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Toward a Christ-centered expression of our faith

Norman Gulley’s “Six Major Theological Divisions” (March 1997) is artificial. Such categories are not found within the Scriptures themselves. The Bible writers nowhere present us with tidy discussions under categories of systematic theology. Rather, they present us with practical discussions of our relationship to God through Jesus Christ. Ellen White displays a similar focus.

I would like to suggest another arrangement of the Fundamental Beliefs which would be more in keeping with the theology. Rather, they present us with discussions under categories of systematic theology. This focus: (1) Christ crucified; (2) Christ risen; (3) Christ ascended as our living Intercessor: “The gospel is the power and wisdom of God, if it is correctly represented by those who claim to be Christians. Christ crucified for our sins should humble every soul before God in his own estimation. Christ risen from the dead, ascended on high, our living Intercessor in the presence of God, is the science of salvation, which we need to learn and teach to children and youth.” (Ellen G. White, Counsels on Sabbath School Work, 124.)

Again, we are told that the focus of our faith is on a crucified and risen Saviour: “Will not our church members keep their eyes fixed on a crucified and risen Saviour, in whom their hopes of eternal life are centered? This is our message, our argument, our doctrine, our encouragement for the sorrowing, the hope for every believer. If we can awaken an interest in men’s minds that will cause them to fix their eyes on Christ, we may step aside, and ask them only to continue to fix their eyes upon the Lamb of God.” (Ellen G. White, SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, 1113.)

Keeping Jesus as the focus of our faith, I would like to suggest the following outline as an approach to the study of theology:

1. Who is our only foundation (1 Cor. 3:11).
2. Who is the Lord of the Scriptures (The fundamental belief dealing with the authority and purpose of Scripture: “They testify of me . . .”).
3. Who is the Everlasting Gospel (the Great Commission, the Mission, Message, and Ministry of the Remnant).
4. Who is the Messiah, the Son of God, our Creator, and Saviour (the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Creation, Sabbath).
5. Who lived for us (the nature of the human as sinner, Christ as our righteousness, justification by faith, law, grace).
6. Who died for us (the Great Controversy, atonement, wages of sin, Christ our Substitute).
7. Who arose from death for us (death, conditional immortality, eternal life, the supernatural).
8. Who ascended for us (Christ as our High Priest, judgment, assurance, victorious living, spiritual gifts and ministries, the Gift of Prophecy).
9. Who shall return for us (the end times, the millennium, the new heaven and earth).
10. For whom we live (obedient discipleship in salvation, sanctification, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the church, unity of the body, stewardship, lifestyle, marriage, and family).

The advantage of this arrangement is that it is all based upon Jesus Himself, rather than the extra-biblical categories of systematic theology. It is a possible example of a truly Christ-centered ordering and presentation of our faith. While I don’t claim that it is perfect, I respectfully submit it as a viable solution to the problems of emphasis, logic, and chronology Dr. Gulley so ably discussed.—James A. Ayars, pastor, Simi Valley, California.

Clergy and violence

Victor Cooper’s article, “Clergy and Violence” (November 1997), makes interesting reading. Counseling involves investigating and probing those dark areas of the psyche that are responsible for erratic and unsociable behavior, a per se process which sooner or later can trigger a violent defensive and obstructive response as the counselee is led to face the underlying factors causing the acts of irresponsibility in the personality: unveiling is often heartrending and frightening for the counselee.

The counselor can become identified in the counselee’s imagination as the factor creating the suffering engendered during the process of rehabilitative exchanges, so that the ensuing pain can be so traumatic that violence becomes the automatic reaction to neutralize the anguish.

In these days when violent confrontation is on the increase for seemingly petty and trifling annoyances, and rage is rife amongst so-called responsible people in the workaday environment, the art of counseling calls for expertise training for those professionals who work daily with the public. A necessary part of our college curriculum should, therefore, include such education by a qualified psychologist.—Norman Wright, Staffordshire Moorlands, England.

Appreciation

I register my sincere thankfulness to you for regularly sending me the bi-monthly issue of Ministry. Since I began receiving the magazine, I have gained a new light and a better dimension for my service from it. It is a great source of learning and encouragement for my ministry. Thank you once again and may God continue to use you for His glory.


Editor’s note: We apologize for misspelling Samuel Pipim’s name in the article “The Bible: Inspiration and Authority” in the May 1998 issue.
Eloquence and authority

WILL EVA

altering eloquence will be wanting.

One of the most striking aspects of eloquent public speech or writing is the authority it gives the speaker or writer. Eloquence is insightfully identified as one of the criteria which “served to identify the New Testament as taking priority [authority] over medieval interpretations without any difficulty.” In other words, something proclaimed with eloquence is destined to be believed and thus to possess an authority over and above similar communications that have lesser eloquence.

All of us would agree that what made the New Testament writers and proclaimers eloquent and thus authoritative was the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life and proclamation. There is the phenomenal contrast between Jesus’ twelve before the wind and fire of the Upper Room versus after it. There is no feature more clearly illuminated in the book of Acts than this comparison and it must remain primary and definitive for those of us charged with authoritatively proclaiming the message of Christ in our time.

Along with this there are other factors that profoundly contribute to the degree of eloquence and thus legitimate authoritateness that we demonstrate in our preaching. It should go without saying that we are called to be students of the Bible, or more specifically, students of the Christ of the Bible. It should also be a given that we confess to be widely and purposefully well read.

A simplistic, anti intellectual mentality is not one that measures with the decisive call for us to develop every faculty with which God has gifted us, challenging us to stretch for excellence. There is a significant false movement among us that champions a brand of “down-home” faith and pastoring that actually promotes ignorance and thus mediocrity. I am all for what is genuinely simple and down-home in our cultures and therefore in our preaching. But I am not for the practice of purposely promoting a false intellectual modesty which glories in a contrived, antiliterate coarseness masquerading as superior spirituality, but which in effect keeps people blind and backward. This mentality devastates the beauty and eloquence that should be in our proclamation of truth.

Another cultural pressure that tends to militate against eloquence in preaching is the one that has caused some pastors to script a role for themselves that tends to make “preachettes,” or more to the point, “preacherettes” out of us. The pressure begins with the genuine need to be relevant and in touch. However, taken to a rather commonly manifested extreme, this pressure can end in reducing pastoring to a kind of glitzy, social operation that limits itself to horizontal realities while neglecting the vertical verities of our calling. This kind of ministry, though engaging, produces a witty or catchy pop preaching style that lacks depth, long term effect and of course, genuine eloquence and authority.

One other eloquence-squelching outlook is perhaps the most pervasive among us and is as old as the church itself. Mark succinctly describes the effect of Jesus teaching and the causes for it when he says, “And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one endowed with authority.” (Mark 1:22 RSV). Jesus had what the scribes did not. I want what Jesus had. But I must confess that I have allowed too much of a stifling, legislative, religionism to dry me out. I have tended to rest on a “I-have-the-truth” mentality that cuts off the felt need to know, grow and become. Controlled by a restrictive traditionalism and the inhibiting constraint to be merely doctrinaire I have too often allowed my God-given creativity and imagination to be dammed up behind the ancient wall of “scribal".

continued on p. 29
I thought you said he was a great preacher.” My commanding officer’s comments cascaded unexpectedly upon me.

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A Distinguished Preacher Series brought to our academy top civilian pastors as guest speakers for our chapel services. These superb pulpiteers would sometimes ignore the fact they were preaching to military students. Instead of preparing sermons specifically for midshipmen, some preached messages that had been successful in other settings. More often than not, these sermons lacked something vital. The message, though profound, lacked relevance for its present context. My CO’s words gently reminded me that our guest preacher’s message had ignored contextual realities.

According to Fred Craddock, “a sermon, to be properly understood and to have its purpose fulfilled, has to be experienced in its context, or rather in its several contexts.” Most sermons fail to fulfill their purpose because preachers ignore the context. Sermons that soar at the worship service may suddenly plunge in a different setting.

Preaching in context refers to the circumstances out of which preaching emerges. It means preaching the right message at the right time and place. We shall consider five components of such a context: personal, cultural, historical, pastoral, and liturgical aspects.

Personal context

Effective sermons begin with a prepared preacher. Lloyd Ogilvie states that “nothing can happen through you until it happens to you, and you can only communicate what you’re in the process of rediscovering.” Personal context requires that ministers do not preach what they have not experienced.

Experiential knowledge presupposes that pastors possess a vibrant spiritual life. Spurgeon once said to a group of ministers, “It should be one of our first cares that we ourselves be saved men.”

This committed spirituality requires faithful and realistic labor. This means we work hard to be ourselves and not someone else. Imitation cripples far more clerics than it helps. Homiletical realists seek to fight with their own armor and are committed to being themselves. William Taylor says: “If one is to do anything effectively in the pulpit, or elsewhere, he must be himself... There is something noble in a voice, but however excellent, an echo may be an echo, there is a hollowness and an indistinctness about it which gives it unreality.” This commitment to genuineness brings its reward. Through our individuality we can reach someone whom our more gifted colleagues may miss.

Personal context includes another important dimension: prayer. Prayer produces power. More things happen because of kneeling pastors than standing ones. Spurgeon believed in prayer power. “I have not preached,” he said once, “this morning half as much as I have prayed. For every

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word that I have spoken, I have prayed two words silently to God."

Cultural context

Preachers must be aware of the cultural context. They must be sensitive to what is happening in society and the world. Bruce Larsen reports that modern culture is characterized by overstimulation, desensitization, enervation, depersonalization, confusion, and preference for the nonverbal. Larsen points out the chief culprit responsible for this condition: “The average household has the television set on seven hours a day. The average young person in our culture has spent 12,000 hours in school by the time of high school graduation and 15,000 hours in front of the television set. No previous generation has ever been so overstimulated by an unrelenting barrage of images, sights, and sounds.”

How can preachers make a difference? What can we do homiletically to influence a generation nourished with sound bytes and music videos? Larsen recommends a preaching that is pictorial, personal, practical, participative, and pointed.

What does Larsen mean? Pictorial preaching moves from being too analytical to appreciating the narrative genre. Personal preaching orientates sermons toward individuals. Practical preaching stresses application. Participative preaching encourages dialogue. Pastors can invite congregants to repeat aloud parts of the sermon, or to say amen, or to suggest sermon topics, or even to critique the message. And of course, preaching should be to the point.

The historical context

Historical context infuses preaching with power, reminding the congregants how God has worked in history. Familiarity with the lives and preaching of great preachers of the past provides a model in excellent and creative preaching. Such an exposure to a variety of approaches to preaching ensures that we are better equipped to meet today’s challenges.

Gardner Taylor says: “Any preacher greatly deprives himself or herself who does not study the recognized masters of pulpit discourse, not to copy them but rather to see what has been the way in which they approached the Scriptures, their craftsmanship, their feel for men’s hearts.”

Taylor lists some of these great preachers: Harry Fosdick, Frederick Robertson, Arthur Gossip, James Steward, John Jasper, C. T. Walker, L. K. Williams, William Borders, Sandy Ray, John Jowett, Alexander McClaren, George Buttrick, and E. F. Boreham. We could add to the list: Justin Martyr, Augustine, Tertullian, Irenaus, Chrysostom, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Baxter, Herbert, Wesley, Whyte, and Spurgeon. In addition, each generation produces its own great preachers.

The pastoral context

Most preaching happens in a pastoral context. Pastoral relationships influence what we say from the pulpit and how we’re heard by our congregations. People who receive quality pastoral care will hear sermons differently than those who miss pastoral contact.

Our sermons should reflect a sensitivity to the needs of the people we serve. When Los Angeles exploded with racial violence, I had completed my sermon for the week, but it was impossible to ignore this pressing concern. I therefore rewrote my sermon, ensuring that it addressed the challenging realities of civil unrest.

Coffin argues that pastoral sensitivity and good preaching cannot be separated. He writes: “When a minister begins a week with the feeling he is ‘preached out, let him spend an afternoon … in going about from family to family and asking himself: What is the spiritual need here? What guidance or comfort or awakening or sharpening of conscience or enrichment in God ought this home or individual receive?’”

The liturgical context

The liturgical context has to do with the role of the sermon in worship. Worship is crucial in the life of a community. As William Temple wrote, “this world can be saved from political chaos by one thing only, and that is worship.”

How does worship provide a context for preaching? First, it provides the occasion for preaching and the best atmosphere for proclamation. This does not mean effective preaching cannot happen outside of the community of faith. Street preachers can proclaim God’s word outside of a formal worship context. So can youth. But worship provides a need-filled, spiritual, and reverent atmosphere where powerful preaching can occur. Second, worship can suggest important themes for preaching, particularly for those who observe the seasons of the Christian year. Third, preaching itself can become an act of worship, if we remember that worship includes an encounter with God, an understanding of Scripture, an affirmation of identity, and an assurance of empowerment.

From the Christian perspective, sermons provide the primary cognitive content for the liturgical context. A sermon is more than a literary or historical exposition of sacred literature or exhortation aimed at producing a certain behavior. Crawford is right when he observes that a sermon’s ultimate content should be “an exposition of the Word, that is, Jesus, the Word from God.” The purpose of the sermon is to search for, discover, display, and apply those principles that are demonstrated through the grace of God that is in the Christ event, the exemplary life that Jesus lived, the teachings He gave, the sacrifice He made, and the eternal strength His resurrection provides.

Preachers can make this happen by taking into account personal, cultural, historical, pastoral, and liturgical contexts of preaching.
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ion, World Ministers Council at Toronto, Canada, in
ne, 2000. Sorry, Adventist PKs only.

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Note: Follow instructions. Entries which do not follow the guidelines will not be considered.

Contest Theme: “The Way of the Cross Leads Home”

Art (for Ministry magazine cover)

- Art must be in color and the original work of the PK.
- Size minimum 8 x 10.5 inches (20 x 27 cm), maximum 11 x 16 inches.
- Joy room in artwork for the Ministry magazine title logo. See magazine cover.

Cartoon

- Cartoons must be single line drawings or a series of no more than four related line drawings which tell a story.
- Ink on 4 x 5 inch (10 x 13 cm) card. No pencil drawings.
- Mount each drawing on 8.5 x 11 inch (26.6 x 28 cm) card stock paper.

Banners & Flags

- Must express theme by script or design representation.
- Make from handmade or commercial cloth.
- Use paint, thread, fabric, stain, and similar materials.
- Minimum size one yard (about one meter) long and wide and maximum three yards (three meters) long or wide including border.

Recitation/Memorization

- Use any recognized version of Scripture in the language of your choice.
- Recitation from memory, without prompting. Your entry will be judged on memorization of the passage and your ability to hold the listener’s attention.
- Submit on audio cassette.

Art

- Article must respond to one or two of these questions:
  How does the fact that Jesus left heaven, became a human and died like a criminal make a difference in your life? How does it affect your thinking, actions, and goals?
  What does Jesus’ sacrifice tell you about God: who He is, what He’s like?
  How does Jesus’ life and death help you understand sin? How does this help you relate to other people, especially those who disagree with you?
  How does Jesus’ life and death here give you hope and guide you “home”?
- Don’t use many quotations from any source. Use one or more personal stories to illustrate your ideas.
- Length between 750 and 1,000 words.
- Type or hand-print with double-spacing.
- You may talk about your ideas with friends, family, teachers, or pastors. They may give suggestions, correct grammar or spelling, but not write, revise, or rewrite.
- Tell your story. Not someone else’s.

Stitchery

- Except for ideas, the entire entry must be your work.
- Types of stitchery eligible: crochet, embroidery, crewel embroidery, quilting, knitting, applique, and needlepoint.
- Size minimum, 4 x 4 inches (10 x 10 cm); maximum, 2 x 4 feet (61 x 122 cm).
- Materials must be native to your country.
- Your entry will be judged on originality, use of materials, neatness, and how well it captures the theme.

Sponsored by the General Conference
Ministries Association
In the first part of this article (May 1998), we examined a fraud that preachers often succumb to: the misuse of Scriptures to deceive both oneself and one’s congregation by not letting the Bible speak for itself, but rather letting our ideas and concepts speak forth, buttressed by a sprinkling of biblical verses.

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We also posed a pointed question to all preachers of the Word: Are there simple principles of Bible study that mark out the difference between using the Word and receiving it in order to obey it?

This article will argue for a five-step method to let the Bible speak for itself and touch the hearts of the congregation with what God has to say. If these simple principles are followed, I am convinced, we can avoid the two extremes that sometimes characterize Bible study and preaching: the extremism of self-centered manipulation of God’s Word that finds its outlet in such eccentric and bizarre interpretations of David Koresh and his ilk; and the extremism of warming, instead of warning, the ego of the hearer by being indifferent to the claims of God’s Word on the life of every human being.

In the context of such dangers, it is imperative that safeguards be put in place so that the Bible will be allowed to speak with its own voice and not be the well-intentioned plaything of pious or freakish minds. Here are five principles that can be helpful in letting the Word speak.

1. Approach the Bible with prayer

   Study the Bible in an atmosphere of self-distrust, prayer, and a willingness to obey (John 7:17). Our hearts are inherently deceitful (Jer. 17:9). By nature we lack a teachable spirit. It doesn’t matter how much Greek we know or how many degrees we accumulate, if we don’t have a teachable spirit, our learning is worth nothing. True knowledge of God does not come from merely intellectual pursuit or academic study (1 Cor. 2:14; James 1:5).

   According to 2 Thessalonians 2:10, the knowledge of God comes from a willingness to receive the truth from God no matter what it costs. The gifts of God are free but they are not cheap; they can cost us everything—our life, family, friends, and reputation. But if we are willing to find the truth no matter what the cost, we will receive it.

   Bible study needs to begin with au-
authentic prayer. The prayer I’m suggesting might go something like this: “Lord, I want the truth no matter what the cost to me personally.” That’s a hard prayer to pray. But if we pray that prayer, we will begin to receive God’s truth. And we will also pay the price.

2. Use a variety of translations

When doing serious study of the Bible, those who have no access to Hebrew and Greek should consult a variety of translations of the biblical text. Every translation has its limitations and weaknesses and to some degree reflects the biases of the translator(s). These limitations can be minimized by comparing several translations. Where most translators agree, the translation of the original is probably fairly plain and can be safely followed. When there is wide disagreement between translators, the original is probably difficult or ambiguous. Wide deviations from the typical translation pattern tend to signal a translator’s biases.

Where translation patterns indicate that the original text is clear, we can safely base our authority on the translated text. Where the translation patterns indicate that a text we are seeking to understand is ambiguous or difficult to translate, it would not be safe to base our teaching and practice on a particular translation of that text.

3. Study the clear texts

If we want really to let the Scriptures speak for themselves, we need to spend the majority of our time in those sections of Scripture that are reasonably clear. There are many parts of the Bible regarding which there is little disagreement among Christians, while other texts vex even the Greek and Hebrew scholars. So an extremely important safeguard in the study of Scripture is to spend most of our time in the sections that are reasonably clear and preach from these. The clear texts of Scripture ground the reader in the great central themes of the biblical message and safeguard the interpreter against the ridiculous use of texts that are more ambiguous.

If we spend the majority of our time on texts like the seals and trumpets of Revelation or Daniel 11, we will go crazy. One of the major tactics of people who misuse the Bible is to take ambiguous texts, develop creative solutions to the problems they find there, and then use those solutions as the basis for their theology. Such interpreters end up having to distort clear texts of Scripture because the message there doesn’t fit the theology that they have developed from the difficult texts.

4. Cultivate a broad reading of the Bible

Another important principle is to spend the majority of your study time reading the Bible rather than searching a concordance. An obsession with detail can lead us away from the central thrust of the Bible. The problem is that we can put Bible texts together in such a way as to prove almost anything we want to prove. Without safeguards, concordance study tends to focus on texts apart from their contexts.

Concordance study is all the more dangerous when it is done on a computer. Thanks to the computer it is possible to spend hundreds of hours in “Bible study” without ever actually studying the Bible itself. The meanings we can draw from such study may be extremely impressive, yet have nothing to do with the original writer’s intention. It can be like taking a pair of scissors and cutting fifty texts out of the Bible, tossing them like a salad in a bowl, and finally pulling them out one by one and saying, “This is from the Lord.” Whether the concordance is a print or a computer version, the process results in putting the interpreter in control of how the biblical text impacts on his or her understanding of truth.

When we read biblical books from beginning to end, the biblical author is in control of the order and flow of the material. The author leads us naturally from one idea to the next, and our exposure to the Bible is not controlled by any need arising from within ourselves or from our background. Broad reading of the Bible, therefore, anchors the interpreter in the intentions of the original writers and helps the interpreter to get the “big picture” that provides the best safeguard against bizarre interpretations of its isolated parts. General reading naturally encourages a teachable spirit and helps us see the text as it was intended to be read. The Bible is not supposed to learn from us; we are supposed to learn from the Bible.

5. Give attention to peer criticism

Finally, we need to give careful attention to the criticism of peers (people who search the Bible as we do), especially those who disagree with us or who are competent in the original languages and the tools of exegesis. As I mentioned before, one of our primary problems in biblical understanding is that each of us has a natural bent to self-deception (Jer. 17:9). That self-deception runs so deep that sometimes, even if we are using the original text, praying, and doing a lot of general reading in the clear texts of the Bible, it is still possible to end up in a completely bizarre place. The best antidote to self-deception is to constantly subject one’s own understandings to the criticism of others who are making equally rigorous efforts to understand those texts.

It may be painful to listen to that kind of criticism. Nevertheless, such criticisms are particularly valuable when they come from people we naturally disagree with because they will see things in the text that we would never see because of our blind spots and defense mechanisms. Others may be just as unteachable as we are, but if they have a different set of blind spots than we do, they will see things in the text that we would miss and we will see things that they would miss.

Interpreters can see much more clearly in relationship than they can individually. God uses our disagreements to drive us back to the text for fresh insight and understanding. What counts is to help each other see what is actually there in the text, not what we want or need to see.

Conclusion

One of the greatest temptations of the pulpit is to use the Word of God to enhance our own reputation or to undergird our own opinions. Even when we are aware of the dangers, it is natural for us to deceive ourselves and to see what we want to see in the Bible. This is all the more true if we have a high view of the inspiration of the Bible. Developing lifelong habits of prayer and self-distrust, of openness to a variety of translations, of broad reading in the clear texts of Scripture, and of a willingness to learn from our peers can gradually fortify our minds on the solid rock of God’s Word. Then we will become teachers of the Word rather than mere users.
Can preaching change behavior? Of course. Can preaching change behavior easily? Of course not. For behavior to change, preaching must deal with issues listeners care about, and the listeners must understand what is said and how it applies to their personal lives.

That’s the great challenge of preaching. To reach listeners’ concerns, to be understood by them, is no easy task. Every sermon should have some milk to nourish young Christians and some meat to challenge more mature ones. The immature, often unaware of their limitations and easily threatened, need to hear the familiar often enough to ward off their uneasiness. If questions are raised, they want answers, or they’re likely to reject the preaching enterprise and the preacher. The “mature,” on the other hand, may be impatient with the familiar; they need to be stretched in their thinking, asked questions with no obvious answers, and invited to explore new meanings, relationships, and values.

What keeps listeners tuned in? The most compelling preachers have an intensity arising from a strong conviction that what they are saying is essential. Experienced preachers know more excellent ways to motivate than by seeking belly laughs. The connection between entertainment and motivation is tenuous at best. And besides, entertainment rarely changes behavior.

Three ways of promoting learning and behavioral change

Three research-based concepts help us understand ways to promote learning—and resultant behavior change—from the pulpit.

Positive reinforcement. Consider Elisha encouraging his servant. Here we have a thematic approach for every God-fearing preacher: He who is for us is greater than he who is against us. Reviewing guilt-producing sermons in my files, I flinch; in contrast, memorable messages from influential preachers provide positive reinforcement. While acknowledging that our task is to “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted,” we should steadily assure people of God’s loving affirmation. That, more than anything else, can lead to the motivation that will change behavior.

Human curiosity. Everyone has interests to nourish, values to examine, information gaps to fill, and beliefs to strengthen. The preacher needs to discover what will stimulate the listeners (juniors to retirees) to want to know more. Listeners initially come to worship wondering what lies ahead. We need to capitalize on this anticipation, so evident...
in the crowds that followed Jesus. Imagine their remarks as they returned home: He wrote in the sand, He sat a child on His lap, in the bottom of too many people's must-do lists. Church and preaching lie at the Prov homelands to avoid religious oppression. It's important to explore the assumptions fueling the problem. For example, those who assume verbal inspiration of the Bible will produce interpretations quite different from those who assume thought inspiration. There's no point in arguing about interpretations when the assumptions have not been examined.

Helping listeners handle important ideas relating to difficult concepts such as the inspiration of the Bible or styles of worship is one of the preacher's greatest challenges. To pose a concept, the preacher brings together shared features of otherwise discrete events. For example, what relationship does "good worship" have with involvement and participation, music, prayer, praise, giving, enjoyment, and/or confrontation?

Valuable communicative resources

In an age of visual/oral stimulation, we need support with examples. It could be Mrs. C, sent off to an Adventist academy at the age of 14 when her parents despaired of controlling her. "Today, after 60 years of church membership, she is the academy's staunchest supporter. Listen to what she says about the profound effect of her first brush with Adventist education . . ." When the preacher juxtaposes an idea with illustration, listeners are more likely to integrate the idea into their own experience. Repeatedly dealing with the same idea or concept in varied settings will emphasize its efficacy.

Congregational participation and overlearning

Revelation seminars have helped us understand the importance of active participation in learning. Studying lesson sheets, getting to ask questions and hearing peers' comments promote a searching, empowering experience. Participants "over-learn" to the point of being able to make connections between new data and threads of history, morality, values, and the "God-consciousness" that they bring with them.

Providing handouts in the church bulletin related to the sermon involves the listeners with meaningful sermon material.

Unfortunately, some have come to expect nothing at church that illuminates their curiosity or that compels them to examine their behavior. For example, if we're looking at a biblical passage dealing with God's providence, the handout may ask the worshipers to recall a time when they experienced or observed God's providence at work. If our theme is church worship, a series of items may ask for a priority rating like this one: Which would you prefer in church: (1) a prayer that is read, (2) a repetition of the Lord's Prayer, (3) a halting prayer by a child, (4) a prayer that lasts five minutes. Each item will have proponents and opponents and is worthy of consideration.

It is crucial that listeners repeatedly see a loving, caring, fair God in sermons. This over-learning about God becomes lifesaving when a traumatic experience comes that would blemish or distort the picture of God as portrayed in Scripture. Here is where preaching can make a significant difference, really changing someone's behavior. Facing the cruel twists of life, listeners are fortified by biblical concepts that have been reiterated in different garbs and guises so that they become immovable reference points.

Handling controversial concepts

When controversial issues arise, with characteristic major misunderstandings accompanying them, it's often important to explore the assumptions fueling the problem. For example, those who assume verbal inspiration of the Bible will produce interpretations quite different from those who assume thought inspiration. There's no point in arguing about interpretations when the assumptions have not been examined.

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Valuable communicative resources

In an age of visual/oral stimulation, a sermon accompanied by visual material and/or worksheets enriches the teaching setting. In a recent series, I used a large poster as a visual chart every Sabbath, each week adding a feature to the chart. Every week's bulletin included a homework handout for the next week's sermon.

Another valuable resource for concept preaching is church history. In a series of sermons on church history, we traced the development of concepts regarding spiritual experience in the reformed church of Europe and the subsequent immigration to America of people with distinctive ideas about spiritual experience. One group particularly rich for study was the German pietistic community of Ephrata, Pennsylvania. We looked at its influence on later spiritual experience in several denominations.

A case study approach, typical in law school, provides a high-interest level, particularly when we see its modern parallels. Consider themes of submission, forgiveness, compassion, deceit, and anger in the continued on p. 29
Jesus is the greatest preacher the world has ever known. Yet we have only two of His sermons recorded in full: the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), and the Sermon on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24, 25).

It could be argued that the Olives sermon really doesn’t count as one because Jesus’ congregation was limited to His disciples. There are, of course, other speeches or talks that Jesus gave: long ones like John 14–17, but these were given on a more personal level; and short ones that probably came from sermons, but we don’t have the full text.

However, we have enough of the content and style of Jesus’ preaching so that we can learn much from Him. Here are eight great principles that define Jesus as the great preacher that He was.

He preached the gospel

Gospel was the first priority in the preaching of Jesus. “I must preach,” He said, “the good news [gospel] of the kingdom of God . . . because that is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43).*

So Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching and “preaching the good news [gospel] of the kingdom” (Matt. 9:35). He called for repentance (Matt. 4:17). He healed. He told those whom He healed to go and sin no more. He fed the hungry. He performed many wonders.

But the bottom line of all that He did was preaching the gospel, the good news of the saving plan of God—the “eternal gospel” (Rev. 14:6).

He ministered with passion

Undoubtedly, passion marked the life and ministry of Jesus. When He saw Mary and Martha grieve over the loss of their brother, He wept. When He looked over Jerusalem indifferent to His messiahship, He wept. When He saw the holiness of the temple turned into the commonness of a marketplace, He was angry and whipped the money changers out of His Father’s house.

Check the passion in Matthew 23. Feel the anger. Notice how focused He was as He used repetition in His stinging condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees. (Warning: Do this very carefully at home or in your pulpit. Jesus could do it well because He understood the heart and could throw a first stone well, with love and skill.)

On a life-and-death mission, Jesus knew that it was going to cost Him His life, but He’d committed Himself to the cause. This realization is important when we think of His preaching, for He was not preaching to give information, to entertain, or to prove a
preacher presenting a colorless, monotone point. He preached to change people’s lives. No one can call Jesus a milk-sop preacher presenting a colorless, monotone message. He had commitment. He embodied His message. He had enthusiasm. He had depth. He had a presentation, but for your storytelling? Jesus to be remembered not for the depth of your theology, your stunning logic and dramatic presentation, but for your storytelling? Jesus always had a story to tell; parables were an important means of His preaching (Matt. 13:34, 35). And if He didn’t have a parable, He had an illustration.

Matthew 24 is a good example of this. First, there’s an illustration from the Old Testament: “As it was in the days of Noah” (verse 37). Then there’s an illustration from everyday life: “If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming” (verse 43). Then follows an illustration from employee-employer relationships: the faithful and wise servant who will continue to be faithful and wise even when the master is away (verses 45-51).

In this apocalyptic sermon, Jesus talked about the end time but did it through stories and illustrations. In Matthew 25 where the sermon continues, Jesus told three parables, each stressing the importance of living, even as we await the Second Coming.

Jesus was creative in His use of illustrations. See the Sermon on the Mount and His references to His followers being salt and light. Note His comment about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field—if God cares for them, doesn’t He care for you? In another place He used a child as a visual aid when He said we must become like children if we were to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

And, yes, He used humor. His humor is sometimes difficult to appreciate in English translations and culture. The humor of His time tended toward wordplay and is often more subtle than the humor of today. However, there’s no denying the humor of trying to take a speck out of someone else’s eye when you have a plank in your own or straining out gnats yet eating camels.

He focused on the big issues

Jesus spoke about big issues. Once again, read again the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes turn the popular thinking of His day, of any day, upside down. And there’s more: Love your enemies; don’t judge; be more righteous than those who claim to be righteous. Social issues? Give to the needy (without fanfare); don’t make divorce easy; love the tax collector. What’s important? Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

Again consider Matthew 24, 25. The big issue is the resolution of earth’s experiment with sin at the Second Coming. That’s what the gospel is all about ("this gospel of the kingdom will be preached"); it’s universal ("in the whole world as a testimony to all nations"); and it’s apocalyptic ("and then the end will come”—24:14). So, be alert: "keep watch, because you do not know on what day the Lord will come" (verse 42). These are big issues.

Jesus spoke on issues impacting Christian living that gave hope for the here and now and for the future. We preachers may be tempted to defend our sermon entitled "Headwear of the Bible" as being biblically based (even if it does have a three-yawn rating), but it just isn’t in the same league with the kind of preaching Jesus did.

He was the complete preacher

The preaching of Jesus had a balance that is not only worth noting but worth imitating. He preached to help people become complete. His messages were designed to help more than the spiritual part of the person. He was concerned with the social aspects of life as well: to give to the needy, to be reconciled with your brother, to go the second mile.

He brought a new morality into the pulpit. He defined adultery as even the thought before it became an act. He saw the merciful not as the weak but as the blessed. He said only the pure in heart will see God.

His preaching contained an obvious concern for health, and He practiced what He preached. He went about healing. Even as He descended from His pulpit after the Sermon on the Mount, He healed a leper (Matt. 8:1-4).

And there was balance in His apocalyptic preaching. He didn’t leave us with only grim warnings but with illustrations on the application, readiness, and rewards connected with His second coming.

He was a Bible-based preacher

Jesus was authoritative. That was one thing that set Him apart from the rabbis, and people did not fail to notice it (Matt. 7:29). However, Jesus never failed to turn to the Scriptures as a source of authority for His preaching and teaching.

"You have heard it said..." was a formula He used often. He expanded and expounded on an Old Testament passage, gave it greater depth, and used it as His base for proclamation. In Matthew 24, 25 He referred to Daniel and Noah—Jesus knew His Bible.

He was a model preacher

Jesus left us a model in preaching. As preachers of the gospel of Jesus, we are to continued on p. 29
KEEPING YOUR FAMILY ON COURSE

Ever heard the expression “couldn’t hit the broad side of a barn”? It’s certainly not true for thousands of people in Illinois.

In a recent study done in that state it was found that in one year there were 54,000 traffic accidents caused by collisions with cars legally parked on the side of the road! They averaged one collision every seven minutes, and most happened during good weather on straight, dry roads, with drivers who had not been drinking and weren’t on any kind of medication.

Why would so many apparently responsible motorists simply run into parked cars? The answer is widely accepted behavior called the “fascination phenomenon” or the “moth effect.” Whatever name it goes by, it’s basically the tendency for drivers to focus on something outside their planned path of travel and then to steer into it involuntarily.

According to Charles Butler, manager of traffic safety services for the American Automobile Association (AAA), “The key to the whole phenomenon is a simple fact: you drive where you’re looking.”*

Take regular breaks

Many pastors think they simply don’t have time for any breaks. Down deep inside it leaves you feeling that you must be pretty important and necessary if you’re so busy you don’t have time for yourself; and you emanate a sort of stained-glass glow (albeit somewhat haggard) when you look in the mirror! But if you want to be healthy and have a healthy family, regular breaks are essential. One of the nicest things we’ve ever done as a family is to schedule a family day each week. I don’t mean a day just to catch up with household chores or run errands. This is a day to relax, have fun, and be together. We plan special things that we can look forward to and back on with fond memories. Plan ahead and find out what the possibilities are within a two-hour travel radius of your home. We’ve enjoyed everything from reading aloud in the backyard hammock to splashing at the beach and imitating the monkeys at the zoo. What you choose to do is up to you, but I’ll guarantee it will add a new dimension to your family and give you extra energy for the work you put off till later.

* From Charles Butler, manager of traffic safety services for the American Automobile Association (AAA), "The key to the whole phenomenon is a simple fact: you drive where you’re looking."
Avoid focusing on roadside distractions

It’s worth the time and effort to consider prayerfully what is important to your family. When you’ve mapped out where you’re going, it’s much easier to get there! And it helps you to avoid “roadside distractions.” Carefully choose three important priorities, and let the other things go. Where you spend your time says a lot about what is really important to you. Remember, if you don’t decide what you will do with your time and your life, someone else will decide for you.

Get rest

Have you ever noticed that people who take good care of themselves are actually a lot more productive? You’re not doing yourself or anyone else a favor by going full-steam all the time. Regularly taking time out with God, getting a full night’s sleep (no matter what still needs to be done), and taking care of the other needs God created us to have really makes a difference. This will protect you from burnout, help you to be more creative, and safeguard your family from internal problems.

During an opening hymn in church one Sabbath I was startled to hear myself singing “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, work (instead of world) without end, Amen, Amen.” You may not have actually sung it, but there may have been days when you thought the work would never end! I think my subconscious was trying to tell me something. Maybe your subconscious, your body, your spouse, or your kids are trying to give you signals too.

Jesus said to His disciples and to us in Mark 6:31, “Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest a while.”

Look far ahead in your lane

Envision what you’d like for your family years down the road. Then plan and act accordingly. Great families don’t just happen. It takes hard work and commitment. I’ve never heard anyone who’s just retired say that they wish they’d placed more emphasis on work. But I have heard many people say they wish they’d spent more time with their family.

We hear so many “oughts” and “shoulds” and “have tos” in our lives, and lots of times it seems we just can’t measure up. True, it’s impossible to balance everything. God has promised that “What is impossible for man is possible with God” (Luke 18:27, TEV). He has given us the precious gift of our families, and if we ask, He will give us wisdom to safeguard what He has brought into our lives.

One day we will stand before God and hear those words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” He will say this to us not only because we have faithfully served Him, but also because we have been committed to the ones He has placed closest to us—our families.

Keeping your family relationships on course can be challenging, but using these safety tips will help.

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Derek J. Morris, D.Min., is a professor of preaching and pastoral theology at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Derek Morris: In the past two decades, you have championed the cause of inductive biblical preaching. What’s behind such commitment?

Fred B. Craddock: The theological reasons have to do with the community and the Book, giving the listeners room to arrive at conclusions rather than concluding and then preaching on it. All Bible study that is good Bible study is inductive, so why not just do it that way in the pulpit? Some people don’t like inductive methodology because it sounds like it doesn’t have any authority to it. But it has more authority than deductive methodology. It’s just that it is relocated between them and that Book.

DM: In your book, As One Without Authority, you suggest that if you do not allow your listeners to follow you in an inductive fashion, you have taken away their freedom to discover the truth.* What do you mean by that?

FBC: It means you leave your listeners in that pitiful box of having only two alternatives of agreeing or disagreeing with you. It is all your work. It is all packaged and delivered and that is it. So you get to say, “I agree with you,” or “I don’t agree with you.” But in inductive preaching, you unroll your idea in such a way that listeners have to work to get it themselves. I think it is a compliment to preaching when listeners don’t quite know whether they thought it themselves or got it from something the preacher said!

DM: So it’s not as though you have nothing to say. Rather, you are trying to invite the community to come with you to the Book.

FBC: That’s right! That’s the way I was taught and the way I preached when I first started in the pulpit. I would give them my proposition at the beginning and then I would break it down into points. That was my sermon. Nobody asked me, “Where did you get that from?” I studied, I worked, but I started at the finish line. They were used to it so they didn’t raise any questions. I was the one who raised the questions.

DM: It sounds like you came to the conclusion that you wanted to encourage the interaction to occur between your listeners and the Book. It was your desire to be a catalyst rather than a person who just stands up and explains or reports. Is there any danger with this inductive approach to biblical preaching?

FBC: Some young preachers have taken the inductive method as an excuse for getting up and saying nothing, just being casual. I have been embarrassed by going to seminars where somebody gets up and says, “Since I read Craddock’s book, I don’t really prepare anything. I just kind of toss out this and that.” That gives me the shakes. I wanted to achieve just the opposite—careful Bible study.

DM: You have suggested that the inductive process calls for incompleteness.
How do you avoid frustrating or confusing your listeners? People want clarity and some definition, but you want to maintain a sense of incompleteness. How do you determine your degree of incompleteness?

FBC: That is a good question and I cannot give an easy answer! I would say that after preaching 8 out of 10 of my sermons, I go back and write notes to myself. "Went too far?" "Didn't go far enough." If I am preaching to a group that is biblically alert and committed Christians, I can take them along an inductive path and I will shortly find them ahead of me and sitting on the porch waiting! Other groups say, "Go ahead, please tell us what you are trying to say so we can go on to the cafeteria!" So your question is pastoral as well as a theological and homiletical. You don't want to frustrate people; you don't want to ask ninety-nine questions and then sit down. If you ask more than one question, you are asking too many. You may ask that one question several ways, some of them quite leading, but keep your focus. Don't let your listeners just chase rabbits everywhere and then go home saying, "I don't know what in the world the preacher was talking about."

DM: It would seem that with inductive preaching, it is especially important to recognize the non-verbal cues of your listeners. Somehow you have got to keep them right on the edge of discovery. How do you accomplish that?

FBC: Yes, as you preach you are reading the listeners. You are sometimes pausing and being casual, what I call "stopping and sitting on a bench a minute." You can tell as you are speaking if you are making progress. Sometimes you jump in too deep. They can't swim. Then what are you going to do? Going back is just as dangerous as going forward. I usually carry a plan B!

DM: If a pastor is wanting to explore the inductive method, what suggestions would you offer?

FBC: Most people who follow the inductive method are inductive up to a certain point. Then, near the end of the sermon, they start drawing some conclusions. It is something like an inductive opening and a deductive closing. And if I were just starting, that is the way I would start. In fact, I would make a practice of constructing my sermon to lead to that result.

DM: In other words, you would gently let your listeners know that you will be expecting more active participation from them when they listen to the sermon. Is that it?

When [preachers] cease to wail about preaching being sick and confess that [their] preaching is sick, then [they] will be willing to do something constructive: not simply choosing more controversial topics and more clever titles to divert attention from [their] monotonous method of outlining, but choosing a mode of discourse appropriate to the content to be shared and the experience [they] hope will occur."—As One Without Authority, 45.

FBC: Yes, that's right. It's expecting more of them, but you are not doing it all at once. They are learning to listen to you; you are learning to speak to them. When I started preaching inductively as the pastor of a church, people at the door would say, "Was that a sermon? That wasn't a sermon!" And I said, "Did you follow it?" "Well, some of it, but I didn't know what you were doing." So at a fellowship dinner, I told the people, "I expect more work out of you folks. Listening is hard work. I want you to draw some conclusions." We worked together and we had a lot of fun. I made a lot of mistakes, but gradually they developed the ability to think about what I was saying, to think their own thoughts and remember things. I learned a great deal.

DM: I notice that you have the ability to make your listeners laugh. You seem to establish rapport by looking at the humorous side of things.

FBC: Laughter does that. It makes a community when everybody laughs together. It is liberating for both you and your listeners. Seriousness of purpose does not require heaviness of mind. You can be light on your feet and still be very serious about what you are doing. In my early days, I used to defeat myself with a counterproductive heaviness. If you don't give your listeners an opportunity to relax and chuckle, they will find an opportunity. But they will do it at the wrong time, when you are trying to be serious. In other words, if you don't let them up for air, they will come up for air at the wrong time!

DM: I hear you saying that when you preach inductively, it's good to plan actually resting points for your listeners. What other suggestions would you give to those who want to improve their preaching?

FBC: I have learned that if you say something that is really true and wise, it is layered. Even children will get your point, but on a different level than the parents. People will come back and say, "You know, I have been thinking about that." Life is layered and I think truth is layered. When Jesus told the parables, I am sure some kids nudged each other but they didn't really get it like some others did. So that is the way I think we should preach. And finally, don't try to pack too much into a sermon. If you put too much on the plate, they can't eat it all. And when they see they can't eat it all, they may quit eating altogether. Just say one thing; say it at the right time, when you are trying to be serious. Without Authority, 45.

DM: That is a good question and I can offer the text. One idea is enough.

Fred B. Craddock, As One Without Authority (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 62, 68.
trying to preach the gospel in this mega city is like punching at fog,” a pastor told me two years ago. His metaphor is apt! He was then assigned to a congregation of about two hundred fifty in one of the 20 largest metropolitan areas in North America—the old “Central” church.

We can spend large amounts of money and invest enormous energy in public evangelism in a highly urbanized community, but the results seem to tell us no one is even listening. “Punching... fog.” You give it your best shot, and “there is no ‘there’ there.”

Of course, there are some exceptions. The Adventist Church has experienced tremendous growth among immigrants in the large cities. One sociologist recently conducted an in-depth study of the Adventist membership in New York City and revealed that in the decades since 1945, it has become almost entirely a city of immigrants.

Then, tent revivals conducted in the African-American communities of the largest cities in the U.S. regional conferences continue to be effective in planting new churches in the inner city, as well as in other communities.

Yet, in many ways the exceptions serve to prove the generalization! Where a multicultural, urban congregation is growing, its new members come more from the sons and daughters of immigrants than from the majority population in its community. In some large cities in North America there is no longer even a single Adventist church where the majority of the members are of the same people group as the majority of the urban population.

Two kinds of people seem to be particularly difficult to reach even though they constitute the largest numbers in most of the largest cities: young, urban professionals and established, blue-collar workers. The vast majority of the second group are lifelong city residents, the fourth and fifth generations of nineteenth-century immigrants from Europe, now almost entirely assimilated. ¹

These two groups account for the majority of urban population in North America. If they are not reached, then we have not reached the cities. Today, there are almost no examples of successful Adventist evangelism among either group.

Attempts at urban evangelism

At the same time, a new generation of Adventist pastors and evangelists is more interested in reaching the cities than at any time since 1906, when the Adventist Church effectively dismantled its original city-mission strategy. Since those days, a couple of stabs have been taken at the topic.

The 1910 General Conference Annual
Council, held in New York City, was entirely devoted to the topic. It voted to publish the papers presented, but that never happened, and they have evidently been lost forever.

In 1950, the General Conference provided major appropriations to start evangelistic centers in London, New York, and Chicago. It was the vision of radio evangelist H.M.S. Richards to start programs along the lines of the highly visible People's Church, in Toronto, which combined a wide range of social-action programs with weekly public-evangelistic meetings. The Chicago center never opened, and now the London and New York centers are gone.

In 1967, in response to the urban crisis sweeping the United States, the General Conference Annual Council established the Inner City Program. Its level of funding has never kept pace with the project proposals, and four years ago the General Conference quit funding it all together. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is currently attempting to renew the program under a new charter.

If you read Ellen White's correspondence on the topic during the last ten years of her life, you will see that she went to her grave deeply disappointed about the church's performance in this arena. Maybe we are finally ready to pass the torch that burned in her heart for the cities.

The secular mind

As the population of North America and Europe has become more urbanized, it has also become more secularized. The two phenomena seem to be related and to reinforce one another.

Today, not only are four out of five Americans urban residents, but the influence of urban culture reaches to the farthest frontier over satellite television and the Internet. Children in the most isolated cabins of Alaska or the Yukon can be immersed in a daily dose of "Hill Street Blues."

Religious leaders fear secularization; and what we fear, we often misunderstand. The "secular mind" of North America is not atheistic. Consistent survey results demonstrate that more than 90 percent of Americans believe in God and pray. Three out of four believe that the Bible is God's Word. The majority claim that they go to church regularly.

Yet, here is the key to understanding the secular mind. When Kirk Hadaway and an interdenominational research team tested the poll numbers of Americans who say they were in church last weekend by actually counting heads in an entire metropolitan area, it was discovered that less than half as many actually made it as told pollsters they were present.

"Dirty trick," people complained when the results were announced. The key to understanding the secular mind is realizing that it does not reject religion, but rather believes strongly that religion is definitely a private matter. Secular people find it easier to chat about sex while they hang around the water cooler than they do to talk about religion.

Anyone who brings up the topic of faith is violating a taboo. Therefore, almost all church members fall into one of two categories. The smaller number are well-known among their work associates, neighbors and friends as people who regularly violate the taboo and talk about religion. They are tuned out by almost everyone. The larger number respect the taboo and rarely mention the topic among their acquaintances outside the church.

At the same time, because the secularized majority classifies religion as "private," the only effective route to this audience is through private channels and methods.

How then can we get people who see faith as "private" to attend a strong public evangelism outreach such as NET '98?

The key to understanding the secular mind is realizing that it does not reject religion, but rather believes strongly that religion is definitely a private matter.

An urban strategy for friendship evangelism

William McNeil, an Adventist pastor in Albany, New York, has perfected an urban strategy for "friendship evangelism." Local churches across North America have begun to adopt and use these methods.

1. Announce, affirm, and support from the pulpit the expectation that believers will share Christ with their circle of acquaintances on the job, in the community, and among relatives. Teach the principles of informal, nonprogrammatic, incidental witnessing. Uphold examples regularly.

2. Provide training in the skills of casual, conversational witnessing. Use introductory training curricula such as Friendship Evangelism Seminar and Making Friends for God. Also provide continuing education and skill development through a monthly People In Evangelism (PIE) meeting where those members who are doing friendship evangelism can pray for one another, debrief, practice what to say next in relationships, and solve individual problems. (I recently saw a nice touch in a church where at the PIE meeting, people not only ate one kind of pie but fresh-baked, homemade pies of a different flavor each month. This has proved to be a great attendance-builder.)

3. Schedule a Friend Day and then follow-up with other special Sabbaths about once every four to six weeks. These are Sabbaths designed for nonmembers, especially unchurched people attending for the first time. There are also times when your members are urged to bring their friends and acquaintances with them. Once they see that you are serious about this strategy, they will begin to bring new people to church.

4. Focus on your most recent converts and help them reach out to their circle of friends. All too soon, they will have less and less contact and influence with this group as they become part of a new fabric of relationships in the church. And, in the zeal of their "first love," new converts need guidance to be most effective in reaching their relatives, neighbors, and others. At the same time, this is one of the most fruitful sources of new interests. It is well worth the time and effort for any pastor to visit personally with the nonbelieving family and friends of each person they baptize.
5. Encourage and facilitate the involvement of long-term Adventists in a community-action program. Volunteer, community service is a proven door-opener to win trust and establish relationships that become a natural context for sharing faith. The longer a person is in the Adventist community, the fewer nonmember friends they have. Even when a person is in a profession that does not lend itself to workplace witnessing, a volunteer role in a service program can open a place for them to share Christ at the "private" level.

6. Develop small-group ministries as a bridge between private and public evangelism. Secular people often turn to faith in times of trauma and transition, so if your church sponsors one or more support groups such as grief recovery, divorce recovery, or 12-step programs, it will become a magnet for these individuals. If these are offered alongside Bible study groups, people will move at their own pace from a focus on their needs to a focus on accepting Christ and learning more from Him.

7. Events like NET '98 become truly "reaping" occasions with a flow of persons who have made it over the barrier of "private" religion and into the arena of public evangelism. Even among the secular audience many people need such an event to make a definite decision for baptism and church membership.

Visibility, positioning, and word-of-mouth

With all the money we spend on evangelistic advertising, we often forget that the advertising industry says that visibility, positioning, and word-of-mouth are the most powerful promotional tools. Any ad agency executive will tell you that money spent on direct mail, newspaper ads, or TV spots is wasted unless there is a strategy that includes complex elements such as "shelf space" and "consumer attitude."

How much visibility does the Adventist Church have in your community? How is it positioned in the minds of civic leaders? What is the reputation of the church as it is passed around informally among thought leaders in the community?

How to get more visibility

Here are some ideas that will help to begin positioning your church for more visibility and positive word-of-mouth from significant sources in your community:

1. Join with one or more neighboring Adventist churches in a steering committee to conduct a community-needs assessment. ADRA North America has a kit, including fact-finding instruments and a training video to guide the group to find a need and develop a plan to fill it. This works most effectively when several Adventist churches in the same metropolitan area collaborate.

2. Get involved in a disaster-response project. Through Adventist Community Services, we have a strong reputation for under-investment in these elements over the past two decades.

In 1994, a survey of a random sample from the general public conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry for the North American Division shows that in the previous decade the percentage of North Americans who recognize the name of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has dropped from 75 to 53 percent. The 53 percent were also asked, "When you hear the name Seventh-day Adventist Church, what comes to mind?" The majority said, "Nothing." And, half of those who responded with something were inaccurate or expressed a negative attitude.

The 53 percent were also asked what contribution the Adventist Church makes through community service, and nine out of ten members of the general public said they did not know. The remaining 5 percent of the population was split between those who felt Adventists make a positive contribution and those who felt it was negative.

The Adventist Church is likely to be almost invisible in your community, unless definite steps have been taken to build a strong, professionally directed community-service program. By "community service," I do not mean the delivery of holiday food baskets or even an emergency food pantry. The traditional community-service activities at churches do not "earn" any points in public positioning, although if they don't exist, points are "taken away."

In fact, community-oriented events held at the church, such as a stop-smoking program or parenting class, do not position the church significantly. In order for civic leaders to pass the word that the Adventist Church is making a valuable contribution, your community-service program must step beyond a church-based role and become a truly community-based agency. An example is Good Neighbor House, in Dayton, Ohio.

But does this pay off in baptisms? The evidence is very strong that it does, although the cause-and-effect relationship is indirect. Research among urban Adventist churches shows that those that sponsor strong community-service programs baptize far more new members than do those who are not involved in community service. The more urbanized the location of the church, the more vital this factor becomes.

If a local church has real respect among the influential individuals in the community because of the nonreligious contribution it is making to community needs, then the thought leaders of that community convey positive word-of-mouth messages about the church, and more individuals decide to respond to its evangelism. If yours is an urban or suburban church, this factor can make a significant difference in the results you gain from NET '98.
disaster service. Even if your local church is hundreds or thousands of miles from the disaster, you can get in on the visibility by organizing a community collection of donated goods and organizing a truckload to be sent to the disaster.5

3. Sponsor a community-based tutoring program for underprivileged children. The national Adventist Community Services leadership in the U.S. has opened a door with the coalition chaired by Gen. Colin Powell. ACS has hired a number of young adults to help local churches set up tutoring sites. This is a timely service that catches the eye of civic leaders, and yet it does not require costly equipment or buildings. It is an opportunity for church members to demonstrate real compassion for at-risk children and make friends in the community.

4. Join the Adventist Health network and sponsor a "Heartbeat" community coronary risk evaluation. This is a proven, up-to-date, strategy for a community-based approach to health screening and education. You can get a fact sheet by calling 800-381-7171.

Need for a metro ministry strategy

The public media, as well as business and civic institutions, no longer work at the neighborhood level. Television and radio stations cover the entire metropolitan area, as do the daily newspapers and advertising strategies for "chain" stores and "franchise" businesses.

In order to be effective in the urban areas today, the Adventist Church also needs a metro strategy. A coordinating committee with representation from all of the churches, both suburban and inner city, is needed to construct a strategy for advertising, building relationships with the media and civic officials, and developing a long-term agency for public service.

During NET '96, the churches in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area came together in this kind of coordinated plan and greatly increased attendance and baptisms over NET '95 results. You can ask your conference administration to convene a similar committee. If your metro area touches on the territory of two or more local conferences, the union conference can bring together a coordinating committee.

The secular, urban audience can be reached through NET '98. But, as is always true in any kind of farming, the results will have more to do with the preparation, seed-sowing, and cultivation than it will with the harvest itself.

1 A good primer is the recent documentary on Irish immigration to the United States, "The Long Journey Home," on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS).
2 The most recent evidence is published in "One Nation, After All," by Alan Wolfe (Knopf, 1998). Studies published over the past several decades by Gallup, Barna, and others all yield the same findings.
3 A complete kit of materials for promoting a successful Friend Day is available through AdventSource at 800-328-0525. Themes, tested invitation letters, and complete graphics are available for seven different special Sabbaths, some keyed to holidays such as Mother's Day and Christmas, in the Welcome Home package available from the Center for Creative Ministry at 800-272-4664. All of the materials are also on CD-ROM.
4 A copy of the research report on "Urban Church Growth" by Monte Sahlin is available from the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University.
5 A needs list and how-to sheet can be obtained from the ACS hotline at 800-381-7171. A disaster sign kit with large, professionally created signs for both indoors and outdoors can be obtained from AdventSource at 800-328-0522.

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Ed and Sue were the perfect couple, or so their friends thought. They were raised in stable homes and shared similar values. They met on an Adventist college campus and were both successful achievers. At their wedding, everyone was convinced it was a marriage made in heaven. But as unresolved problems grew and differences became more difficult to manage or deny, their conflicts eventually escalated into bitter arguments and hostile outbursts. Over time, walls of resentment replaced intimacy. Ed and Sue filed for divorce.

Marriages may be made in heaven, but they are lived on earth. The truth is, there are no perfect marriages. Marriages must be grown over time, as two different personalities discover their common ground. Every married couple eventually discovers disruptive elements in their relationship that need modifying. Yet, the presence of problems is not an indicator that the marriage has failed. Problems can be resolved. It is when problems are not resolved, but allowed to grow over time, that divorce can become an attractive option.

But is divorce ever a reasonable response for the Christian in a troubled marriage? While we may expect two mature Christians to find an acceptable solution to their problems, reality reminds us that one out of every two marriages ends in divorce. As a church, should we accept this reality or insist on the rest of their life in this marriage, why not? With effort and guidance, the majority of marital problems can be resolved. Being patient and exerting the extra effort is supported by the biblical mandate of lifetime marriages. “What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6).

But what are one’s options when marital difficulties are not resolved? Rather than harmony, the couple experiences disharmony that undermines love and trust. This can occur when one ignores the concerns of the other, choosing instead to be concerned only with one’s own needs and desires. Under these circumstances, the walls of separation grow until they become well fortified barriers of isolation, self-protection, and even hostile aggression. Why should anyone be forced to spend the rest of their life in this marriage, especially if one believes there is no possible resolution or conciliation to the problems? And in all honesty, if either partner is unwilling to work on improving the relationship, the problems may never be resolved.

God understands the devastation of being caught in such a relationship. He personally experienced this in His intimate association with Israel. What did God do when He found Himself in a situation in which Israel refused in a appeals? He attempted to restore the relationship by sending His prophets to call Israel back. The message of Hosea’s prophecy is a powerful example of God’s pursuit of Israel. But over time God’s messengers were repeatedly rejected and even killed. Finally, in the light of Israel’s unfaithfulness, and with a sadness that only one who has loved so deeply and yet been spurned so completely can feel, God speaks of ending His relationship with Israel with a “decree of divorce” (see Jer. 3:6-8, RSV).

This response on the part of God may conflict with our understanding of divorce. But we must be careful not to define the marriage relationship in terms inconsistent with our relationship to God. This is especially true in light of the fact that the marriage relationship is the most frequently used biblical illustration of our relationship to God. Are the circumstances under which God divorced Israel valid for the Christian couple when confronted with similar circumstances? I think so.

Marriage is definitely a commitment for life. While this is true and unquestionably desirable, it does not take into account the fact that marriage commitments can be and are broken. Once broken, trust is seriously impaired and the essential relationship is often permanently disrupted. In short, if a marriage does not function as a marriage, then why should it be considered a marriage?

Evidence for a marriage’s viability

What then is the necessary evidence for determining a marriage’s viability? As a church, we have historically used the landmark of sexual infidelity as the sole justification for divorce. But is this the only appropriate indicator of a broken marriage? Would you consider any of the following destructive behaviors and attitudes indicators of a broken marriage?

- HOSTILE UNRESOLVED ARGUMENTS
- PHYSICAL INJURY IN A DESTRUCTIVE MARRIAGE
- ATTITUDES INDICATORS OF A BROKEN MARRIAGE
- BREAKUP OF A MARRIAGE TO CONVENE ANOTHER
- MARRIAGE THAT IS NOT JUSTIFIED
- MARRIAGE IN WHICH ONE OR BOTH PARTNERS HAVE BEEN SPURNED SO COMPLETELY
• physical abuse of spouse and/or children
• significant financial irresponsibility
• alcoholism and/or drug abuse
• chronic depression and withdrawal
• pornographic or sexual deviations
• long-term psychiatric disturbances
• addictive gambling or credit-card abuse

I am not talking about moderate problems in these areas but extreme difficulties where there is no hope for, or desire to make real and lasting change. While some can only imagine what this would be like, others live in such marriages on a daily basis.

In the presence of such marital difficulties, it is important to distinguish between “the problems” or behaviors that disrupt a marriage and the “choice” one makes or fails to make to be committed. We should not assume a broken commitment because of the presence of disruptive behaviors. For while behaviors may be fairly reliable indicators of commitment or lack of it, they are not the same thing.

In evaluating such difficult marriages, the real issue to be understood and clarified is not only whether divorce is justified but whether the marriage is justifiable. Rather than focusing on blame, we would be better off focusing on solutions whenever a commitment remains in both members of the couple to resolve problems. The marriage vow implies a mutual commitment to resolve problems. The Bible refers to this as the work of “two” becoming “one.”

Clarifying the commitment

The starting place, therefore, is not in the documentation of problems but in clarifying the commitment each person brings to the relationship. We should not seek justifications for leaving a marriage but rather seek clarification about the functionality of the marriage. So, what defines a functional marriage? A successful marriage is ultimately defined by shared commitment. It begins with the wedding vows and is maintained through the continual expressions of commitment. Shortcomings can be corrected if one is willing to grow.

While intervention in troubled marriages needs to begin by clarifying current commitments, it should also assess the reliable sustainability of that commitment into the future. In my counseling I have helped more than one couple work through their problems—even when the problem was an affair. But it takes two committed people to make a marriage work. One committed individual cannot bind the marriage together without commitment from the other.

When Paul faced the issue of abandoned marriages (withdrawn commitment), he left it open for the abandoned spouse, in at least one set of circumstances, to leave the disrupted marriage (see 1 Cor. 7:10-16). While Christians should never abandon their marriage, they have the right to recognize that choices made by the other can disrupt the marriage. In short, while you are held fully accountable for your commitment to your spouse, you cannot be responsible for your spouse’s commitment to you. So if you are the one who is abandoned, you are not bound to the marriage indefinitely. This makes sense, for there is no longer a reciprocated commitment to hold the marriage together.

We should not take lightly the importance of commitment. After all, is it not the question of broken commitment that underlies Jesus’ permission to divorce in the case of adultery? Breaking one’s commitment to one’s marital partner is a reflection of breaking one’s commitment to Christ. Our marriage commitment should never be taken with any less consideration than our commitment to God.

The presence of a commitment

So, what is commitment, and how do we know if it is present? The dictionary defines commitment as: “an agreement or pledge to do something in the future.” The emphasis is not so much on the past promise as it is on the future implications of that promise. Past commitments function through daily recommitment. The following guidelines may prove helpful in determining the presence of marriage commitment:

1. Choosing not to divorce is not the same as choosing to be committed. If a marriage is in trouble, the couple should begin by clarifying their commitments to one another.

2. Assuming a lack of commitment in the presence of problems does not provide the necessary clarification for making a decision to divorce. If problems are present, necessary help should be obtained to better understand the problem in order to correct it.

3. Commitment is demonstrated when no decision is made that provides an advantage to one member of a couple at the expense of the other. To understand each other’s needs, both must express themselves.

4. Broken commitments are identified when the other is unwilling to work toward a mutually satisfying resolution to the problem that honors the shared values of the relationship.

5. If commitment is not offered by one or both parties, it will be almost impossible to resolve the problems and sustain the marriage.

Problems need to be viewed as opportunities for growth. Marriage is not about power or control; it is about partnership. I define commitment as “one’s promise to one’s spouse to love, honor, and cherish till death do us part.” To love, I must become “other-centered” by learning to overcome my “self-centeredness.” Yet to love another, I must be capable of loving myself. To honor, I must respect the other’s aspirations and values with the goal of building the other’s dignity and worth. Yet to honor another, I must act with integrity based on my own values and beliefs. To cherish is to “appreciate” what I have above anything or anyone else. Yet in cherishing another, I am not to give up my purpose in life.

It is almost too obvious to say but so important that it must be said; if each commits to the other in marriage, there will be no divorce.

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The key principle

The key principle for a couple to keep in focus in the face of marital difficulties is to correct disruptive actions rather than to justify their presence. No one makes people act the way they do. The secret to a successful marriage is not in gaining compliance to our demands but in finding solutions to our problems that are acceptable and fair. The goal of commitment is not “my way” or “your way” but to discover “our way” through open sharing.

I encourage couples to grow their marital commitment by developing the skills of communication, conflict resolution, and positive expressions of love. These skills can be learned with counseling and support.

I believe marriage counseling is worth the effort. I am convinced that a restored marriage is stronger than a second marriage, and it is definitely better than the old marriage with all its unresolved problems. Christians should always attempt to restore and renew their marriage whenever options exist or issues remain unclear. We must be careful of the allure of a fresh start. In almost every instance, the same problems that eroded the first marriage will reappear in the second. A person was once attracted to his or her spouse, and for a reason. Chances are those same reasons, needs, and desires will cause a person to select a similar partner. A couple must take the necessary time to understand themselves and the problems in their marriage before considering divorce.

Role of the church

What is the role of the church in relating to couples who are experiencing troubled marriages? The tragedy of a broken marriage can be made even more tragic by a broken relationship with the church. Rather than receiving the necessary support in their time of need, too many experience the pain of rejection from the fellowship of the church. If we walk away from the divorced, what are we simply teaching about compassion, care, forgiveness, grace, and redemption?

The problem this poses for the church and its concerned members is a serious one. Do we capitulate to the growing ease with which divorce is accepted today and allow for easy divorce? Or do we stand up to divorce with discipline to the offenders? I believe we should discipline with a desire to “discipline.” By that I mean the church’s main purpose, when intervening in a struggling marriage, should be to help the couple come closer to Christ.

Often, our traditional disciplinary approach to divorce creates some awkward moments and unique complications. It is often impossible to determine who did what and when in a dying marriage without initiating intrusive detective work. Should this be the work of the church, especially in light of the fact that the Bible places no significance on who had sex first outside the marriage in order to create the categories of “innocent” and “guilty.” Nor will you find in the Bible anyone being required to play a “waiting game” to see who will have sex first outside the marriage in order to legitimize divorce. After all, how can the sin of one person’s infidelity be used to justify the innocence or guilt of another? The problem with this behaviorally based approach is that it fails to recognize that relationships cannot be legislated.

The real issue is not blame but responsibility. What must be sorted is the willingness each brings to live by their full marriage commitment. Who is committed and who is not? The answer to this will determine if there is a viable relationship upon which to build a secure marriage. If there is commitment, there is hope. But in the absence of commitment, there is little or no hope for building a successful marriage.

Intervention principles

In my interventions with troubled marriages, I am guided by the following principles:

1. The Bible presents a consistent and clear position against divorce.
2. In Scripture there is only one basis upon which to build a secure relationship, and that is commitment (covenant).
3. Commitment must always precede behaviors or one is left with a works-based relationship.
4. The primary goal of marriage is to become “one” with one’s spouse.
5. Rather than declaring every marriage for life, no matter what the circumstances, there must be a realistic view of sin and its destructiveness to mutual commitment within the marriage relationship.
6. A determination needs to be made about the levels of commitment each brings to the marriage.
7. An effort should be demonstrated by both in the marriage to understand and utilize the tools needed to strengthen the relationship.
8. If one chooses not to be committed, that individual needs to be counseled about the spiritual dangers associated with such a choice.
9. Church policy must attempt to mediate God’s redemptive grace and healing in situations where God’s ideal is not met.

Such an approach will, while maintaining the sanctity of marriage, create a congregation of “wounded healers” who are understanding of the struggles of life and thus capable of ministering to the wounds of others. The church, through its ministry to its members is to become a living witness of Christ’s healing ministry in the world. This is the kind of church that will attract the lost and the struggling to find their strength in Christ to carry on.

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I have been a committed Seventh-day Adventist since childhood. I believe in the church's mission. I subscribe to its beliefs.

However, during my adolescence, I faced a great challenge in my faith journey: the church's stand on abstinence from alcoholic beverages. In my culture, a glass of wine is the very symbol of the party. In my large, extended family, composed of at least 100 people, though no one ever got drunk, everyone drank a glass at parties. It seemed to me then, as it seems to me now after 24 years of pastoral ministry, that there is no absolute prohibition against alcoholic beverages in the Old Testament or in the New.

However, every now and then, I have come across books and articles published to demonstrate that a biblical prohibition against the use of alcohol does exist. I have read these arguments, hoping to find that definitive word that would answer the many objections raised against abstinence. In the end, though, all these readings have not convinced me.

I am deeply convinced that during Old Testament times, to drink moderately was considered compatible with faith in Yahweh. I also believe that such was the case in the apostolic church. Here are five reasons for my stand:

1. The philology that proabstinence authors appeal to does not prove anything.
2. The law of Moses, so full of minute prohibitions about every aspect of life, including a meticulous list of foods, does not contain any radical prohibition against alcoholic beverages when it would have been simple and consistent to express it.
3. The history of Judaism gives no hint of such a prohibition.
4. If texts that forbid alcoholic beverages during the practice of certain ministries or for certain vocations (Lev. 10:8-11; Prov. 31:4, 5; Num. 6; Judges 13:13, 14), including the leadership of the early church (Titus 3:3), prove that the biblical ideal was to abstain from these, then they also prove indirectly that a general prohibition did not exist.
5. The interpretation of passages like 1 Timothy 3:8 and Deuteronomy 14:21-29 by proabstinence writers seem untenable.

Theological understanding
Yet in spite of the above arguments, I am a convinced teetotaler. I believe that the church should hold nothing but a radical position against alcoholic beverages. But

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this declaration should be made not because of biblical proof texts advocating total abstinence from alcohol. Instead it should be taken because of a necessary theological reading of the Bible.

Even Ellen White indirectly invites us to this sort of reading when she asks us to read her writings, taking into consideration “time, places, circumstances.” Similar sound principles of Bible reading lead us to exalt monogamy in marriage and to despise the institution of slavery.

A serious theological reading of the Bible cannot be accomplished by simply establishing what God said in the past to biblical men and women. It must also try to understand what God says today about our mission and responsibility.

What, then, did God say in the past in biblical situations when it comes to the consumption of alcoholic beverages?

1. He did not universally prohibit their use.

2. He showed their destructive potential by way of negative examples (Noah, Lot, etc.) and formal declarations (Prov. 23:39-44).

3. He made it clear that even a moderate use of alcohol was incompatible with certain vocations (Num. 6; Judges 13; 14) and commanded certain people to abstain completely from alcoholic drinks during the fulfillment of services in which the complete function of their mental faculties was necessary (Lev. 10;10; Prov. 31:4, 5).

4. A few texts seem to exalt the euphoric qualities of wine (Deut. 14:22-29; Amos 9:14; Zech. 10:7), but in every one of these texts the alcoholic beverage is a poetic symbol of festivity and of abundance.

But, what does God say today, to us, to our mission and to our historical responsibility?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to carefully redefine the nature and modern use of alcohol. Its diversity, along with the social and human context in which it is consumed, today transcends the ancient definition and gives rise to a totally new, spine-chilling phenomenon.

Alcohol: seven facts

Seven contemporary factors radically transform the definition that alcoholic beverages had during biblical times. Alcohol today is the number one social killer in many cultures of the world—a killer against which the Christian community, conscious of its own vocation, cannot but take a strong opposing stand:

Factor 1: The variety of alcoholic beverages. The only alcoholic beverages that biblical men and women knew were wine and beer. Today there are a myriad different varieties in every culture, and they are increasing every day. Pressing advertisements have managed to make them seem to be the need of everyone, every day, especially if it is a party day. It is not unusual in many cultures at a normal dinner party to consume in different quantities eight to ten different alcoholic beverages.

Factor 2: The high proof. The average alcoholic beverage during biblical times (when distillation was less developed) did not exceed 9 to 10 percent alcohol content; in certain cases it could reach extremes of 15 to 16 percent. Today one goes from 5 to 6 percent in wine coolers, to 7 to 8 percent in sparkling wine, to 35 or 40 percent bit ters (so-called digestives), and to 90 percent vodka. Alcoholism often originates from the small daily consumption of quantities of various alcoholic beverages.

Factor 3: The association to medicine. Many modern pharmaceutical drugs and sedatives use alcohol as well as tobacco in prime destructive blends.

Factor 4: The easy availability. In the past, alcoholic beverages were found in the cellars of the rich and in the relatively few taverns at crossroads and in villages. Mostly, alcoholic beverages were consumed on holidays. However, today you can find alcohol everywhere, and many homes have a small bar.

Factor 5: The low cost. Forty years ago, in my hometown, an agricultural town and a large producer of wine, a liter of wine cost at least a fifth of a laborer’s daily wage. Today, a fifth of a laborer’s daily wage can buy at least seven liters of wine. Drinking costs comparatively little today.

Factor 6: A strong pedagogical perspective. During Bible times, adolescents who saw their fathers drink had little possibility of imitating them away from feasts. There was no massive commercial system that moved them to drink nor were there images that associated alcohol with success and strength. They did not have the numerous opportunities to drink, sniff, and smoke that young people today have. Unlike today, youth in biblical times had a pedagogical fortress, made up of a patriarchal family of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, and sisters.

Factor 7: The higher need for readiness of mind. Travel in biblical times, on foot or on the back of a donkey, did not require the alertness or the presence of mind that today’s travel by automobile does. Drunk driving is one of the major causes of premature death today.

Abstinence, a biblical ideal

These seven factors, combined together, make alcohol the number one social killer of the modern age. Its disorders, silent in most cases, make up the calamities of an appalling invisible war that kills and mutilates the bodies and spirits of huge numbers of people. In Italy, 10,000 people a year die in car accidents, of which at least 50 percent can be traced to alcohol. Some eight thousand people die in household accidents, and even here alcohol is often responsible.

But death is not always the worst of evils. Alcohol is responsible for domestic violence, abuse of women and children, mental illness, social irresponsibility, and other crimes.

Society seems to fear only illegal drugs. Yet alcohol is no less a killer. In Italy, where about a thousand people a year die because of drugs, 50,000 die because of alcohol.

In biblical times, when alcohol was a relatively minor problem, the Bible presented abstinence as the ideal for living. How much more should this be the stand today, when alcohol has become one of the great social evils of life, affecting the physical, mental, and spiritual health of people everywhere.

Ellen G. White, motivating the pioneers of our church to take a stand against alcoholic beverages, wrote over a century ago, “Satan gathered the fallen angels together to devise some way of doing the most possible evil to the human family. One proposition after another was made, till finally Satan himself thought of a plan. He would take the fruit of the vine, also wheat, and other things given by God as food, and would convert them into poisons, which would ruin man’s physical, mental, and

Continued on p. 29
When one leader, who has never served as a pastor, recently suggested that there are no expectations for pastoral spouses, it is appropriate to ask whether we should lower our expectations?

Have we really expected more in the past from pastoral wives than we ought reasonably to anticipate now? Is it time for a change in attitudes as well as policy?

Personally, I do not think we have expected too much. But I do believe we have expected too much for too little in the way of remuneration, nurture, and supportive affirmation. And now, unless the proposed retirement plan for North American Division is revised prior to implementation, no pastoral spouses will receive a retirement benefit based on their joint-ministry through many years of service.

While I recognize that some pastoral spouses are men, the vast majority are women, and role expectations seem to be more deeply established for pastoral wives than for those men whose wives serve in ministerial functions. As my own wife, Sharon, says: “I’ve served as a pastor and as a pastor’s spouse. Believe me, the harder of the two jobs is pastor’s spouse.”

For example, no other group gives more volunteer hours to the work of the church than pastoral wives. Plus, most of this voluntary labor is provided after many of these spouses have worked full time jobs to help support their families. The volunteer services of these faithful pastoral spouses have led many congregations to conclude that the pastor’s wife ought to be responsible for many things without remuneration or even recognition.

Too many congregations expect the pastor’s wife to serve as an unpaid assistant pastor. This leads many individual members to conclude that she is able, ready, and willing to serve as piano player, children’s leader, hostess, message taker, head deaconess, information dispenser, visitor of the ill, infirm, and discouraged, choir director, song leader, church secretary, fellowship meal coordinator, VBS director, youth sponsor, deputy communications expert for her husband, and to be present at every church function.

As one pastoral spouse stated, “Being the First Lady of my church means I’m the first lady anyone calls when they want to assign a task.”

This list only begins to illustrate how much is expected of the pastoral wife. She is also looked to as a spiritual leader, supportive counselor, family therapist, nutritional specialist, general promoter of every church activity or fund-raising project that comes along, and a model of Christian motherhood.

Furthermore, conference leadership has expectations for pastoral wives that include participative involvement in various church functions, supportive involvement in their pastoral spouse’s ministry, exemplary modeling of Christian life, and being prepared to relocate at a moment’s notice if the committee votes a transfer for her spouse.

Throughout the history of our denomination, thousands of pastoral wives, like my Mom, have labored alongside their spouses in untiring service of evangelism, nurture and church operation. Many of these have hoped for the day in which team ministry might officially be recognized and encouraged as we are instructed by prophetic guidance.

Thus you can understand why any scheme that ceases to provide a spouse allowance at retirement for such devoted team-ministry wives will not harm those who have earned their own retirements, but rather punish the very group which have traditionally been defined as “our best spouses”—those who do not seek outside employment, who stay home to raise their children, and who support their husbands in team ministry.

Furthermore, even those who have worked “outside their home and church” have seldom had the necessary longevity of location to become fully vested in some other retirement plan because of too-frequent transfers. Are we now to lower our expectations that pastoral wives will follow their spouses and upset their own ability to “earn” a retirement in their own workplace.

We have made some progress in encouraging, affirming and nurturing pastoral spouses. This is not the time for retreat.

Shepherdess International is an entity of the General Conference Ministerial Association with the specific responsibility for providing nurture, support and continuing education to this group of para-professional women. Shepherdess International also serves as a discussion forum and representative advocacy to church leaders and members on behalf of pastoral spouses and children.

Implementation of the idea for Shepherdess International began with Marie Spangler whose husband, Pastor J. Robert Spangler, was the Secretary for the Ministerial Association. She had a burden that the General Conference would provide a supportive ministry to pastoral spouses that would recognize in a tangible way the contribution made by these women.

Research and surveys of pastoral wives had demonstrated the sad facts that there was a great void in the care and nurture provided them by the church. Along with Ellen Breesee, wife of Pastor Floyd Breesee, who followed Pastor Spangler as Ministerial Secretary, Marie began drafting a proposal which eventually became a reality as part of the General Conference Ministerial Association. Sharon Cress has served as...

Today there are Shepherdess International leaders in every Division, albeit under a variety of names which may be more palatable to some than the designation Shepherdess International. Coordinators have been appointed for most unions and conferences. These coordinators typically serve within the Ministerial Associations in the various church structures or local administrator’s wives undertake the responsibility and privilege of nurturing the pastoral wives in their fields. Local conference chapters are the key to providing the best nurture to these special women.

Too often both church members and conference leadership expect a two-for-one special by assuming that when they hire a pastor they automatically get the wife as “free labor” although the reverse is never assumed for a man when a woman serves as pastor.

Because pastoral salaries are often insufficient to provide the educational and other needs of the pastoral family, many pastoral spouses must seek employment to supplement the family income. Add to this the consideration of her family’s needs and it is easy to comprehend why there is ever-diminishing time left for volunteer church activities.

 Unrealistic expectations of either the local church members or conference leadership can produce undue stress for the pastoral family. Such unrealistic expectations are a major concern of most pastoral spouses. Official removal of the spouse allowance for retired pastoral wives will add insult to injury for a group of workers who have already been too long ignored.

So should we expect less from pastoral wives today than when my Mom was a young pastor’s wife fifty years ago? I repeat, the answer is no. We must continue to hold high expectations for our pastoral wives and we must not retreat in recognizing and supporting their faithful service to God’s cause.

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Eloquence and authority

religious formulations. If it does nothing else, this mentality almost visibly destroys eloquence and authority in our preaching. God break us free of it!

But which way is freedom? I believe it is in a freshly quarried encounter with the foundational Christ and the Holy Spirit He has liberally given His ministers. With this comes the courage to break free, to be wise, insightful, and creative. I also believe freedom comes in immersing myself in the life of my fellow humans, that is, in the lives of people. It lies in judicious, but broad-based, purposeful reading and exposure to the best resources available to me where I am.

A quiet yet determined concentration in these realms will bring to our lives and our preaching an unselfconscious, authentic eloquence and the authority we so profusely need now in our churches. This edition of Ministry is dedicated to these principles.

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Can preaching change behavior?

family stories in the Old Testament.

Looking prayerfully and thoughtfully at preaching, we should be humbled by its demands. The challenge is not just to dispense information, even good information. The challenge is to dispense it in a way that can change lives. Of course, it is staggering even to presume that we finite creatures can deal effectively with the questions of sinners in the light of the person of God in Jesus. But that’s what we are told to do; that’s what preachers have done for centuries. Countless souls have been blessed and saved; countless lives have been impacted for the good; and an untold number of behavior patterns changed. To see God’s presence thus demonstrated in believers’ lives and to see this reality manifested in the way people behave—this becomes the essential reward of the preacher.

Can preaching change behavior?

It had better!

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The case against drinking

moral powers, and so overcome the senses that Satan should have full control. Under the influence of liquor, men would be... made corrupt."2

"It is not mimetic battles in which we are engaged. We are waging a warfare upon which hang eternal results. We have unseen enemies to meet. Evil angels are striving for the dominion of every human being."3

It is not surprising that a theologian as famous as Brunner wrote: "Today, abstaining Christians are not the ones who should justify this stand, but those who refuse it should justify theirs."4

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And Jesus came preaching... continued from p. 13

preach as He did. His message must be our message. His authority must be our authority. His objective must be our objective. No matter how we dress it, no matter how we illustrate it, no matter how we present it, our preaching must be Christ-centered. That should drive us to our Bibles—the Word that reveals the Word. Then we will have the consistency of His life, the power of His influence, and the results of His touch. Then we will be like Him—a teacher, a pray-er, a friend. Then we will have His compassion and love as we preach.

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Can preaching change behavior? continued from p. 11

"All Scripture passages in this article are from the New International Version.

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This article is the final of a three-part series.

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SHOPTALK

Family missionary tin
We have many friends, far and near, Christian and non-Christian, who need spiritual help. Because of busy schedules, we are unable to visit them personally. But through literature we can extend a spiritual ministry. So we discovered an idea that works. We have set up a family missionary tin where we put whatever we can after we have budgeted the household necessities. This money is used specifically for reaching friends with magazines, photocopied sections of books, and buying books for them. We have been busy but helpful.—Daniel Kiptoo Belt, pastor, Kericho, Kenya.

And the band played on!
Recently, due to the resurgence in home schooling among many Christian families, our church began some activities for home schoolers and their parents. One of them was a home school band. A weekly rehearsal was held on Thursday afternoon with tutoring done by our church music director and another qualified band member of the church orchestra. Children from all faiths were represented in the band, and it was a great need met for the home schooling parents as well as the students. It was also goodwill public relations for the local church.

We also sponsored a gym night where they all could meet at the church gym.—Rev. Doug Rose, Grand Prairie, Texas.

Real witnessing through Realtors Tube
The simple Realtors Tube could become a mass witnessing tool. About two years ago I erected Realtors Tubes at my three churches and at my house. Scores of individuals have taken the witnessing pamphlets I placed in the tube and hopefully read them. In the tube at my home I put only one piece or unit of material at a time so I can know immediately if there has been a “take.” People on their morning walks or those just walking down the sidewalk at any time can get something about the good news of the gospel. I can be a witness 24 hours a day.—Antoine Maycock, pastor, Huntsville, Alabama.

Interested in out-of-print SDA books?
Anyone interested in locating out-of-print or hard-to-find SDA books should check out the Internet site at www.LNFBOOKS.com. There are thousands of titles, many of which have pictures and descriptions. The list is updated weekly.—Wayne Reid, Brushton, New York.

Ministering to parents with infant children
As a cradle roll leader, my wife gives to each parent at the close of Sabbath School a one-page spiritual message or a summary of the sermon to be given by the pastor that Sabbath. This might be the only adult blessing they will receive that Sabbath at church.

In Sabbath School they are with the children, singing and listening to stories. Then in the worship service they are busy with the responsibility of keeping their children quiet and entertained and many times miss the adult spiritual blessing of the worship service.


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Postage stamp advocates philanthropy

... and in so doing brings America to a more complete realization that giving and sharing is a distinctive virtue of the nation. The United States Postal Service (USPS), long-time supporter of noble and worthy causes, decided to recognize the essential quality of humanitarian values.

"Giving & Sharing ... an American Tradition" is the one-liner on a postage stamp to be issued on October 7, in Atlanta, Georgia, to celebrate the country's philanthropic heritage of doing good.

This event should not be lost to those who provide spiritual and volunteer leadership to their congregations. One of America's most distinguished professionals in the field of philanthropy, Arthur C. Frantzreb, has held to the view that "philanthropy is a ministry." Indeed it is. When congregations respond to the needs of others, they become all the more spiritual. Giving is religion in action. Ministry magazine and the Seventh-day Adventist Church call on the clergy of the United States to invite their adherents to take inventory of their personal giving and sharing practices. Such soul-searching will build a stronger nation where people care more for each other. Capitalizing on the stamp's one-liner "Giving & Sharing ... an American tradition," why not have a service centered on stewardship on the weekend before or after October 7!

The stamp illustrates the point with a flower and a bee—underscoring the symbiotic relationship that exists between the two. As the bee pollinates the flower, it benefits by obtaining food. In every philanthropic act, both the recipient and the donor benefit.

Thousands of concerned individuals and organizations worked with persistence to bring this stamp into being. They alerted the USPS to the importance of philanthropy in modern life. The effort was encouraged by Milton Murray, longtime director of the Adventists' Philanthropic Service for Institutions and member of several professional organizations. Once the issue was approved by the USPS, Murray was named Chair of the Task Force for the Philanthropy Stamp by the Washington, D.C., Consortium.

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