Pastoring People In TRAGEDY
Ministry to people facing life-threatening illness (part 1)
How does a pastor relate to people who are facing death?
Larry Yeagley

A person of peace
Being a person of peace amid conflict depends on what's in here, not what's out there: A sermon
Randall L. Roberts

The cosmic controversy
A christocentric view of the eighth statement of Adventist belief
Norman R. Gulley

Peaceable people or peacemakers?
Contrasting the mere advocating of peace and the ministry of peace-making: A sermon
Hyveth Williams

Understanding grief: A pastor's primer
What a pastor needs to know in helping someone through serious grief
Martin W. Feldbush

ASPIA: Scoring pastoral effectiveness
Five crucial elements in pastoral leadership and how you rate
James Coffin

The preacher's temptation
One of the pastor's most pressing public temptations
John McVay

Train up a child
Encouragement and perspective for the struggling Christian parent
W. Norman MacFarlane

The day Columbia disappeared
How one church coped with a major tragedy
Lawrence G. Downing
I found myself in almost total agreement with the author’s findings, yet somehow I couldn’t escape the feeling that a central piece of the puzzle was missing.

Thank you for sending Ministry to us—we enjoy it very much. The article “Should We Depersonalize Another’s Faith?” (January 2003) caused me concern. I think I understand Julia Vernon’s point, but I am concerned that it may cause some to consider the “gods” of other groups, especially Muslims, to be acceptable to the Christian faith.

We must keep in mind scriptures such as “They have forsaken the right way and gone astray” (2 Peter 2:15); “Nor is there salvation in any other” (Acts 4:12); “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6); and so many others.

—Irish Syl, Hillsboro, Texas.

Woodrow W. Whidden, in his article “The Trinity” (February 2003), states that “There is a growing consensus . . .” regarding Jesus being divine and human.

To which I say respectfully: We are skittering the boundaries of human comprehension. While we stand mute in wonder before our own existence, how much deeper are the mysteries of Jesus Christ!

He who is everything that Adam was at his creation, how much more is Christ, the second Adam, transformed to dimensions inscrutable (1 Cor. 15).

As Christ says, there is just one thing for me to do, no consensus asked, in one word, “Believe!” (John 6:29).

That should keep you busy, mystified beyond all dimensions, and ever more eternally when you are glorified.

There is one detail of faith regarding His human body. In fulfillment of Psalm 16, both Peter and Paul state in one Greek word, “No decay” (Acts 2:31, 13:36).

Dwell on that awhile. It can drive you to dimensions unsearchable.

—F. A. Hertwig, Lincoln, Missouri.

As Miroslav Pujic’s well-written article unfolded before my eyes, I found myself in almost total agreement with the author’s findings, yet somehow I couldn’t escape the feeling that a central piece of the puzzle was missing.

The author wondered aloud, “Why does Christianity struggle in the Western world?” Perhaps you would allow me to share my humble opinion, as to why this does indeed seem to be the case.

Imagine, if you will, human beings given the choice of living their lives by faith in an unseen God, or of living for that which can be seen, tasted, felt, touched, smelled, etc. Imagine being surrounded by every kind of amenity and high technology. Then throw in the fact that their morals have been under constant attack for some 50 years or more. If that isn’t enough, imagine being taught to accept every kind of belief and doctrine that comes down the pike (Eph. 4:14).

Imagine being in a country (Western) where there is a church on every corner, each preaching a different gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). Imagine even your church and your pastor preaching tolerance of even the godless religions. Is not Jesus Christ the one and only Way to the Father (John 14:6)? How long would we have to wonder who is the culprit behind all this confusion in the pulpits of our churches (2 Cor. 11:13-15)? Is it not obvious? Certainly God is not the author of such confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

Christianity in the Western world is a watered-down version of the real thing. Materialism has become a god in our Western culture (1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4). We are bombarded day and night with sex, violence, drugs, false doctrines and gospels, false prophets, godless atheism, all while Islam is nipping at our heels, making inroads into our Western “Christian” society.

In the Western world, we are not nearly zealous enough in our God-given task to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15; see also Rev. 14:6-12). We seem to be hell-bent to have one foot in this pleasure-loving world, and one foot in the new world to come. Can we really serve two masters (Luke 16:13)? Is it any wonder why Jesus said that many will be lost and few shall be saved (Matt. 7:13, 14; Luke 13:23-30)? Is it any wonder?

Why does Christianity struggle in the Western world? Let me count the ways!

—Richard Dibell, Coldwater, Michigan.
Since the moment it drew its first breath, the Christian Church has been challenged, and its way of life shaped by the climactic mandate of Jesus, "Go and make disciples" . . . not proselytes or even converts, but disciples (Matt 28:19).

As the Church has matured and particularly as definable ministry specializations have unfolded, there has been a well-meaning tendency to assert distinctions between what we have come to know as "evangelism" and "nurture." Still more recently, this differentiation has been taken further to create what, in effect, amounts to a dubious separation of these two fundamental operations of the Church.

In some circles, nurture is assigned a significance that crowds out evangelism, while in others evangelism is championed as an activity superior to nurture, and as a form of ministry that is more representative of real Christianity.

It's time, I think, to decidedly assert that if we create a separation—any separation—in the well-matched marriage of these two great principles of Christian action, thus shouldering under what God has joined together, we seriously impair both, and injure the divinely designed, inclusive ministry of the Christian Church as it was so definitively modeled by Jesus Himself.

When we review the unsurpassable ministry of Jesus, we are immediately struck by the functionally holistic way in which He consistently combined nurture and evangelism in His approach to people. In Jesus' ministry, evangelism and nurture form a superably tailored seamless robe. Jesus guilelessly blended healing, understanding, and encouraging people with His cogent, communicative teaching and preaching.

Along with the transcendent elements so ultimately present in Jesus, it was precisely the quality of Jesus' nurture of people that caused them to trust Him, and thus to believe more readily what He proclaimed. On top of that, what He preached and taught centered in the foundational reality of a God introduced by Jesus as "our Father"—whose nature was "nurture," and the fabulous vision of creating a people of nurture and service in this world. A thoughtful, panoramic study of the apostles' ministry bears out the same kind of inseparable blending of evangelism and nurture.

The point for us, of course, is to cease promoting these false dichotomies between nurture and evangelism, whether the separation is advanced intentionally, or infiltrates by default; whether we dichotomize the two, coming from either the nurture or the evangelistic side of things.

What, after all, is more persuasive to the average person? Being the recipient of compassionate, consistent acts of kind assistance, healing, and succor, and in that context hearing the offer to drink the water of life, or merely being on the receiving end of the best evangelistic proclamation when it is done in a nurtureless vacuum?

When we look inside the church, public or "professional" evangelism—crucial as it by all means is—has traditionally had a certain intimidating effect upon the rank-and-file church member (along with many pastors), tending to divert them from doing any significant outreach. The impression has too often been given that public evangelistic meetings are the only unfeigned way of doing "real" evangelism, and that for pastors, at least, such outreach is the only worthwhile way for the church to share the gospel and all that goes with it.

Our congregations need to see that simple nurturing activities are highly legitimate and indispensable to the ministry of the Church, and that such ministry by all means contributes very significantly to the Church's evangelistic thrust. We could go so far as to say that well-directed nurture ministries may be in themselves highly effective forms of Christian evangelism.

Further, when actual pastoral nurture is sensitively done (in the way suggested, for instance, in this month's lead article by Larry Yeagley) with Spirit-inspired disinterest, authenticity and accomplishment, we create an immensely important quality of trust in people. Because of this trust people are definitely more open to discerning that what we proclaim is by all means worthy of their attention and commitment.

Will Eva
Any pastor harboring an illusion of immortality will be hindered as he or she attempts to minister to a seriously ill parishioner. It is vital that we consider the inevitability of personal death. If not, the parishioner may receive few visits because contact with dying people may create anxiety in the pastor. Some pastors with low personal death awareness refuse to engage parishioners in conversations about their illness and prognosis. A pastor with low personal death awareness cannot adequately meet the needs of critically ill patients.

They are losing everything

Family members of the dying person face losing one person, but the one dying faces the loss of all family, friends, relationships, positions in the community, and possessions. Amazingly, the dying person usually adjusts to the many losses before the family adjusts to their loss.

The sustaining ministry of a pastor can assist the parishioner with anticipatory grief. This is the incremental awareness of diminishing health and the mini-losses it brings. Anticipatory grief is adjusting to the loss of things such as self-feeding, self-bathing, driving a car, contact with friends, church attendance, and going to work. The dying person can face death with greater ease when a pastor steadily and regularly is present to hear, listen to, and acknowledge the strong emotions that go with such losses.

They need to communicate

Family members frequently avoid talking about worsening prognoses and imminent death. The ill person usually wants and needs to communicate. A pastor who has comfortably and privately discussed the issues of illness and death with a parishioner is often asked to facilitate family communication.

A Texas rancher fell silent when he visited his wife in the hospital. She wanted to discuss the metastasis of the cancer, but she didn’t know how to bring it up. With her permission I invited her husband to sit at the head of her bed. I told him, “John, Rachel received bad news today and she wants to tell you about it. I’ll stay by in case she needs help, but once you two get the conversation rolling, I’ll step out and give you privacy.” Both told me later that I had opened the door to a conversation they longed to have but didn’t know how to begin.

They need your loyalty

I tell ill parishioners and their families that “I am going to be by your side through good times and bad. There is nothing you can say or do that will frighten me. You can talk, cry, scream, or grow silent, but I’m going to be your friend no matter what happens.” I stand by that promise.

Expressions of doubt, guilt, anger, hopelessness, sorrow, and being forsaken by God are all part of facing personal death. The ill parishioner doesn’t need a pastor to scold, admonish, or buoy her up. She needs a pastor who shows no alarm or displeasure, just acceptance. As a patient in a psychiatric hospital said many years ago, “What we need above all else is someone who accepts us as we are, for what we are, so that we can become more than we are.” The same need is true of the critically ill parishioner.

I have listened to dozens of cancer patients say negative things about God, but I made no defense. My steady, friendly presence joined the steady, friendly presence of God. Patients have said such things as, “I can’t believe you keep visiting me after the awful things I said about God.”

They need to have a purpose

Illness often terminates involvement in
formal vocations that have provided a consistent sense of meaning and purpose for the person. Family, friends, and the church sometimes view such a parishioner as helpless. There is no reason why many ill people, such as a women’s ministry leader, for example, cannot function in a hospital bed or in a semi-ambulatory condition at home. A member of a finance committee can serve in an advisory capacity. A sick church elder can meet with the rest of the elders in his home.

A pastor can keep parishioners abreast of church life and ask them for their advice about important issues. When I visit ill parishioners, I make it a practice to repeatedly say, “I really appreciate you spending time with me today. Thank you for the encouragement and advice. I always learn valuable lessons when I visit you.”

I have often visited sick people to give them encouragement, but found myself on the receiving end. Their situation has equipped them to give me spiritual counsel and assurance. One of my nieces told her aunt, “I don’t talk to God very much now. I don’t have much time left, so I’m just going to enjoy His friendship.” I wasn’t present, but her spiritual maturity has been tutoring me ever since I heard about her comment.

They need pastors who try to understand

When I met Dame Cicely Saunders at the first national hospice convention in Washington, D.C. (she was then director of St. Christopher’s Hospice in London), I asked her what a terminally ill person wants most of all. She had just asked that question of a patient. His reply was, “For someone to look at as if he is trying to understand me.”

A pastor doesn’t know how a sick parishioner feels any more than he can breathe through that person’s lungs or see through his or her eyes. To say, “I understand how you feel” doesn’t make sense, nor is it comforting.

They sometimes protect family

Rick’s wife fought cancer for years, but now she lay in a hospital bed during the last week of her life. During Rick’s visits she expressed strength and acceptance of her situation. But the night before her death she asked her favorite nurse to hold her in her arms. Safe in the nurse’s careful embrace, she wept and said she did not want to die. She put her deepest sorrow into words that she could not share with Rick.

Pastors can expect to hear emotional outpourings from ill parishioners, expressions that are kept from family out of love for them, and out of a desire to shield them from greater sorrow.

They review their life

Once people know they have a terminal illness, they spontaneously review their life. Making sense of the past clears the way to face the present. This process includes grief, laughter, love, joy, gratitude, a sense of accomplishment, and sometimes awareness of failure.

A pastor needs to give a patient encouragement so that the parishioner can complete his story. She can also assist the person in summarizing his or her positive contributions and achievements.

I spent over an hour listening to an elderly woman telling her life story. When she finished, she embraced me and said, “What you and I did together here was a prayer.”

They are lonely

Many terminally ill patients feel alone, out of touch, and untouchable. Loneliness includes frequent weeping and nostalgia for the life they have had, that will never be again. It embraces knowing that all that life provided will be lost. Loneliness is exacerbated by the awareness that fewer people choose to spend time with them.

Touching is like a soothing massage to the person whose sense of personhood has been shattered. Human touch erases the distance between two people.

Cheryl, a hospice nurse, taught me to be unafraid of holding a hand or giving a hug. Her patients told me that she made them feel warm and a part of her family. They looked forward to her visits. Terminally ill patients need a pastor who isn’t afraid to touch away their loneliness.

Years ago a friend of mine was taken to a tuberculosis (TB) sanatorium. As soon as I heard about it, I visited her. I went to the head of her bed, grasped her outstretched hands, and greeted her warmly. Instead of smiling, she burst into tears—tears of joy, tinged with some hurt. Joy because she no longer felt untouchable. Hurt because her pastor visited her while standing ten feet from the foot of her bed. He didn’t touch her once. After a quick Bible verse and a prayer, he headed for a sink just out-

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side the door to her room. She watched as he scrubbed his hands and arms. She felt like a leper.

My friend’s life was taken by TB. I am so grateful that I had the privilege of easing her loneliness and feelings of abandonment.

**They reach out to God**

The capacity to relate with God continues until consciousness ceases. For this reason alone a pastor’s ministry should intensify as death approaches. The ill person needs the validation and support of attendance at religious services as long as possible. Bringing audiotapes and videotapes of church services into the home is a good idea. Any type of involvement in one’s faith community protects against or helps to relieve the depression often experienced by the terminally ill parishioner. Knowing that God is on their side is a real boost to morale.

An ill person prospers more when family and friends are near, but the pastor can ascertain whether that person has adequate time for solitude and meditation. There needs to be a balance between being alone and having togetherness.

Many patients nearing death have grasped my hands tightly and asked for prayer. I shall never forget what Mr. White told me after my prayer with him ended. “Chaplain, I have a peace about me that I never had before. God and I are on good terms.” I felt that I had just reached the pinnacle of my ministry. His was not the only peace. I, too, had peace, because I reached out to God along with Mr. White.

**They need professional care**

In spite of publicity, a surprising number of families are not aware of the services provided by hospices. A pastor would do well to become involved with the local hospice so that he can make referrals.

Hospices make it possible for an ill person to die at home with dignity and with less stress on the family. They advocate placing a bed in a sunny room near family. This prevents the feeling of abandonment. Hospice staff provides nursing care, respite care, some medications and supplies, housekeeping, chaplaincy services, and social services to care for the inevitable paperwork.

When my mother-in-law was ill, hospice personnel went the extra mile to meet the needs of patient and family. The last day of her life the hospice nurse provided the usual morning care. At the end of her day, she had an urge to swing by the house to see how things were going. She arrived just as my mother-in-law was dying. Quietly she comforted us and made all the necessary phone calls. Our family will always feel gratitude toward that hospice staff.

Some hospices are now building hospice houses. I attended a groundbreaking for one in my community. Sunny rooms, wide doors to accommodate the width of a bed, quiet rooms for family conversations, a chapel, and even provisions for the family pet to visit—these and other features are part of hospice houses. When a terminally ill person doesn’t have family or a primary care provider, he or she can make the hospice house a home.

There are times when a patient or family cannot communicate with physicians for some reason. The pastor, with permission from the family, can convey their wishes to the physician. Usually the physician is unaware of their need for further explanations or clarification. I have always found physicians grateful for my intervention.

Yes, there is pain involved in ministering to the dying, but the sacred opportunity of loyal pastoral support for one of God’s children is worth all the pain. To see a person close life with dignity and God’s peace shining forth is, to me, the greatest joy of ministry.

The final part of this series will appear in Ministry’s September issue.
I’ve got a problem. I’ve been asked to speak on “a person of peace.”* As a Christian, I’m called to be a person of peace. As a preacher, I’m asked to speak on peace. As a Christian, I’m called to live in peace. But my life is anything but peaceful.

The reason I struggle with peace is quite simple. It can be summed up in two words: hurry and worry.

I’m called to be a person of peace, and I’m in such a hurry that life will not slow down and give me some peace. Richard Swenson, author of books such as The Overload Syndrome: Learning to Live Within Your Limits, quotes one person: “It’s like somebody took the lid off the blender of my life, and the stuff on the walls is not a mirage!” Another quote says: “I quit my job when I started screaming at the microwave because it took 60 seconds to heat my coffee!”

I’ve got a problem. I’m called to be a person of peace and the lid is off the blender and the microwave’s too slow.

Now, I’m not the only one with the problem. One statistic tells us that 36 percent of Americans say they are rushed all the time.

Can you imagine? Over one-third of Americans say that, for them, life is constantly defined by being “in a hurry to get things done.” One writer says that this is historically unprecedented, anytime, anywhere. I wonder how many of those 36 percent are pastors . . .

Do you wonder if you’re one of them? Then take this little test:

You have pulled up to a stoplight. Now let me ask you, What happened immediately before and while you were there at the stoplight waiting? You just may be one of that one-third of people who are rushed all the time if this is what happened: First, as you were approaching the stoplight, you raced another car to get to the stoplight just so you could be first in line when the light turned green! Then, if you lost that race, while you sat there fuming, you surveyed the car in front of you. Who is the driver? How old is the driver? Is the driver male or female? What kind of car is it? What are the chances that the driver is going to take two extra seconds to put the pedal to the metal when the light turns green?

Have you ever done that? Join the one-third! And I’m happy to welcome you, because that means I’m not the only one with a problem!

But it’s not just the word hurry that threatens to define our lives and rob our peace. It is also the word worry. There is just so much to do! Will it never end? Will the phone never stop ringing? Is there no end to the list of demands?

There is just so much to do and so many people for whom to do it. Did you know that the average desk worker in this country has 36 hours of work on his or her desk at any given time? That means that at any given time, you are approximately one week behind just in terms of desk work!

And rest doesn’t always help. In fact, the average American gets 2.5 hours less sleep now than 100 years ago.

Several years ago, my wife’s niece from Bolivia came to live with us for a while. She had been most eager to come to this country, anticipating what it would be like. She had heard so many things about it.

One day, after she had been here for a while, I asked her, “Silvia, what do you think of los estados unidos, these United States?”

She was pensive for a couple of moments, and then she said: “La vida aquí es muy agitada.” Life here is very—and this is the word she chose—agitated.
I immediately thought of our washing machine. If you open it up during the wash cycle you can see it right there—the agitator. It is thrusting the clothes back and forth, agitating and pounding the clothing against itself, against the sides of the machine, and against the other clothing. It’s constantly moving—pounding, thrusting, agitating.

And that, said Silvia, is life here in these United States. Agitated.

So there’s my problem. I am to be a person of peace. I am to speak on peace. And yet, the two words that frequently crowd to the forefront of my life are hurry and worry.

A person of peace: challenge to the pastor

Now, it would be nice if we as a gathering of the clergy could say, “True enough. That is life. But that is life out there. In here—in the parsonage—life is different. It is quiet, tranquil, serene.”

Well, that would be nice, but it’s not what happens. No, a glimpse of life in the parsonage suggests that it simply reflects the world around us.

I recently attended the National Pastors Convention. At the second plenary session, the conference organizer introduced a pastor who had been given—by surprise—tickets to come to the meeting. He had been a pastor at the same church for 44 years! When he was introduced that evening, that congregation of pastors gave him a standing ovation. Why? Well, there were different reasons, I’m sure, but I suspect that chief among them was the fact that we as a congregation of pastors recognized just how difficult ministry is. We knew of the challenges that come into the pastor’s life. We realized the difficulties that pastors face. We knew the turbulence of the pastoral world. And when we were suddenly in the presence of one who had pastored for 44 years at the same place, we were deeply moved. The hurry and the worry had not deterred him from a life of service in one place.

But that’s my challenge, and it just may be yours. I’ve got a problem. I’m called to be a person of peace, yet my life is often hunted and haunted by hurry and worry.

Now, please don’t misunderstand. It’s not that I don’t want peace. I very much do. I am deeply drawn to it.

My life may be filled with hustle and bustle, hurry and worry, but I want peace. The question is, How do I get it? It’s very difficult to find such peace, especially in the pastoral world. Things just don’t go the way we wish they would. It is a job that is never finished.

Have you heard Chuck Swindoll tell the story? It seems that a pastor left the pastorate after 20 years. He decided to become a funeral director. Somebody asked him, “Why did you do that?”

“Well,” he said, “the answer is pretty simple. You see, in the pastorate, I spent about twelve years trying to straighten out John, and I never did get him straightened out. And then I spent about fourteen months trying to straighten out the marriage of the Smiths, and she never did get straightened out. But now? Let me tell you something—now when I straighten them out, they stay straight!”

I suppose that’s one of the problems of working with the living—they just won’t stay straight! And since they won’t, being a person of peace is a challenge.

So how can we become persons of peace?

A person of peace: how?

Well, one way our culture tells us to do it is to escape. You know, escape to the islands. Escape to the movies. Escape with a good book. Escape, because in escape there is peace.

Escape is certainly one option, though, quite frankly, it’s not a very good one, because as soon as the escape is over, all life’s problems are still sitting right there.
Well, another option is to depend on the circumstances around us to provide us with peace. If the circumstances are right, then we can be at peace, right?

There was a time when, if you were dependent on circumstances to make you into a person of peace, it might have worked and even worked reasonably well. But such times have long since disappeared from the rearview mirror.

So how do we become persons of peace?

Would you open your Bibles to John 16? Keep your finger there, and then turn back to John 14. I want to read two verses together, one from each of these two chapters. Jesus is speaking the night before His crucifixion. The cross looms right ahead. Life has grown dangerous, deadly. In fact, it would be hard to imagine a more turbulent time. The storm is preparing to unleash its fury upon Him. Even now, the thunder rolls. The emotional climate is heavy. Trouble is on its way. It’s a good time for hurry and worry “Let’s hurry up and get out of here because there are plenty of reasons to worry.”

And yet, it is in the midst of this turbulent time that Jesus talks about peace. Can you imagine? Could there be a worse time to be talking about peace? And yet listen to what He says. Read John 14:27 and 16:33.

This is a new promise. John 14:27 is the first time the word εἰρήνη—peace—occurs in the fourth Gospel. It’s a strange time to start talking about peace right when the storm gathers, before the conflict sets in. I don’t know what you make of that, but at least one thing must be clear—the peace of which Jesus here speaks cannot mean the absence of conflict. After all, He is merely hours away from crucifixion. He has just recently—just a couple of chapters before this—said that He is “troubled” (John 12:27) by what lies ahead of Him. And yet He speaks of peace.

So there you are: The peace that Jesus offers us does not come from the cessation of stress, trouble, or difficulty. One New Testament theologian states it in a very simple way: “The peace that Jesus gives is grounded in God and not in circumstances.”

If we draw together these two verses we can make two simple statements about Jesus’ brand of peace. First, we can say this: In the world, trouble. And yet, that certainty, that promise on the part of Jesus, is oddly comforting, for it tells us that when we do face trouble in the world, it doesn’t mean that something has gone wrong. In fact, it may mean that something has gone right.

Back in the early 1990s in the United States, large numbers of upscale professional people began moving from the cities to the country. Well, when wealthy people, accustomed to all the conveniences of suburban and city living, arrived in rural areas, you can imagine what happened! Patrick O’Driscoll, writing in USA Today, said, “Your neighbor’s cattle may stink. . . . You may have to haul your own trash to the dump. The mail carrier might not deliver daily, or perhaps not at all. Power or phone lines may not reach your property. The fire department or ambulance may not come quickly enough in an emergency. And, yes, your remote mountain road may not get plowed—or paved, for that matter.”

Apparently many were not ready for such realities, so they called to complain. Well, their complaining didn’t go down too well. In fact, one county commissioner, John Clarke of Larimer County, Colorado, got so many cranky calls that he finally wrote a 13-page booklet entitled, “The Code of the West: The Realities of Rural Living.” He warned people thinking about moving to the country about what they should expect. Listen to some of his warnings:

“Animals and their manure can cause objectionable odors. What else can we say?”

“If your road is gravel, it is highly unlikely that Larimer County will pave it in the foreseeable future. . . . Gravel roads generate dust. . . . Dust is still a fact of life for most rural residents.”

“The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go in case of heavy precipitation. When property owners fill in ravines, they have found that the water that drained through that ravine now drains through their house.”

Clarke wasn’t trying to keep newcomers away. “We just want them to know what to expect,” he said.

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And just so, Jesus. He says to hurried and worried people who want peace, “In the world, trouble.” But that reality need not deter us from the reality of His second statement, which is this: In Jesus, peace. Though you can count on the fact this “world [is] with devils filled,” those who are in Jesus are with peace filled. They are given the grace to rise above the fray to a place of serenity.

Eugene Peterson, author of the book, The Contemplative Pastor, writes about a scene in Herman Melville’s classic book, Moby Dick. The scene presents a whaleboat thudding across the frothing, turbulent ocean in pursuit of that great, white whale, Moby Dick. The sailors labor intensely, with every muscle taut, focusing all their attention and energy on the task at hand. It is the cosmic conflict we see, the battle between good and evil. There is the chaotic sea and the demonic sea monster versus Captain Ahab, the morally outraged man.

But what catches our eye is that in this boat there is one man who does nothing. He is not holding an oar; he isn’t sweating; he doesn’t shout. He is deliberate and languid amidst all the crashing and the cursing. Who is he? He is the harpooner—the one who will launch the harpoon toward the whale. And as the harpooner, he waits quiet and poised. And then, in Moby Dick, comes this sentence: “To ensure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooners of this world must start to their feet out of idleness, and not out of toil.”

Did you catch that? Now listen to what Eugene Peterson has to say about Melville’s images and words: “Melville’s sentence is a text to set alongside the psalmist’s ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ (Ps. 46:10), and alongside Isaiah’s ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength’ (Lsa. 30:15).”

Peterson continues: “Pastors know there is something radically wrong with the world. . . . The white whale, symbol of evil, and the crippled captain, personification of violated righteousness, are joined in battle. . . . In such a world, noise is inevitable, and immense energy is expended. But if there is no harpooner in the boat, there will be no proper finish to the chase. Or if the harpooner is exhausted, having abandoned his assignment and become an oarsman, he will not be ready and accurate when it is time to throw his javelin.

“Somehow it always seems more compelling to assume the work of the oarsman, laboring mightily in a moral cause, throwing our energy into a fray we know has immortal consequence. And it always seems more dramatic to take on the outrage of a Captain Ahab, obsessed with a vision of vengeance and retaliation, brooding over the ancient injury done by the Enemy. There is, though, important work to do. Someone must throw the dart. Some must be harpooners.”

It is so tempting to allow the hurry and worry of life to crowd out that for which every Christian and, more closely, every pastor has been appointed—the duty of simply being with Jesus. When the storm of life’s demands, schedules, expectations, and appointments pounds into the boat in which we ride, we are tempted to abandon the harpooner’s post and throw our weight into rowing. But it is then that we must remember that every Christian, but more specifically, every pastor, is called, first of all, to simply be with Jesus.

That’s what He says here in John: “In me you will have peace.” In the world, trouble, but in Me, peace.

In Jesus, peace
We must be with Jesus. We must abide—as He says in these closing chapters of John’s Gospel—in Him.

When was the last time you were with Him? When was the last time you lingered long in His presence? When was the last time you huddled in the eye of the storm, huddled in that one still, silent pocket of peace while the fury raged around you, huddled alone with Him?

In the world, peace too often depends upon what happens out there. The world’s gift of peace is often dependent upon outward things. But Jesus says, “That is not my kind of peace. My peace,” he says, “depends on what’s in here (the heart), not on what’s out there.”

During World War II, when London was being bombed, an elderly woman seemed strangely at peace. “How can you be at peace?” her friends asked. “How can you rest when it seems the city will be blown apart?”

“Well,” she said, “it’s like this: Every night before I go to bed, I kneel and ask God to be with me through the night. And then I figure there’s no point in both of us staying up, so I go to sleep.”

God’s peace doesn’t deny danger. But God’s peace does allow us to rest even in the face of danger. Why? Because being a person of peace depends on what’s in here, not on what’s out there.

And so I’ve got a problem. My life is filled with hurry and worry. But you know, the real problem is not hurry and worry. No, the real problem is whether I dwell mainly in the world or mainly in Jesus.”

* This article is a condensed version of a sermon. The original preaching format is retained.
† Unless otherwise noted, all Bible texts are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.
The cosmic controversy

Norman R. Gulley

There was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him” (Rev. 12:7-9).

War in heaven! Strange that war should break out in the most holy place of heaven’s sanctuary! God’s throne is the last place one would expect a fight. But the throne was the focus of the battle. Possession of the throne was the issue. Two groups battled—the dragon and his angels, and Michael and His angels. The dragon is Satan, the devil (see Rev. 12:9; cf. Ezek. 28:14-17; Rev. 20:2). The Hebrew word for Michael (micael) means “who is like God.” Michael is another name for Christ, the One who protects God’s people in the time of trouble (see Dan. 12:1), and the One who guarantees the resurrection of the saints (see Jude 9).

Clearly the war in heaven was between Christ and Satan, first in heaven and then on earth. Before this war in heaven, God created the universe through Christ (see John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:2). “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities” (Col. 1:16). This means Christ created Lucifer (who later became Satan) and those who joined his side of the cosmic controversy. Rebellion was against Christ, the One who gave them existence.

Lucifer’s rebellion in heaven

But consider Lucifer’s position in heaven before his rebellion. The name means “the shining one.” He stood at God’s throne as the “anointed . . . guardian cherub” (Ezek. 28:14). Like Christ (see Rev. 22:16), he was called a “morning star” (Isa. 14:12). Christ created Lucifer as much like Himself as He could. We might call him a look-alike.

Lucifer even had his own throne. He said, “I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:13, 14). Lucifer, a created being, wanted to raise his throne above the throne of God and be “like the Most High.” How could this be—a created being wanting to become as the Creator and sit on His throne?

Why did Lucifer rebel and become the devil? He thought he could become God, sit on His throne, in spite of the fact that it was Christ who created him (see John 1:3) and gave him everything, including freedom of choice and a position as the leading cherubim at the throne (Ezek. 28:14, 15), and thus great authority.

Lucifer was the most exalted created being in the universe. He should have been grateful and known that the One who created him was the Creator and not a created being. And a creature can never become the Creator. Yet Lucifer sought to be one. So blind is pride. Thus sin, rebellion against God, had its roots in self-exaltation, or self-dependence. Lucifer knew that He was dependent on Christ for his life (see Ps. 36:9), yet said “I will” be independent (the word appears five times in Isaiah 14:13, 14). Lucifer’s rebellion was not public at first. It started in his mind. That’s where all sin begins. Sin is not just the outward act, it’s the inward thought. Lucifer was becoming Satan in his mind. He mulled over the position of Christ and became jealous. He wanted to take the throne of the One who had given him his throne, and he hated Christ. To hate someone is murder (see 1 John 3:15), and that’s why Christ called him a murderer and liar from the beginning (see John 8:44). Satan’s jealousy and hatred of Christ led him to launch a campaign of disinformation about Him among the angels (cf. Rev. 12:10).
Scripture says of Satan, “You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence” (Ezek. 28:15, 16). The Hebrew word for “wickedness” is ṭekułlah, meaning “trading” or “peddling.” As Richard Davidson points out, the “widespread trade” refers to goods or to gossip. Here Satan spreads gossip about God among the angels. The cosmic controversy spread with gossip, slandering the character of God as unjust.

Satan silently and seditiously invaded heaven’s peace and joy with selfishness. From sin’s inception “he was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Satan claimed himself a better choice to run heaven’s government. His influence permeated Paradise like cancer.

One-third of the angels succumbed to his deception and cast their lot with him (see Rev. 12:4).

Mournfully come the words, “How have you fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’” (Isa. 14:12-14). Satan wanted to take Christ’s place. He wanted to be like Him in position, not in character. This look-alike wanted power for selfish reasons. He wanted to be God. No wonder he urged Christ in the wilderness to fall down and worship him! (See Matt. 4:8, 9.)

Satan, the prince of the world

After he was cast out of heaven, Satan shifted his focus to Planet Earth to cause the human race to rebel against God (see Gen. 3:1-5). Satan knew that God has given all His creatures, angelic and human, freedom of choice. It was the wrong exercise of this freedom that led Lucifer and his angels to rebel, and now he would use the same technique with our first parents. Adam and Eve, made in the image of God (see Gen. 1:26, 27), were free beings. They could converse with God, and God expected them to serve and obey freely out of love. Once again the wrong exercise of freedom on the part of Adam and Eve led them, and with them all humanity, to become subjects of sin and Satan. God knew that freedom is risky, but the fearful risk was worth it, for at the end of history all created beings will choose to freely follow Christ forever.

God warned Adam and Eve that they would die if they ate the forbidden fruit (see Gen. 2:16, 17). But Satan in the form of a serpent told Eve, “You will not surely die. . . . For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4, 5). Eve doubted the word of her Creator and accepted the word of the tempter.

Thus, through Adam and Eve sin entered the world, and all humanity fell prey to sin and its effects (see Rom. 5:12). Consequently, Satan pretended to be the master of this earth (see Job 1:7). Jesus called him “the prince of this world” (John 12:31), and Paul labeled him “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). As prince and god of this world, Satan claimed the human race as his. But Christ came to this world to win back the lost world.

The book of Job unravels the drama that ensues, and one imagines that angels and inhabitants of all the worlds watched to see whether Job would stay true to Christ.

Christ allows Satan to cause Job’s family and possessions to be taken through death and destruction (see Job 1:6-20). Rather than blame God, Job “fell to the ground in worship and said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.’ In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (Job 1:20-22).

At another meeting of the council (see Job 2:1, 2), Christ asked Satan again about Job. “Skin for skin!” Satan replied. ‘A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face” (Job 2:4, 5). Again Christ permitted Satan to test Job. “So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head” (Job 2:7).

Through it all Job remained faithful to

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COSMIC UNITED NATIONS WHERE ADAMS OF DIFFERENT WORLDS CAME TO A COSMIC COUNCIL.

Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8). Here’s a test case of one who freely followed Christ in the cosmic controversy. The book of Job unravels the drama that ensues, and one imagines that angels and inhabitants of all the worlds watched to see whether Job would stay true to Christ.

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Christ and was commended by Him (see Job 42:7), and He made him twice as prosperous as before (see Job 42:10).

Job is a type of all those who will be saved. Each one witnesses to the universe about the justice of God. Paul had it right. God’s intent is “now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:10, 11).

**Biblical worldview**

So the biblical worldview is far more than human salvation. It is about the cosmic controversy of which human salvation is only a part. It is easy for Christians to think everything centers on this world, and in a sense that is true, because this is the theater in which the controversy is unfolding. But the interest in what happens here is not confined to this world and heaven. Scripture is clear that Christ created worlds (αἰώνας, plural, Heb. 1:2, ages or worlds, translated “worlds” in KJV, NKJV, and “universe” in Phillips, NIV) populated by unfallen intelligent beings. These and the unfallen angels view the course of the cosmic controversy on this earth with great interest.

**Satan against Jesus during His human life**

When Jesus became a helpless babe and a dependent human, Satan must have exulted in his advantage over Him. How he must have wanted to wrench back His position in heaven by defeating Christ! That’s why he tempted Jesus (see Matt. 4:1-10).

After fasting forty days and forty nights, Jesus was physically exhausted. Then “the tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread’” (Matt. 4:3). What a temptation to a man at the point of death, and to a God who had the power to perform the deed! “Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone”’” (Matt. 4:5, 6). When you are emaciated and at the point of death, and are not known for who you really are, it’s a great temptation to test God, who had made the promise Satan quoted.

“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me’” (Matt 4:8, 9). What a temptation this was to One at the point of death, and who knew that one day crucifixion would be far worse. He came to die to win back the kingdoms of this world usurped from Him by Satan in Eden. The temptation was, “If you bow to me now, you can get these kingdoms and avoid the horrors of Calvary.” This last temptation provides insight into what the cosmic controversy is all about.

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Satan wants to be worshiped. He wants to take the prerogative that belongs only to Christ and the Godhead. Satan always wanted to be like God.

How did Christ respond? He answered with the Word of God (see Matt. 4:1-10; Deut. 8:3; Deut. 6:16; Deut. 6:13). Whereas Satan questioned God's word in Eden and beyond, Christ used God's word to overcome him.

Christ defeated Satan at Calvary

In the trials and crucifixion of Jesus we find the climax of the cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan. Properly understood the destiny of the world hung in the balance at Gethsemane and the cross. The temptations endured during those crises can only be glimpsed, never fully understood. Amid the anguish and shame of crucifixion, carrying the crushing weight of the world's sin (see Isa. 53:6), the mob mocked and ridiculed the One who hung there for them. Was it worth it? Should He give up? Satan knew everything was at stake now. If Christ died triumphant, he was doomed. But if he could make Christ come down from the cross, or just sin once, his future was secure.

But Calvary decided the controversy. Christ won the decisive victory. Satan knew he was defeated. He knew Christ's death meant that he would die. But Satan would not give up. He flung his full fury against the resurrected/ascended Christ. He would throw all his energy against Christ by attempting to make the Cross of no avail. If the human race neglects what happened that day on the Cross, then it would be of no value to them, and Satan would still come out the winner. He would invest everything to make the Cross of none effect to humans.

The cosmic conflict and the final judgment

Although Christ has won the cosmic war on the cross, the Bible does speak of a final judgment at the end time (Rev. 20:11-15) when the great controversy will meet its final resolution. Indeed, it makes no sense to have a final judgment if there isn't a cosmic controversy needing resolution. For why else would God gather all who ever lived in one place at one time? This post-millennial judgment (see Rev. 20:11-15) is one thousand years after the saints went to heaven in the second advent (see 1 Thess. 4:16-18), and includes the dead wicked who are now resurrected (see Rev. 20:12, 13). The fact that one group has been in heaven and the other group not, shows destiny has already been decided and experienced by the saved.

The wicked dead are resurrected to face their Creator and Savior and to receive their final judgment, along with Satan and his angels. What is this final judgment? It is God's self-revelation, providing overwhelming evidence that convinces all created beings that God is just, gracious, and loving. True, God's character was fully revealed at Calvary. But only a few saw Jesus die. How could He show the others? What if He replays the scenes of the cross across the canvass of the heavens. The saved and the lost would gaze upon this greatest revelation of God. Here they would see that God poured out all His love to save every human. Here they would see that Satan and his fiends did everything to kill the One who had given them life. The contrast between Christ and Satan would be stark and shattering! Then each one would realize on that judgment day that their destiny was decided not arbitrarily by a vengeful God, but on the basis of whether they accepted or rejected Christ's death for them as a ransom for their sin.

In the light of Calvary the saved will say, "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the Ages" (Rev. 15:3), and "Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments" (Rev. 19:1, 2). It's not hard for the saved to say He's just, but what will the lost say? Will they cry out, "You are unjust?"

In the light of salvation offered to all at Calvary, the wicked realize their abject slavery to Satan. For the first time they see the utter contrast between Christ and Satan. They realize that only God is love. But they also realize that they don't love Him. They are un fitted for life with God. They want to be hidden from God. Sin has separated them from the Savior.

But there will be a universal acknowledgment of God's love and justice. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10, 11; cf. Isa. 45:23, 24; Zeph. 2:11). "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!'" (Rev. 5:13). The wicked can't help saying these things. The evidence is overwhelming. But they remain unchanged. Their last act is to follow Satan in battle against God, His city, and His people (see Rev. 20:7-10). Their demise is their choice, and the saints will forever know that God gave them their desires and so is just. Throughout eternity the saved, the unfallen angels, and beings from unfallen worlds, will revel in the great love of God manifested in Christ. Then every created being will realize "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:28). For God is love (see 1 John 4:8-16). On that universal acclamation, the cosmic conflict will see its end. 

Norman R. Gulley, Ph.D., is research professor of systematic theology, Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.

1 Except as otherwise stated, all Scripture passages quoted in this article are from the New International Version.
Peaceable people or peacemakers?

Hyveth Williams, D.Min., is senior pastor of the Campus Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Loma Linda, California.

Editorial Note: This is the edited transcript of Pastor William’s sermon presented at the recent Ministry uplink seminar, beamed from Pacific Union College on April 1. The theme of the seminar was “Rumors of Peace.”

Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God (Matt. 5:9, YLT).

Young Ryan was having a terrific time on his first airplane trip. He began by picking and pulling at everything in his reach. He soon became bored, though, and began to kick the back of the seat in front of him until the passenger stood up and glared at him. Ryan jumped out of his seat and dashed down the aisle, through the cloth curtains separating first and economy classes, and crashed into a flight attendant serving hot beverages. The tray went up and the flight attendant went down. She quickly recovered, and as she picked herself up, she grabbed Ryan’s arm as he was about to flee the scene. Without thinking she blurted out as sweetly as she could under the circumstances, “Son, why don’t you go outside and play?”

Some tasks in ministry seem as impossible to accomplish as the exclamation of that exasperated flight attendant. Today, I have the privilege of participating in an assignment that is not only challenging, it is achievable—to remind believers they are to be a people of peace, especially now, during a time of war and tragedy.

More than forty years ago, I left my small sun-drenched paradise nestled in the heart of the Caribbean. Since then, I have traveled to more than forty countries, watched men walk on the moon, and admired the power of technology, especially in satellites and space shuttles. I have been amazed by the proliferation of the Internet and Web sites where men and women are praised, vilified, and entertained. I have drunk deeply, to the point of intoxication, from the cup of the increased knowledge of these last days, but I’ve never lost the ability to be awed by it all.

One thing that used to take my breath away was rainmaking. I was astounded by the ingenuity of pilots who flew into dry, rainless clouds to seed them with chemicals and, voila, rain! To make rain fall in drought-stricken places where crops and creatures would have otherwise perished for lack of water was, to me back then, godlike.

Today, it is the actions of peacemakers that leave me spellbound. It’s a divine attribute to create harmony in hostile situations, calm troubled waters, smooth out ruffled egos in multiethnic, racial, and religious communities where there would not otherwise be the remotest chance of anything but conflict.

Peacemakers bring real answers to our restlessness, anger, and assault upon God, self, and others.

Nature in convulsion

When we survey the world today, it is commonplace for us to discover that all nature is in convulsion. If we begin with our own fallen nature, as we ought, we will notice that it is the hiding place of irregular imaginations, disobedience, disorder, and a host of perverted passions. Without God in residence to order our daily affairs, these insurgent passions will quickly dethrone reason, so that the anarchy in our souls will be established as the regent of our lives.

Under its dominion, crimes of indulgence, sensuality, and a litany of addictions too numerous to count will be easily committed. The broken shards of our lives will not only cause internal injuries, but they will push into diabolical deeds against ourselves, others, and, ultimately, God.

I once saw a woman in a hotel lounge dur-
ing a convention, beating her head against the wall, screaming, "I'm stupid! I'm so very stupid!" Upon enquiring what was wrong, she sobbed and confessed that she had said something "stupid" in the presence of people whose approbation she had desperately sought. Immediately, her habituated, shame-based past sprang up to accuse her, and her only course of action was to inflict the harshest punishment upon herself for her "stupidity."

I have never beaten my head against the wall, but there have been times when I have gone home to spend days and even weeks in bitter recrimination and harsh self-criticism, accompanied by thoughts of suicide, after making such a mistake. But God stepped in and changed the scenes of emotional turbulence and distorted these kinds of self-messages. He did this through the ministry of His peacemakers.

Through them, God took away the evil passions that drove me to such extremes and replaced them with His presence, hope, and courage, so I could actually dream dreams and see visions of a day when there will be no more pain, sin, or death.

Right now the world and every society in it is in distress. We are overwhelmed by the imaginative creations of virtual reality and special effects by the young and restless in their quest for peace. We are undermined by the double idolatry of violence and selfishness, jealousy, resentment, and revenge, which are amply rewarded for us, with this perverted perception of peace. The peacemakers versus peaceable persons.

It is significant that in his great Magna Carta sermon Jesus said "peacemaker" and not "the peaceable person," when He declared, "Happy are the peacemakers."

There is a dramatically distinct difference between the two.

For example, the peaceable person is more inclined to go to great lengths to make others feel comfortable in awkward situations, even if they have to compromise principle and abandon wholesome standards. The peaceable person will risk nothing, accepting things as they are, leaving well-enough alone, to follow the path of least resistance with merely prudent maxims that promise a quiet life. Their supreme device for maintaining peace seems to be expediency and status quo before principle.

Peaceable people have average opinions, not creative ideas. They are the ones who seem to always know how to get along, to do the work of peacemaking God's way. They make real peace as only a divinely inspired person can. When adversity appears, they remain calm, and are intrepid witnesses in the heat of an argument.

Peacemakers versus peaceable persons

Just as those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are filled; just as those who mourn are comforted and the pure in heart see God; just so, according to Matthew 5:9, happy are peacemakers for they shall be called sons and daughters of God.

This is how Eugene Peterson presents this verse in his paraphrase The Message: "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family."

Only those empowered by the Holy Spirit to cry, "Abba Father!" are able to do the work of peacemaking God's way. They make real peace as only a divinely inspired person can. When adversity appears, they remain calm, and are intrepid witnesses in the heat of an argument.

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This is how Eugene Peterson presents this verse in his paraphrase The Message: "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family."

Only those empowered by the Holy Spirit to cry, "Abba Father!" are able to do the work of peacemaking God's way. They make real peace as only a divinely inspired person can. When adversity appears, they remain calm, and are intrepid witnesses in the heat of an argument.

Peacemakers versus peaceable persons

It is significant that in his great Magna Carta sermon Jesus said "peacemaker" and not "the peaceable person," when He declared, "Happy are the peacemakers."

There is a dramatically distinct difference between the two.

For example, the peaceable person is more inclined to go to great lengths to make others feel comfortable in awkward situations, even if they have to compromise principle and abandon wholesome standards. The peaceable person will risk nothing, accepting things as they are, leaving well-enough alone, to follow the path of least resistance with merely prudent maxims that promise a quiet life. Their supreme device for maintaining peace seems to be expediency and status quo before principle.

Peaceable people have average opinions, not creative ideas. They are the ones who seem to always know how to get along, to do the work of peacemaking God's way. They make real peace as only a divinely inspired person can. When adversity appears, they remain calm, and are intrepid witnesses in the heat of an argument.

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out the repeated warnings against indolence and sluggards in the Bible, particularly in the book of Proverbs.

By dramatic contrast, a people of peace are called to be peacemakers in the very way Jesus was. He, the Prince of Peace, declared that He had not come to bring peace as people generally understood it to be, but a sword (that is, the word of God—see Heb. 4:12). He was mocked, scourged, and crucified, yet He appealed to God with His last breath for the forgiveness of His assailants and foes.

He troubled the status quo with His interpretations of Scripture. He tore the veil of the temple, from top to bottom, with His radical life and death. He established that a peacemaker is one who is nailed on the cross of utter surrender, sacrifice, and total obedience to God. He created a whirlwind of infinite desire and unsatisfied longing for His heavenly Father in the hearts of men and women.

As a result, those who went out in His name turned the world upside down, not with swords or MOABs (Mother of All Bombs), but with unconditional love and compassion for all peoples, tongues, and nations.

No one who truly has God’s Spirit and peace can be a peacemaker until she or he has been crushed on the grinding stone of affliction. For, if you have never been there, you cannot lead people through it. Only those who have dipped their hands in the bowl of life with a friend, received their kiss of betrayal, and remained compassionate can and will be called peacemakers. Peacemakers cannot avoid being sorrowful unto death or fearful of being alone as they kneel in their own Gethsemane.

All peacemakers will struggle and fall under the weight of their own cross on the way to a place of crucifixion, often on a hill, outside of conventional Christianity.

And the disturbing truth is that unless we, in one way or another, struggle through such an experience, we will tend to remain mere peaceable people, rather than the peacemakers Jesus blesses.

**Who are the peacemakers?**

God’s peacemakers are like Him. They disturb the traditions, conventions, and formalities of humans. They are and will be persecuted for righteousness’ sake, not for their own ambitions and goals. They will be reviled or verbally abused and have all manner of evil spoken and written against them falsely, precisely because they are not peaceable.

They will not leave well enough alone, but on the contrary, are assertive guardians of God’s will and Word. They are resolute, feisty fighters for the faith against principalities and powers and the evil, disruptive elements of this world. They are always ready to follow Him who could flash forth a “Woe unto you,
Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” (Matt. 23:13-36), or welcome little children to sit on His lap.

They are armed and extremely dangerous, dressed in the armor of God from head to toe, where their feet are shod with the gospel of peace (see Eph. 6:15).

God’s peacemakers are like Athena, the goddess of wisdom, whom the ancient Greeks chose as their protector. When they carved her image, she was boldly portrayed wearing a helmet, bearing a spear in one hand to defend the peace, and an olive branch in the other to assure that she also brought harmony to earth. They are as wise as the pre-sin serpent and harmless as the dove that appeared above Jesus when He was baptized (see Matt. 10:16).

Jesus, the great Peacemaker, is the model after whom all people of peace should be molded. He threatened merchants and moneychangers with a rope twisted in His hand, as He drove them from the temple and denounced their combination of works and worship (see Mark 11:15-17).

Like Him, peacemakers stand firm against the wiles of the devil. They don’t keep his dirty secrets or cover up his evil deeds! They are divinely appointed and anointed peacemakers who fight the good fight of faith for God’s name and sake. They know that their heavenly Father’s warfare is against principalities and powers, evil elements of the air, in order that actual peace may reign forever and ever. They are very much a part of the war struggle, triumph or trauma, can take away the peace God has given the perennial fountain of forgiveness, in Christ runs deep from springs of grace, and love. No earthly strife or struggle, triumph or trauma, can take away the peace God has given the peacemaker.

Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God. They live harmoniously with even their enemies. They rely not on the current political climate, but on God, who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay” (Rom. 12:19, NKJV). They are peace chasers who know they are born of the Spirit, called out to be children of God.

Those who have that kind of intimate relationship with our heavenly Father will also live like our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, who did nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regarded others as more important than Himself (see Phil. 2:3). They are happy knowing they have been justified by faith and have peace with God in Christ Jesus.

**Peace, real peace**

But tragedy is real and peace is rare! The world has been at peace only eight percent of its history. In the three millennia since records have been kept, out of 3,530 years, only 286 have been warless! Historians estimate that more than 8,000 treaties, signed by great men of even greater nations in their quest for peace, have been broken during this time.

Peace is rare! Ask the people who live in such hot spots as the war-torn Middle East. Question orphans in AIDS-ravaged Africa or the idle rich of the land of the idle rich from America to Arabia who roam the earth looking for intimacy and personal satisfaction.

Peace is rare! Ask the pimps, prostitutes, and pushers on the streets of our cities or the peddlers of cheap grace and materialism from the pulpits of some Christian churches.

“There is no peace,” says the Lord, “for the wicked” (Isa. 48:22; see also 57:21, NKJV), and so it has been and is. Yet, in the midst of all this pain and confusion Jesus said, “Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God.”

Once, two artists were commissioned to paint a picture of perfect peace. On his canvas, the first artist depicted a carefree boy sitting in a boat on a placid lake, without a single ripple disturbing the surface. The lake was nestled in a valley near a range of rugged mountains where there was no movement of fish or fowl. This artist painted a peaceable scene.

The other painter chose a roaring waterfall with raging winds whipping the spray high above the river. On a fragile limb bending over the foam, overhanging the swirling water, he painted a bird in its nest. She seemed serene as she sat peacefully brooding, while spray from the thundering waterfall threatened to wash away her abode.

There was that little bird, sitting pretty and tranquil, unafraid of the dangerous sprays from the roaring falls because she knew that in that setting she was absolutely safe from predators. She was shielded and protected by the very thing that seemed to threaten her and her tiny brood.

A people of peace are like that bird! They remain calm in the midst of trial and temptation, knowing they are the children of God. They lean upon the promises of God, refusing to let the world and sin disturb their spiritual equilibrium.

The true peacemaker is, of all things, one around whom there is tranquility and energy, silence and turbulence, creation and destruction, fearfulness and fearlessness, all under control and operating in balance, because they, like Jesus Christ, are sons and daughters of God.

Like Jurgen Moltmann, I believe that someday the biblical theology of “it is written” will become an ontology of what has taken place. Someday the groaning in nature, history, and society will cease as a people of peace—sons and daughters of God—are revealed. Someday, promise and hope, reality, and experience, will be in one accord. But until then, as long as there is war and only rumors of peace, as long as guilt is piled on fear and tears are not wiped from all eyes, God’s people of peace must find solace in His Son’s promise that “happy are peacemakers for they shall be called gods with a little g” (see Ps. 82:6)—sons and daughters of the Most High!
Understanding grief: A pastor’s primer

Martin W. Feldbush

Ten days after 9/11. The Family Assistance Center at Pier 94, Manhattan, New York. Thousands were walking along the great wall of photographs, looking for their missing loved ones. Among the anxious searchers was the Rivera family. Alternating between shock and sobbing, denial and disbelief, the family walked and walked, looked and looked, hoping for a miracle. Mr. Rivera had worked in the broadcast transmission facility atop one of the towers. The family knew that doom was staring them in the face, yet they would not end their search.

In those horrible days, I was serving as a Red Cross volunteer chaplain. When I encountered the Riveras, they were carrying a large sign with Mr. Rivera’s picture on it. They welcomed pastoral care and spoke of their loved one in hopeful terms—though every now and then they would slide into the past tense. Remarks such as “We loved him so much” and “We’ll see him in heaven” conveyed a connection with reality, even as they continued to search the streets of a city frozen in pain and death.

The Riveras were a living demonstration of the mosaic of grief’s reactions.

Grief is the human response to loss. It is the total rejoinder of the soul to the process of irreparable negative change. From this perspective all changes, even positive ones, produce some type of loss, resulting in a grief reaction. Thus: Change = Loss = Grief.

However one defines grief, the therapeutic goals that it calls for are to help us accept the reality of the loss and experience its pain, to adjust to our environment without the lost object, and to reconstruct life and reinvest in living again.

While we grieve over the loss of many things—people, pets, jobs, houses, etc.—we will focus here on grief after the death of a person.

Windows on grieving

Grief can be viewed through various windows, each providing a different perspective. R. Scott Sullender identifies two.

Grief as separation anxiety. From birth to death, life is a series of separation events. There is a push-pull effect as we are forced into the unknown of change, yet pulled back into the safety of the known from which we come. There is also a sense of losing a part of self when our identity is closely bound to our connection with the deceased.

A part of this dynamic is what Colin Murray Parkes calls the concept of deprivation, or the loss of roles (and their practical benefit) that the deceased person played in our life—as spouse, confidant, handyman, financial supporter, etc. We grieve over the loss of the person, but we also experience loneliness from the loss of the constructive presence of those roles in our life.

Grief as relational detachment. This second window of relating to grief connects the loss of a loved one and the need to withdraw the energy we had invested in that relationship. Grief is the result of both the loss and the need to detach from an existing relationship. Attachment brings vulnerability to loss and pain, and the level of pain is dependent upon the strength of the attachment before the loss took place.

A biblical view of this would say that Christ’s invitation to love is an invitation to pain, but the joy of loving is always greater than the risk of pain. Whichever window we use, the reality is that grief brings deep pain; so deep that we experience certain reactions, and so we try to shield our eyes from its glare.

Grief and the tasks it calls for

We respond to grief with a variety of reactions, including tears and sorrow, somatic
stress responses, anger and guilt, deep discouragement and depression. Our experience can be so painful that we often try to protect ourselves by various means, including denial, repression, regression, and idealization, which may include a selective memory of the deceased.

The process of grief has sometimes been described as a series of unalterable stages that happen to us and that we passively endure. This view is changing today, and grief is seen more as an assortment of fluid tasks that we work on over time. We are not passive but active participants in the journey that has been thrust upon us. A prominent proponent of this tasks concept is J. William Worden. He outlines four tasks of grieving:

1. To accept the reality of the loss.
2. To work through the pain of grief.
3. To adjust to an environment without the deceased.
4. To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life.

The last point suggests moving from the consciousness of a face-to-face relationship to finding an acceptable place for the deceased in one's memory. The deceased is not forgotten, but new attachments are made.

During these tasks the grieving person experiences various reactions that can provide a need for pastoral care. Parkes writes about several of these:

- Shock and numbness.
- Searching and yearning: an intense preoccupation with the person of the deceased.
- Disorganization: a time of deepening sadness while the structures of life seem to be coming apart.
- Reorganization: a time of coming out of the pit of sadness and realizing that, while the loved one is gone, life can be worth living again.

Complicated and uncomplicated griefing

Grief that follows the somewhat predictable course of the grieving tasks (although there is often progression and digression) is said to be uncomplicated grief. By contrast, there are forms of grieving that are called complicated grief, such as:

- Chronic grieving: when a person is stuck in some task and it seems the grieving will never end.
- Delayed: when grief is not initiated in the usual way, but a secondary loss may belatedly trigger the process.
- Exaggerated: when a normal reaction escalates into a more serious condition.
- Masked: when a reaction occurs that does not seem to be connected with the loss, but really is—such as sleep disturbance, etc.

Complicated grieving is often cause for seeking help from a professional counselor. It is important that pastors understand the process of uncomplicated grieving, and know enough about complicated grief so that referrals can be made when necessary.

Signs of progress

Indications that the bereaved person is successfully handling the tasks of grieving include:

- The adjustment to one's environment without the deceased.
- Remembering with diminished pain.
- The fading of idealization and selective memory.
- A subsiding of anger and bitterness.
- The reconstruction of life and a reinvestment of emotional capital in living.
- The formation of new relational attachments.
- A renewed sense of being a whole person.
- Embracing the future again.

Ten ways pastors can help in uncomplicated grieving

Psalm 23 reminds us that the way out of the valley of despair is through it. But the psalmist also tells us that we don't walk the valley alone. As pastors we don't do the healing in grief; but the Holy Spirit does! Our work, however, is to help create an environment where the Spirit does His work. The helping pastor has much to offer in his or her ministry that is helpful in facilitating the process of uncomplicated grieving. Here are ten ways:

1. **Actualize the loss** through active listening, helping the bereaved person to tell his or her story and express the full range of reactions.

2. **Use words that help, not hurt.** Phrases such as “His time was up,” “I know how you feel,” “You can marry again,” or “It was God's will” don't help. Use instead simple words that encourage and convey a true willingness to listen deeply.

3. **Maximize the benefit of religious ritual.** Funeral and memorial services and other rituals provide a multisensory way for the bereaved to articulate their story, express their emotions, and lay hold of spiritual support.

4. **Provide practical assistance** with the tasks of daily life in order to help restore some of the tangible support lost through deprivation.

5. **Allow time to grieve and don’t abandon the bereaved.** Grief takes time—don’t rush it! And don’t abandon the grieving person during that process.

6. **Interpret normal reactions, but anticipate difficult times.** Many grieving persons feel as if they’re going mad or crazy and that no one else has felt the way they do. Help them know that their experience is normal and they are not alone. Be there during the hard times—the death anniversary, holidays, and other times when the absence of the deceased is keenly felt.

7. **Honor the memory of the deceased.** Help create a memorial or find some way to honor the life of the deceased.

8. **Provide spiritual ministries.** Prayer, use of Scripture, pastoral counsel, and other pastoral means can convey perspectives that provide meaning in the midst of crisis.

9. **Help the bereaved examine their picture of God and confirm or help them develop a theology that will provide support in the midst of crisis.**

10. **Cherish and share the blessed continued on page 23**
ASPIA: Scoring pastoral effectiveness

James Coffin

Whether pastors like it or not, parishioners constantly evaluate their performance. Having observed congregations closely for more than 25 years (both from the pulpit and the pew), I would suggest that congregational evaluation of overall pastoral performance focuses primarily on five areas—Administration, Speaking, People, Ideas, and Aura (ASPIA). Pastors don’t have to excel in every area, but if their overall score is low, their ministry will languish. Let’s look briefly at each category.

Administration. We may not like it expressed in these terms, but churches are big business: The bigger the church, the bigger the business. The physical plant must be cleaned and maintained. Programs and facility usage must be scheduled. Budgets must be created and accomplishment monitored. Church officers have to be chosen. New officers have to be trained. Volunteers and employees have to be overseen. And the list goes on.

In short, the pastor must ensure that these concerns are attended to. When pastors delegate administrative responsibility, they must ensure that those to whom the responsibility is given are executing their tasks. While high-quality administration may slip by unnoticed because things generally run smoothly, ineffective administration can ruin a church.

Speaking. The spoken word is the pastor’s medium of exchange. Sermons, prayer meetings, Sabbath School discussions, board meetings, committee meetings, hospital visits—all these are a daily part of a pastor’s life. Ministerial effectiveness is greatly determined by the pastor’s ability to communicate publicly.

If a pastor’s voice is shrill and grating, if a pastor shows no enthusiasm for what he or she is saying, if a pastor’s speech is laced with colloquialisms, if a pastor doesn’t understand the basic rules of grammar and subject-verb agreement, the message can easily get lost in the transmission.

A young woman in biblical times told Peter that his speech betrayed him. Similarly, a pastor’s speech can enhance or detract from his or her credibility. It’s tough but true that a person who speaks well gets ahead, while people who speak poorly get left behind. Words are the packages in which thoughts are wrapped, so present them well.

People. Pastors exist to help people. But busy pastors can easily forget their real raison d’etre. Administration, sermon preparation, evangelism, crisis management, and even counseling can become so all-consuming that the pastor doesn’t interact with the bulk of the parishioners in a caring, loving, clearly concerned manner.

Do your parishioners like being with you? Or do they fear that you’ll embarrass, dominate, or disregard them? Do they think of you as caring and compassionate, or as harsh and judgmental? Do you make people feel at ease in your presence? Do people feel that their concerns are your concerns? That their joys are your joys? That their sorrows are your sorrows? That you’re an integral part of their life, a part of their extended family?

A pastor who is a good administrator and a good speaker can run a good church program and keep people coming to church. But a pastor who’s a “people person,” who truly cares and who’s perceived to truly care, is the pastor who’s going to be most loved by the congregation. Love and concern cover a multitude of shortfalls.

Ideas. Pastors need to have something to say that’s worth hearing. Whether it’s a sermon, a presentation at prayer meeting, or a comment during a planning session for a Vacation Bible School, pastors are judged by the quality of their ideas. Are the ideas imagin-
native, creative, practical, well thought through? Or are the ideas ordinary, run-of-the-mill, tired, worn-out?

True leaders are “idea” people. True leaders move others not just because of how they share their ideas but because their ideas actually merit consideration. Parishioners want pastors who bring forth undiscovered things from biblical passages. Pastors whose ideas create more effective administrative structures and programs tend to be respected, as are pastors who pull new possibilities from ground already plowed many times over.

So-so, same-old, same-old, just isn’t good enough. Pastors need to inspire. Ideas, well presented, are the grist of inspiration.

Aura. Administratively speaking, people and ideas are all quite tangible. But successful pastors always have a less-tangible element: that which may be called “aura.” Every pastor has to have one or more characteristics that set him or her on a pedestal in the minds of parishioners. There must be some area or areas of performance that are so outstanding the average parishioner simply has to grant respect to the pastor. In short, the pastor must have an aura, or a “presence.”

The area can be any of the foregoing abilities. The pastor may be such a superb administrator that the congregation can’t help but admire him or her. He may be a great speaker or so caring and loving that people know they can trust him. Or she may simply overflow with good ideas. This aura can come from other sources as well.

A pastor may be so hardworking—or so close to God, or such a person of faith, or so upright in his or her personal life—that the congregation can’t fail to be impressed. The aura can be the capstone on a great ministry, or the means of survival in a mediocre ministry. But there must be something special about the pastor that demands respect from the onlooker.

WHAT’S YOUR ASPIA SCORE?

Using the following scale, grade yourself in each category:
(1 = weak; 2 = competent; 3 = excellent.)

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Before writing your total score, subtract one point—because in most of our cases it’s unlikely that your congregation perceives you to be as competent as you perceive yourself. (Of course, if you really want to know how you rate, get your church board to evaluate your performance. And if you’re really brave, get the whole congregation to do so.)

SO WHAT DOES YOUR SCORE MEAN?

7 or below. You might consider some other calling or profession. Your weaknesses are substantial when compared with your areas of competence and excellence.

8-10. You probably won’t be a star, but you can succeed by working hard. Your competence and excellence in some areas should help to compensate for your weakness in others, and you may have gifts not covered in this test, or possess a composite of giftedness not that readily perceived.

11-12. You should be a productive and appreciated pastor. Your areas of excellence and competence should go a long way toward compensating for your weaknesses.

13-14. You should be highly sought after as a pastor and much appreciated by your congregation.

Understanding grief continued from page 21

...hope. Christians grieve, but as Paul said, they grieve differently from those who have no hope in Christ, no faith in the resurrection and eternal life!

Often pastors feel their impact is limited and referral is best. However, many mental health professionals today affirm that competent pastoral care and counseling is the “treatment” of choice for many who need support and meaning in the midst of this kind of ultimate crisis.
The preacher's temptation

John McVay

I have a sovereignty problem. In the morning, I ponder God's Word, where I see clearly that God is the Lord of all things. I confess His sovereignty and bow the knee, ceding all my domain to Him (as if I really had one!).

As the day unfolds, though, I begin to annex territory. Perhaps just a hamlet here and a house there. I may even lay quiet claim to a county or two. No invasion or revolution, mind you; just quiet, subtle incursions into the sovereign realm of God. Such moves can, of course, lead to something more than storming God's citadel and planting the angry banner of my own rule where only the ensign of the King belongs.

This is what I call "the preacher's temptation."

Sin of omission?

In Acts 12:19-24, Herod (Agrippa I) has a sovereignty problem.1 It is not that some barbarian tribe is gnawing away at his southern border or that the Romans are threatening to discount his authority. He has the same kind of sovereignty problem you and I have as ministers. Because he bears the title "king" (or, in our case, "pastor," "leader," "elder," "president," "dean," "chair," "father," "mother"), he thinks he really is king.

He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

The hungry citizens of Tyre and Sidon have grown weary of their running feud with Herod. So through the mediation of Herod's chamberlain, Blastus, a conciliation session is arranged. But because they know the kind of man Herod is, they are in a "bow and scrape" mood.

The day arrives and the conciliation session begins: "On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people" (verse 21). Herod's oration—his sermon, if you will—receives strong praise. The delegation from Tyre and Sidon shouts, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man!" (verse 22). Herod does not dispute the statement, and the divine response is as devastating as it is instantaneous: "Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died" (verse 23).

It seems curious that Herod is struck down as the result of a sin of omission, of failing to give praise to God. In fact, one could argue that the judgment comes, not for his own sin, but for the sin of others—the people of Tyre and Sidon who offer him blasphemous praise. Herod must have committed many sins of commission. Did he not needlessly kill people? Did he not misuse his power and authority to mistreat his subjects? Even in the account we are looking at, does not the sin of starving or at least threatening to starve the citizens of Tyre and Sidon amount to anything? Why is this sin of omission so egregious—the sin of not giving praise to God? From a human perspective, it may seem a victimless crime.

Other examples

It may help to notice that in Acts others have been struck down because of their failure to acknowledge God. Ananias and Sapphira die because they "lied to the Holy Spirit" (5:3), lied not "to men but to God" (5:4), and tested the Spirit of the Lord (5:9). Herod shares a common flaw with these two who also are struck down: Herod paints God out of the picture. His mute response would be appropriate only if there were no God in heaven.

Likewise, the story of Simon the Sorcerer in
Acts 8:9-25 presages the account of Herod's death. "And all the people, both high and low, gave him [Simon] their attention and exclaimed, 'This man is the divine power known as the Great Power'" (verse 10). Simon himself seems to counter such thinking by being baptized, accepting "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (verse 12). However, Peter pronounces judgment on Simon ("May your money perish with you . . . .," verse 20), when Simon tries to franchise the Holy Spirit, an attempt that shows a continuing hunger for blasphemous praise (cf. verses 20-23).

With the story of Ananias and Sapphira, and that of Simon the Sorcerer, Herod's death illustrates the wrong of failing to give God His due. If one looks at the themes of the book of Acts, it could be strongly argued that Luke, the writer, sees this as no minor sin, but the worst of all.

**The contrast**

If there are those in Acts who behaved similarly to Herod, there are also those who did differently: the true followers of Christ. In Acts 4, Peter and John are arrested and brought before the Council in response to the healing of the crippled beggar. When released, they go to their fellow Christians and report what happened. A prayer meeting ensues.

"Sovereign Lord," they said, 'you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them!'" (verse 24). The prayer recounts how Gentiles, kings, rulers, Herod (Antipas), and Pontius Pilate all sought to exercise their own sovereignty in executing Jesus. But behind the human machinations, the Christian community sees the sovereignty of God. In fact, all these only "did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen" (verse 28). They conclude the prayer by requesting God's intervention as they seek to carry forward the story of Jesus. "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (verse 31).

One more story, likely intended by Luke as a foil to the story of Herod's death, helps us understand and apply the strange narrative. In Lystra, Paul heals a crippled man and the citizens respond by shouting, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" (Acts 14:11).

Believing they have experienced a theophany (in which gods appear to be human), they dismiss the opportunity to know the Incarnation (in which God did become a human). They identify Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes, "because he was the chief speaker" (verse 12). A worship service—complete with sacrifices of bulls—is choreographed quickly by the priest of Zeus. It doesn't take much imagination for us to sense the temptation that Paul and Barnabas might have felt: to accept this mistaken belief and these misplaced accolades . . . all for the sake of the shortcut spread of the gospel, of course. But they did no such thing.

The parallels with the earlier story of Herod's death are clear. Here, citizens of a city respond blasphemously to mere humans and include praise of the speaker in their false worship. The response of Paul and Barnabas could not be more different from that of Herod. While Herod accepts the blasphemous praise of the citizens of Tyre and Sidon, Paul and Barnabas signal their dismay by tearing their clothes and running into the crowd shouting, "We too are only men, human like you!" (verse 15).

Resisting the blasphemous worship with every decibel they can muster, they shout the message of God's sovereignty: "We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them!" (verse 16).

**The preacher's temptation**

Again, the parallels are clear: Success in mission (and in life) is founded on acknowledging the sovereignty of God. Behind every political force, we see the hand of God. Operating through our own meager efforts at mission—inconsequential in themselves—we trace the effective actions of God. He is sovereign. What appears, on the human plane, to represent failure may be reconfigured by God as stunning success. Our first task is not to be successful. Our first and most important duty is to praise God and acknowledge His sovereignty.

The contrasting results of acknowledging God's reign and ignoring it are made explicit in the conclusion to the story of Herod's death: "But the word of God continued to increase and spread" (Acts 12:24). Herod dies because of ignoring God's sovereignty. The Christian community thrives because they acknowledge it.

In many churches the minister sits on a throne much like that of Herod. Sovereignty problem and all, he faces the preacher's temptation. His congregation flatters at the church door, "What a sermon, Herod! That was great teaching! That was not a mere human message! That was divine!"

**continued on page 29**
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Train up a child

W. Norman MacFarlane

Cain "was from the evil one and murdered his brother" (1 John 3:12, NRSV).

Samuel, the last of the judges and the first of the prophets, literally grew up in the church (that is, the tabernacle in Shiloh) under the tutelage of Eli the priest. Those were Israel's dark ages, both morally and spiritually. "In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions" (1 Sam. 3:1, NIV).

Godly old Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phineas—scoundrels who exploited and disgraced the priesthood. Though Samuel reared his sons in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4), even made them judges over Israel, "his sons did not follow in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice" (1 Sam. 8:3, NRSV). Yet Samuel was a man of such integrity that he could ask the people he served, "Whose ox have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe?" (1 Sam. 12:3, NRSV). This integrity, however, was not passed on to the next generation.

Maybe the genealogies of Matthew don't make for the most interesting reading, but they do tell how wicked King Ahaz was succeeded on the throne by godly King Hezekiah. How could a rascal such as Ahaz sire a saint such as Hezekiah? But godliness continued to skip a generation, because Hezekiah's son was Manasseh, whose 55-year reign was one of the most wicked and corrupt in the Old Testament. But later we have Manasseh's grandson Josiah, who brought faith and revival to the people of God, even if Josiah's sons were degenerate and ungodly.

Notice these interesting words from the Lord: "Consider the man who is righteous and does what is just and right. . . . He may have a son who is a man of violence and a cutthroat who turns his back on these rules. He obeys none of them. . . . This man in turn may have a son who sees all his father's sins; he sees but he commits none of them" (Ezek. 18:5-14, NEB).

"Train up a child in the way he should go" is a solemn admonition, but there are powerful genetic factors, which means that it is possible to succeed as a Christian parent, while your children are failures. Our responsibility is to rear our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but then it is out of our hands.

We need not be consumed by guilt if, after having discharged our responsibilities as Christian parents, our children do not cherish and adhere to the faith in which they were nurtured.
The day Columbia disappeared
How one church coped with a major tragedy

Saturday, February 1, 2003. I was walking across the kitchen to put the cereal bowl in the sink when the phone rang. “Who’s calling us so early?” I said to my wife as I picked up the receiver. It was our daughter. “Dad, did you hear the news?” she asked.

“No, why?”

“Columbia went down this morning.”

The words sent a shock wave through my mind. I flipped on the TV. There, spread across a luminescent sky, clear for all to see, were the scattered remains of what had once been the pride of American technology.

We all saw the white contrails sprouting off the white dot that was the spaceship that took with it seven brave persons. The burned fragments spiraled toward earth in a wide path of destruction like so many cast-off tendrils.

I knew that this Sabbath would not be worship as usual. I, along with millions of others, witnessed a national calamity! The loss of Columbia and its crew was one more link in what had become a chain of emotional shocks that have shaken America and the world to its core.

I knew that many of my church members would not have heard the news, but when they did, they also would experience shock and grief. Thoughts began to pile one upon the other.

Follow the planned service and include a moment of silence? Cancel the worship service? Change the sermon topic as printed in the bulletin and start over? What would a new service include? Who should participate? Can we pull it off on such short notice?

Designing the worship service

When traumatic events occur that impact life on a global, national, or local level the opportunity is ours to respond in ways that will bring hope, comfort, and assurance to our congregations. The worship service provides a meaningful setting to initiate a healing process. That’s what our church did that fateful Sabbath morning—turned a major tragedy into a sober search for understanding loss and affirming hope.

Within twenty minutes of hearing the news, I decided we would change the planned service. I made my first phone call that morning to the White Memorial Medical Center switchboard. I explained to the operator what had happened (he had not heard the news) and requested that he contact the three chaplains and ask each to call me.

The calls were returned within minutes. I invited each one to join me in the worship hour. One of the chaplains had a previous appointment. The other two readily agreed. We decided that we would share with the congregation how sudden loss and grief affect us and simply recognize that bad things happen. We also wanted to touch on how families can talk with their children when there is a tragic event. Our presentation would be in the form of a three-way, spontaneous conversation.

I arrived at the church at about 9:15, went to my office, and began to implement the program design that had been developing in my mind. I felt that the traditional memorial service would fit well. A call to the church organist, who had not heard about Columbia, brought assurance that he would leave immediately for the church. Together we would select appropriate music. We wanted hymns that proclaim hope and assurance, and I wanted the organist to play a meditative piece at some point in the service.

Our multimedia operator came to the office. He had not yet heard the news. His first response was to begin a Web search to find pictures of the Columbia and the seven astronauts. I sent someone to locate the choir director.

She also had not heard the news, but when
I explained to her our change in plans, she said she would look at the morning anthem to see whether it would fit the occasion. She decided to choose another piece. After exploring several options it was decided to have the choir join the congregation in singing “Eternal Father, Strong to Save,” the same hymn that would be sung a few days later as part of the National Memorial Service.

I decided that the ministry staff would take the leadership role during the service. It is important in a situation such as this to have worship leaders who are known and trusted by the congregation.

I asked an elder to inform the participants listed in the bulletin that we were changing the service and we would implement the originally planned program on the following Sabbath. The Scripture lessons, like the hymns, were selected based upon their strong statements of assurance, hope and faith. I copied both Old and New Testament readings from the translations I liked best and gave them to the readers.

The children’s story offered opportunity to share with the children the impact that an event such as the loss of the Columbia has on our lives. Children understand loss. Every child has experienced loss in one form or another. Kids listen as adults talk about tragedy, and they have questions. The time with the kids provided an opportunity to share with them how the loss of Columbia touched our lives and why its loss makes us sad.

When the children had come to the front, as is our usual practice, I began with a question: “What have you lost that made you sad?” The response was immediate: “My dog lives and why its loss makes us sad. Our time together ended with a reminder of the promises of Jesus and that in heaven there is no sadness or loss. I then asked our children to pray for the children whose parents were Columbia. (The children’s story is as much for adults as for the kids.)

The “sermon”

When the time came for the sermon, we pulled three chairs to the front of the platform. I sat in the middle, the two chaplains on either side. After a brief introductory statement, I asked one of the chaplains to explain how loss affects us and how we can deal with the grief that accompanies loss.

The conversation followed a question-and-answer format. The chaplains’ responses guided the discussion. After about 20 minutes, I concluded our conversation with a summary statement and invited the congregation to join in a time of silent reflection and prayer.

At the start of the service, the multimedia coordinator had gone across the street to the Medical Office Building, where he had access to his high-speed computer, and pulled pictures of the astronauts from the Web. He projected each astronaut’s image on the screen as we sat in silence. This quiet time allowed people to reflect on the event and begin to deal with the loss. Many expressed their sadness through tears. The service ended with the hymn “O God, Our Help” and a benediction.

Our people’s response to the service was immediate and positive. Some expressed appreciation that they had never seen a worship service where loss was discussed and people were led to understand how we may find healing and resolution when tragedy strikes.

Even though we have resources that other congregations may not have, our experience demonstrated that it is possible to present a meaningful worship service in the midst of great and sudden tragedies. The Holy Spirit can turn traumatic moments into affirmations of hope.

The preacher’s temptation

What if the minister chooses not to respond, if he instead chooses to annex the territory of the King of kings?

While I do not believe Luke includes Herod’s story simply to strike fear into the hearts of Christian ministers, sovereignty problems such as Herod’s can be fatal. We preachers—who experience applause for our words from week to week—have a special need to cede our rule to the Sovereign Lord. Along with those early Christians, we must pray and live those sacred words, “Sovereign Lord…” (Acts 4:24).

1 All citations are from the New International Version.
2 Josephus provides an alternative account of the event in Jewish Antiquities 19.343-352.
3 Obviously, I do not agree with David John Williams’ who dismisses the story of Herod’s death as “a kind of footnote to the previous section, adding nothing to the main thrust of the narrative, but giving a point of reference to secular history” (Acts, Good News Commentary [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988], 205). I would argue, instead, that the story poignantly develops “sovereignty issues,” which play a central role in the narrative fabric of Acts.

ATTENTION: If you receive Ministry through your conference and you transfer to another conference, make sure your subscription moves with you! Contact your new conference to be added to their subscription list.
One is a whole number too

Evaluate your congregation and the ministries it provides. One often overlooked group consists of single individuals. You may not immediately recognize some of these individuals because they have stopped attending, so carefully analyze your singles before concluding that you know who they are, much less what they need. In future articles we will consider various ministry options; but first, let’s recognize the significance of singles.

Who are singles? Statistics are high and the church mirrors society where as many as 30 percent are adults living alone. There are more singles in the United States than the entire population of France and The Netherlands combined. Nearly one-half of adult church members are single. While less than 8 percent of them will never marry, many are divorced, widowed, or not-yet-married young adults.

Because so many people are single for such different reasons, the church (and for that matter the individuals, themselves) may not see what they have in common.

Singled out. Many singles have opted out of church attendance for a variety of reasons. Some young adults expect to re-establish their relationship with the church when they marry and have children. Some believe they can maintain spiritual life separate from the church because they feel the church ignores them. They believe the church’s doctrinal or spiritual message, but they hear a strong cultural message that excludes them by emphasizing marriage as the preferred, or only acceptable, status. They are made to feel “less than whole.”

Suddenly single. Some were once married but have unexpectedly become single through death, divorce, separation, or abandonment. After they lose a spouse, more and more retirees live alone either by choice, imbalance of genders in older age, economic chaos, or by fear as a result of having observed peers who ended up unfortunately unhappy in second marriages. These sudden losses are always traumatic and can be catastrophic both economically and spiritually, shattering one’s personal identity. Strategize how to serve these sudden singles.

Single by choice. For those individuals who choose singleness, honor their completeness rather than making unfortunate comparisons with those who are married as the “correct” option. Avoid blatant (or even subtle) insinuation that singles are “marriage wannabees” just waiting to be rescued. When we showcase marriage as the only lifestyle that brings happiness and fulfillment, we set some people up for disillusionment, pain, and despair.

Kit Watts, communications director of the Southeastern California Conference and former assistant editor of the Adventist Review, has written extensively on the church’s treatment of singles and has influenced my thinking and words on this topic. She asks, “Have we overemphasized marriage and family as symbols of God’s love to the exclusion of other symbols? For example, could we emphasize Jesus’ own model more: ‘Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends’ (John 15:13 NASV).”

Circumstantial singleness. Some, who once expected to marry, discover that obligations to parents or siblings, completing an education, establishing a profession, or even the passing of time reduces the pool of possible partners. They may not have consciously chosen to remain single, but circumstances have formed this conclusion.

Further, because of strong emphasis on not being “unequally yoked,” believers in some areas of the world cannot find a marriage partner of the same faith with similar spiritual, educational, professional, or social expectations. Sometimes singleness is not the choice but the consequence of belief, compatibility issues, or geography.

Single leaders. Intentionally include singles in leadership and team activities. Jesus and Paul, single men themselves, demonstrated that the church is the place to make family. While upholding the sanctity of marriage and our duty to honor parents (Matt. 12:46-50), they explained that the gospel transcends family ties and that the church is a fellowship built not upon race, tribe, gender, or social status, but upon each individual’s choice to follow Jesus.

Respect marriage as honored by Scripture, but not as a requirement for spiritual service or leadership. In some areas of the world, the church would refuse ordination to ministry for Paul or John the Baptist because they were unmarried.

Single examples. Kit Watts points out that Jesus, as God in the flesh, was a single man who lived an exemplary life. God created humans for fulfillment, we set some people up for disillusionment, pain, and despair.

Paul describes the church as a body—with two arms and two legs, but only one heart and one brain. Remember, the body needs every single part! 

James A. Cress
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