Through the lenses of the new creation
As a result of what Jesus has done for us, we can and must both view and treat one another as He would.
Ivan T. Blazen

What preachers can learn from aviation
There are five elements of flying an airplane that parallel preaching a sermon.
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Preaching Old Testament Law to New Testament Christians
Daniel I. Block

Coping with the stresses of ministry
Five stress points that pastors will encounter at some point in time, and how to face those stressors victoriously.
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The pastor’s guide to resource materials on the Old Testament
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Ten commandments for the senior pastor
Practical counsel for senior pastors who lead other pastors within the same congregation.
Mark J. Mollodrem
**New look for Ministry**

Just a note to say that ministry is looking good. Well done! More power to you.

—William G. Johnsson, editor, Adventist Review, Silver Spring, MD, United States

**The Da Vinci Code**

After reading Robert McIver’s article explaining The Da Vinci Code (May 2006), I am somewhat confused by his statement, “According to the character Teabing in The Da Vinci Code, Jesus was just a man, albeit an important man, and married to Mary Magdalene. It was only later, and under the somewhat sinister instigation of the Emperor Constantine, that Jesus was said to be the Son of God, and all other documents that might suggest otherwise were suppressed.”

Is McIver stating that it was Constantine’s sinister instigation to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God and attempt to suppress all documents suggesting otherwise? Where is the historical evidence that Constantine had “sinister” intents in this matter? While he was never accused of being the most honorable of emperors, his aim in calling the bishops to end their divisiveness was to unify the empire, rather than promote any particular concept of the nature of Jesus.

—Elaine Nelson, Fresno, CA, United States

Response from Robert K. McIver: Many thanks to Elaine Nelson for allowing me to clarify who is responsible for the statement that “It was only later, and under the somewhat sinister instigation of the Emperor Constantine, that Jesus was said to be the Son of God, and all other documents that might suggest otherwise were suppressed.” As Elaine Nelson points out, this statement is indefensible historically. To say nothing else, Jesus was seen as divine from the earliest times and identified as such in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, written over two hundred years before Constantine. The assertions about Constantine’s role are made, not by me, but by the characters in the book The Da Vinci Code in support of the claim that Jesus was “just a man.” This is one of the key things in the book that have so many Christians concerned, even though the book is clearly fiction. Their concern arises out of the fact that this attack on the divinity of Jesus might seem plausible to those who are not well informed about historical and religious matters.

**Old Testament Law in New Testament times?**

I found your May 2006 issue particularly stimulating and noteworthy because for many years I both believed and taught (as a pastor) the assertions and arguments regarding the Law and Sabbath as posted in the article by Professor Block and the article by James Cress. My position on the subject, however, has changed over the years.

First, regarding James Cress’ point of imitating the practices of Jesus, there is a weakness in his rationale. Namely, while Jesus was alive in the flesh, being Himself Jewish and dealing with primarily a Jewish audience (including those he refers to as needing to flee, which was historically fulfilled about A.D. 70), one would expect that He would comply with the terms and conditions of the Old Covenant, including the keeping of the Sabbath, tithing, physical circumcision, and animal sacrifices.

However, after His crucifixion and subsequent resurrection and ascension, we see an entirely different paradigm. Now there is a church taking a message to individuals of all nations and cultures—but it is not a message encouraging people to keep the Sabbath.

If the assertions of the aforementioned authors were true, one would surely expect generous inclusion of the Sabbath in the book of Acts and the Pauline and other epistles. And while we recognize that there are a few references to the Sabbath in the book of Acts, they are presented in the spirit of custom and practice—not in the sense of a spiritual requirement.

The fact of the significant level of omission of such scriptural content speaks volumes to the reality that the basis of maintaining a positive relationship with God has changed. And, in my opinion, this is a point that has never been effectively addressed by the scholars of the Sabbatarian community simply because the underpinnings of their arguments are inherently flawed.

Moreover, Cress’s explanation about the Law being written on our hearts is a narrow application of the teaching. It makes more sense to believe that having the Law written on our hearts is consistent with the spiritual reality of the indwelling of Jesus through the Spirit since Jesus is the personification of the Law including the Sabbath. He is our rest and our peace, functioning in that respect in a manner that is not limited by any physical calendar.

Those whose lives are hidden in Jesus will manifest obedience to God, as initially magnified by Him beginning with the transition books (the Gospels) and later in the epistles and other writings of the New Testament, because He has miraculously taken up residence in born-again believers.

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**Letters**

If you’re receiving Ministry bimonthly and haven’t paid for a subscription, it’s not a mistake. Since 1928 Ministry has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can’t use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all clergy of other denominations. To receive your complimentary subscription, please write to us at our Editorial Office, visit us at www.ministrymagazine.org, or email us at ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.

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How often are you asked, “Do you remember me?”

Ministers are asked that question many times, and frequently we have to acknowledge that, while we recognize the person, we just don’t remember the name. On other occasions we may not even recognize the person. Therefore, those who have not learned to acknowledge that they have a less-than-perfect memory are often embarrassed.

One Sabbath morning I was visiting a congregation that had been recently formed. They were celebrating the opening of their new church building, and I was there as a guest. The tallest man in the crowd came over to me and called me by name.

“Do you remember me?” he asked. He looked familiar, and for a moment I was tempted to say, “Yes,” but I did not, for I could not place him. To my embarrassment, he was enjoying the moment, and I realized that impressing him with my memory was not going to happen. He told me that I had been in his house, and that made the moment even more embarrassing. After he shared a few more details, I remembered the house and his family, but I still had difficulty recognizing him. He was a new person—he did not look, behave, or talk the same way. The last time I had seen him, my associate and I were visiting the family because his wife and children were attending evangelistic meetings that I was conducting. During our visit, the husband made us feel unwelcome because while we talked to the wife and children his attention was focused on the television program. At the end of the visit, I suggested we pray for the family, and he reached for the television control. Wonderful, I thought, he will turn off the television. But he didn’t—instead, he turned up the volume. That’s my memory of that man.

No wonder I did not remember him that Sabbath morning. He was a changed person.

Preaching and teaching

Whenever we preach or teach the Word of God, we invite each hearer to become a new person. In this issue, Ivan Blazen writes about the relationship of theology and life. Theology does not exist for its own sake. In fact, the most effective biblical scholars and preachers present the Word of God in such a manner that they invite their hearers to live this new life described in the Bible. Let’s look at some examples.

Acts 5:20 (NIV). In the early days of the Christian church, the preaching of the Word focused on Christ and the life of His followers with theory not separated from life. The angel who opened the prison doors for the apostles gave them a specific command: “‘Go . . . and tell the people the full message of this new life.’”

Romans 6:3, 4 (NIV). The apostle Paul states that those who are baptized are “baptized into [Christ’s] death.” But just as the Resurrection followed Christ’s death, so “we too may live a new life.” Throughout his writings, Paul focused on the importance of the Christian’s life.

Ephesians 4:22, 23 (NIV). In this passage, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they were taught to “put off your old self.” But it’s not enough to put off the old self. Paul challenges the readers “to be made new in the attitude of your minds.” As we know, attitude is reflected in our actions and words.

All three passages highlight the importance of the new life, and this new life, central in the Bible, must also be central in our preaching and teaching. To effectively present this invitation, we need to be first-class students of the Word of God. For that reason, three major articles in this issue focus on the Bible. The first is a study of 2 Corinthians 5:14–6:2 by Ivan Blazen. The second is the second part of Daniel Block’s article “Preaching the Old Testament Law to New Testament Christians” (the first part is in the May 2006 issue). And third, Greg King and Roland Shoemaker present “The pastor’s guide to resource material on the Old Testament.” (The May 2006 issue had a guide on the New Testament.) We will provide resources for other subjects in forthcoming issues.

All these, and the other articles in this issue, can help us to be more effective preachers and teachers—so that God will have more people in this world living the new life. And, as we help others experience the new life, God will help us also live that new life. Together then, preachers and those who hear the preaching can “sing to the Lord a new song” (Ps. 98:1a, NIV).
Second Corinthians 5:14—For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. 15—And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 16—From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. 17—Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. 18—All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19—that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20—So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21—For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 6:1—Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. 2—For he says, “At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation.” Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (RSV)

This passage provides a series of theological affirmations and its purpose is to give insight and bring change in the way the Corinthians evaluate and deal with others, Paul in particular. In this passage, Paul is trying to bring about a long-sought-after reconciliation between himself and his cantankerous converts. Their relationship has been strained to the breaking point, and Paul wants to heal the wound.

The passage shows how a pastor must go about the practical work of healing fractured relationships. Not with “you ought,” but with “you are.” Not with a list of what we are to do but with a delineation of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus as the basis for how we ought to view and treat each other.

Christ’s death for all

In the interests of his reconciling purpose, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:14, declares that the center of and power behind his ministry is Christ’s love for the world located in the Cross. It is a love that “constrains” him (KJV). By using the word synécho (literally “to hold or press together”), Paul means that Christ’s love controls the course he follows. It inspires, impels, and compels him to take only those actions befitting the love of Christ. This is the motive force that “urges us on” (NRSV). The love of Christ puts us on track.

If love is the motive force of our lives, what is the content of this love? Paul’s answer is found in the Christian conviction “One has died for all.” The connection between the love of God and the Cross of Christ is ever so strongly emphasized by Paul. The Cross is the proof of God’s love (Rom. 5:5–8; 8:31–39; Gal. 2:20). That “One has died for all” is the heart of Christian faith.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4, Paul appeals to the earliest Christian confession we possess. It was a confession passed on to him, which he, in turn, passed on to his hearers. It contained matters of “first importance” (v. 3). The confession begins, “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.” The “our” of this confession becomes the “all” of 2 Corinthians 5:14. It would not accord with “He died for all” (v. 14) to say that He died for some, for the elect (thought of as a limited number), or for believers alone. Christ’s death is universal in its range and significance. It is “in behalf of” (hyper) the entire human race. That Paul is stressing the universal is evidenced by the fact that, whereas the confession of the early Christians says “Christ died for our sins,” in 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul replaces “Christ” with “One.” His purpose in this can only be to make it possible to switch from “for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4) (or “for us,” 3:13, or “for me,” 2:20) of the early Christian confession to “for all.” “One for all” is a perfect fit and contrast. The accent of the statement is meant to be upon
“all.” Consequently, we must affirm that Christ died for all without exception; therefore, in accord with verse 14, all without exception have died in His representative death. If this be true, the warfare between Paul and the Corinthians and between ourselves and others is, in principle, over and should therefore be ended in experience as well. If every person is the object of Christ’s self-giving love and shares in His death, it is clear that we all are united to each other in a new kind of community. Thus, if not another word had been written after “Christ died for all,” or if our passage had been mutilated or broken off at this point, the rock-bottom solution to divisive and injurious relationships would have been reached. Everything else in the passage expands or implies the basic truth that “Christ died for all.”

New life and the new creation

While making an affirmation that, because of its importance, could stand alone, 2 Corinthians 5:14 finds its chief function in the flow of thought by providing the foundation for what Paul, the theologian of the Cross and Resurrection, says in verse 15. Verse 15 is the destination to which verse 14 is traveling. The practical significance of verse 14 in relation to verse 15 is to announce that Christ’s death for all had as its purpose that those who live as a result of it live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and rose again. If verse 14 involves the principle of “One for all,” verse 15 stresses “all for One.” Thus, those who have received life as a result of Christ’s death are to conduct that life, not in their own self-interest, as they did before being personally joined to Christ, but in the same way that Christ conducted His. They are to live with Christ’s interests in mind. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” is the idea (Phil. 2:5, KJV). Christ as the Man who gives Himself for others is to be the object of our affection, the goal of our living, and the inspiration and standard of our service.

The thought of new life from the crucified, risen Christ continues in 2 Corinthians 5:17. When Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ,” the reference must be to a personal connection with Christ and not to something that is merely legally true. An examination of all the data on the use of “in Christ” in Paul’s writings reveals that “in Christ” is not a forensic but a relational reality. It refers to the most intimate bond possible between the risen Christ and the believer. Because the believer is united with the living Lord through the indwelling of His Spirit, he or she is incorporated, on the one hand, into the death and resurrection of Christ, which inaugurate the new creation, and on the other, into the body of Christ, the church, which draws its life from Christ’s death and resurrection. As a result, the believer is the recipient of all the blessings of salvation that flow from Christ and exist in the fellowship of believers. In the “in Christ” experience, the One who has represented us on the cross is the One who now floods our personal and communal lives with His presence, the efficacy of His saving deeds, and the powers of the age to come.

How to translate 2 Corinthians 5:17 has been debated. The problem is that after “If anyone be in Christ,” no subject or verb follows, only the words “new creation.” Some translate, “If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation,” others, “There is a new creation.” I do not believe these translations are adequate. The new creation is not merely an individual experience but an eschatological reality belonging to the age to come. Therefore, in my judgment, the best translation is, “If anyone is in Christ, he/she is a part of (a participant in) God’s new creation.” In other words, the new creation, which traditionally has been looked forward to in the future, already exists in reality, created by God alone through Christ’s death and resurrection. Personal access to the new creation comes only by union with the risen Christ. When entry to the new creation takes place, “everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (NRSV). This is another way of saying that, in view of Christ’s death for all, which is the death of all (v. 14), and the resultant new life lived for Christ alone (v. 15), we are no longer to judge anyone from a worldly point of view (v. 16). It is to the significance of verse 16 that we now turn.

Seeing through the lenses of the new creation

What Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, and 17 is relevant to the situation in Corinth and for all relationships in all time. Paul’s correspondence reveals that the Corinthians were very self-centered, arrogant, and critical of others, especially him. Paul tells them, in effect, that if they take their cues from (1) the death of Christ for them, which was meant to lead them to life lived for Him, and (2) their present sharing in the new creation, then their relations to him and others will be radically altered. This can be seen in verse 16, which best expresses Paul’s practical intention in 5:14–6:2. In this verse, with its “formerly/from now on” perspective, Paul asserts that we no longer regard anyone, even Christ, from a this-world point of view (Greek: “according to the flesh”). The old mores, standards, presuppositions, understandings, and evaluations are gone as a result of the risen life of the crucified Christ flowing through us. Transformed relationships, rather than worldly perception, are to reign (cf. Rom. 12:2). Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to see him, his work, and the whole human realm through the lenses of the already present new creation in Christ rather than with the old lenses of the world. As in Galatians 6:14, 15, the world is crucified to us and we to the world so that the only thing that really counts from now on is the new creation with its radically new perspective and power.

Those who belong to Christ, and hence to the new creation, are a totally changed people. They look at others, no matter who they are or what they have done, the way Christ did—He gave Himself for them—because they have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5). As participants in the new creation, pastors are to view their parishioners and parishioners their pastors and other church members with the mind of the self-giving, reconciling Christ. Academics are to see nonacademics and vice versa with the mind of Christ.
be. In the Corinthians’ alienation from Paul, the agent of God’s reconciling appeal, this truth was being lost sight of. To end suspicion and hostility and be on right terms with Paul, it was necessary for the Corinthians to more fully enter the domain of God’s reconciliation. They needed to realize the full potential of the Cross. Paul calls them and us to this. Ephesians 2:11–18 is instructive in this regard. Here the alienated Gentiles have been brought near to the people of God by the blood of Christ. He embodies in Himself the peace that can exist between Jews and Gentiles. As their peace, He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between them so that He might create (notice the word) in Himself one new humanity in place of two and reconcile both groups to God through the Cross. In consequence of this, He has proclaimed peace both to those far off and those near. The text is clear. Peace is already objectively present, so now it is to be experientially realized. The reality of peace and the invitation to receive it go hand in hand. “Become what you are; realize in your lives what you already have in Christ”—this is the message. The gospel calls us, not to a salvation that might be, but to one that already is, and that, therefore, impinges upon our daily lives and relationships with everyone—the “all” of whom the formula “Christ died for all” speaks.

When 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that God made the sinless Christ to be sin for us, he resurrects the thought of verse 14 about Christ’s death for all in a new and more striking form. Since the two statements are both talking about Christ’s death for us, it is most likely that in saying “being made sin for us” Paul is talking about Christ as a sin offering; that is to say, One who bears our sins—indeed the sins of the entire world (v. 14). As verse 15 describes the intended result of verse 14, so the second half of verse 21 gives the intended result of the first half of verse 21. Christ identified with us in our sins and bore them “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (NKJV). To be the righteousness of God, in the context of verses 18–20, whose main emphasis is the reconciliation that God effected and to which He summons us, is tantamount to saying, “so that we might be reconciled to God in Him.”

If we connect the statement of verse 21, that through Christ’s offering we become the righteousness of God, to verse 15, which declares that the purpose of Christ’s death is that we should live for Him, then becoming
the righteousness of God means that in being reconciled to God we begin to live for Christ in that His love for us constrains or propels us to give ourselves for others, to seek reconciliation with them, and to serve them in love. This is just what the new creation, as a reality in the here and now, means. It is not merely a private experience but a social experience in which our stance toward everyone contains the same self-giving, reconciling love we find in the Christ who died for all.

With these considerations on reconciliation we come upon the answer to a question arising from verse 17, which trumpets that the new creation is already here and the new has replaced the old. This is an incredibly energizing but rather surprising, even shocking, idea. There is much evidence to suggest that it is preposterous. We must ask what is new about this morally anarchic, disease-ridden, tyranny-driven, poverty-stricken, suffering world in which catastrophe follows catastrophe and death reigns as a king. What’s new here?

Where is the new creation in this world? Is it only a dream, an ideal constructed by the mind, a Freudian projection by those filled with fear? If we have been following the course of Paul’s argument, we must say me genoito, God forbid, absolutely not! Wherever the powers of reconciliation are at work, there the new creation is present. The only form the new creation has in this world of tragedy and death is that of the love of Christ that is shared in the attitudes and actions of those who embody and promote reconciliation, the peacemakers who Jesus pronounces blessed (Matt. 5:9).

**Salvation and decision now**

Paul, who said that God entrusted him with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18b, 19b) and through him appeals for people to be reconciled (v. 20), now in 6:1 claims that in doing these things he works together with God. If this is so, everyone should take him with utter seriousness. In his capacity as a co-worker with God, Paul urges the Corinthians, and implicitly all of us, to not make God’s grace vain.

How is it possible to make God’s grace vain or futile? Answer: by not seeking for, and living in, reconciliation with others after having learned the good news that God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ (v. 18) and not counting our trespasses against us (v. 19). If we do not live in forgiveness and reconciliation with others after receiving our reconciliation with God, we shortchange the full meaning of reconciliation and frustrate its purpose to place us in the new creation and change our lives from self-centeredness to other-centeredness, which is what “Christ died for all” implies.

Consequently, Paul says, in accordance with Isaiah 49:8, the acceptable time, the day of salvation, is here. This is a remarkable statement. The reconciliation between God and humanity already effected at the Cross, and which is the foundation for reconciling all human relationships, now becomes the basis for a challenge to decision. No one can escape this challenge. In essence, Paul says to the Corinthians and to the “all” included in Christ’s redemptive purpose, “Make a decision to let God’s reconciliation determine your relationships and conduct. Do not accept God’s grace for yourself, only to frustrate its full reconciling intention toward others.” Paul’s thought reminds us of the message of Hebrews in which, though God’s rest is already present, the readers are enjoined, “ ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts’ ” (Heb. 4:7, NIV). Since the salvation won yesterday at Christ’s cross is an eschatological, eon-turning act, it makes all time “today” and hence a day of decision.

What the Corinthians and all of us need to understand and accept is the paradox that what by God’s grace alone is already finished is not yet finished until it is finished in our lives and relationships, social vision, and community building. Not legal adjustment but personal and communal transformation is God’s goal. This is the reality we are bidden to be part of in the here and now of the new creation, rather than letting the flame of God’s reconciling, re-creative work be extinguished.
Learning to prepare sermons and learning to fly an airplane both require precise knowledge and sound judgment. The similarities between preparing a sermon and flying an airplane are especially enlightening to preachers who fly a lot, for both pilots and preachers have the responsibility of taking the people safely to where they need to go. Like a short flight, the preacher elevates listeners to spiritual heights.

Air travel and sermons have distinct transitions and phases, including an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. This article draws lessons from basic flight anatomy, such as flight preparation, destination, takeoff, cruising altitude, and landing, and applies them to sermon preparation and delivery.

Preparation

A safe flight and a good sermon begin, of course, with good preparation. For optimal performance, aviators and preachers need good physical and mental preparation for the journey. Naturally, pilots should not fly when they are fatigued or ill. The same is true for a preacher who is tired or sick. Even minor illnesses, such as a common cold that affects the tone of voice and normal breathing, can spoil a good sermon and undermine communication skills.

The operational manual. Pilots are required to follow the instructions of the manufacturer’s manual for the planes they fly. For Christian preachers, the Bible remains as the undisputed preaching manual and operational handbook. After all, God commands His emissaries to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2, KJV). This Word, useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, assures us that “the man of God may be thoroughly equipped” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NIV). Competent preachers adopt the Bible as their operational handbook.

The source of food for spiritual growth. Providing good and abundant food during flight was one of the airline industry’s strategies, years ago, to attract and retain frequent travelers. Some airline companies even served coach passengers with cloth napkins and real silverware, but those were the “good old days.” Because of financial constraints, food service in the airline business has decayed considerably; today, passengers in the United States receive only a soft drink and a small bag of snacks.

With the main source of spiritual food centering around the Bible, the pulpit should never reach the current status of airline-meal service. God has given Scripture as a recipe book to feed spiritual passengers with the dishes of heaven, served from the pulpit’s table so abundantly and appealingly that new people are attracted to the church and continue to come for more food.

Plotting the course. Success in aviation centers around careful planning. Prior to departure and before passengers enter the aircraft, aviators check the electronic and mechanical instruments of the plane and review the trajectory of the flight. Likewise, preaching includes planning. “Preachers must be more than sermonic disc jockeys playing other’s creations.” They need to compose new and attractive sermons for their audiences.

Consumed by the rigors of ministry and daily life, even the best preachers may not allow enough time for the ministry of the Word. For example, the apostles were busy doing ministry to the point of disregarding the preaching of the Word of God. In view of this predicament, the Twelve summoned the general body of disciples and told them that it was not right for them “to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2, NIV).

Destination

With the destination as the focal point of flight preparation, pilots plot a safe route to take passengers where they need to go, communicating with the control tower to meet departure and arrival times. Good preachers not only start and finish sermons on time but also maintain constant communication with God in

What preachers can learn from aviation

Ricardo Norton

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the control tower during the preparation and delivery of the sermon. Lloyd M. Perry, in *Biblical Preaching for Today’s World,* writes, “Following a systematic method for constructing a sermon does not rule out nor does it limit the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”  

Henry J. Eggold affirms that “every sermon must have a goal, and both the preacher and the congregation ought to know what it is if dialogue is to take place. When a hearer doesn’t know where a preacher is headed, he begins to think of other things and lets the preacher go his solitary way.” Without a clear destination, the preacher may get lost in the sermon and lead the people astray.

**Choosing the topic can be compared to choosing where to fly.** People book flights to places they need to go, and most go to church because they want sermons that help them reach higher levels of spirituality. Some sermon ideas may be theoretical and biblically correct but may not be relevant to the needs of the flock. Before deciding what to preach about, the preacher must be acquainted with the needs of the audience. They need to know in what airport of life they reside as they journey toward heaven. Every successful sermon leads hearers of the Word a step closer to their destination.

**Takeoff.** Takeoff exists as one of the most important maneuvers in aviation because a miscalculation or mistake by the pilot can be disastrous. It starts with the crew’s effort to capture the attention of passengers, and to provide them with specific instructions, and it continues with taxiing and liftoff. Similarly, the sermon introduction can be compared to the takeoff in aviation. People sit down before the sermon begins; the preacher captures their attention and then takes off with the sermon.

**Capturing the attention of the audience.** Capturing the attention of air travelers to make sure they are on the right flight, particularly frequent flyers, is of paramount importance for safety reasons. People who travel frequently tend to ignore the announcements and safety demonstrations provided by the crew. Preachers similarly have difficulty capturing the attention of worshipers who go to church regularly. Some worshipers sit in church and listen to sermons nearly 52 weekends a year. To capture their attention week after week requires ingenuity and avoiding predictable sermon introductions. 

Eye contact. While taxiing and during the flight, pilots look at the surroundings to avoid colliding with other aircraft and obstacles. With eye contact being very important in preaching, good preachers listen to the audience with their eyes. A tear, a glow of satisfaction, or a frown in the forehead of the listener reveals a lot about the effect of the sermon on the congregation. Preachers are “ordained to preach the gospel, not merely to read it.”

**Introduction length.** Some taxiing at large airports takes so long it seems as if the pilot leads the passengers to their destination by road, not by air. Likewise, some sermon introductions keep the listener wondering how the preacher will reach the destination. Some writers believe the introduction of the sermon should not comprise more than 10 to 15 percent of the sermon and indicate that preachers “should not spend so much time setting the table that there’s no time left to eat.”

**Lift-up.** Normal liftoff can be described as the airplane heading into the wind and gradually gaining altitude, with the airplane “flying itself” off the ground. The effective sermon gradually lifts up the audience into the contents, allowing them to understand and assimilate the message.

**Cruising altitude.** Pilots and preachers can take their passengers to unbelievable heights. The higher the altitude and the less oxygen available, the more difficult the journey. “The world altitude record for an airplane was set on August 22, 1963, at 354,200 ft (107,960 m) by an X-15.” Most commercial aircraft fly with pressurized cabins because, otherwise, passengers would not survive for lack of oxygen. The higher the contents of a sermon, the higher the concentration level and retention capacity the congregation needs. Preachers should preach at an altitude suitable for their congregation.
they leave the audience breathless, but this type of homiletic hypoxia may fail to communicate the gospel properly. Sometimes people leave the church very impressed by the eloquence but without a clear understanding of the Word of God. Nothing vainer exists in preaching than saying nothing with elegance.

Flying straight. A government agency that sets and enforces flight rules strongly emphasizes the necessity for forming correct habits in flying straight and level. Straight-and-level preaching, as easy as it looks, has never been easy. Starting with good preparation, the mind becomes a powerful warehouse of ideas that surface during delivery. For the unprepared preacher, in need of content and level, the preacher must be acquainted with the needs of the audience.

Some sermon ideas may be theoretical and biblically correct but may not be relevant to the needs of the flock. Before deciding what to preach about, the preacher must be acquainted with the needs of the audience.

The world’s record for a nonstop, nonrefueled flight of 24,987 miles was set by the specially designed Voyager in 1986 while flying around the world. To be immortal, a sermon does not have to be infinite. Because the capacity of human retention and concentration has limitations, a sermon can overdose a congregation with knowledge to the point of saturation.

Landing

What goes up must come down—air travel and sermons have a beginning and an ending. In aviation, landing stays as one of the most important phases of flight, with over 50 percent of aerial accidents happening on the approach or landing. The flight does not end until the aircraft parks safely at the terminal and all passengers and crew are safely out of the plane. The conclusion of a sermon and landing in aviation share striking similarities when memorable sermons and flights have a perfect ending. In fact, a perfect landing may help passengers forget a bumpy ride.

Conclusion phases. Sermon conclusions and landing in aviation can be divided into three phases closely related to each other: descend, touch down, and shut up. The pilot and crew inform passengers of the proximity to the destination, provide safety instructions, and, once on the ground, welcome them to the city where they have arrived and invite people to fly with them again. Sermons, in particular, summarize and exhort the congregation to respond by going home and doing the Christian deed. Satisfied church listeners come back to churches that offer inspiring and relevant sermons.

Some sermons electrify audiences; others only electrocute them. Aviation offers preachers excellent ideas to produce unforgettable and inspiring sermons. Next time you step into the plane’s cockpit to feed the saints, take them on an electrifying and transforming spiritual ride.
Even though we have clarified the forms and genres of the major constitutional documents in the Pentateuch, we still may not have overcome the prejudices that inhibit preaching the Old Testament Law. In order to do so, we probably need to wrestle a little more with the significance of these laws, particularly as Moses and the genuinely pious in ancient Israel understood them. As we try to resolve this issue, we must keep in mind two important principles of interpretation. First, whenever we interpret a biblical text, the most important clues to its meaning must be derived from the immediate literary context, not later comments on the text. Second, biblical texts must always be interpreted in the light of the broader cultural context from which they derive, not the culture of a later time, let alone pervasive modern understandings of these texts.

Let’s begin by considering an important question Moses raised in his second farewell pastoral address to his people, as quoted in Deuteronomy 6:20: "When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the covenant stipulations and the ordinances and the laws that Yahweh our God has commanded you?’"

The point Moses raises is that succeeding generations will not have memory of the experiences that the people in his audience have shared, either of Yahweh’s revelation at Sinai or of his present discourses on that revelation on the plains of Moab. Therefore, it will be necessary for this and all subsequent generations to be very intentional in transmitting their faith to the next generation. As in every social context and every age, the children will watch the way their parents live, and, especially when faced with the challenge of competing cultures, they will be curious about the nature and rationale behind their own traditions. Moses assumes that the children will ask their parents for an explanation of their way of life.

**Totality of God’s will**

The specific question Moses anticipates here concerns the covenant stipulations (ḥa’edôt), ordinances (ḥa’uqqîm), and regulations (hammiṣpā’îm) that Yahweh has commanded Israel to observe. These three expressions function as shorthand for the totality of the will of God as it had been revealed primarily at Horeb and to a lesser degree en route to the Promised Land. The question assumes a package, all the moral, ceremonial, and civil regulations that God has prescribed as the appropriate response to His salvation and the privilege of a covenant relationship. As illustrated so impressively in Leviticus 19, this revelation refused to divide life into the sacred and the ordinary. When the children observe how their parents conduct their private and family lives, how they carry on their social and economic relations, how they worship, how they conduct themselves within the family, then they will inquire concerning the meaning of it all. Of course, what the children’s question calls for is not a detailed exposition of each of the 613 laws in the Pentateuch identified by Maimonides, but an explanation of the significance of the entire package. In short, “Why is it that our lives are governed by this set of principles?” and “What is the significance of this set of laws?”

If we were asked today, “What is the significance of the stipulations, the ordinances, and the laws that God commanded the Israelites to observe?” we would probably respond with several different...
answers. If we were actually to read the laws, some of us would probably shake our heads in bewilderment and wonder seriously whether there is any point to these laws at all.

Some with cultural and antiquarian interests, especially those interested in the history of law and culture, might say these laws offer the modern reader an interesting window into the society of ancient Israel. Readers familiar with the

(Rom. 7:6, NAS); “as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse,” “the Law is not of faith,” and “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law” (Gal. 3:10–13, NAS); and “before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor” (Gal. 3:23, 24, NAS)? Further, does not Paul in Galatians 4:21–31, speaking of the Law,

Near Eastern legal world of the second millennium B.C. might even conclude that these laws represent a significant advance on those found in the law code of Hammurabi, king of Babylon in the nineteenth century B.C.

My suspicion, however, is that many of us would not have answered the question in either of these ways. In our day, especially in contemporary Western evangelicalism, when asked about the significance of the Law for Israel, many would answer that for Israel, the Law was the way of salvation, whereas in the New Testament, people are saved by grace.

The problem with this explanation is that it contradicts Paul’s explicit statements that even in the Old Testament people were justified by faith (eg: Abraham) rather than through obedience to the Law (Rom. 4; Gal. 3:1–12). Many evangelicals view the Law, not as a way of salvation, but as the way of death. And they quote Paul to buttress their position, for does he not say, “The Law brings about wrath” (Rom. 4:15, NAS); “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound” (Rom. 4:15, NAS); “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound”

Paul’s answer to Moses’ question

These verses seem to offer a rather clear answer to the question that Moses raised. The significance of the Law lay in its power to bind those who are under the Law, to subject them to the curse and the wrath of God, and to demonstrate their desperate need of a Savior. While on the surface this seems to be the way the New Testament perceives the law, it raises serious questions concerning both the justice and mercy of God. How and why would God rescue the Israelites from the burdensome and death-dealing slavery of Egypt (cf. Exod. 20:2) only to impose upon them an even heavier burden of the Law, which they in any case were unable to keep and which would sentence them to an even more horrible fate—damnation under His own wrath? When you look at the Exodus this way, it turns out not to be such a good deal after all.

One of the most important principles for the interpretation of Scripture is to interpret Scripture with Scripture. And this is indeed what we are doing when we appeal to Paul for the answer to Moses’ question. But sometimes we move too quickly to later texts, especially the New Testament, and we forget the primacy of the immediate context in determining the meaning of any word or statement in Scripture. When we seek to understand the significance of the regulations and ordinances that God prescribed for His people, from the outset we need not only to explore seriously their function in the original settings but also to distinguish between the ideal and the real, between the role of the laws in the lives of Israelites as intended by God and Moses and the way the Israelites actually used the laws.

First, God and Moses perceived obedience to the laws, not as a way of or precondition to salvation, but as the grateful response of those who had already been saved. In the New Testament, Paul demonstrates this point by appealing to Abraham (Rom. 4), but he might just as well have cited the experience of the nation of Israel, whose deliverance from Egypt becomes paradigmatic of a person’s experience of salvation. God did not reveal the law to the Israelites in Egypt and then tell them that as soon as they had measured up to this standard He would rescue them. On the contrary, by grace alone, through faith they crossed the Red Sea to freedom. All that was required was belief in the promise of God that He would hold up the walls of water on either side and see them safely through to the other shore.

The chronological priority of Israel’s salvation vis à vis the revelation of the law is illustrated clearly by Deuteronomy 6:20–25: “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against
Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes; and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land which he swore to give to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us’ ” (RSV).

Second, God and Moses perceived obedience to the law not primarily as a duty imposed by one party on another, but as an expression of covenant relationship. Before God revealed His will to His people, “He brought them to Himself.” Israel’s primary commitment was not to a code of laws but to the God who graciously called Israel to covenant relationship with Himself; they were to obey “His voice.” In fact, He does not reveal His will to the people until He hears their declaration of complete and unconditional servitude to Him as covenant Lord (Exod. 19:8). Every one of the so-called law codes listed in the previous article must be interpreted within the context of covenant.

Third, God and Moses perceived obedience to the law not as the precondition for salvation, but as the precondition to Israel’s fulfillment of the mission to which she had been called and the precondition to her own blessing. The first point is highlighted in Exodus 19:5, 6: If Israel will keep Yahweh’s covenant and obey His voice, she will be God’s special treasure, His kingdom of priests, His holy nation (cf. Deut. 26:16–19). The second is spelled out in detail in Leviticus 26:1–13 and Deuteronomy 28:1–4.

Fourth, God and Moses perceived God’s revelation of the law to Israel as a supreme and unique privilege (Deut. 4:6–8), in contrast to the nations that worshiped gods of wood and stone who never spoke (4:28; Ps. 115:4–8). Contrary to contemporary evangelical opinion, obedience to the law for the genuinely faithful in Israel was a delight, in part because of their deep gratitude for God’s grace experienced in salvation and covenant relationship, but also because they knew that God would respond to their obedience with favor (Deut. 6:20–25; Ps. 24:3–6). Moses alludes to this extraordinary fact in Deuteronomy 4:1–8: “And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances which I teach you, and do them; that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, gives you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Ba’al-pe’or, for the Lord your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Ba’al of Pe’or. But you who held fast to the Lord your God are all alive this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances as righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?” (RSV).

An example in contrast

To help us understand the significance of the Torah, consider a prayer, written in Sumerian, and probably dating back to the second millennium, but preserved in the library of Ashurbanipal, one of the seventh century B.C. emperors of Assyria.1 The text is repetitious, but to get the point, read the entire piece.

Prayer to Every God2

May the fury of my lord’s heart be quieted toward me.3
May the god who is not known be quieted toward me;
May the goddess who is not known be quieted toward me.
May the god whom I know or do not know be quieted toward me;
May the goddess whom I know or do not know be quieted toward me.

May the goddess [who has become angry with me] be quieted toward me;
May my god and goddess be quieted toward me.
May the goddess [who has become angry with me] be quieted toward me.

(lines 11-18 cannot be restored with certainty)

In ignorance I have eaten that forbidden of my god;
In ignorance I have set foot on that prohibited by my goddess.
O Lord, my transgressions are many; great are my sins.
O my god, (my) transgressions are many; great are (my) sins.
O my goddess, (my) transgressions are many; great are (my) sins.
O god, whom I know or do not know, (my) transgressions are many; great are (my) sins.
O goddess, whom I know or do not know, (my) transgressions are many; great are (my) sins.
The transgression that I have committed, indeed I do not know;
The sin that I have done, indeed I do not know.
The forbidden thing that I have eaten, indeed I do not know;
The prohibited (place) on which I have set foot, indeed I do not know.
The lord in the anger of his heart looked at me;
The god in the rage of his heart looked at me;
When the goddess was angry with me, she made me become ill.
The goddess whom I know or do not know has oppressed me;
The god whom I know or do not know has placed suffering upon me.
Although I am constantly looking for help, no one takes me by the hand;
When I weep they do not come to my side.
I utter laments, but no one hears me;
I am troubled;
I am overwhelmed;

1. The text is repetitious, but to get the point, read the entire piece.
2. Prayer to Every God
3. May the fury of my lord’s heart be quieted toward me.

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I cannot see.
O my god, merciful one, I address to you
the prayer,
“Ever incline to me”;
I kiss the feet of my goddess; I crawl
before you..
(lines 41-49 are mostly broken and
cannot be restored with certainty)
How long, O my goddess, whom I know
or do not know,
before your hostile heart will be
quieted?
Man is dumb; he knows nothing;
Mankind, everyone that exists—what
does he know?
Whether he is committing sin or doing
good, he does not even know.
O my lord, do not cast your servant
down;
He is plunged into the waters of a swamp;
take him by the hand.
The sin that I have done, turn into
goodness;
The transgression that I have committed
let the wind carry away;
My many misdeeds strip off like a
garment.
O my god, (my) transgressions are seven
times seven;
remove my transgressions;
O my goddess, (my) transgressions are
seven times seven;
remove my transgressions;
O god whom I know or do not know,
(my) transgressions are seven times
seven;
remove my transgressions;
O goddess whom I know or do not know,
(my) transgressions are seven times
seven;
remove my transgressions.
Remove my transgressions (and) I will
sing your praise.
May your heart, like the heart of a real
mother, be quieted toward me;
Like a real mother (and) a real father may
it be quieted toward me.

Is this not a pathetic piece? And
what an indictment this prayer is on the
religious systems of the world around
ancient Israel! To be sure, with his keen
sense of sin and his awareness of ultimate
accountability before deity, this person
expresses greater enlightenment than
many in our own day. However, he
cannot escape the fact that he is faced
with three insurmountable problems. First,
he does not know which god he
has offended. Second, he does not know
what the offense is. Third, he does not
know what it will take to satisfy the
god/gods. It is against this backdrop that
we must interpret Moses’ statements in
Deuteronomy 4:1–8. With their clear
knowledge of the will of Yahweh, the
faithful in Israel perceived themselves
as an incredibly privileged people and
the envy of the nations. Unlike other
peoples, whose gods of wood and
stone crafted by human hands neither
saw nor heard nor smelled (Deut. 4:28;
cf. Ps. 135:15–17), Yahweh hears His
people when they call upon him (Deut.
4:7). And unlike the nations whose idols
have mouths but they do not speak (Ps.
135:16), Israel’s God has spoken. By His
grace He has given His people statutes
and judgments that are perfect in
righteousness (Deut. 4:8), because: (1)
they reveal with perfect clarity who He is;
(2) they reveal with perfect clarity
what sin is; and (3) they reveal with perfect
clarity how that sin may be removed and
a relationship of peace and confidence
with Him established/maintained. This
explains why, when David experiences
forgiveness for his sins, he can exclaim,
“Oh the joy/privilege of the one whose
transgression is forgiven, whose sin is
covered!”

Fifth, God and Moses perceived true
obedience to the law to be the external
expression of an inward disposition of
fear and faith in God and covenant love
toward Him. True biblical religion has
always been a matter of the heart. This
internal transformation is referred to
metaphorically as a circumcised heart
(Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6–10; Jer.
4:4), a heart transplant (Jer. 24:7; 32:39;
Ezek. 11:19; 36:26), the placement
of God’s Spirit within a person (Ezek.
11:19; 36:26), and the writing of God’s
dbăr on the heart (Jer. 31:33). While
these are occasionally viewed as future
eschatological events to be experienced
by all Israel, it is clear that they have
always been true of the remnant of true
believers in ancient Israel (e.g., Caleb,
Num. 14:24; also Ps. 19:7–13; 37:31;

Sixth, both God and Moses perceived
the laws holistically, viewing all of life
as under the authority of the divine
suzerain. Whereas modern interpreters
tend to discuss the ethical relevance of
the laws by classifying them according
to moral, civil, and ceremonial categories,
these categories are not very helpful and
in any case do not reflect the nature and
organization of the laws themselves.
Christopher Wright has moved the discussion forward by recognizing five categories of Israelite law: criminal law, civil law, family law, cultic law, and compassionate law. Even so, we must realize that the documents themselves do not make these distinctions. This is illustrated most impressively in Leviticus 19, which, with its more than four dozen commandments, refuses to classify, let alone arrange in order of importance, civil, ceremonial, and moral laws.

Seventh, both God and Moses perceived the laws as comprehensible and achievable (Deut. 30:11–20). God did not impose upon His people an impossibly high standard but revealed to them in great detail a system of behavior that was uniquely righteous and gracious at the same time (Deut. 4:6–8). The genuinely pious in Israel, transformed in heart by the Spirit of God, lived by faith and by the promise, assured that if they would conduct their lives according to the covenant they would live (Deut. 4:20–25). However, God also had a realistic view of His people. Recognizing their propensity to sin, He provided a means of forgiveness and communion through the sacrificial and ceremonial ritual. There was no time in Israel’s history when every Israelite was truly devoted to Yahweh in this sense. For this reason, within the new Israelite covenant, Jeremiah anticipates a time when the boundaries between physical Israel and spiritual Israel will be coterminous and all will love God and demonstrate with their lives that His Torah has been written on their hearts (Jer. 31:31–34).

Of course, these facts did not prevent later Israelites from perverting obedience to the law as a condition for blessing into a condition for salvation. The prophets constantly railed against their people for substituting true piety, which is demonstrated first in moral obedience, with the external rituals prescribed by the law (Isa. 1:10–17; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:6–8), thinking that if they performed these rituals God was obligated to receive them favorably. Nor did these facts prevent the Israelites from perverting their possession of the law as a privilege into a divine right and an unconditional guarantee of God’s protection (Jer. 7:1–10, 21–26; 8:8–12), as if the covenant only obligated God to them and not them to God. Nor did Yahweh’s desire that His people have His Word written on their hearts prevent Israelites from being satisfied with, nay, taking pride in, the external law that they possessed but forgetting to write the law on their hearts. Nor did the fact that God and Moses considered all of life as holy prevent the Israelites from perverting the law by placing great stock in divinely prescribed rituals while disregarding God’s ethical and communal demands. Instead of heeding the examples of Cain and Abel and acknowledging that God looks upon our religious expressions through the lenses of our hearts and everyday lives, they imagined that God looked upon their hearts through the lenses of their sacrifices (“To obey is better than sacrifice” 1 Sam. 15:22). So they violated the moral laws with impunity even while they continued to observe the ceremonial regulations (Isaiah 1; Jeremiah 7).

(To be concluded in the September issue.)

1 According to Ferris J. Stephens (ANET, 391–92), “This prayer is addressed to no particular god, but to all gods in general, even those who may be unknown. The purpose of the prayer is to claim relief from suffering, which the writer understands is the result of some infraction of divine law. He bases his claim on the fact that his transgressions have been committed unwittingly, and that he does not even know what god he may have offended. Moreover, he claims, the whole human race is by nature ignorant of the divine will, and consequently is constantly committing sin. He therefore ought not to be singled out for punishment.”

2 Adapted from ANET, 391–92.

3 According to Stephens, the Sumerian is rendered literally, “of my lord, may his angry heart return to its place for me.” The phrase “return to its place,” a figurative expression for “to settle down,” suggests the imagery of a raging storm or of water boiling in a kettle.

4 The restoration is based on line 32, after Stephen Langdon, Babylonian Penitential Psalms (Paris: P.Geuthner, 1927), 39–44.

Coping with the stresses of ministry

Darren Croft

Statistics from the United States indicate a high and increasing dropout rate in the ministry. Elsewhere in the world the stresses that impact ministry may vary in intensity, but the impact is widespread. Focus on the Family suggests from their investigations that 80 percent of pastors are discouraged or dealing with depression, while 40 percent suffer from burnout, frantic schedules, and unrealistic expectations.

Those in ministry know that it can be stressful, frustrating, and just sheer hard work. The flip side shows that ministry can also be immensely enjoyable, challenging, and rewarding. The challenge, over the long term, includes learning to cope with the negatives. This process makes the difference between thriving in ministry or merely surviving and even leaving.

Under normal circumstances, we juggle the stresses of life, but at times—when a particular stress or several sources of stress combine—the warning bells start to ring. Ministry, normally rewarding and meaningful, becomes stressful and wearing. That church member who always sees the worst in everything becomes a major thorn in the side rather than the cause for mild amusement when life has balance. Rather than fading quickly from memory, church meetings become utterly draining as our emotional reserves quickly fade. Sleep, normally quick in coming, becomes a short-lived experience, further depleting emotional and physical reserves.

Here are some of my experiences in pastoral ministry, including what has kept me thriving in a calling that seems to leave increasing numbers burned out. However different your experience, I hope you may be encouraged by what I have learned. I faced a time when all five of the stresses (see below) resulting from ministry came together in one short time, and having lived to tell the tale, I am sharing why I am still in ministry today.

The stresses of ministry

Death. It may be a death in your own family, the death of someone close, or simply too many deaths in your congregation that weigh you down. Clearly, death is one of the major stressors in life regardless of a person's occupation. By nature, ministry is a calling in which dealing with death remains as part of life.

Moving. Ministry personnel seem to have more than their share of moving. Our oldest child, seven years old, has celebrated every birthday in a different house. Besides the stress of moving, we experience new people, new houses, new doctors and dentists, new schools and shops, and more. Repeat it too frequently, and it can lead to a sense of rootlessness and a lack of belonging. While we ultimately don’t belong in this world, ministers need support networks too. God created us to be part of community, and to uproot this becomes stressful every time.

At times our system rewards those whose allegiance stays with their superiors rather than those who do what seems best for the local church.
Dealing with administration. This has become one of those things that sometimes falls short of what we desire. Sometimes leaders make decisions that impact us, but we have little say. Sometimes we see the hurt inflicted on others. Sometimes particular people seem to have undue influence, while others not enough. At other times, the objective of the administration seems to clash with the objectives of the local church.

At these times being a pastor can be plain hard work. As a pastor, your ultimate loyalty is to God—but if the local church and the conference end up at loggerheads, can you maintain an impartial distance? Where should your allegiance lie? At times our system can easily fall into the trap of never stopping because guilt assails us when we do. For some reason, we feel better if people admire our ceaseless work. But who are we fooling? We can never do it all. There is a time for long hours, but there is also a time to stop. We should not be slack, nor should we be seduced by that need either, because colleagues are promoted as a result of overwork or a neglect of family and a total work focus.

Reasons for continuing in ministry

So what has kept me going? The beginning and end to my answer lies in Scripture, with the first verse coming out of Ephesians.

Remember your call. “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (Eph. 1:1, KJV). Paul was an apostle, not because of his brilliance, his compassion, his personal skills, or his preaching ability, but because of God’s will. And like Paul, I am here “by the will of God.” That means He will provide me with what I need to fulfill His calling, and it means I can be myself.

I remember sitting through many ministers’ meetings early in ministry feeling utterly inadequate as person after person told us how we should engage in ministry. I would leave dejected and disheartened, wondering how I would ever get through another day. Today I enjoy ministers’ meetings because I now realize that God calls each one of us to minister in our unique way. I can learn from others and be enriched by them. My ministry occurs because of the will of God—not because of the will of local church leaders or administration.

Expectations. Highs and lows are normal. Jesus went from the height of the mountain in the presence of the Father at His transfiguration to the height of frustration with feuding disciples.3 After a busy Sabbath, adrenaline lows on Sunday can be expected—and to keep pushing without a break not only means to work contrary to God’s plan but leads to an even bigger crash later.

Time off—the Sabbath principle. Even Jesus took time out. Ministry is about people, people are about relationships, and relationships take time. In Jesus’ life we see that there were times when the crowd was ready, primed, and waiting, and Jesus simply headed for the hills.4 If Jesus was not “driven” according to the desires of the crowd, we should no more be driven by that need either, whatever it is.

In fact, the principle had its beginning in Genesis and is announced clearly in Exodus 20. Six days are for work, but the seventh is a day of rest. As a minister, I have often been involved in preaching, teaching, counseling, problem solving, and driving long distances on Sabbath. While there is much I am able to do to maintain the blessing inherent in the day, it cannot be described as a day of rest any more than it was a day of rest for the Old Testament priests. Take a day off a week, and like a marathon runner, you will learn to pace yourself so that you will run the race of ministry.
and life to its conclusion, and you will get more done. Take a day a week, and you will arrive at the end of the year still committed to your calling rather than worn out, washed up, and ready to crash.

In my college years I worked in a factory during its shutdown time—cleaning, painting, repairing, whatever. The first year we worked on Boxing Day, New Year’s Day, and every day except Christmas and Sabbath, all from early morning until late evening. The next year we were given time off for the public holidays; we were also given a short Sunday work day—and something amazing happened. More work was achieved than in the previous shutdown.

Likewise in ministry—less can be more. Take off one day a week and be amazed how much more you can achieve. For me the family benefit has become significant because when a funeral or something similar occurs and I miss my day off, the result becomes noticeable in the behavior of my children.

We should have other interests and outlets—be they working in the garden, restoring cars, working with wood, photography, or whatever—something that has a beginning and end that we can point to and say with satisfaction, “I did that!”

Saying “No.” This is hard to learn. As ministers we want to do all that we can for others. However, we cannot do everything, and learning to prioritize makes the difference between aimless busyness and a ministry that makes a difference.

Learn from mistakes. If we do something that obviously doesn’t work, it shouldn’t be a reason to castigate ourselves. Rather, we should learn from that experience and not repeat the mistake. A wise man once said that we learn more from our mistakes than from our successes. However, we first have to be willing to recognize a mistake and make the requisite adjustments.

Find a friend. Somewhere, somehow, sometime, you have to find a friend or a mentor. This person needs to be someone with whom you can unload without fear of censure or recrimination.

Likewise in ministry—less can be more. Take a day a week and be amazed how much more you can achieve. For me the family benefit has become significant because when a funeral or something similar occurs and I miss my day off, the result becomes noticeable in the behavior of my children.

We should have other interests and outlets—be they working in the garden, restoring cars, working with wood, photography, or whatever—something that has a beginning and end that we can point to and say with satisfaction, “I did that!”

Saying “No.” This is hard to learn. As ministers we want to do all that we can for others. However, we cannot do everything, and learning to prioritize makes the difference between aimless busyness and a ministry that makes a difference.

Learn from mistakes. If we do something that obviously doesn’t work, it shouldn’t be a reason to castigate ourselves. Rather, we should learn from that experience and not repeat the mistake. A wise man once said that we learn more from our mistakes than from our successes. However, we first have to be willing to recognize a mistake and make the requisite adjustments.

Find a friend. Somewhere, somehow, sometime, you have to find a friend or a mentor. This person needs to be someone with whom you can unload without fear of censure or recrimination.

Conclusion

Ministry can take many shapes and forms, but to have a calling in which you experience the high points of life’s major milestones with other people, see the excitement of lives changed by Jesus, as well as sharing people’s most desperate times—I wouldn’t have it any other way. We can and must learn to cope with the negatives and maintain a living connection with the Lord of the work. For what shall it profit a minister if he wins the whole world but loses his own soul?6

T H O S E I N M I N I S T R Y K N O W 
T H A T I T C A N B E S T R E S S F U L, 
H A R D W O R K. T H E F L I P S I D E 
S H O W S T H A T M I N I S T R Y C A N 
A L S O B E I M M E N S E Y E N J O Y A B L E, 
C H A L L E N G I N G, A N D R E W A R D I N G.

1 James Dobson, “The Titanic. The Church. What They Have in Common.” Dr. Dobson’s Newsletter, August 1998 www.family.org/docstudy/newsletters/a0002430.cfm. This article indicated that an estimated fifteen hundred pastors leave their assignments each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout, or contention within their local congregations.
2 Ibid.
3 See Luke 9:28-45. Verse 41 illustrates Jesus’ frustration with His disciples whose argument over who is the greatest takes full flower from verse 46.
4 In John 12 the crowds had declared Jesus the Messiah, and then in verse 36 John simply states, “Jesus left and hid himself from them” (NIV). In Matthew 14:13 Jesus seeks to withdraw from the crowds after hearing of John the Baptist’s death. Also, in John 6:15, the crowd who seeks to forcibly make Jesus king fails to find Him as He “withdrew again to a mountain by himself” (NIV).
5 Boxing Day is the day after Christmas and is observed as a holiday in various parts of the world.
6 Almost a complete quote of Mark 8:36.
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The pastor’s guide to resource materials on the Old Testament

Greg A. King

O
f making many books there is no end,” declared Solomon long ago.1 Evidently, even many centuries ago, there was already the sense that written material had proliferated to where it was difficult for any single reader to read it all. If that was so prior to Gutenberg’s use of movable type and the printing press, how much more so today when, according to statistics, the year 2004 saw a staggering 450,000 new books become available in the English language alone!2

Not only is there a multiplication of the written page, but the price of books continues to escalate. Meanwhile, pastors operate on a limited budget and also have limited opportunities in their busy schedules for study and reflection. Thus, there simply is not enough time to delve into all the available resources. Considering all these factors, it is all the more important for the minister to choose wisely when deciding which resources to consult and which volumes will be part of his or her pastoral library. The purpose of this article is to give some suggestions as to which resources and books would prove the most helpful for the pastor, particularly relating to Old Testament studies. The intention is that this article will be read in conjunction with and will supplement the previous Ministry article “The pastor’s guide to resource materials on the New Testament.”

Bibliography

A very useful and extensive bibliography of Old Testament resources, covering most of the leading works of the past quarter century, is published by Richard Hess and M. Daniel Carroll as part of the electronic Denver Journal. It is available online (and without fee for subscription) at www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles2005/0100/0101.php. In addition to author, title of book, publisher, and copyright date, brief but helpful annotations are given for most volumes listed. One good aspect of this online bibliography is that it not only does it cover books dealing directly with the Old Testament (such as Old Testament introductions, theologies, and commentaries), it also has sections dealing with archaeology, the history of Israel, Bible atlases, and so on. Another positive aspect of this bibliography is that, being online, it can be regularly and easily updated by its compilers, though I did notice several recent titles missing that are worthy of inclusion. This would be a good first stop for bibliographic information.


Online and electronic resources

Several Web sites offer online resources related to Old Testament studies. Two worth exploring are the Old Testament Gateway site and the iTanakh site, found respectively at www.otgateway.com and www.itanakh.org. Both of these sites incorporate materials on a wide variety of topics. In addition to having resources on the various books of the Old Testament, the Old Testament Gateway site has links to articles on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Old Testament archaeology, the Intertestamental period, and more. The iTanakh site, maintained by an Old Testament professor from Pepperdine University, has an even more diverse menu and includes selections on homiletics, narrative criticism, textual criticism, and many others. One valuable aspect of these Web sites is that their menu items often link to a useful journal article or some other written material that gives a nice presentation of the topic at hand, though some of the links no longer work. Also, be advised that the resources represent a variety of theological perspectives, ranging from those that take a high view of

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Scripture (such as the article by the late Gerhard Hasel on the Old Testament Gateway site titled “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Epochs/Periods of Time?’”) to others that approach Scripture largely as an ancient human literary document.

As indicated in the May 2006 Ministry article on New Testament resources, it is helpful for pastors to have access to an excellent online database of biblical and theological articles. The most extensive is the electronic American Theological Library Association (ATLA) Religion Database with ATLA Serials, which combines the leading index to journal articles, book reviews, and essays in all fields of religion with an online collection of religion and theology journals. A number of seminaries will provide access to this database to their graduates through their library Web site. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this database is that it provides the full text of articles in electronic format to some of the most helpful journals for preachers, such as Bibliotheca Sacra and Interpretation, thus rendering it unnecessary to spend a day tracking down an article at a local library, only to discover that it wasn’t as useful as one had hoped.

Additionally, individual journals that are useful sometimes provide access to their archives. For example, past issues of Ministry can be found by selecting “Online Archives” from the menu at www.ministrymagazine.org, though the search feature is not as transparent as one would hope for and the site uses the less familiar DJVU browser instead of the Adobe Reader. However, often a past Ministry article can be helpful in crystallizing a thought or sparking a new one. Moreover, a number of fine articles have appeared in the Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, and most of the last eight years’ worth can be found (and searched by author, title, verse, and key word) online at www.atsjats.org/publication.php?journal=1.

The Academic Search Premier from EBSCOhost, available at many libraries, offers full text access to a number of helpful journals and magazines, including more popular ones such as Christianity Today and Christian Century, as well as more scholarly titles, such as Journal of Biblical Literature and Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. The pastor will benefit by having access to such databases as part of his or her study life and sermon preparation.

**Specific books related to Old Testament studies**

Notwithstanding the plethora of electronic resources, it is still important to have a library well stocked in certain core areas in order that the minister may have good tools to assist in the understanding and proclamation of God’s Word. What books, particularly those related to the study of the Old Testament, are recommended to be part of the pastor’s library? Of course, there must be some allowance for personal tastes and interests, but the following suggestions provide some direction.

**Hebrew language resources.** The pastor who has taken Hebrew in college or seminary probably still has the grammar, lexicon, and Hebrew Bible that were used

### Recommendations for specific areas and selected Old Testament books

**Preaching**


**Introduction**


**Anthropology**


**Pentateuch**


**Genesis**


** Exodus**

for class. Though there is no need to purchase an additional grammar if you have one, the recent Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar by Gary Pratico and Miles Van Pelt (Zondervan Publishing House, 2001) is unusually thorough in its coverage. It also includes in most every chapter a section that gives an example of the practical use of Hebrew for the understanding of the biblical text, which is a welcome feature. The most helpful lexicon is William Holladay’s A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972). For the busy pastor, this work is much easier and more up-to-date than the famous Brown-Driver-Briggs work is much easier and more up-to-date. However, if one’s Hebrew is still rather strong, reading the Old Testament in Hebrew is facilitated by the use of A Reader’s Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament (edited by Terry Armstrong et al., Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), which gives, in verse-by-verse order, a brief definition for all words used fewer than 50 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. All of these tools can be supplemented and augmented with a good Bible software package such as BibleWorks, Accordance, or one of the packages available from Logos Bible Software. You are advised to do some careful research and read several reviews before buying a program to ensure that you are purchasing the item best suited to your own personal research needs. There is no need to buy a “Cadillac” program when all one needs is a “Chevrolet.”

**Isaiah**


**Jeremiah**


**Job**


**Ecclesiastes**


**Minor Prophets**


so forth, nearly all of which were written by evangelical Christians. It is something of a one-stop reference for many items and topics connected with biblical studies. It can also be be had at a price that doesn't break the bank, if one looks around. (For some helpful suggestions on all book purchases, see the section on purchasing books online in the previous Ministry article “The pastor’s guide to resource materials on the New Testament.”) Also helpful is the five-volume Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (edited by Merrill Tenney, Zondervan Publishing House, 1975) and the six-volume Anchor Bible Dictionary (edited by David Noel Freedman, Abingdon Press, 1992), though the latter can sometimes provide more material than the busy reader might desire and evinces a lot of variety in theological perspective. It is also wise to have a couple of one-volume Bible dictionaries when one wants a quick overview of a biblical concept or topic instead of a more extensive article. The New Bible Dictionary (edited by I. Howard Marshall et al, InterVarsity Press, 1996) and the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (edited by Siegfried Horn, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979) are useful in this regard.

Commentaries. In addition to looking at the online Denver Journal bibliography mentioned previously, the busy pastor can find some helpful evaluation of commentaries in books such as John Glynn’s Commentary and Reference Survey: A Comprehensive Guide to Biblical and Theological Resources (Kregel Academic and Professional, 2003) and Tremper Longman’s Old Testament Commentary Survey (Baker Publishing Group, 1995). The former of these volumes lists about eight hundred commentaries (in addition to some twelve hundred other volumes in the area of biblical, theological, and historical studies, and is thus useful in the overall area of bibliography). Additionally, it denotes the theological perspective of the commentator, whether the volume is technical, and it sometimes indicates the commentary’s position on a key issue (such as whether it is dispensationalist). Of course, when considering a commentary series, one should keep in mind that series can be uneven and that no commentary set has a stellar contribution for every volume. However, there are a few series whose volumes are still worthy of consideration. For Old Testament books, ministers would do well to consider the volumes of the ongoing New American Commentary series (Broadman and Holman) and the now complete Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (InterVarsity Press). For helpful exposition along with application and the development of themes from specific Old Testament books and passages, certain volumes from two other sets can be very useful, namely, the mostly complete Bible Speaks Today series (InterVarsity Press) and the ongoing NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan, Publishing House), which has several Old Testament volumes still to come. Commentary series that are more technical in nature but whose volumes often contain some excellent exposition are the New International Commentary on the Old Testament and the Word Biblical Commentary.

Exegetical method. The aforementioned Douglas Stuart’s Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors (third edition, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) sets forth a step-by-step method to use in doing biblical interpretation and focuses especially on the Old Testament. Chapter 3 of this volume is specifically helpful for ministers, being titled “Short Guide for Sermon Exegesis.” Another helpful book in this genre is Handbook for Bible Study, an award-winning book by Adventist minister Lee Gugliotto (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995). It includes a number of helpful charts and worksheets for analyzing biblical passages and getting at what they are really trying to say. In addition to having chapters on verbal analysis, theological analysis, homiletical analysis, and so on, it also includes valuable information in a number of other areas related to biblical interpretation. Also worthy are the popular How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (now in its third edition; Zondervan Publishing House, 2003) and Grasping God’s Word, by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays (Zondervan Publishing House, 2001).

Other areas. Having a volume or two in a few other areas will assist in the study and proclamation of the Old Testament. In theology, Paul House’s Old Testament Theology (InterVarsity Press, 1998) provides a helpful chapter setting forth the theological message of each of the various Old Testament books (or in some cases, such as the minor prophets and Ezra/Nehemiah, group of books). As for Old Testament ethics, worthy of mention are Walter Kaiser’s Toward Old Testament Ethics (Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) and Christopher Wright’s Old Testament Ethics for the People of God (InterVarsity Press, 2004). In the field of archaeology, the pastor would benefit from Archaeology and the Old Testament by Alfred Hoeth (Baker Academic, 1998) and On the Reliability of the Old Testament by Kenneth Kitchen (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

Conclusion

While making good and appropriate use of the various tools mentioned above, the interpreter must remember that the tools are not an end in themselves. The ultimate goal is not to understand what the tools are saying, it is to understand more clearly what Scripture is saying, or better yet, what God is saying through His Holy Word. Highlighting this tendency to put the cart ahead of—or instead of—the horse, a wag once remarked sarcastically, “It’s good to consult the Bible once in a while. It sheds some light on the commentaries.” It must not be the case that the minister of the gospel masters the tools but does not know the Word. The reason a minister makes use of any tool was stated in Paul’s challenge of long ago, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.”

1 Eccl. 12:12, NRSV.
2 This statistic is provided by Bowker, a company that collects bibliographic information on published works and maintains a Books in Print database. See the information available at www.bowker.com and www.bookwire.com.
3 By John McVay and Phillip Long in the May issue of Ministry.
4 2 Tim. 2:15, NRSV.
Beginnings
Leonard Brand

“We like to think that science bases its conclusions on data, but data alone are seldom adequate to answer our most important questions,” says Leonard Brand in his new book, Beginnings. A highly regarded scientist, researcher, and professor of biology and paleontology at Loma Linda University, Brand has written a landmark book in the ongoing discussion regarding science and religion. His goal is to illustrate a method of understanding science from a Christian perspective and to apply that method to actual case studies in the integration of science and Scripture. He explores the strengths and weaknesses of arguments used to explain both creationism and evolution as applied to origins and the Flood. He asks the questions that need to be asked and offers thought-provoking and often provocative answers.


Unveiling Daniel and Revelation
Roy Allan Anderson

“The book of Daniel is unsealed in the revelation to John, and carries us forward to the last scenes of earth’s history. . . . There is need of a much closer study of the word of God; especially should Daniel and Revelation have attention as never before.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers, 112, 115.

These prophetic messages help us understand what is happening in our world today. Two out-of-print classics are brought together in one volume.


Available at your local Adventist Book Center, 1-800-765-6955 or online: www.AdventistBookCenter.com
Unlike the original Ten Commandments, that have not been improved upon, the ten commandments for senior pastors in this article can indeed be improved upon, added to, and developed beyond this presentation. However, like the original, when these are broken, the result can be dire consequences to endure and penalties to pay. Although not written in stone, yet with nuances about which to be sensitive, these commandments do provide a good guideline for much of the modus operandi for a senior pastor’s regular routine.

It’s still the Lord’s church, not yours
When Paul writes about the church as the Body of Christ with Christ as its Head, he reminds us of its ownership (Eph. 5:23). When one serves as the senior pastor of a congregation, we commonly hear people talk about “Pastor Miller’s church” or “Dr. Johnson’s congregation.” Although people may sometimes miss the point of whose people they are, the senior pastor must never forget. The function of every pastor includes remembering and reminding the people as to who heads the church. Our pride and glory should not be to have our name at the top of the marquee but, rather, to know the Name above all names in heaven and on earth.

Serve your staff and key leadership individuals
One of the joys of being the senior pastor of a congregation is having a staff with whom to work. A larger congregation that requires and can afford a senior pastor needs other ministry staff and support staff. This staff becomes a primary focus for attention by the senior pastor. Think of all the time Jesus spent with His disciples, even washing their feet. Caring for the people who are in the inner circle of church operations has always been a vital role for the senior pastor. When these people do not function well, for whatever reason, it affects the entire ministry of the congregation. In one sense, the senior pastor’s real congregation consists of this inner circle of staff and key lay leadership, who are then equipped, encouraged, and mandated to provide their practical ministries with and for the rest of the people in the congregation and in the community.

Pray for your staff
One of the most important and powerful ways to express and extend care for the staff and leadership of the congregation centers around praying for them. Paul exhorts us to “be constant in prayer” (Rom. 12:12, RSV). This time of prayer will shape the other times actually spent with staff and leadership, and develop in the senior pastor sensitivity to the people with whom they share their ministry as well as provide focus for what needs to be done together to be faithful and effective. Prayer feeds the soul and gives muscle to the exercise of one’s ministry. When you, as the senior pastor, sit down at the desk to begin the day, before going through the mail, before sorting out the files from the previous day, before returning phone calls, before meeting with people, pray! Pray for the staff and leadership that make the ministry of the congregation what it is and what it can become.

You are only as good as the people who surround you
What would David have done without Jonathan? What would Jeremiah have done without Baruch? What would Paul have done without Silas or Barnabas or Timothy? The church centers on team effort. With the senior pastor’s responsibility composed of assembling the best team possible in order to effect a significant ministry in and through the congregation, the “success” of the senior pastor will, to a large degree, rest upon the quality of people recruited for and maintained on the ministry team.

Lead, don’t manipulate
The senior pastor has power, and this power has to be exercised respectfully. A minister can
easily fall prey to the temptation to control others and manipulate them to do what they want done. To do so shows a lack of trust in the working of the Holy Spirit, Who, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, inspires a variety of gifts in the people of God to be employed for the common good. To lead one’s staff and lay leadership effectively means to help them as they minister in positions where their gifts can shine by being turned loose to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Manipulation is guided by one’s own agenda. Leadership, inspired by the Holy Spirit, directs faithful stewards in what has been entrusted to them for the sake of the common good. An effective way to keep check on the fine line between leadership and manipulation is to put everything on the table for awareness and discussion by all parties involved in any given situation. The senior pastor must be intentional about this to show respect for each person and to exemplify an honest hand.

**Control yourself, not your staff**

Confucius said something like, “One cannot master the nation unless one can master the family; one cannot master the family unless one masters the self.” Mastery of one’s self is fundamental to maturity and leadership. The senior pastor must have a secure and confident handle on self or one’s ability to lead will be severely compromised. Rather than seeking to control the staff in their behavior or productivity, the senior pastor can set a good example in behavior, attitude, and work patterns for the staff to appreciate and emulate. Ultimately, each person’s responsibility centers around their response to the world. To do well, authentically and freely, is far better than being coerced or cajoled into it by someone who thinks he or she knows better.

**Two heads are better than one**

With the issues of a larger congregation more complex, with the schedule more dynamic, and the multiple staff relations adding a challenging component, the senior pastor would be wise to solicit advice and counsel from others in addressing these and other matters. Although the senior pastor position consists of power, this does not necessarily ensure in the senior pastor an abundance of wisdom to exercise that power. Often, the solo ego can enter into the mix and inhibit the creativity that could result from bringing others to the conversation. The wise senior pastor will search for the best solutions regardless of who may provide them and will recognize the tremendous resources at hand in others whom God has positioned strategically to be of help in the ministry.

**Try not to sneeze in public**

Recently, I was at the altar for prayers and presiding at Communion when I felt a tickle in my nose and knew that a sneeze would not be far behind. Fortunately, with some concentration and relaxation, I was able to avert the sneeze in the middle of worship. Had I sneezed, it would not have been the worst situation ever. It did remind me, however, of how the senior pastor stays very public and is watched very closely. People will take note of the least little sneeze or hiccup (read behavior or attitude). It’s the proverbial “living in a glass house.” Although true for all pastors and religious leaders, because of the prominence of the senior pastor in the life of the congregation and in the community, the effects become magnified. True, senior pastors are still human, but that cannot be an excuse for unnecessary or undesirable displays in public that could bring question or shame to the office of the ministry and the congregation served.

**Three eyes are better than two**

One eye on the future, one eye on the past, one eye in the present represents a balanced perspective so important for the senior pastor in all attempts to steer the ship of the church without getting the passengers “seasick.” Predecessors and previous programming need to be understood and valued for what they contributed to the life of the congregation. However, the present needs intense focus, for row is the time of ministry that impacts the lives of parishioners—not only today but also tomorrow. As if this were not enough for the senior pastor’s concern, attention must also be given for the future. “A people without vision will perish.” And, so will a senior pastor! The mantle worn by the senior pastor must have as part of its design threads that portend the future of the congregation, calling it forward to where God would want it to be for ministry in tomorrow’s church.

**Be careful not to “pull rank”**

The senior pastor might be tempted to constantly remind the church members that “I’m the pastor.” This tactic keeps the pastor, for all practical purposes, at the top of the pecking order in the regular operations of the congregation. But constantly doing so will lead to resentment. Collegiality and the art of persuasion from reason and not power comprise a far more effective way of working through the issues of the day.

**Conclusion**

When the senior pastor breaks any of these commandments, there will be consequences, and it does not take too much imagination to perceive what they would be. Yet, the confidence of the senior pastor remains the same as for any other Christian: the power of God’s abundant forgiveness through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit to renew the vital ministry that the senior pastor has been given.

If one were to collate the “commandments” learned by senior pastors everywhere, there would certainly be more than ten—probably a list of at least one hundred, or perhaps thousands. It takes more than a lifetime to learn them, but most important is to be learning them as one does ministry and as one grows from call to call. Senior pastors can learn and practice the ones that make the most sense within their specific and respective calls and for their personalities.

Senior pastors, enjoy your journey to Sinai, and then from Sinai into the Promised Land that God has given you for your ministry.
Meetings with potential writers

Nikolaus Satelmajer, editor, and Willie Hucks, assistant editor, have been meeting with pastoral groups, leadership teams, and theology professors, encouraging them to write for Ministry. They have held 15 meetings in 5 countries since July 2005.

Pastors and others read the English version of the journal in numerous countries. Additionally, many of the articles of the journal are translated into seven other languages. With Ministry published as an international journal, we solicit submissions from all parts of the world.

Individuals who wish to send manuscripts to Ministry will find helpful information and guidelines on www.ministrymagazine.org.

Geoscience Web site: frequently asked questions (FAQ)

In response to questions regarding the issues in the interface between science and faith, we have posted a frequently asked questions (FAQ) section at www.grisda.org.

The FAQ contains questions on 12 different topics, including dinosaurs and other fossils, the age of the earth, change in species, and the Bible and science. The FAQs have been useful to many individuals with general questions about faith and science.

Geoscience Institute, Loma Linda, CA, United States, has a staff of scientists who address issues of science and faith.

Meet the editorial assistant

Sheryl Beck, editorial assistant

Meet the editorial assistant

When our readers and writers contact us, they usually are greeted by our editorial assistant, Sheryl Beck. She coordinates the processing of manuscripts from the time they arrive until final decisions are made. Additionally, Sheryl, a valuable member of our team, has the responsibility for contacting writers whose manuscripts are accepted for publication.

Letters continued

Nevertheless, I am not saying that there is anything wrong with keeping the seventh-day Sabbath to the extent that it is possible and reasonable in our modern culture and society. However, Christians should consider that in choosing to keep the Sabbath they do so by permission and not by command. Furthermore, although the specific reasons are not spelled out, numerous prophecies suggest that the keeping of the physical Sabbath and annual holy days will have relevance and utility at least for a certain period during a future era.

Some of the benefits of keeping the Sabbath are relatively obvious in a physical sense. The extent to which Seventh-day Adventists can practice their distinctives while maintaining the kind of accepting attitude encouraged by Dr. Cress will largely determine their effectiveness in impacting the lives of others in a positive manner.

—Felix Heimberg, retired pastor, Murphy, TX, United States

Preaching Scripture from memory

In regard to Andrew Marttinen’s article, “Let the scriptures speak: preaching memorized passages” (March 2006), I say, “Right on!”

A most valuable resource is the Network of Biblical Storytellers, a group dedicated to the revival of the oral tradition in biblical study and interpretation. The Word of God is alive and powerful; however, if the Word of God remains only as words on the page of a book, it will not have nearly the same power as it has when it comes out of the Book and into the life. Passages of Scripture, presented orally, come alive in a manner, both for the hearer and the teller, that is virtually impossible to duplicate by reading.

This certainly has enlivened my own preaching, and I recommend it highly: www.nobs.org.

—Chaplain Tim Eberhardt, Ukiah Valley Medical Center, Ukiah, CA, United States

Preaching to an unknown audience

I enjoyed reading the May issue of Ministry magazine. However, I believe one statement is in error. In Xavier Green’s article “Preaching to an unknown audience”

Free of Charge, the latest book by Miroslav Volf, is the exact opposite of a page-turner according to Archbishop of Canterbury William Rowan, “one of the most celebrated theologians of our day.” As one reads about giving and forgiving in a culture stripped of grace, as the book’s subtitle explains, one hesitates to turn the page too hastily lest one miss so much in each of the sentences on the present page.

There is so much to underline, so many insights to ponder and digest of a twenty-first century erudite that reminds one of the way great thinkers used to write in the “good old times” of the previous centuries. The book offers such depth of Trinitarian wisdom that not only focuses on the triune God but also attempts to organize all thinking in triplets, that no space is left on the margins to write another “yes” or to repeat Volf’s turn of phrase that one would want to repeat in a pulpit or a classroom.

Volf attempts to engineer a bridge and then invites the reader to walk over it from “deep self-centeredness to true generosity” (p. 20). From personal experiences put into capturing story-narratives, through classic literary, theological, and philosophical insights to close readings of the biblical texts, Volf persuades and shames, challenges and encourages the reader to the renewed living “in Christ.” Because God is, fundamentally, the Giver (and not Negotiator or Santa Claus), we are invited to be “givers” despite our inertias. Likewise, our forgiving must be a response to God’s forgiving in order for us to be Christ’s “social body alive and growing on earth” (p. 118). (The way God is not a Negotiator or a Santa Claus but the Giver in the first half of the book, God is not an Implicable Judge nor a Doting Grandparent but the Forgiver in the second half.)

God’s giving and forgiving starts in the centrifugal triangle of the Godhead. And God’s love expressed in giving and forgiving spills over the rim of the Trinitarian circle of reciprocity, and gifts flow to creatures. So, the “law of the flow” is not aimless spillage, but it aims to create human givers. This is continual centrifugal giving and forgiving because it is the very essence of God. As Volf concludes, “God is a giver more the way ducks are quackers than in a way I’m a biker” (p. 69).

If you are buying only one book this summer, Free of Charge should be that book. This will become a modern classic in the line of Mere Christianity and Basic Christianity and should be on a “must-read” list of every pastor, indeed, of every disciple of Christ.

—Zdravko Plantak is the chair of the Religion Department of Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland, United States.

Letters continued

unknown audience,” he states that “Every congregation has a median (average) age and a dominant age cluster.” This is most likely true (one could conceive of a congregation that has two equal age clusters), but the implication is that median and average are equivalent.

I understand that median is the number in a group that has equal number above and below it, that is, the middle number. The average, or mean, is the number obtained by adding all the numbers together and then dividing by the number of numbers.

—Karen Shea, Red Bluff, CA, United States

Editor’s note: We checked with two mathematicians who confirm that Karen Shea is right. We failed to make the change. Thank you.

Professional growth seminar

I am a pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), Jamaica, West Indies, and an avid reader of Ministry magazine.

On Tuesday, March 21, 2006, I was privileged to be a member of your audience viewing by satellite the live telecast of the annual Professional Growth Seminar.

I wish to commend Ministry for such insight and foresight to help us pastors sharpen our professional skills. All the presenters were awesome. I learned a lot from all of them.

Dr. Roy Adams’s message on “Immersed in the Word” touched me deeply. The main points he made will stay with me forever: Having something to say and the authority to say it, it transforms our souls and gives us the hope to share.

After listening to the first three speakers, I felt that I was totally filled, spiritually. Dr. Haddon Robinson caused me to realize that I had more space to contain much more.

At the end of the seminar I left the conference room feeling courageous, energized, and empowered to continue the spiritual and professional journey.

Thank you for the seminar. As I look forward with great expectations and anticipation for next year’s seminar, I will be inviting many of my ministerial colleagues from the AME Church to view it next year.

—Rev. Barrington S. Lawrence, Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies
How would I know?

In all my years of writing, I’ve never received as many significant responses to anything as last December’s article “What My Psychiatrist Never Told Me” (available at www.ministerialassociation.com).

Most of these interactions have come “below the radar” in the form of affirmation, comments, questions, dialogue, and a couple severe criticisms that I would admit to seeing a therapist or that the denomination would permit me to reveal such a horrible and secret shame.

However, behind most of the feedback and questions that have come over the past few months has been the recurring query, How would someone know if they needed to see a professional therapist? Typically this question has been preceded by, “Of course, I haven’t experienced a tragedy like your sudden loss of your brother and friends in a plane crash, but...”

I have decided to return to this subject for precisely the reasons that seem to lie behind these questions. How does someone know when they need help beyond their spouse, their friends, or that the denomination would permit me to reveal such a horrible and secret shame.

Have we attached so much shame and prohibition to the process of seeking counsel that real needs are not being addressed and pastoral caregivers are attempting to help individuals even as they remain deeply wounded and untreated themselves?

In “Pastor, Deal With Your ‘Soul Holes,’ ” a recent anonymously written article, a minister of more than two decades describes confronting his own traumas while serving as a pastoral counselor during the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombings. “After each meeting, the care teams were required to debrief with a psychologist. I remember thinking, What a waste of time to debrief with this shrink. I’m around death and dying frequently as a pastor. I don’t need debriefing.”

He continues, “After all, we pastors have to be tough. Pain, sorrow, trauma, and conflict are commonplace in our lives. Nothing sticks to our Teflon hearts. I’d referred a boatload of neurotic parishioners to psychologists over the years, but I didn’t need one. I was a counselor... But after nearly a quarter century of church work, I began to see my own need for therapy. For years I’d wrestled with free-floating anger, which would pop up as irritability, defensiveness, a need ‘to win,’ sarcasm, condescending speech, restlessness, and other symptoms.”

A sidebar to this penetrating article lists seven signs, any one of which may indicate the need to talk to a reputable, professional counselor to discover if inner issues might be holding you back in your ministry’s effectiveness:

1. You have frequent, low-grade anger and/or feel defensive and irritable.
2. You feel depressed about ministry and life and/or experience mood swings.
3. You wrestle with addictive behaviors: alcohol, drugs, sex, or others.
4. You pursue workaholism, justifying it out of need or ambition.
5. You recognize traumatic events in your past, but you’ve never discussed them openly with a counselor.
6. You’re in frequent conflict with others at home and at work.
7. You have marital or parenting problems that don’t go away. When others mention them, you dismiss the topic or the person.

Noting the intimate connection between our mental and physical health, Ellen White stated, “The relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes. The condition of the mind affects the health to a far greater degree than many realize. Many of the diseases from which men suffer are the result of mental depression. Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces and to invite decay and death.”

Our anonymous pastoral writer continues (and perhaps his choice to remain anonymous says something significant about the scope of this challenge), “Pride kept me from seeking help in those times when I wondered if might benefit from the perspectives of a trained professional. My roles as a ‘tough’ pastor and a Bible know-it-all made it even more difficult for me to admit my need for help.”

In his conclusion, “Embracing My Weaknesses,” he says, “Paul’s writing to the Corinthians has come to make more sense than ever: So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12:9, 10). I used to think that health was a matter of embracing my strengths and pretending I had no significant soul holes. I’ve come to realize that only when I’m willing and able to embrace my weaknesses as well as strengths can I ever hope to become healthy.”

I’ve concluded that the strongest thing we can do is to get the help we need.

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1 “Pastor, Deal With Your ‘Soul Holes,’ ” Rev! Magazine (January/February 2006), 134.
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