervat dabar differently (aschemon pragma). But the direct citation of Deuteronomy 24:1 in Matthew 19:7 does not closely follow the Septuagint either.
6 This was Ellen White’s final theological pronouncement on the matter, and the only one published in a book during her lifetime. Both before this and afterward she made pastoral judgments on individual cases that were strikingly less restrictive than her categorical general statements.
7 Parthenos is commonly translated “virgin,” and it can have that meaning; but it can also mean simply “unmarried,” agamos. That is obvious in verse 27, which is still addressed to the parthenos: “Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from sin? Do not seek marriage” (RSV). But after giving that counsel, Paul adds: “But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl (parthenos) marries she does not sin” (verse 28, RSV). The marriage of a virgin would hardly have been in question.

8 Note for example, Ellen White’s counsel: “Yet even for those who have found bitterness and disappointment where they had hoped for companionship and joy, the gospel of Christ offers a solace. The patience and gentleness which His Spirit can impart will sweeten the bitter lot. The heart in which Christ dwells will be so filled, so satisfied, with His love that it will not be consumed with longing to attract sympathy and attention to itself. And through the surrender of the soul to God, His wisdom can accomplish what human wisdom fails to do. Through the revelation of His grace, hearts that were once indifferent or estranged may be united in bonds that are firmer and more enduring than those of earth—the golden bonds of a love that will bear the test of trial” (Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 65).
Some pastors deem it unthinkable even to suggest that the need for dialogue on sexual ethics exists. During one presentation to church employees on the subject, a young pastor chastened me for wasting time talking about a problem that did not exist. I spoke with him later. He told me that he had never had a problem with sexual ethics and for that matter had never even fantasized about anyone except his wife. Even those fantasies were rigidly controlled, he said, lest they be inappropriate. He also testified that he was never tempted sexually, and that it was degrading for any pastor to admit to immorality.

My heart went out to this young pastor. “I fear for your soul,” I told him. “Denial of our sexuality leaves us naked before the tempter. Between innocence and virtue there’s a vast difference. Innocence is a state in which you never have been tempted. Virtue is a state where you have been tempted, but by God’s grace have successfully passed the test. I fear that your test is yet to come and you may be unprepared.”

Pastor’s professional pitfalls

The roots of denial run deep within Christian ministry. By admitting to sexual temptations, some would ask, are we not equating ourselves with other mere mortals? Are we not denying God’s calling? How can we admit to struggling with the same temptations as our congregation? How can we help others solve their sexual problems if we admit to the same problems? Would not admissions of sexual temptations make pastors less effective as counselors and less respected by church members?

Beyond such questions, pastors are also troubled by several professional pitfalls. One of them may be an overfamiliarity with God. We become so accustomed to speaking frequently with God throughout the day that we may no longer stand in awe of Him. Even our devotional life may become a part of our workday. (What pastor has never taken sermon notes during his devotional time?) Recreation is integrated with church activities, and even our homes often are owned by the church. In other words, our career and the church become synonyms.

Another pitfall is sin saturation. Every day people come to us burdened with sin. They often share their anguish in vivid detail. Such constant exposure to the sin problem can desensitize our minds to its awfulness, and sin may lose its sting and get categorized into carefully calculated behavioral stereotypes.

A third pitfall is job overload. The young pastor mentioned earlier indicated he seldom took a vacation, because he was too busy. He seldom was home, either. When pastors fail to take time away from the things of God, burnout often results. Time away from the things of God does not mean
time away from God. It means taking time out from our frantic pace to be recharged and renewed. If Elijah needed six weeks away from the things of God for renewal, and Jesus needed periodic quiet time, what pastor in today’s hectic and hurried lifestyle can afford to forgo a vacation each year?

All these pitfalls compound the problem of sexual ethics in ministry. When we are overworked, underappreciated, and constantly exposed to sin, we may fail to recognize the temptations of sexual attraction before it’s too late.

Facing the issues

A Christianity Today survey reported in Leadership reinforces our need to address the issue of sexual ethics in ministry.1 When asked “Since you’ve been in local church ministry, have you ever done anything with someone (not your spouse) that you feel was sexually inappropriate?” one in four pastors admitted to a problem in sexual ethics. When asked “Have you ever had sexual intercourse with someone other than your spouse since you’ve been in local church ministry?” one in eight admitted to having committed adultery. Many who answered no added, “I’ve come very close!”

Sexual attraction and fantasies are often considered inappropriate for pastors. A survey by Men’s Health reported that 35 percent of the respondents had sexual fantasies on a daily basis, and 80 percent at least weekly. It is important to note that almost nine out of 10 of the respondents had at least some college education, with four out of 10 having taken postgraduate studies.2 Contrary to what is believed by some, sexual attraction and fantasies do not decrease with higher education.

Looking back on my own seminary experience, I realize that little time was spent preparing me to deal with physical or emotional attraction and my own sexuality. The perception was that pastors should be able to control their sexual needs and thoughts. In fact, if you asked the wrong types of questions you risked being labeled as unworthy of ministry. The Christianity Today survey found that in the case of three out of four pastors sex was never discussed or explained in the home in which they grew up. The failure of the seminary to address this issue serves to reinforce pastors’ denial of human sexuality. Gary Collins, professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, says, “We’re living in a Corinthian Age, but we’re preparing students for the Victorian Age.”

When we are overworked, underappreciated, and constantly exposed to sin, we may fail to recognize the temptations of sexual attraction.

An Adventist survey

During 1991 and 1992 I presented seminars on sexual ethics in caregiving in nine North American conferences and Andrews University. We took a sexual ethics survey at each seminar before presentations could begin. Of the 586 total respondents, 416 were male. Most were pastors (88 percent of men but only 5 percent of women). Only a few of either men or women were counselors. Among the women, one in five was a teacher, and more than half listed their occupation as other—usually the wife of a pastor. Two hundred eighteen of the respondents had been raised as Adventists, 119 in Protestant homes; the rest did not indicate home background. The survey was taken in a crowded room with no privacy, and with couples seated together, perhaps suggesting that the results should be considered conservative.

Have you ever engaged in premarital sex? Half the males and 47 percent of the females answered yes. A significantly lower percentage of those raised in Adventist homes had premarital sex. Even if we don’t talk about sex much, we manage to communicate the importance of abstinence before marriage. Perhaps also a lack of opportunity to err could contribute to this success rate.

After marriage, have you ever had sex with anyone other than your spouse? One in nine males and one in 10 females answered yes. However, those raised in Adventist homes had 10 percent more extramarital relationships than the average. Apparently parental pressure in the home to abstain from premarital sex has a reverse effect when it comes to extramarital sex. In all likelihood this is because not all values taught by parents are internalized by children.

Have you ever been sexually attracted to a client, patient, student, parishioner without actually engaging in sex? Sixty-five percent of the males and 31 percent of females responded yes. Interestingly enough, more pastors (64 percent) than counselors (48 percent) or teachers (39 percent) felt such attraction.

Would you feel comfortable speaking to your spouse about your sexual attraction to a client/patient/student/parishioner? Almost half (47 percent) of both sexes responded no! Those who felt least comfortable discussing the topic with spouses were raised in Adventist homes (60 percent). Perhaps pressure to refrain from premarital sex without actually discussing sexuality does not encourage open dialogue on the subject even after marriage.

Have you ever had an affair? Apparently this question was more widely interpreted than After marriage, have you ever had sex with anyone other than your spouse? One out of eight males (mostly pastors) and one out of six females (mostly spouses of pastors) answered yes. In a society in which male sexual infidelity is well documented, it’s alarming that more
pastors’ wives than male pastors reported having affairs.

Were you sexually abused as a child? We know from research that many individuals abused in childhood cannot recall their abuse until some event triggers the memory later in life. The mind mercifully blocks out such traumatic experiences, or else the pain would often be too great. Still, one out of 16 men and one out of five women reported they were sexually abused in childhood. The highest percentage of sexual abuse came from those raised in nonreligious homes (18 percent), and the lowest rate from those raised in Adventist homes (8 percent).

Cautious conclusions

The Adventist family seems to be somewhat successful at protecting children from sexual misconduct while in the home. Those raised in Adventist homes had significantly less premarital sex and suffered less sexual abuse as children. However, when these young people become adults they engage in more extramarital affairs and feel less comfortable discussing sexual issues with their spouse.

This survey confirms Peter Rutter’s (Sex in the Forbidden Zone) premise that more males than females are sexually attracted to someone other than their spouse. The Christianity Today survey indicated eight out of 10 extramarital affairs were initiated by physical or emotional attraction and not by problems in the marriage. Because of sexual attraction, even among pastors, we may need to approach sexual ethics in a more thorough and ongoing manner than in the past. Our survey shows that more than six out of 10 pastors report being sexually attracted to someone other than their spouses and one out of eight male pastors actually have had an affair after marriage. That means that with approximately 3,900 church professionals in the North American Division (3,200 in actual pastoral assignments), nearly 480 of them have had an affair and approximately 2,500 have struggled with a sexual attraction to someone other than their spouses.

Recommendations and observations

1. Develop an ongoing educational program and curriculum for pastors and other caregiving professionals to reaffirm and teach sexual ethics. This would require a more extensive endeavor than the good beginning in a video and study guide format currently available through the General Conference Ministerial Association’s Ministerial Supply Center.1

2. Restructure the seminary curriculum to provide more emphasis on sexual ethics, counseling, and personal relationships. Pastors already in the field could attend sexual ethics and personal relationship seminars as part of continuing education. Attendance at such seminars could be required for ministerial license renewal.

3. Establish clear and enforceable policies which deal seriously with sexual misconduct and which provide adequate rehabilitative therapy prior to any promises of reemployment or reassignment to spiritual leadership. Such training should seek to address spiritual restoration and healing of broken relationships more than emphasizing the possibility of continuing church employment.

Because of sexual attraction we need to approach sexual ethics in a more thorough and ongoing manner.

4. Provide support groups and networks for pastors and other caregiving professionals. “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1, 2, NIV).

5. Provide professional counseling services and establish ongoing renewal retreats that specialize in pastors and other caregivers. Kettering Clergy Care Center is leading the way in this area in North America.

6. Promote awareness of and adherence to a code of sexual ethics for pastors and other caregiving professionals. The Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Manual has one. Here is another model:

“As a professional caregiver I am an agent of healing and restoration. Sexual exploitation of spouse, family, colleagues, congregants, employees, or counselees is an abuse of the trust, power, and authority of my position.

“I am aware of my obligation to adhere to strict standards of confidentiality concerning that which is confided in me.

“I am aware of the long-term effects of all forms of sexual exploitation, and will seek to help victims cope with such damage through every available means.

“I am aware that sexual harassment and immorality are chargeable offenses under civil and/or moral laws, and I alone bear final responsibility for my actions.

“I am aware of the denominational discipline policies concerning sexual exploitation.

“If I learn of the sexually exploitive behavior of another professional caregiver, I will practice the advice of Jesus (Matt. 18:15-17) and seek to stop such exploitive behavior.

“I am aware of my calling as a caregiver and accept the responsibility entrusted to me by those who seek my help.

“I will seek the advice and counsel of other professional caregivers when issues of sexual ethics arise in my practice or ministry.” 4

3 Sexual Ethics for Professionals (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Continuing Education, General Conference Ministerial Association, 1992).
My husband committed adultery

The tortured testimony of a wounded heart

I used to be a pastor’s wife. My husband was a successful soul winner and an excellent speaker. He had charisma that attracted people and won their friendship. For many years his commitment to serve people was genuine. Unfortunately, he let himself become too close to the women of the church.

For 25 years his warm personality and flirtatious manner won him many lady friends. I accepted this as part of his sanguine personality. Then something happened. He committed adultery.

Looking back, I now see that I had been living in denial. Considering my husband a godly man, I couldn’t comprehend that he might even consider having an affair. In fact, I believed in him right up until the last week we lived together. Whatever his deceit and rejection, I kept trying to fix our relationship. I asked him if we could get away for a few days or go to a family life weekend, but his answer was always no. I couldn’t understand why. Then my health began failing; I suffered migraine headaches and high blood pressure. After I learned what was going on behind my back, these symptoms disappeared.

The other woman

Who was the other woman? Someone my husband had studied with and baptized. As he showered her with attention and devotion, I saw many warning signs of emotional ties being formed. Several times I confronted him about it, but he convinced me I was mistaken. He made me feel foolish for even suggesting there could be a problem. After all, the other lady was my close friend, too. She sat beside me in church every week. With her husband and two children she shared holidays and special events with us. She bought me gifts and told me she loved me and valued our special friendship. We often prayed together.

I found out later that she “fell in love” with my husband the first time they met. The combination of her infatuation and his flirtatious personality proved combustible, and they found themselves playing with fire. When the truth finally came out, the affair already had been going on for two years.

My first reaction was disbelief. Then came devastation. I felt as though my heart had been ripped out and I was only half a person. My husband didn’t acknowledge my hurt or seem to care at that point. Emotionally, I couldn’t deal with the little things of life, much less the bigger things. Financially, I couldn’t afford to stay in our house, and had to move. Meanwhile, having left all the responsibilities in my lap, my husband moved into a motel with our friend. Later he took up residence across the street from my workplace and regularly attended my church.

Devastated people

Our children, though they are
young adults, also felt devastated. They still call me and cry. They wonder whether anything they ever believed in was true. They question if God is real and want nothing to do with religion. Life will never be the same for them.

The other woman’s children, who are younger, have problems in school and can’t get along with their peers. Both are depressed. Her ex-husband thinks Seventh-day Adventism is a cult. He can’t relate to a religion that thinks Seventh-day Adventism is a cult. He can’t relate to a religion that breaks up homes.

It was hard for me to accept too. After learning about the affair, I prayed long and hard for the Lord to restore my husband to his senses. For a brief time it seemed as though we might reconcile. He came home on our twenty-ninth wedding anniversary to see if we could start over. But the other woman was relentless in calling him at my house, threatening suicide. She finally got what she wanted; I was left alone.

Not only innocent spouses and children suffer when the pastor has an affair. The credibility of the gospel, the ministry, and the church are tarnished. So many lives are hurt. People phoned and asked me to help them understand what was happening, but because of my own state of mind I was ill-equipped to help them.

Although time brings healing, I still hurt every day for my children. They love their dad and want him to be OK. They try to be supportive. To do this they must accept the other woman as something of a stepmother instead of a family friend, knowing that they will lose any hope of a relationship with their father unless they accept the situation on his terms. Nevertheless, for them the hurt just doesn’t go away.

Recovery for wounded families

Adultery is not a matter between two people, since so many are hurt by it. It is as hurtful as murder, and the devastating effects never go away entirely. The offenders had the privilege of making the choice to engage in adultery, but families have no choice about the suffering inflicted upon them. I think the church should have a recovery program for the families of pastors who commit adultery. We seem to have recovery programs for everything else imaginable.

Essential to the recovery process from adultery is that those involved take responsibility for their actions and stop excusing sin. Expecting family and friends to accept immoral behavior is unreasonable. Those who commit adultery and try to fix it by writing a note of apology to the wounded parties have no idea of the injury done. Would an apology note fix the results of murder or stealing someone’s home?

I’m tired of hearing how badly the church treats ex-pastors who have committed adultery. They have shown blatant disregard for the spiritual welfare of their flock. Love, acceptance, and forgiveness are biblical, but I have a problem with premeditated sin and planned repentance. True repentance brings humility and an attitude of restitution.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they deluded themselves that because of His love for them God would excuse their disobedience. They realized the consequences of their sin when God cursed the ground. From that point on, their lives were full of anxiety and constant toil. I’m thankful God has made provision through the blood of Jesus that forgiveness and salvation are available to all. But grace does not give license to sin, and the converted heart doesn’t play cheap and loose with forgiveness.

Don’t do it

My point in writing this story is to help pastors and other spiritual leaders realize that adultery is worse than death. Its effects are so far reaching that people never forget it or fully recover from it.

So if you are considering an affair, please don’t do it. The excitement will soon wear off and is not worth the price you and your family will have to pay. Talk to someone you trust or get professional help. Most of all, pray. The demon of adultery is powerful, and you need God’s strength. And beyond renewing your spiritual resources, rekindle the old feelings you once had for your spouse. Cherish each other and share the joy that marriage can bring. Slow down enough to make special time for each other.

For those who have already committed adultery, please make things right as much as is possible with your family. The hurts are deep; don’t brush off what has happened. When Jesus comes, the only thing that will matter is whether you have made peace with your God and your family.

To the women of the church who see themselves as needy and demand the pastor’s time to fill unmet emotional needs, let me warn you that you are treading on dangerous ground. If you steal attention from your pastor that belongs only to his wife, you are guilty before God. I appeal for you to renew your commitment to your marriage partner and to God. The marriage institution is sacred and ordained by the Creator of the universe.

My life today

It’s been more than two years since my divorce, and I have remarried. When I was pleading with God to bring love back into my life, He had a plan I didn’t know about. My new husband restored love to me, and we are enjoying life to the fullest. I praise God for him every day. Our relationship is everything I’ve always longed for.

Finally, to all who are reading this, I urge you to be faithful. Jesus is coming soon. Don’t exchange eternity with Him for a passing fancy.
Why a church wedding?

Seven reasons a church wedding should be encouraged.

Rex D. Edwards

The ritual of a Christian wedding ceremony in most cases includes this significant statement: "By the authority committed unto me as a minister of the church of Christ, I declare that [names] are now husband and wife, according to the ordinance of God and the law of the state; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This pastoral pronouncement seems to blend the twin notions of legal and religious authority in establishing the status of marriage. But the Bible nowhere insists on a religious ceremony to legitimize a wedding service; nor does it prohibit marriage by civil law. A justice of the peace or one endowed with similar legal authority can conduct a wedding without any church service. However, it has been a historic tradition and a recommended practice of the church that Christian couples getting married have a church wedding.

Why a church wedding? Consider these seven reasons.

1. Marriage is an act of God.
   A religious ceremony acknowledges that marriage is an act of God. Legally it could be done at the courthouse; the couple could pick up their license, go down the corridor, and ratify the marriage before an official of the law. But for Christians, that would leave out the most essential part. A miracle takes place in a Christian marriage. Each person is transformed into a different sort of creature. Before marriage they belonged to the families to which they were born; after it they belong to each other. At marriage a new family is created, a new home is established on earth. All this is not human doing but God’s.

   Marriage is a divine order of Creation. At their marriage a man and woman enter into what was given at Creation. The bride and groom need to recognize that they are entering into something that will always be alien to the life around them. If they cannot recognize this uniqueness of Christian marriage, they might as well get married at the courthouse.

2. Marriage is religiously established.
   A religious ceremony reminds the bride and the groom that the greatest responsibility taken on in marriage is religious. A marriage partner who is spiritually a poor provider has failed in the most important obligation. It is awesome to think that those who marry are the keepers of each other’s souls. This responsibility looks clear beyond this world. Augustine set as the final purpose of marriage “that the one may bring the other with him [or her] to heaven.”

   A secular marriage has a legal or sociological rationale, but a religious marriage has religion as its constituting element. Without religious attitudes and practices it has lost the foundation on which it was created.
3. Marriage inaugurates a Christian home.
A marriage ceremony formalized in a church setting is a witness of what Jesus Christ can do for life. A Christian marriage is not a contract between a man and a woman, but a covenant between three. The third partner is Christ, and when He is given no room in a marriage, there can be no assurance for a happy Christian home.

4. Marriage is a sacred covenant, not a civil contract.
A religious ceremony is a statement against the trend toward the secularization of marriage. Secularization of marriage, according to Samuele Bacchiocchi, holds "that marriage is a temporary social contract governed by civil laws, rather than a permanent and sacred covenant, witnessed and guaranteed by God Himself." Instead of promising to each other faithfulness "till death do us part," a couple pledge to remain together "as long as we both shall live." 1

The diminution of marriage from a sacred covenant to a civil contract can be traced back to the French Revolution. Among the laws passed at that time, as Ellen White explains, "was that which reduced the union of marriage—the most sacred engagement which human beings can form and the permanence of which leads most strongly to the consolidation of society—to the state of a mere civil contract of a transitory character, which any two persons might engage in and cast loose at pleasure." 2

A religious ceremony affirms that marriage cannot be so loosely considered. It places upon the union of a man and a woman the sacredness and permanence of a covenant. It also conveys a divine warning to all who might try to come between the two. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt. 19:6, NASB).

5. Marriage bonds the partners to the church.
A religious ceremony also affirms the church's role in the lives of the bride and groom. Church is not what is important; God is. And God has placed the church on earth to bring people nearer to Him. It may be too readily assumed that a "church connection" makes a home religious. Church membership is not a connection; it's a way of life. Those who accept this way of life may be getting what their homes need most of all. The very act of going together to a church and sitting side by side in worship can unite a married couple with something rapt and wonderful. If the Christian religion uses family relationships to express spiritual truth. Think of how many of our Christian concepts depend on what we have learned in families: God is our Father, we are His children; Christians are brothers and sisters; God's comfort is like that of a mother; new life in Christ requires nurture as newborn babes do; God loves His people as a husband loves his wife; the church is the bride of Christ.

A home not founded on religious roots deprives its children of a great spiritual nurture and heritage.

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A religious ceremony places upon the union of a man and a woman the sacredness and permanence of a covenant.

6. A religious marriage provides spiritual roots for children.
"As they become parents, a sacred trust is committed to them. Upon them depends in great measure the well-being of their children in this world, and their happiness in the world to come." 3 Children whose parents are not religiously united are less likely to have strong spiritual roots. As a child is dedicated, parents are urged to be the evangelists for that child.

7. A religious marriage is a testimony to faith in God.
A religious ceremony gives the bride and the groom the sure ground of faith in God, which in turn helps them develop faith in each other. They can face the future full of hope because they know what will bring their marriage its daily comforts and ultimate success. Side by side they can start down through the years, held to each other by a love whose source is in the heart of God.

"Men and women can reach God's ideal for them if they will take Christ as their helper. What human wisdom cannot do, His grace will accomplish for those who give themselves to Him in loving trust. His providence can unite hearts in bonds that are of heavenly origin. Love will not be a mere exchange of soft and flattering words. The loom of heaven weaves with warp and woof finer, yet more firm, than can be woven by the looms of earth. The result is not a tissue fabric, but a texture that will bear wear and test and trial. Heart will be bound to heart in the golden bonds of a love that is enduring." 4

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4 Ibid., p. 362.
Some sermons find their resting place in a filing cabinet while still wet from preaching sweat. Still others wander back into the “To do” file to wait patiently for better days. Not so this one. “Through the Valley” has wandered with me through summer camp, through the last semester of college, and through my first year of ministry.

It was during a summer camp that this sermon developed in my mind. While hiking through the beautiful scenery of the Rocky Mountains, the tune and picture of Psalm 23 accompanied me step by step. One phrase hit me in particular—“through the valley.” I suddenly realized the theme of this psalm: no matter what our life’s situation, we always walk through the valley—we don’t stay in the valley of life. I immediately smelled a good sermon in the making.

The following six steps show the process from idea to product.

**Step 1** is pondering the passage, rocking it back and forth in your heart. Scripture meditation is the most important and most fruitful part of sermon preparation. It takes time, and there is no shortcut to it. After letting the text soak into heart and mind, it is time to study it carefully.

**Step 2** is InLine, the translation of the text from Hebrew (or Greek), turning over every word, feeling out every nuance of the text itself. This is a tedious process, of course, but worth the effort. The reward: Every word becomes a gem, every phrase a treasure.

**Step 3** is TextLine, in which I watch for the development of the thoughts, buildup of tension, and process of text motion. It is simply a strict technical outline of the text. This is the place for asking questions: How do the verses relate to one another? What are the transitions (or intentional leaps)? How is the tension built? Why did the writer express the thoughts that particular way?

**Step 4** is ThemeLine—short in the product but long in the making. The ThemeLine expresses in one spicy sentence what the Scripture passage is saying. If someone missed my sermon and asked me what it was all about, this ThemeLine would be my answer. Better yet, if a listener was asked the same question, the response of that listener would more or less center on that ThemeLine.

**Step 5** is OutLine, formed by taking in the ThemeLine, TextLine, plus my notes on illustrations, introduction, body, and conclusion. (To leave the full manuscript at home and preach from a mere outline is a big leap in my sermon delivery!) This OutLine is a logical workout. Many a thought that might be good but just doesn’t fit into the flow of logic has to be left out and preserved for later use. I have found out that good research for one sermon means good results for two sermons.

**Step 6** is OnLine—the full manuscript. To be honest, these steps are not strictly sequential. Throughout my sermon preparation I keep a sermon journal at hand in which I jot down word pictures, alliterations, and whole paragraphs that plead to be secured on paper. Thus almost half of my OnLine...
is already in writing and just needs some organization. Since so much has been said about Psalm 23, I purposefully abstained from reading human commentary on it. What a joy to find a new road of thought in a much-traveled terrain!

So walk with me through this well-known psalm. Better yet—walk with the Shepherd!

**Introduction**

This morning I invite you to walk with me through a picture gallery. I admit I am not an expert in art, but I promise that you will see pictures that are not of an exhibition, but of life. And I also promise that you will get to take some of those pictures home with you. They are priceless in eternity. The pictures I am talking about this morning are found in Psalm 23.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"—what can be said about a text that has been preached a thousand times? Children memorize it, high school seniors find it in their graduation cards, old saints die with its words on their lips. What is left of a text that has been passed around like a coin, traveled through so many minds, and passed over so many lips? I have heard this psalm in weddings as well as in funerals. And yet, while well known, text is inexhaustible.

**Body**

**Picture 1:** "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." I am satisfied; my needs are met! This is a good beginning! Someone is in control; the Shepherd knows what’s going on. There is peace—perfect peace, perfect care, and perfect rest. A beautiful picture is painted here. You are getting yourself a nice cool lemonade from the refrigerator; you are ready to sit back, relax, and enjoy the blue sky. No cloud in sight; no problem to fear. The great Shepherd makes me lie down in green pastures. This is not the brown grass of Texas in the summer; this is the first sprouts of the earth—fresh green! David paints a picture here where everything is under control. Even when I am busy He makes me lie down in green pastures. There is no fear of having to get up quickly; my Shepherd is alert for me! In the Middle East the phrase “to lie down” describes camels lying down to rest. And when a camel lies down to rest, you can count on it not getting up for a while! There is no hurry or worry in this picture. Rest your eyes on it; sink into its pastures; dream of the quiet waters the Shepherd provides for His sheep! Feel the warm rays of sunshine, take in the scent of clean air, and taste the crystal-clear water; experience the peacefulness interrupted only by the humming of the bees and the birds! I might have stumbled a little, even fallen, but the Shepherd puts me back on my feet. My soul is restored, and I can rejoice; "It is well with my soul!" No bad grades, no unemployment, no doctor’s bill, no divorce pending—I just rest in the Lord. My life is right. I get perfect peace, perfect care, and perfect rest. Life isn’t that bad after all!

**Picture 2:** Notice with me verse 4. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. . . ." Let’s pause at this second picture. The sky turns dark, the clouds roll in, the air gets thicker, the heavens turn gray, and the earth opens up its mouth like the throat of a lion, ready to swallow you up. No more lying down in green pastures, no more resting beside quiet waters; your peaceful world is shaken, the birds don’t sing anymore, and then your question is: Where is the Shepherd?

All of a sudden life takes you down a cliff, and a valley of the shadow of death lies threatening before you. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” doesn’t talk about a rained-out vacation or a lost football game. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" doesn’t bring to mind a burned dinner or an hour in traffic. No, the green pastures turn into dry desert, the quiet waters into a rushing river, and the soul that was once restored is tossed and torn. It is not well with my soul anymore!

I remember my dad when I was 9 or 10 years old. He had a job a couple hundred miles away from home, so we saw him only every other weekend. The company he worked for wasn’t doing too well, but the management urged us to make the move anyway. Only a few weeks later my dad lost his job. Talk about a dark valley. Two boys needing shirts and shoes. New town, new school, no job. But my parents made it through.

Both of my grandmas went through two world wars. You would think that one was enough. After all, my grandma told me nobody thought they would make it through the first one anyway. Bombs hitting right next to your house, every night and day the sirens, hours in a cold and wet basement, bread mixed with sawdust. No McDonald’s, no Pizza Hut, no popcorn and soda. But they made it through.

The valley of the shadow of death reminds me of Someone who went through the darkest of all valleys—for you and me. It reminds me of the Carpenter from Nazareth who left His nails and wood to minister for us, only to find those nails and wood again—in the form of a cross (read Mark 15:16-20). This does not sound like a palace to me. But this is Christianity at its best. One day on a Friday in Jerusalem the Good Shepherd silently but unmistakably proved to the sheep of the world that He would be the one going through the valley of sin. Alone, despised, rejected by humanity, stricken and smitten, afflicted, pierced and crushed, punished and wounded, beaten, bruised, bleeding, cut off from the land of the living, and assigned a grave with the wicked (Isa. 53). With this thought "they led him out to crucify him" (Mark 15:20).

The darkest of all valleys. No, He didn’t fear evil. But He took all evil on Himself. For us, for you and me. For our peace, for our care, for our rest. A little further it reads: “At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, . . . ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Mark 15:33, 34). If we could have seen the invisible at that moment, we would have seen a gap between heaven and earth. He carried the sin of the world so we won’t have to die with the sin of the world! He walked through the
valley of death so we won’t have to
die in the valley of death! Down the
Via Dolorosa He went, like a lamb
went the Messiah, Christ the King!
For us, for you and me. For our peace,
for our care, and for our rest. This
morning I have good news for you to
proclaim: Jesus Christ of Nazareth,
the carpenter, the Great Shepherd,
did not stay in the valley of the shadow
of death—He walked right through it!

You know your own valleys. You
know the shadows you have crossed—
and some of you, I know, are crossing
shadows right now. You know where
you are right now. When life gets
rough, when the rocks hit hard, when
the wind blows cold through the val-
ley and the air gets thick, remember
there is a Shepherd who walks with
you; you don’t stay in the valley, you
walk right through it!

And yet there is a gleam of light
piercing through the darkness. How
many times did David flee from Saul,
how many times was he an inch away
from death? But confidently, or shall
we say stubbornly, he writes: “I will
fear no evil.” David’s reason for his
courage was not just that little push
we give ourselves to make it through
the valley; no, David’s reason was much
bigger and better than that! It takes
only five words to say it—“For you
are with me.” God Himself is with us!

The Lord is my Shepherd! He is the
one who walks with us through the
valley!

“For you are with me” tells me
something about God as my Shep-
herd. God doesn’t tell David, “Well,
David, I have another test for you,
another valley for you to go through.
Go ahead. Go through the tunnel, and
I’ll wait for you at the other end! And
by the way, good luck on your trip!
I’ll be thinking of you.” But that’s not
what God is saying here. And God
doesn’t even say, “It’ll be all right.
Don’t worry, be happy.” No, what
God is saying here is “My child, I am
going to walk with you! We can talk
about the how and the why later; let
Me just walk with you!” Let’s not
stay in the valley; let’s walk right
through it! With perfect peace, per-
fected care, perfect rest!

Let us keep walking with the Shep-
herd, on to the end of verse 4. “Your
rod and your staff, they comfort me.”
One function of the shepherd’s rod
was to count the sheep. Leviticus
27:32 says: “The entire tithe of the
herd and flock—every tenth animal
that passes under the shepherd’s rod—
will be holy to the Lord.” The count-
ing rod means that somebody is count-
ing the flock, making sure nobody is
missing! We know from the Bible that even one
sheep missing is reason enough for God to
leave the flock and find the missing one.

You may guess an-
other function of the
rod, and that is disci-
pline. The rod disci-
plined the sheep to stay
on the right road. It was
thrown with great skill
and speed at the stray-
ing sheep.1 At times we
need more correction
than comfort!

If you have a
free minute sometime,
study sheep! Do a little
sheepology! You will
find that sheep are fear-
ful, that they lack self-
confidence, and that
they risk nothing and gain nothing.
No rough play with Mary’s little lamb.
The following statement might not be
biologically correct, but sheep are
chicken! Sheep need a shepherd who
walks with them and instructs them,
“This is the way, walk ye in it!” At
least somebody is keeping them in line! The rod meant leadership and
destiny.2

And third, that rod and staff, David
says, provide comfort. The word com-
fort has gone through an interesting
history. Did you know that not until
the eighteenth century did comfort
adopt the meaning of “ease, encour-
gagement, and reassurance?” To com-
fort originally meant to strengthen
intensively! That’s where fort comes
from—a strengthened, fortified city.
In addition to that, Webster lists “to
make less severe or more bearable,”
and having the capacity of physical
ease and well-being.3 In other words,
in the Lord’s presence and His ability
I find my strength and confidence!
The Lord is my rock and my salva-
thion. Whom shall I fear? Knowing
and living in the presence of God
makes me a strong person. More of
Him and less of me: thus my strength
is wrought in Him!

Picture 3. Notice with me in verse
5 how the tone and the pace of the text
changes. The third picture David is
painting differs from the first and the
second. Out of the blue (or should I
say, out of the dark) we find a table
prepared, a meal ready for us to en-
joy: “You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies” (NIV). I
would like to have seen the faces of
these enemies! The threat of the dark
valley is turned into triumph! Let me
assure you this morning: if you walk
in the presence of God, you don’t
have to fear the presence of enemies!
God is with you! God is setting the
table for you. Have a seat; enjoy din-
nner! Every valley has its end; every
tunnel has its opening. The dead-end
street of life opens up, and a chorus of
angels welcomes you. “Let your cup
overflow, let the joy of your heart be
complete, let it flow, let it flow, let it
over—overflow!”

He even anoints my head with oil,
I am the honored guest: my cup over-

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Through the Valley

Outline

Introduction

A. Pictures of life
B. Well-known texts: inexhaustible

Body

A. Picture 1: Before the valley
B. Picture 2: Walking through the valley
C. Picture 3: Walking out of the valley
D. Picture 4: Staying out of the valley

Conclusion

Walking and staying for eternity
flows—what a treat after the dark valley! The oil protected the sheep against little flies that would lay their eggs onto the sheep's moist nose. The larvae of these eggs would hatch and travel up into the brain of the sheep—a most irritating and aggravating experience. Not so if an ointment is applied to the sheep's noses during fly season. Often it is the little things in our lives that upset the applecart. Let the Shepherd anoint your troubles this morning!

Picture 4. “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (verse 6). This last little sentence is not the conclusion of a theologian who pondered over God's care and guidance and then wrote a poetic thesis. No, it is a decision by a sheep that has walked through the valley of the shadow of death. It is the conclusion of a sheep that is now coming home. It is a free decision.

David wants to stay—do you? I wonder why so few young people decide not to stay in the house of the Lord. Maybe we haven't given them a chance to walk with the Shepherd! Let me appeal to those of you who are adults: watch out for the young little lambs along the roads and valleys of this church! Don't leave them behind; don't miss a chance to show them the Shepherd! And if these little lambs wear strange clothes and, dare I say, a ring through the ear and the hat the wrong way, and the hair too long or too short, may we not forget that they are lambs of the living God!

Conclusion
Psalm 23 closes its gallery with a picture of being at home. The soldier who has been to faraway countries understands the word “home”; the sailor of the mighty sea, the restless wanderer on the way to pilgrim's rest, knows what home really means. Picture a ship in a storm, tossed in the valley of the waves—and then a haven of rest, the sea like a mirror, the sails rolled down: a sunset. You are home. Blessed are the homesick, for they shall come home. Perfect peace, perfect care, perfect rest. No matter how hard and how long the road is, we are on our way home!

Our tents here on earth are not pitched forever. We're just passing through. Keep walking. Whether you are walking into, through, or out of a valley, you are walking home. Don't stay in the valley, but walk right through it! The valleys change, the pictures change, but keep walking. Walk on with the Shepherd: walk home—and stay for eternity! •

* All scriptures in this article are from the New International Version.

4 Keller, p. 115.
Pastor’s Pastor

A call to consistency

James A. Cress

L
ike ripples from a rock dropped into a quiet pool, the trauma of clergy sexual misconduct spreads well beyond the personal life of those directly involved.

The toll, of course, is heavy for the one who has abused a position of trust—loss of relationship with family and parishioners, loss of respect, loss of leadership, loss of employment, and loss of church membership.

But the trauma goes beyond the pastor’s personal loss. The pastor’s spouse and children feel branded by a sin in which they did not participate. Congregational and collegial support structures that minister to others in crisis now appear to abandon the pastoral family.

Victims of abuse also suffer. Clearly these individuals are victims, whether they believe they have freely chosen the illicit relationship or not. Sexual misconduct by professionals, such as physicians, attorneys, therapists, teachers, and clergy, who hold power or authority over their victims, amounts to a betrayal of trust and an exploitation of the victim, jeopardizing the victim’s home, family, and status in the community of believers.

The reputation of the congregation is also damaged, and its members’ ability to trust future leaders is stymied. Typically, it takes more than a decade for a congregation to recover from the trauma of pastoral sexual misconduct. Ministerial colleagues and the wider body of the denomination also suffer from lowered esteem for spiritual leaders and a generalized assumption that “all clergy are like that!” Ultimately, Christianity in general suffers public scorn from those who mock the sins of those who have been granted spiritual trust.

No wonder the penalty historically has been severe for pastors who morally fall. Increased responsibility means greater accountability. Parishioners have a right to expect the best from their pastors and to believe that a leadership position should not be a launching pad for sexual abuse of power.

Inconsistency in discipline

Increasingly, however, we find sexual misconduct covered up, ignored, or treated as a minor infraction, leaving the guilty clergy free for reappointment to another pastoral role, often without so much as a lapse in service record. Recent cases include clergy who have been “disciplined” for a moral fall and yet reassigned pastoral duties within the same month. One conference asked a congregation to apply church discipline to its morally fallen pastor while administrators continued to maintain his ministerial credentials that enabled him to enter a clinical pastoral education (CPE) course to prepare for chaplaincy ministry. The church refused to discipline a pastor who was still credentialed by the conference.

Reinstating or transferring quietly a morally lapsed clergy hurts the body of Christ. Church members, on the one hand, are scandalized and may assume that the church administration colludes to protect its own. Members may thus conclude that what is acceptable for leadership should be applicable to them, and violate the seventh commandment with impunity.

The church, on the other hand, faces enormous legal risk for continuing a person in employment after knowing that such an individual had indulged in sexual abuse of power.

If current policy needs revision to allow for employment restoration of clergy involved in sexual misconduct, an appropriate process exists for debating and amending policy in which every viewpoint can be discussed and evaluated. In the meantime the church administration should not establish precedents that are scofflaws or continue to disregard policy under the rubric of compassion.
Of course the fallen pastor needs compassion. But forgiveness and compassion do not guarantee job security. Compassion should focus more on spiritual restoration than on continuation of employment. While I might personally rejoice for individuals who have found professional restoration, I grieve for an increasing perception that concludes that a well connected or popular clergy who has engaged in professional sexual misconduct will professionally survive while others, less well connected, will be terminated without recourse.

Further, it is helpful to note that current policy envisions compassion along with discipline: “Where practical the organization involved shall provide a professional program of counseling and career guidance for the minister and family to assist them in transition.”

**Compassion and discipline**

Recently the General Conference Ministerial Association prepared the following resolution:

**Whereas** the call to ministry is a sacred trust, involving among other things a respect for the personhood of people as envisioned in the seventh commandment, and any breach of trust in this area brings reproach to ministry, to the church, and to God;

**Whereas** it is unreasonable to ask members to trust pastors who have engaged in sexual misconduct (adultery, pedophilia, homosexuality, fornication, etc.);

**Whereas** the church is at legal risk when employing or transferring as pastors those with a history of sexual misconduct;

**Whereas** the conference is the ordaining and employing authority of the church, and is charged with the sacred responsibility of protecting, preserving, and projecting the good name of the church, and maintaining standards in the ministry for the glory of God;

**Whereas** confusion exists where no consistent policy is applied, leaving many pastors convinced that it is not what one does but whom one knows that determines the discipline received;

“We strongly recommend that the established policy be followed in both its disciplinary and its redemptive provisions.”

Consistency is needed. If current policy needs revision, then let us address the issue in a way that answers questions and avoids charges of cronyism or cover up. If current policy, disqualifying ministers who have experienced a moral fall from future pastoral or church leadership, is appropriate, then let us stand united in its application rather than allowing some to reenter ministry while excluding others.

Above all, let us emphasize a code of sexual ethics for church-employed professionals that seriously acknowledges that any sexual misconduct within the context of ministry is professionally unethical and morally wrong. Let us also find practical ways to help those who find themselves heading toward such misconduct to seek professional assistance to avoid the moral fall that could destroy their ministry.

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2 Ibid., p. 331. (Italics supplied.)
3 Ibid., p. 332. (Italics supplied.)

### Minister’s Code of Ethics

The General Conference Ministerial Association, with counsel from pastors and church administrators around the world, has prepared and recommends to every Adventist minister the following code of ethics:

#### Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Code of Ethics

I recognize that a call to the gospel ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not for the purpose of bestowing special privilege or position, but rather for living a life of devotion and service to God, His church, and the world. I affirm that my personal life and professional conduct and competence in my ministry. I purpose to build relationships based on the principles expressed in the life and teachings of Christ. I am totally committed to the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I am dedicated to the maintenance of high standards of professional conduct and competence in my ministry. I purpose to build relationships based on the principles expressed in the life and teachings of Christ.

I shall, by the grace of God, apply these standards in my life so as to include the following:

1. Maintain a meaningful devotional life for myself and my family.
2. Give full time and attention to the ministry as my only vocation.
3. Commit myself to continuing professional growth.
4. Initiate and maintain supportive professional relationships with fellow ministers.
5. Practice strictest professional confidentiality.
7. Manage church and personal finances with integrity.
8. Perceive and treat my family as a primary part of my ministry.
10. Relate with propriety to those of the opposite sex.
11. Respect the personhood of every individual, without bias or prejudice.
12. Love those to whom I minister and commit myself to their spiritual growth.
barriers. But obstacles are a part of life for everyone. I have found that little acts of kindness and compassion break down these barriers.

I love that passage in Romans that says “outdo one another in showing honor.” When we work with difficult people, the natural tendency is to be as difficult as they are. The more rewarding path is to try to find a creative way to break down the barrier. Many times I’ve prayed for just the right thing to say or do. After all, the Creator is the best source of creative ideas.

The rewards of this kind of living are great. Imagine the surprise of an “opponent” when they realize you have indeed outdone them by showing honor. Mr. Brady was certainly surprised when I showed up at his door. We built a positive relationship that day. This could be the happy ending to the story, but there’s more.

Six months later my telephone rang two times.

“Hello, this is Esther.”

“Hello, I called because I need to talk to a pastor.”

“Yes, how can I help you?”

“Pastor, my family has a big problem. Please, please pray with me.”

As I prayed, I could hear he was crying. I had tears of my own. I was glad he had called.

It was Mr. Brady.

I shared this story with my fellow pastors as part of a worship presentation. Later that day a retired pastor came to me and let me know how much he enjoyed my worship thoughts and how appropriate they were. He then proceeded to tell me that he didn’t think that I, a woman, should be a pastor. I listened politely. Then he said, “So what are you going to do with a coddler like me?”

I smiled and responded, “I’m going to outdo you in showing honor!”

### Peter’s Pastoral Ethic

From page 5

charged the elders to “tend the flock of God . . . not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly.” The pastoral ethic demands an absolute willingness to serve. There is no coercion in ministry, except the kind experienced by Paul (“For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” [1 Cor. 9:16]), and Jeremiah (“His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.” [Jer. 20:9, KJV]).

An inner constraint of love, an eradication of self in order to recognize the needs of others, an absolute commitment to the Christ who had compassion on the lost of this world—these are the stuff out of which a willing ministry is made. Theological acumen, pulpit dynamics, persuasive techniques, emotional tenderness, personal charm, and even brilliant ability to handle Scripture don’t make a minister. Nor can all the powers of ecclesiastic authority constrain or conspire to produce a caring shepherd.

Caring shepherds are not bought or sold. They are not hirelings, out to make quick money. While the command stands that “those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14), one cannot remain in the ministry “for shameful gain.” The recent televangelist scams in accumulating personal wealth in the name of proclaiming the Word is a warning that a clean heart cannot exist without a clean hand. To be a shepherd is to be a steward, and a good steward’s first question is not “What’s in it for me?” but rather “What should I do to tend the flock of God?” A perennial temptation in ministry is to convert the flock of God into a personal empire of pride and achievement, marked by politics of prestige, popularity, and power. Peter’s pastoral ethic warns against such empire building; instead it invites the minister to serve “eagerly,” suffer if necessary the perils of the immediate, and lovingly serve in anticipation of the “unfading crown of glory.”

### Leadership Style

The only cure for the malignancy of shameful gain is radical surgery: the removal of self as a life priority in order that the Chief Shepherd’s charge to tend the flock may be carried out without interruption or indifference. Such a surgical process will result in a new leadership style in the pastor: “not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.”

Was it Disraeli who said, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”? Of course, he was speaking about the world of politics, but the world of the preacher is no different. Indeed, here it is even more dangerous. When ministry that is meant to be an instrument of grace and mercy turns itself into a seat of arrogance and dominance, when ministers who speak from the pulpit about the Christ who took the towel in His hand and bore the marks of humiliation on His body act in private as purveyors of tyranny and injustice, when ministry fails to make a distinction between a missionary and a mercenary, watch out: we have a leadership style contrary to what Peter is affirming.

Peter’s ministerial ethic is not against authority. Tending the flock of God requires the strong hand of authority and the discipline of an organization; but authority does not mean domination, and organization does not mean the violation of the personhood of a fellow-member of the body of Christ. “It shall not be so among you,” said the chief Shepherd (Mark 10:43), warning His disciples that lording it over is not His model of leadership.

Servanthood is thus the key to Christian ministerial ethic. Where there is the spirit of service, there can be no violation of the other and no trespassing into forbidden zones of any type. Instead, servanthood drives a minister to be an example to the flock, and enables him or her to say with integrity: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1, KJV).
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Go '94! for young adults

Young adults interested in mission service can be equipped and inspired at Go '94!, December 27-31 at Andrews University. In a setting of prayer, small group fellowship and Bible study, there will be interactive mission seminars about medical evangelism, inner-city service, pioneer missions, tent-making opportunities, disaster relief, and more. Seminars will be offered on two levels, for beginners and the experienced. Evening sessions will focus on five areas: reaching Muslims, China, the limited access world, eastern Europe, and the secular West. Representatives from 20 mission organizations will discuss service opportunities, from the dirty and dangerous to the safe and sanitary.

For your mission-minded members aged 18-35, all this inspiration and fellowship will cost only $85, which includes conference fees, meals, and accommodations. For more information about Go '94! contact Sutherland House, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104. Phone (616) 471-2521; fax (616) 471-3540.

Christmas card sharing

Your members can become better acquainted with each other by bringing to a small group meeting a Christmas card they received from someone special. They might trade cards for silent reading or share the messages verbally. Perhaps a discussion will result regarding the meaning of various cards.—Wil Nuckolls, Fair Oaks, California.

Holiday grief

For those who have lost a loved one during the past year, holidays can be especially difficult. Social psychologist Marianne LaFrance offers the following suggestions to help friends deal with grief at Christmas:

Give them something for their memories. A scrapbook filled with photos and other memorabilia of the departed gathered from family and friends will make a treasured gift.

Help them decide which holiday traditions to keep and which to change, thus making the absence of a loved one less painful. Suggest attending a concert, joining a caroling group, or going on a sleigh ride.

If the bereaved ones are far away, include them in your celebrations by sending an audio tape or videotape of your family decorating the tree, reading The Night Before Christmas, or performing a Christmas pageant.

Plan an outing to the gravesite. Decorate it for the season with a small pine tree, holly, or an evergreen floral arrangement.

For some, the loss of a loved one leaves them feeling less needed. Volunteer your own services at a soup kitchen or children's hospital and invite a grieving friend to serve with you. Or take him or her shopping for food, clothing, or toys to give to a charity.

Don't be afraid to mention the deceased's name—it's important to reassure the bereaved that you haven't forgotten the loved one.

Christmas trees, lights, candles, and other decorations are usually neglected in homes in which someone has passed away. Help them bring some of the season indoors by sending a small tree, wreath, or evergreen floral arrangement.

Attend religious services with the bereaved. Religious communities often provide a strong support network, and holiday services may be comforting to someone in grief.

Encourage the bereaved to spend Christmas with you and your family. Often those who grieve don't feel like celebrating, but being alone during the holidays can be even more difficult. Offer to come to their home if they aren't ready to go out. Remember that the grieving process lasts a long time and, in some ways, never ends. Holidays are especially difficult.

Call 1-800-370-3737 for a copy of Caring in a Time of Need. This free educational brochure, produced by FTD florists in conjunction with the Hospice Association of America, outlines the different phases of the grieving process and offers additional suggestions for helping friends and loved ones through each stage.—Jennifer Minicucci.

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Speaking in Tongues

What was the gift of tongues in the New Testament? Was its manifestation in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost the same as the gift whose abuse Paul had to deal with in the Corinthian church? Is it an unknown and heavenly language that God bestows upon believers to show His acceptance and the presence of the Holy Spirit? Is it still the gift of the Spirit? William E. Richardson presents a careful study of the biblical evidence on the gift of tongues. Paper, 127 pages. US$7.95, Cdn$11.55.

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