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CONTENTS

06 Spiritual intimacy: The challenge and delight
Karen Holford
Read how couples could work together to enjoy the spiritual intimacy that God wants for them.

10 Legal substitution and experiential transformation in the typology of Leviticus: Part 2
Roy E. Gane
To accept His calling as a holy nation, the Israelites were to cooperate with God by living holy lives in harmony with His holy character.

13 Listening love
Larry Yeagley
Reflective listening, or listening love, means to give all your attention and energy to the process of understanding what the person means and reflect that meaning back to the person accurately.

16 The wedding at the well
Kendra Haloviak Valentine
What would it mean for us to live in such a way that the Living Water bubbles up in us?

20 The gospel’s worldwide ethos: Culture, identity, and heart implications of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit’s outpouring—Part 2
Larry L. Lichtenwalter
How can we spread the message across the vast linguistic, ethnic, and cultural divides we face? The author describes how the good news was presented and spread in the early days of the church.

24 Social media and evangelism
Miroslav Pujic
The author shares five ways that social media communication tools have profoundly changed our lives.

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“Surely, it is out of a desperate open sense of need that leads us to pray without the paralyzing sense of being totally locked up in ourselves.”

Praying the psalms

As a Catholic priest who prays the psalms daily in our Liturgy of the Hours, I would like to thank Dragoslava Santrac for her excellent reflection, “Praying the Psalms,” in the November 2013 issue of Ministry. It will help me to pray them better, and I hope it will help others to experience the profound expressions of humanity and divinity that the psalms reveal.

—Bill Menzel, email

Many thanks for printing this article. In one word, I would describe it as brilliant!

I was, however, saddened when I read of that evangelist’s untimely and clearly ungracious, uninformed comments relating to “borrowed oil”—alluded to early in the article. Perhaps that individual was unaware of Matthew 13:52, Romans 11, and Paul’s counsel to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5. As an evangelist—one who is supposed to share the good news—his comments revealed the opposite.

Our Jewish heritage remains vital and intact, not to be cast as no longer important or worthy. If we think that way, then we deny Jesus’ own cultural heritage—something He did not do.

—Rev. Matthew Beech, clergy team member, Motueka Anglican Parish, Motueka, New Zealand

I am a retired minister of the Church of Scotland. I am most glad to receive a copy of the monthly issues of Ministry from the local branch of your church in Comrie, Perthshire.

I did appreciate the article “Praying the Psalms.” Here are some questions that arose in my mind. Could the writer of the article expand on her words “Careful use of Psalms in liturgy”? It does seem we can have a problem in selection—some suitable—some not. Does the phrase “careful use” imply exegesis—or introspection to identify such psalms as or as not appropriate? Is it simply that a careful personal selection is the answer?

Could the writer expand on, “Thus, the selectiveness of Psalms in liturgy reflects the exclusiveness of moods and words that we express in our communal prayers”? Also, could she address the phrase “the failure to express honestly and openly our feelings and views before God in prayer often leaves us in bondage to our emotions and sin”?

Surely, it is out of a desperate open sense of need that leads us to pray without the paralyzing sense of being totally locked up in ourselves. But to be classified as in “bondage” rather gives the impression that we can’t climb out of it.

Help relating appropriate psalms to particular issues and problems would certainly be a most useful aid in reaching that essential communion with God through the Holy Spirit.

—James Lawson, email

Here is a response from the author, Dragoslava Santrac:

Dear Pastor Lawson, let me first express my gratitude and appreciation for your fine comments concerning my article. I will attempt to briefly reply to your questions. The words “Careful use of Psalms in liturgy” mean that the psalms require interpretation as they sometimes may be misunderstood by the listeners who do not understand their cultural and theological background (e.g., the imprecatory psalms). I believe that pastors or priests should caringly lead their parishioners toward appreciating the depth and power of the psalm or prayer. For example, after praying the psalm, the pastor or priest could make a thoughtful application of the psalm in few words. “Careful use of Psalms in liturgy” should by no means imply selective use of the psalms, saying that some psalms are suitable and other psalms are not. (The point that I tried to argue for in the article is that such selectiveness is tragic.)

The second quote, “The selectiveness of Psalms in liturgy reflects the exclusiveness of moods and words that we express in our communal prayers”?

It has been an observation that most Protestant liturgies tend to employ

Keep up the good work with the magazine.

—Rev. Matthew Beech, clergy team member, Motueka Anglican Parish, Motueka, New Zealand

Continued on page 26
What Facebook has taught me about myself

Several years ago, my children convinced me that starting a Facebook account would be a good idea. They successfully argued that I could keep in touch with college classmates from the 1980s, become reacquainted with church members I pastored in the 1980s and 1990s, maintain contact with university students I had taught from the late 1990s onward, and expand my worldwide circle of friends I was gaining as a result of my current job responsibilities.

Growing numbers, growing influence

For the first year and a half, my list of Facebook friends grew rapidly—with people ranging from childhood friends to those I was meeting via my travels. I quickly discovered that sending personal emails and/or chatting with past church members or students proved to be an extension of my ministry from years earlier. Perhaps my greatest joy gained through Facebook has been seeing how many of my students have matured through their joys and struggles. Some of them have married and had children and established their own ministries or other careers—experiencing the ups and downs that come with it all.

Something is missing

My wife also has a Facebook account. She has had hers longer than I have had mine, but she does not have as many friends as I do. As is the case with me, her list of friends dates from her childhood years to the present.

But there is one significant difference between her list of friends and my list. Because she attended public schools from her elementary years through her advanced degree studies and has always worked in nonchurch settings, her acquaintances are far more philosophically and religiously diverse than mine. Mine is, sad to say, largely (though not exclusively) Adventist.

My list of Facebook contacts forces me to look into the proverbial mirror and honestly assess my life’s journey. I understand that I count those more than 800 people as friends because of the paths I have traveled. But why have I spent so much time traveling paths that are occupied largely by other Seventh-day Adventists? Have I created a life for myself where I “touch no unclean thing” (see 2 Cor. 6:17) so that I can be accepted by God? Most important, have I spent so much time ministering to those who are like me that I don’t know how to relate to those that I possibly perceive are not like me?

A vow for 2014

Each year as the calendar marches from December to January, I reminisce both upon lessons learned during the year and what I wish to accomplish in the upcoming year. And I have given much thought to the role I need to actively play in sharing Christ with others. I have often heard the refrain that “shepherds don’t produce sheep; sheep produce sheep”—and I’ve most often heard that from those who find it more palatable to engage in public pursuits rather than in personal, one-on-one contact. It is as if the truth escapes our thinking that we as ministers are both shepherds and sheep.

So what do I need to do in 2014? How can I impact my neighbors (many of whom have never been inside a church building except for a wedding or funeral) to whom I speak about a variety of subjects, but they only know that I work for some denominational organization? I pray for opportunities to benefit them, but do I recognize those open doors when they present themselves? And what about the person in the grocery line, or the barber who cuts my son’s hair? What kinds of God-given opportunities am I passing by?

How is your life journey? Are you so consumed with sermon preparation, church administration, and a myriad of other responsibilities (some of which could be addressed by others) that you’ve lost touch with those who see life through different philosophical lenses? I find myself constantly drawn to the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who engaged in a comprehensive ministry for others (see Matt. 9:36)—not merely leaving the work of personally touching distressed souls to those He was mentoring.

I promise God and myself that in 2014, I will not leave the work of personal evangelism solely to church members to fulfill. After all, I am a sheep as well as are they. I am convinced that, as a gospel minister, I have to do more than train and equip the flock. I have to genuinely model what I teach, just as Jesus did in reaching out to Nicodemus (John 3:1–21).

And in doing so, my own walk with Jesus will be enhanced.
Spiritual intimacy: The challenge and delight

Three months into our marriage, Bernie and I were having worship together. We were quietly reading the same passage of Scripture, preparing to share our insights and ideas. I immersed myself in the verses, trying to experience what it would be like to be there with Jesus in that moment. I was breathing the air, living the story, and touching the complex emotions of the different characters.

I shared first, full of passion and excitement about my inspiring new insights and fresh perspectives. And then Bernie spoke, redefining my creative thoughts as some kind of *ology* or *egesis*. And then he explained what he had learned in one of his theology classes about the real meaning of the passages.

Bernie was sharing the best of his experience of these verses; I was sharing the best of mine. There was nothing wrong with what either of us said. But we were speaking two different “languages.” At that moment, I did not want to analyze the verses and know the Greek or what a Bible commentator had said. I wanted to live inside the story and make sense of it in a way that inspired me. Bernie was approaching the Bible verses as a verbal learner; I was approaching the story as a sensory learner. I was reading the story as a writer, while Bernie was reading it as a seminary student and pastor.

So we struggled to connect during worship. We did not know how to experience spiritual togetherness when we were so different. I did not want to feel that Bernie was preaching at me or teaching me because that positioned us in a pastor and church member relationship rather than a husband and wife relationship. I felt inadequate. I thought it was my fault that we found it difficult to share a devotional space. Maybe if I were more spiritual or had Bernie’s theological insights and interests, this would all be so much easier.

How can couples work together in order to enjoy the spiritual intimacy that God wants for them?

Different approaches

Many couples find spiritual intimacy challenging. It is one thing to be spiritually vulnerable and open with God, but quite another to be spiritually vulnerable and open with God in the presence of another human being, even one we love dearly. Very few couples are equally balanced in their spiritual development, biblical understanding, learning styles, and preferred approaches to Bible study, prayer, and fellowship.

Each spouse has different biblical and spiritual interests, learning styles, and preferences. Some people like to analyze Bible passages. Some like to explore them creatively. Some want to think about the practical difference the passage will make in their lives. Some want to be filled with praise and wonder. Some want to find out the facts. Couples’ worship can incorporate all of these perspectives.

When one partner has had a theological and hermeneutical education, the spouse can feel spiritually inadequate or discouraged by his or her partner’s knowledge and expertise. We should recognize the importance of understanding our differences, value the rich perspective of each other’s styles, and plan a balanced diet of worship activities that accommodate each person’s needs that will keep your devotional life fresh and interesting.

Confusing messages

Another challenge for pastoral couples is working out the different roles and expectations. This can be complex. We might give each other mixed messages:

- “I don’t want you to fix me, preach to me, or teach me. But I do want you to be there and help me explore my thoughts, beliefs, values, and ideas.”
- “Ministry is my profession, my passion, and my vocation, but I also need to come home and chill out so that I can be reenergized.”
- “I have spiritual needs needing your ministry too. But I don’t want..."
you to treat me like just another church member.”

“...You’re a pastor (or pastor’s spouse), so you can manage spiritually on your own if you’re too busy for our worships.”

Nonpastoral partners are also trying to manage the complex and often conflicting expectations of their spouses and church members. This can sometimes be so overwhelming that they pull back from spiritual activities in the home, feeling that they have already given more than enough to the church, God, or their partner, or that the pastor should always take the initiative for the spiritual activities in the home.

The pastor may also try to use the couple’s devotion time to develop sermon ideas or slip into a preaching or teaching role, rather than taking time to listen to the spouse’s ideas and needs. Ellen White suggests the biblical model of the husband being the priest, who humbly confesses his sins first. This is a servant-leader position, which is a more helpful spiritual model for healthy couples than having one spouse spiritually dominating the other.

Finding spiritual intimacy

A married couple’s spiritual intimacy is an amazing gift from God that can help them grow closer to Him and to each other. This is a place where we can study and learn more about God’s Word, learn about forgiveness and grace, and be changed more and more into His moral image.

God has given us this special dimension of our relationship to bless each other, not to cause hurt and create distance. So whatever we choose to do in the spiritual dimension of our marriages, we need to ask ourselves: Does doing this, or saying this, bring us closer together spiritually, or does it cause us to withdraw from each other?

We also need to recognize the importance of helping each other feel accepted, forgiven, encouraged, hopeful, loved, and respected, as these experiences can encourage spirituality to flourish. In contrast, criticism, resentment, loneliness, abuse, discouragement, and rejection can be roadblocks to spiritual close-ness between partners and between each person and God.

Try talking about your spiritual intimacy in a nonthreatening or potentially nonjudgmental way. You can do this by telling each other some of the hopes you have for your spiritual intimacy and your worship times together. Focusing on your hopes, rather than

When we love each other deeply, we create the optimum environment for God to work His will in each of our lives. Everything we do unselfishly and lovingly for our partners is also a gift of love to God.
on your complaints, frustrations, and fears, helps you to have positive and constructive conversations. Look for the hopes and ideas you share so that you can build on your common goals. Talk about the times when your devotions together have been inspiring for both of you, and think about what helped you to enjoy your spiritual closeness.

   Learn about each other’s spirituality. Ask questions such as, Please tell me what inspires you the most. When do you feel closest to God? Or, What would you like me to do to nurture your relationship with God? Help your spouse discover and use his or her spiritual gifts and create opportunities for him or her to flourish. Look for projects where you can use your spiritual gifts together to serve God and help those around you.

   Be respectful of each other’s spiritual preferences, learning styles, challenges, and spiritual journeys. Do not push your partner into having worship in the way you prefer because it may be counterproductive. Ask yourselves, How can we work together to create a safe, enjoyable, and shared space for our spiritual intimacy?

When you walk along the road

   The traditional concept of couples’ devotions being two people studying the Bible and praying together early in the morning, is a beautiful ideal. But it is not always practical in today’s family where both partners may have different work schedules and preferred worship times. So how can we inspire, support, encourage, nurture, and pray for each other in our busy and unpredictable lives?

   Deuteronomy 6:4–9 holds some answers. Just as we can worship God with our children and families and learn about Him when we rise up, when we sit down, and when we walk along the road, we can apply the same principles to our joint devotions.

   Here are some ways to infuse your relationship and your everyday lives with prayer, a fresh approach to Bible study, and creative opportunities for spiritual connection.

   **Praying together throughout the day**

   - Call, email, or text/SMS a short prayer for your partner during the day. Or slip a hand-written prayer into a lunch sack.
   - Write down three prayer points in your journal each morning:
     - Today, I most want to praise God for . . .
     - Today, I most want to thank God for . . .
     - Today, the most important thing I can pray is . . .
   - Share each of your three prayer points in your favorite way (email, call, or write) at some time during the day, and then talk about them when you travel, exercise, or eat together.
   - Create a shared prayer list. What are you praying about together?
     - Your family’s spiritual development? Your health? Your ministry? Your hopes and goals? The needs of people around you, and other prayer thoughts?
   - Pray for specific things at specific times throughout the day, even when you are apart. This helps to stay connected spiritually when you both have busy schedules.
   - Thank God together when your prayers are answered. After talking about your prayer requests and needs, you can pray aloud together or hold hands and pray silently. When the first person has finished, he or she can squeeze the other’s hand; when the second person has finished, he or she can say “Amen.”

   **A different framework for Bible study**

   If you find it hard to study the Bible together, try the following approach: study what you each feel guided to read by the Holy Spirit or use a simple Bible reading plan. Then meet together for a few minutes and discuss the following questions:

   - What did you enjoy most about the Bible passage you read?
   - What do you think was the most important message in the passage you read?
   - What did you read that was the most about you or that connected the most with where you are right now?
   - What did you sense the Holy Spirit inspiring you to do in response to these verses?
   - What other insights did you have while you were reading these verses?

   These questions are useful ones to discuss when each of you are at different levels of biblical scholarship and understanding, because they move away from a knowledge orientation and into a “wondering and curious” space where you are more equal. Or choose some other questions that you both like.

   Print these questions with spaces for your written responses. Write down your answers and ideas. Then swap your pages, email them to each other, or discuss them when you have time together.

   **Spiritual connections for busy couples**

   - Find something beautiful and natural to explore together for a few minutes, such as a flower, stone, tree, or sunset, for instance. Talk about all the ways God made it so perfect, and share a moment of wonder together.
   - Listen to worship music together, and learn to sing a new song to the Lord. Listen to scripture songs, so that you are praising and learning Bible verses at the same time.
   - Tell each other about the time you most experienced God’s love during the day.
   - Sit peacefully together in a quiet and beautiful place. Be still and listen to God. Tell each other your thoughts.
• Listen to the same Bible passages or an inspiring book as you walk or drive in different places, and then talk about them when you meet again.
• Memorize Bible passages together. Learn a whole book, such as 1 John or Philippians.
• Find a shared ministry that blends each of your spiritual gifts in a way you both find inspiring and rewarding.
• Attend a Christian couples’ retreat together, sign up for daily couples’ devotion emails at www.familylife.com or find a good couples’ devotion book to use.
• When you wake up, list ten different things for which you want to thank God. Tell each other what is on your list.

• When you go to bed, recognize and list the ways God has blessed you during the day, and thank Him for His blessings.
• Create inspiring pieces of art, music, or poetry together, based on a favorite Bible passage.
• Plan and carry out secret acts of kindness together to bless needy families in your church and community.

Love above all

One of the greatest hindrances to our spiritual intimacy is fear. And one of the greatest keys to our spiritual intimacy is love, because “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18, NIV). The more secure and loved I feel, the closer I want to be to Bernie and to God, and the easier it is for us to worship together.

The pattern is circular. The more we understand about God’s love, the more fully we will be able to love each other. And, the more we love each other, the more completely we will understand God’s love. When we love each other deeply, we create the optimum environment for God to work His will in each of our lives. Everything we do unselfishly and lovingly for our partners is also a gift of love to God. These kind and generous actions are also the everyday “sitting, walking along the road, lying down, and getting up” acts of worship that bring us closer to each other and to God.

The setting of the book of Leviticus lies within the Israelites’ epic journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the land that the Lord had promised them (Lev. 1:1; 7:38; 26:46; 27:34). God provided this journey in order to transform their experience, especially in relation to Himself as their covenant Lord. At Mount Sinai, God told the children of Israel through Moses: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:4–6).1

To accept this calling as a holy nation, the Israelites were to cooperate with God by living holy lives in harmony with His holy character, which was reflected in His clear instructions (Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26). He established an earthly residence in their midst (Exod. 25:8) in order to be as close to His erring people as possible without destroying them by revealing His unveiled glory (cf. Exod. 33:20). There, through the ministry of priests whom He authorized, they were to interact with Him by means of rituals. These rituals maintained His awesome presence with regular services (Exod. 30:7, 8; Lev. 24:5–9; Num. 28:1–8), honored Him on special occasions (Lev. 23; Num. 28:9–29:39), expressed thanks and devotion (Lev. 7:12, 16), and sought reconciliation with Him when they violated His laws (Lev. 4:1–6; 7). God’s loving presence, guiding and protecting them, was at the center of their camp and lives (Num. 2). The experience of the Israelites was radically changed from the bad old days when Pharaoh’s oppressive power exploited and crushed their lives.

The following sections first explore the evidence in Leviticus and related passages regarding God’s plan for the transformation of the Israelites through the typological sanctuary system and then briefly consider the call in the book of Hebrews to enjoy the effects of Christ’s sacrifice.

Participation of offerers in sacrifices for sins

When the Israelites committed sin, they were to express their repentance and ongoing loyalty to God through accepting His provisions for putting things right by offering sacrifices. It was not enough to believe in the effectiveness of the morning and evening burnt offerings and the special sacrifices on festival occasions that the priests performed for the whole community (Num. 28; 29). An individual was to bring his or her own animal, lay one hand on its head, slit its throat, and cut up the animal as indicated (Lev. 1:3–13; 4:22–35).2 While it is true that priests were to perform all activities of mediation connected with the holy altar, including applying blood to it and burning the Lord’s portions (Lev. 1:5, 7–9; 4:25, 26; etc.), the offerers also participated in the necessary sacrifices because of their sins.

Priests and offerers worked together, with the offerers entering into the experience, and the priests providing the activities that the offerers could not do for themselves. The actions performed by the priest and the offerer were both necessary and inseparable. Not until the sacrificial process was complete could it be said that expiation (Heb. verb kipper) was accomplished (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35). This process included the application of the blood and flesh to the altar by the priest. Therefore, the sacrifice included not only the death of the victim but also priestly mediation.
Participation by offerers did not mean that they earned their own salvation, which was beyond their capability and was God’s gift to them through the sanctuary system that He had set up. Rather, the offerer’s part was to accept and cooperate with the gift, expressing faith in the divinely appointed ransom that pointed beyond a token animal to a much greater Sacrifice.

The stream of events in Leviticus 5 reveals the experience of an Israelite who sins and consequently bears blame (Lev. 4:13, 14, 22; 5:4, 5; 6:4). Offering any kind of sacrifice for sin would express repentance. An additional oral confession contributed to the expression of repentance in some cases in which sin had been concealed (Lev. 5:1; Num. 5:7) or had resulted from forgetfulness (Lev. 5:2–4). Another expression of penitence was the payment of reparation (principal amount plus 20 percent penalty) in cases involving the misuse of property. An Israelite, who inadvertently misused something holy, was required to make reparation to God (v. 16), and a person who used a false oath to defraud someone else was to make reparation to the wronged party before offering a reparation offering (Lev. 6:5; cf. Matt. 5:23, 24). So the system of expiatory sacrifices and associated penalties required the active involvement of sinners to acknowledge their faults and put things right in order to heal the relationships that they had hurt. Through this system, God was teaching them how to live in harmony with His values.

**Participation on other occasions**

In addition to teaching the Israelites how to deal with their acts of sin, God also taught them about their physical state of mortal sinfulness by contrast (Lev. 12:6–8; 14:19; 15:14, 15, 29, 30). The fact that purification offerings remedied both sins (Lev. 4:1–5:13) and physical impurities indicates that they pointed to comprehensive healing from moral faultiness and physical mortality (cf. Ps. 103:3).

On the Day of Atonement, the remaining effects of physical impurities and moral faults that had accumulated at the sanctuary were purged from it, resulting in the moral purification of the people (Lev. 16, esp. vv. 16, 30). This purification was provided for all Israel; but to receive the benefit, each individual was required to participate in the experience by practicing physical self-denial (Lev. 16:29, 30; 23:26–32). Self-denial could include fasting and other practices associated with an intense petition to God at times of...
special need (see Ps. 35:13; Ezra 8:21; Dan. 10:2, 3, 12).

God arranged for plenty of opportunities for the Israelites to improve their internal attitudes through the influence of impressive activities, including the annual festivals (Lev. 23), if they would only allow themselves to be transformed. Everyone was amazed and profoundly impressed when divine fire consumed the inaugural sacrifices (Lev. 9:24). But then two newly consecrated priests failed to honor God (Lev. 10:1–3), and the book of Numbers tells how an entire generation lost the opportunity to enter the Promised Land due to their unfaithfulness (Num. 14; 26:64, 65). The Lord provided clear and powerfully persuasive invitations, but He did not force His people to be transformed. He respected their free choice, even if they chose against Him.

**Experiential transformation in Hebrews**

The book of Hebrews reveals transforming effects on those who accept Christ’s sacrifice. The blood of Christ will “purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14). Similarly, “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). The promise of a new covenant, in which God would put His law in the minds and hearts of His people and remember their sins no more (Jer. 31:31–34) applies to all who accept Christ’s single offering (Heb. 10:15–18).

Hebrews 10:19–25 urges fellow believers to accept God’s invitation:

> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Here, experiential transformation is based on the accomplished fact of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice. Without that sacrifice, there could be no transformation. It is also true that unless a person accepts the sacrifice and experiences transformation, the sacrifice does not achieve its goal for that individual. This is why the affirmation in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” is followed in the next verse by the appeal, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (v. 20).

**Conclusion**

In Leviticus, the animal sacrifices serve as token substitutes to ransom the lives of Israelites from blame leading to punishment. Aaronic priests also bore such blame as substitutes for their people, but they did not actually suffer the consequences. The book of Hebrews, however, identifies Christ as the Priest who bore human sins and actually suffered the consequences of those sins as the Victim of adequate value. This combination of roles as Victim-Priest proves that Christ’s atonement is substitutionary.

The scope of Christ’s atonement is not limited to the Israelites but is available to all the inhabitants of the earth (John 3:16). Anyone can be saved—as long as they accept Christ’s provision for their salvation (Acts 13:39).

The Israelites were faulty, but their covenant Lord called them to follow Him by living holy lives in harmony with His principles. He gave them sacrificial remedies for their moral failures and for the physical impurities that signified their mortality. Having provided what they needed, God required their obedience, including participation in sacrifices, to express their choice to receive His gift of deliverance and transformation. In harmony with Leviticus, the book of Hebrews invites people to enter a transformed experience by accepting the reality of Christ’s ministry on their behalf.

1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the ESV.
3 Oral confession is only required in certain cases (see also Num. 5:7). Bringing any sacrifice for sin is an unspoken confession.
4 Lev. 5:17 is an unusual but significant case: “If anyone sins, doing any of the things that the law of commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then makes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity” (ESV); that is, he shall bear his blame or culpability. Here a person somehow realizes that he is guilty, perhaps through pangs of conscience or by suffering adverse circumstances that indicate divine displeasure, although apparently the individual has not identified the sin. In such a situation, the sinner can be freed from culpability by offering a separation offering (v. 18). The fact that the person knows to bring the sacrifice shows that he realizes his guilt, but there is no requirement to make prior repentation because he cannot identify the precise sin.
5 On a false oath as a sin of sacrilege in this context, see Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus 7–16, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 137, 138, 305, 366.
6 Although the Lord’s revelation of Himself and His ways to the Israelites inspired holy fear (Exod. 19:16, 20:18, 19), it removed the dread of the unknown that haunted other peoples. They were often uncertain as to the wishes and reactions of their gods and other supernatural beings. When things went wrong, they had to figure out which god or demon was upset, why or she was causing them harm, and how to placate the supernatural being. The Israelites had no such uncertainty. There was only one God. He told them how to keep him happy, and He told them how to remedy their errors, even when they could not identify their mistakes. God’s law sounds like good news! See Ray Gane, “Leviticus,” in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 1:294.
7 “Values are what Leviticus is all about. They pervade every chapter and almost every verse.” Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 1.
8 Regarding supplementation of purification offerings by burnt offerings, see Roy Gane, Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 84. In Lev. 14, one being purified from a scaly skin disease (so-called leprosy) is also required to bring other items, including a separation offering, oil, and a grain offering (vv. 12–14, 15–18, 28).
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Listening love

Listening Love was the title of a booklet I read and lost many years ago. I was unable to track it down, but I remember the message: there is a time to speak only after a time to listen. Christians need bigger ears and smaller mouths.

During my chaplaincy training, a doctor became my pastoral mentor. He shared that the best tools in diagnosing medical or spiritual problems are two ears. He may have read the scripture “Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak” (James 1:19, TEV).

It is a sacrifice to listen; good listening is caring. Anyone with a friend who will sit with them and listen without judging, blaming, giving advice, interpreting, approving, or disapproving—who will just listen and understand—is very fortunate. Reflective listening is to give all your attention and energy to the process of understanding what the person means and reflect that meaning back to the person accurately. To do this is to be a window to God’s unconditional love.*

I attended a clergy conference where Henri J. M. Nouwen was the presenter. The announcer told the 600 attendees that Dr. Nouwen would speak when all talking ceased and the doors were closed. Nouwen carried a folding chair onto the empty stage, sat down, and quietly read his New Testament. Ten minutes later, silence settled on the auditorium and Nouwen began his 45-minute lecture, “Compassion,” without a single note. He politely scolded the audience by saying that some people are afraid of the noise of silence. I felt his gentle rebuke because I was guilty of filling all the quiet spaces. By God’s grace I applied his counsel; I called it listening love, or evangelism of the unsaid word. Jesus modeled this style of ministry when he met Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus heard words of condemnation from his spiritual leaders, for people were uncomfortable conversing with a blind man. Unable to share the pain and despair of his dark world, he carried it down the inevitable road to loneliness. That is, until he met Jesus.

A gathering crowd noisily spread the word that Jesus was approaching. Bartimaeus began calling to Jesus because he could not miss this chance to meet the healer. The crowd that never listened to Bartimaeus ordered him to be quiet. They let him know that the Master had no time for the likes of him, but Bartimaeus called all the louder. To the amazement of the crowd, Jesus stopped and called the sightless one to His side. Jesus took time for him; Jesus listened as Bartimaeus wept and poured out his story. The Scripture gives a very brief account, but I have to believe that Bartimaeus spoke many words. At last Someone was willing to listen! Only after taking time to listen did Jesus cure because to cure before listening would have been to dehumanize the lonely man at his feet. I like to think that Jesus practiced TLC (tender loving care) via taking time to listen, and then curing.

The shape of listening love

Listening love is a gift from God—selfless interest in the well-being of another is its heart. Listening love is patient and perceptive, always desiring to help a person feel valued. It is knowing the heart of a troubled soul not by interrogation but by opening to words, body language, and feelings. You give 100 percent of your attention as a person shares his or her experience; only then can a plan or solution be implemented.

A Texas rancher proved this to be true. Ned was a terminally ill patient in hospice care; twice a week I visited. For months, we played dominos without uttering many words. Occasionally we laughed at his jokes, for he would always say, “If I couldn’t laugh I’d die.” When Ned became bedridden, he and I shared silence together. When he spoke, I listened. One day he told me his plans to end his life: his pistol was under his pillow and he had a supply of bullets. After a brief exchange of ideas and quiet reflection, Ned concluded that his plan would cause never-ending pain to his wife and family. He gave his gun and bullets to his wife with the order to hide them.

Listening love, as I have experienced it, may violate all the workshop concepts of soul winning, but it builds a framework in which the Spirit of God can operate. My friendship with Ned taught me that God often speaks through my silence, and this happens in the least expected places.
The mall in our town has trees and benches between stores. When I see a person occupying a bench, I ask permission to share their bench. After a few comments, many people will share. Here is one example.

A man in his 80s was waiting as his wife tried to find a modest dress in a department store. He told me it had been a rough month, for his daughter had fought cancer for years, and two weeks earlier she had died. He and his wife were very sad, and they believed that they should have preceded their child in death. He was struggling with the question, “WHY?” Is God punishing me for some wrongdoing? Is God trying to teach me a lesson? He concluded that even though he could not understand, God still loved him. After listening for 15 minutes, I talked with him about God’s plan to reunite families. When his wife arrived from her shopping, he thanked me for being a good listener. He had not had anyone to talk to, and he was grateful for the chance to get things off his chest.

In the 30 years I worked for hospices, I have listened to people get things off their chests. We hospice staff called it “life review.” When people realize they have a life-threatening illness, they evaluate their life to determine whether it counted.

Arthur, a local newspaper editor, is another example. His son asked me to visit his father, and he said, “I’d like to know that he is ready to meet the Lord.” I simply commented that I had always enjoyed his editorials in the local newspaper. For the next hour, Arthur told his life story, and during a long silence he looked out the window. Turning to me he said, “You know something? God and I don’t have any arguments.” Then his son winked and smiled at me, and I realized that listening had a reward.

Matt, my dear friend of the Amish faith, told me his experience with listening love. John, a close friend from boyhood, called him. “Matt,” he said, “I have to talk. Can we take a ride and talk?” For the next hour John talked while Matt listened. “Matt,” he continued, “I’m so deeply in debt that I will never see the light of day. Foolishly I did not take my wife into my financial affairs. She doesn’t know how close we are to losing everything. How can I ever tell her I betrayed her trust? I see no way out. I wrote her a letter and put it in the glove box of this car. I planned to drive in front of the fast freight train and hopefully she’d find the letter. Matt, while we’ve been talking, I thought what a sad way out of my predicament, my listening, and you know, we don’t have enough listeners in this old world. Everyone is doing their own things and don’t take the time.”

The tragedy of not listening

Programs, projects, techniques, and formulas have wasted countless hours and dollars only to be discarded. I have tried some of them, but nothing has been as rewarding as being with another person. Giving the gift of myself and listening with all my soul has created bonds unbroken by time or space. Working in the third largest city in New England proved this to be true.

I was invited to give the invocation at a city council meeting. Before the meeting began, the chairman asked my name and church. His response was a jolt to my system. “I don’t mean to be
unkind, Reverend, but I must say this. If your church burned to the ground, nobody in this city would know the difference." His comment made me rethink my approach to ministry; I had to feed the church members, but I also had to move beyond the four walls of the church.

Once a week I spent a day visiting people in the tenements while I listened to their stories of poverty, loneliness, and sorrow. I visited storefront churches full of youth who had left the organized church. With the help of professionals, we helped 3,000 smokers quit within a two-year span. Women from the church spent time tutoring single mothers who had children in the Head Start program. Nutrition classes were taught in churches and a local university. A large part of all these ventures involved listening.

The glitzy advertising of public meetings does not substitute for personal friendship and willingness to listen, and media programming is no substitute either. Like Jesus, we must go beyond the edifices of the organized church into the places where people live, love, suffer, and die. All the advertising in the third largest city of New England would not expose the church to the heartbeat of the residents.

With the city council member’s words ringing in my ears, I volunteered to visit patients and families in the hospices. For 30 years I stood by the beds of the dying and conducted funerals for the unchurched. I thanked God for giving me the world as my parish. He taught me that listening love is weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. He taught me that listening love is the window on God’s unconditional love, a window that must always be open to all in the sphere of our influence.

Resources

Chapters 9–12 speak about dialogue, the elixir of life. Lynch warns of the dangers of communicative disease that may surpass the dangers of communicable disease.

Konigsberg, Ruth Davis. 2011. The Truth about Grief. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks. The author shows by reliable research that the steps and stages theory made assumptions not proven by research. Understanding the truth about grief improves the ability to listen.

Miller, William R. and Jackson, Kathleen A. 1995. Practical Psychology for Pastors. 2nd edition. NJ: Prentice Hall. Chapters 4 and 5 are gold mines for developing listening skills. The authors view listening as the number one skill for effective ministry.


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The wedding at the well

Introduction: Wells and weddings

Abraham decided it was time for his son Isaac to get married. In Bible times, fathers decided these things. So Abraham sent his servant to go to the place of Abraham’s birth, to a foreign land, and, among his relatives, to find a wife for Isaac. The servant packed ten camels with tons of goods and gifts and headed out (Genesis 24).

After entering the foreign land, the servant stopped by a well and he prayed: “There are young women coming to this well to draw water. I am going to ask for a drink. May the one who gives me a drink and offers to water my camels, may she be the wife you have chosen for Isaac.” Even before he finished his prayer, Rebekah arrived at the well and did everything he had asked. When she finished watering the camels, she ran home. The servant of Abraham was then invited to supper, but before he would allow himself to eat, he asked that arrangements be made for the marriage of Rebekah and Isaac.

Isaac and Rebekah’s son Jacob also met his bride at a well (Genesis 29). After traveling to a foreign land, Jacob stopped near a well and began asking whether anyone hanging around knew his relatives. Just then a young woman came up to the well. Scripture says that Jacob kissed her and wept. Like his ancestors, Jesus goes to a foreign land, to Samaritan land, and he sits down at a well. Is Jesus looking for a wife? While I do not believe he is, I am interested in why the story is told in such a way as to suggest he is, or at least to remind us of others who have found their brides at wells. Just a few verses earlier John the Baptist talked about Jesus as the Bridegroom and himself as the friend of the Bridegroom (3:29). What did John the Baptist mean? What is being suggested by this sequence of stories?

Verse 7 says, “A Samaritan woman came to draw water.” Just like Rebekah, Rachel, Zipporah, and her sisters, a Samaritan woman came to draw water. “And Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.’)” (vv. 7, 8). Later in the story, when the disciples return from getting food (4:27), they are dumbfounded. Scripture says they “marveled that He talked with a woman” (NKJV). Given their questions, the disciples seem to assume that what happened at past wells is going on here. Probably, given their understanding of the Messiah as an earthly ruler, Jesus seeking a wife is not a bad thing. But this particular woman is a huge problem. A Samaritan cannot be part of Jesus’ family. She is not an acceptable bride. Why not? Who is she?

After Jesus asks for a drink, verse 9 says, “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans)” (NRSV). She is surprised that Jesus is talking to her; women and men who were strangers did not talk together in public. She is surprised that a Jew is asking her for a drink because Jews would not use a drinking vessel or an eating utensil that a Samaritan had used. Jews considered Samaritans unclean in every way. As New Testament scholar Gail R. O’Day observes, “The woman herself notes the scandal of their conversation.” It went back to a time of war; when God’s people were conquered and relocated. Those who intermarried...
with other cultures—Samaritans—were looked down upon by those who had not. They had “spiritual germs” because Jews and Samaritans had a different set of holy books—a different hermeneutic, we might say—and also because Jews and Samaritans had different worship practices. From the disciples’ perspective, she cannot be part of Jesus’ family because she is a Samaritan. And every minute that Jesus talks with her is a violation of appropriate social behavior. Yet Jesus keeps talking!

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” (4:10–12, NRSV).

Notice how this section of the story reminds us again of the story of Jacob. We are reminded that Jacob was born because of an encounter at a well. We are reminded that Jacob became the father of a dozen sons because of an encounter at a well. We are reminded that Jacob and his sons used this very place to water their fields and provide for their animals. Jesus, are you greater than Jacob? After all, this is the gospel that starts with “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”! Jesus, are you greater than Jacob?

Jacob gave us this well, its water, and a secure place to live and flourish. Here Jacob gave us a future. Jesus, are you greater than Jacob?

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (4:13, 14, NRSV). And the Samaritan woman says to Jesus, “Sir, give me this water . . .”

I must admit, I am surprised at Jesus’ next words. She moved from

assuming that her ancestor Jacob was greater than Jesus to asking Jesus for living water. Is that not what we are supposed to do—to ask? So why, in this story, does Jesus bring up her past?

Modern western readers typically think of her as a loose woman with a sinful past—because of her five marriages and because, at the time she met Jesus, she was living with a man who was not her husband. However, in the world of Jesus’ day, men decided issues of marriage and divorce, not women. Unlike today, only husbands could get a divorce, abandon their families, and kick out their spouse. Also, in the world of Jesus’ day, women could not survive unless they were attached to a man. After this woman’s first abandonment (through death or divorce), if she did not have a father or brother or adult son who would take her in, she had to attach herself to another man in order to live. Going through this experience five times is tragic beyond words.

Given the world of Jesus’ day, her story is probably more of a discarded woman with a painful past than of a loose woman with a sinful past. Why was she discarded so many times?
Since her current living conditions were based on her own survival, she was living with someone who refused to acknowledge his responsibility to her. We should probably see her more as a slave who had to do whatever he wanted than as a secret lover having an affair. She was trying to survive. He should have married her.

Whatever her sad story, when Jesus asks her for a drink from Jacob’s well, in society’s view as well as in her own mind, this woman is as different from Rebekah, Rachel, and Zipporah as it is possible for her to be. They were young virgins with fathers who offered security prior to a proper marriage. They met men who, guided by God, offered the protection of a home, the promise of children, and the hope of a future. This Samaritan woman does not seem to have any of these things. Hers is a past full of pain.

Yet Jesus keeps talking with her. He keeps offering her living water. He proclaims to her that His “hour” is coming and when it comes, worship of God will not be about ethnicity or whether one worships on this mountain or that mountain. With Jesus, the hour has come where true worshipers will worship God in spirit and truth. Jesus tells her that God seeks such worshipers. In this encounter at a Samaritan well, the family of God is expanding!

For the first time in John Jesus shares his true identity. When she begins talking about the Messiah who is coming, Jesus says, “I am”! I am the Living Water, the Messiah, the One coming, the One here, God! Suddenly her hope for the future is also for the present! The Messiah is no longer something to anticipate, the Messiah is here . . . present with her and with us! She experienced the presence of the future.

The presence of the future

One of the Adventist convictions I find most moving is a sense of the presence of the future; hope in the return of Jesus when all things will be new. I find it so inspiring that this church movement believes that we should live out our hope now. And such dedicated living gives us glimpses into the future right now, in the present. If some day Jewish men and Samaritan women will be treated equally, to be Adventist is to believe that the time has come! When the Samaritan woman said, “I know that Messiah is coming,” Jesus said, “I am!” It was the presence of the future!

Typically in scenes when women and men meet at wells, the woman leaves the well and goes to her family, and the family then comes to meet the man, the future bridegroom, at the well. Then, after they share a meal, the two families make wedding plans. In John 4, the Samaritan woman does not go to her family. This is another clue in the story that she probably does not have one. But she does go to her community.
It is ironic that as she goes to town to tell everyone about the Messiah, the disciples arrive from town with food. Do you remember how Abraham’s servant refused to eat anything until the marriage arrangements between Isaac and Rebekah were completed? Jesus will not eat the food brought by the disciples. Instead Jesus begins talking about His food being the completion of God’s work, like He has some wedding plans to arrange. The disciples are totally confused, wondering who gave Him food. Meanwhile, the Samaritan woman is preaching her heart out in the town.

She does what the first disciples, Andrew and Philip, do when they witness to Jesus earlier in the gospel: “Come and see,” she says. “Come and see!” (1:39, 46; 4:29). She witnesses and people in her town come to believe in Jesus because of her word (4:39, 42; 17:20). What would get a town of Samaritans interested in a thirsty Jewish stranger sitting by a well?

With all the Samaritan woman’s past pain, limitations, and questions, she is used by God to bring people to Jesus. Later Jesus says to the disciples, “I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into that labor” (4:38, NRSV). Who labored earlier? The Jews? The Samaritan woman? God?

Earlier in the set up to this story, John 4:6 says, “Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon” (NRSV). Then Jesus says, “I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor.” Those who share the good news enter into Jesus’ labor. The “I am” invites human beings to enter into His labor, and our feeble efforts build upon those who have gone before—people like Philip and Andrew and the Samaritan woman.

As Jesus is talking about fields ripe for harvest, the disciples are puzzled. They went into the city and brought back food to Jesus that He does not want. It did not occur to the disciples to bring Samaritans to Jesus. But the fields are ripe for harvesting, and the harvest has begun. All the people from the town start coming across those fields to meet Jesus at the well. They will share a meal with Him—a real meal, Jesus’ true food, which is to do God’s will: to share God’s goodness with Samaritans; to create a new family.

Together they will make marriage plans. Scripture says that Jesus “remained” with them two days, the same word for the Spirit that “remained” with Jesus after His baptism (1:32, 39). The language suggests intimacy, connection, kinship. They will join together as one family. Since Jesus’ new covenant bride/church transcends all boundaries, Jesus the Bridegroom really is the Savior of the world. The family of God has expanded. The harvest has begun. Jesus receiving hospitality from Samaritans for two days must have meant lots of sharing of eating utensils and drinking vessels. When women from other Samaritan homes went to the well to cook and serve Jesus and His disciples, did the disciples go with them to help? What boundaries were broken down during those two days? How were the disciples’ eyes opened? After all, in the future they will follow the Samaritan woman’s example, bringing all kinds of people to Jesus, in all different cities and villages.

**Jesus is thirsty again**

At the end of John’s Gospel, when Jesus is handed over to be crucified, it is said to be “the sixth hour” (noon), the same time when Jesus rested at the well and met the Samaritan woman (4:6; 19:13, 14). Jesus’ body is exhausted from His labors—He is no longer beside a well, He is dying on a cross. And Jesus is once again thirsty.

What could Jesus be thirsty for? He is the Living Water. Is Jesus thirsty for a world where women with painful pasts experience security in a new type of family? A world without prejudice, without discrimination?

What could Jesus be thirsty for? He is the Living Water. Is Jesus thirsty for a world without crucifixions and all other kinds of violence? A world where women and men meet at wells and offer each other a future with integrity and intimacy, loyalty and love? A world where the people of all nations make up God’s family? A world where no one is ever thirsty again?

Jesus said, “It is finished.” He completed His work—that which was food to Jesus (4:34), forever breaking down the barriers between Jews and Samaritans. Then a soldier pierced Jesus’ side, and blood and water flowed from the Living Water. Jacob’s well might provide water for the fields of Sychar, but the water from Jesus’ side nourishes a world of fields ripe for harvest; lands waiting for harvesters.

What would it mean for us to live in such a way that the Living Water bubbles up in us? What would it mean if sharing that Living Water with others was like our food? Imagine people in our towns saying to us in the words that forever honor the Samaritan woman: “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world” (4:42, NRSV).

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1. A version of this article was shared as a devotional presentation at the January 16, 2013, meeting of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) in Laurel, Maryland, USA. It is also a chapter in the recently published work Signs to Life: Reading and Responding to John’s Gospel (Melbourne, Australia: Signs Publishing, 2013).
4. Later revelations include John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.
The gospel’s worldwide ethos: Culture, identity, and heart implications of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit’s outpouring – Part 2

Three cultural realities relate to the gospel’s translatability. The first is language, which is the most obvious difference between cultures. Next are social conventions and customs, which always present challenges to spreading the gospel. Finally, there is race (or ethnicity) and the latent prejudices and reactions inherent here.1

Thus, as the people asked Peter when they first heard the gospel, “‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:12; NIV), questions linger in regard to how we can spread the message across the vast linguistic, ethnic, and cultural divides we face. Nevertheless, how the good news was presented and spread in the early days of the church reveals that the gospel’s translatability can transcend issues of language, custom, and race.

This article looks at how.

The inflexibility of the message

Despite all the narrative in Acts, “a third of the book is taken up with teaching: explaining what the gospel is, why we need it, and how we don’t deserve it.”2 Thirty percent of the text is taken up with preaching that explains the meaning of the gospel.3 We can observe how carefully the church did this in the differing contexts of their Greco-Roman world. “Early Christians were contextually sensitive to the varying cultures of their day as we need to be in our own time.”4

And yet, despite the vast cultural divides, there was but one unadulterated gospel message throughout.5 Via the exposition of prophetic Scripture in light of concrete historical events in the life of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:16–36), Peter gives initial witness of the unchanging content and unswerving purpose of the gospel. He later asserts that “‘there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved’” (Acts 4:12, NASB), regardless of where they are from, the language they speak, or their cultural traditions.

This early preaching of the gospel included rejections of syncretism, relativism, legalism, or ethical compromise, which were seductive in the Greco-Roman culture of the first century (Acts 5:1–11; 8:9–24; 15:1–29; 16:16–18; 20:30).6 There was a willingness to dialogue, but they would give ground only for evangelistic persuasion (Acts 17:16–31).7 If one really believed that Jesus was both divine and atoning, they would not place Him on a shelf alongside other deities.8 The gospel asserts that the Absolute has come into the world of the relative, and the first gospel workers were not prepared to abdicate that claim.9

Unfortunately, we often turn it around. We have great fixity about how the gospel is to be translated and preached and great flexibility about its content.10 The certainty and the New Testament content of the gospel have been largely lost. Our flexibility of translation and preaching must always be consistent with the fixity of what is to be translated and proclaimed; otherwise, it is no longer the translatable gospel of which we bring witness.

Witnesses

I wonder whether much of this is so today because many of us are not really witnesses (the Greek word is used 18 times in Acts)11 of Jesus Christ—His person, life, death, resurrection, priestly
service, and sovereign reign. The biblical reality of witness is an unambiguous, Christ-centered, personal experience and confession passionately demonstrated in one’s very own moral spiritual being, life, and word. Because we are so weak on Jesus—His incarnation, atonement, resurrection, priestly reign—we are weak on the gospel.12

Acts portrays an immense confidence in a biblically rooted gospel. As such, the gospel did not come “simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy spirit and with deep conviction” (1 Thess. 1:5, NIV). The first century gospel workers were faithful to the Word, the revelation that they had been given in Jesus. They were so persuaded of that Word, and so full of the Holy Spirit, that they came across with conviction.13 Thus, no matter the culture or context, the gospel message was consistent and exclusive—that is its character, its nature. “Truth is by definition exclusive: if a given statement is true it necessarily excludes its contradictory as false.”14

If, as Acts portrays, the gospel has a clear identity, it will inevitably place some limitations on theological development.15 It will always be rooted in Scripture, the realities of the human condition, the person and work of Jesus personal, existential, penetrating, life transforming: “‘Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death’” (Acts 2:22, 23, NASB); “‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified’” (v. 36, NASB).

Finally, the gospel’s translatable gospel has “an ontological reference”—truth as actual state of divine and human affairs in relation to the resurrected Christ and, as such, tells us the identity of the realities to which it points.16 The key to knowing the identity of the gospel is knowing the identity of the realities to which the gospel points—fallen human beings, substitutionary death, resurrection, exaltation, outpouring of Holy Spirit in context of Joel 2, and so on.17

Heart piercing

Again the big question is, How is the gospel translatable? Peter’s answer is Scripture records that “when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart” (v. 37, NASB). Their response was personal, existential, self-disclosing, believing: “‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” (v. 37, NASB). The answer was unequivocal: “‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (v. 38, NASB). These and other images from Acts point to human realities that transcend our questions of culture, language, and worldview. They bring us beneath the surface, deep down below the surface to the geography, culture, and worldview of the heart.
is about—relating to the hunger for freedom, the disenchantment with authority, the absence of meaning and purpose, the quest for satisfaction, the emptiness of existentialism, and the perplexing nature of spirituality—not to mention, guilt and shame. The gospel addressed the mind, heart, conscience, and will leading to the radical transformation of conversion.

In their preaching, early gospel workers concentrated on the person of Jesus Christ, and not a philosophy of life or system of morals. They spoke of Jesus as fulfillment of the existential quest (Acts 2:16ff.; 7:2–53). They told of the humanity of Jesus along with a firm declaration of his deity (Acts 2:22, 36). They proclaimed the crucifixion of Jesus, and thus implicating hearers in the guilt of putting Christ on the cross along with the offer of forgiveness (v. 38). They bore witness of the living resurrected Christ (v. 32) who can be known and loved and who calls now and holds accountable. They announced as well the reign of the throne of God (v. 34) and will come again. And they proclaimed a contemporary Jesus, not someone of long ago but our contemporary Jesus who speaks now and can change one’s life even today: “Through the Holy Spirit Jesus has changed our lives,” they maintained, “He can do the same for you.”

When gospel workers appeal to people’s needs, they are making connections that transcend a given culture. Gospel truth is relevant and translatable because gospel truth remains something that can be experienced in relation to the needs and longings of one’s very self.

Holy Spirit empowerment

Despite clear challenges, there were bridges that enabled the gospel’s phenomenal reach through the Mediterranean world. These included the Roman peace, pervasive Greek culture and language, and the ubiquitous Jewish presence and faith (Jews were everywhere with their monotheism, LXX—OT in Greek, and regular synagogue worship). In addition, gospel workers served with passion, personal sacrifice, commitment, and flexibility. Following the Spirit’s lead and empowerment, they learned to be contextually sensitive to the cultures of their day.

But this can never be the complete answer, or even the most significant reason for the gospel’s translatability or rapid expansion in the first century. The principle reason for the gospel’s translatability and rapid expansion lay in the supernatural activity and sovereign power of God.

The book of Acts is often referred to as “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” or “The Continuing Ministry of Jesus.” According to Luke, Acts continues what was a “Christological event.” And the Holy Spirit—no matter the context, language, or culture—mediated and presided over the gospel’s translation: “When the day of Pentecost arrived . . . they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them this ability” (Acts 2:1, 4, paraphrased); “when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NLT).


This divine empowerment through the Holy Spirit includes the power resident of God’s Word when shared with simplicity, clarity, and integrity. It is not so much what the missionary brings with their culture that makes the difference, but rather the translation of Scripture—the Word of God, the gospel of God’s grace, the Living Christ—in the vernacular (and culture) that is important. At bottom, the life transforming re-creative power of the Word of God itself is in view (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:23). The power and presence of the Holy Spirit are experienced in the context of the faithful preaching of God’s Word—the translatable gospel.

Conclusion

Pentecost and the book of Acts project a translatable gospel of cultural (and linguistic) maturity and open-mindedness on a staggering scale. They reveal “a Gospel that by its very nature crosses barriers, transcends any single, normative cultural expression, and accepts all peoples as they are, within their concrete circumstances.” They offer both an overarching horizon of the gospel’s translatability and the patterns of Spirit-guided theological reflection for new situations.

This translatability assumes that the implications of the gospel can be explored in different directions. No single person, culture, or rendition is capable of drawing out all the riches implicit in the eternal gospel.

This translatability affirms that gospel truth (1) is ever relevant (Rev. 14:6); (2) has an ontological reference (truth as actual state of divine and human affairs, reality); (3) is existential (truth as something knowable, experienced, and life transforming); and (4) is epistemological and linguistic (knowable, truth as true beliefs, judgments, propositions). They suggest that we are to realize the importance of language and culture and have a worldview in communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ, reminding us that we can effectively communicate to the people of any given culture only to the extent that we understand that culture and its worldview.

Most of all, Acts and Pentecost remind us that it is the heart, the need
of human beings, that this translatable gospel addresses, and that in the end this is what the gospel is all about: reaching and piercing each heart with the incredible truths and hope of a living Savior. Pentecost and Acts reveal the Holy Spirit as the real and only gospel translator. Human beings are merely instruments, living witnesses of just how the Holy Spirit translates the grace of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ to one’s own heart. 

3 Ibid., 4.
4 Ibid., 5.
5 The gospel, while culturally pluralistic, is exclusive in its focus, content, core, and purpose: “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!” (Gal. 1:6–9, NASB).
7 Ibid., 92.
8 Ibid., 9.
9 Ibid., 92, 93.
11 Green, 95.
12 Ibid., 96.
13 Ibid., 96.
14 Harold Netland, “Religious Pluralism and Truth,” Trinity Journal 6, no. 1 (1985), 75. The idea of theological pluralism lends legitimacy to the entire theological spectrum—do we embrace theological pluralism or have a theology of pluralism that enables boundaries? Are all doctrinal opinions viable? What about doctrinal opinions, which contradict basic biblical beliefs, the gospel in particular?
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 59. What is the nature of theological language—does it have an ontological reference, or is it only about human experience? I.e., when we speak of the resurrection of Jesus, are we talking about an event in which God actually raised Jesus from the dead? Or are we actually only talking about our response to Christ? The translatable gospel of Acts is unequivocal about the actuality of events and state of affairs.
18 Ibid., 75–83.
19 See ibid., 86.
20 Ibid., 11–17. And there wereitches that did hinder gospel workers. The gospel was foolish (to the Greeks), weakness (to the Romans), and an incredible affront (to the Jews). Christians most everywhere had bad press (ibid., 17–24.)
21 Thomas, 5.
22 Ibid.
24 Thomas, 5.
26 Ibid.
27 David Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 69.

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Ministry Student Writing Contest

Ministry, International Journal for Pastors, announces its next Ministerial Student Writing Contest. All students enrolled in a full-time ministerial preparation program on the undergraduate or graduate level may participate.

Submission deadline
All submissions must be received no later than JUNE 30, 2014.

Prizes

GRAND PRIZE: $750
FIRST PRIZE: $500
SECOND PRIZE (five possible): $400
THIRD PRIZE (five possible): $300

The evaluation panel will determine if all prizes will be awarded. The decisions of this panel are final.

Submission requirements
1. Writers must choose a category from the list below for their submission.
   a. Biblical studies
   b. Historical studies
   c. Theological studies (including ethics)
   d. Ministry (preaching, leadership, counseling, evangelism, etc.)
   e. World missions
2. All submissions must follow the Writer’s Guidelines as to length, endnotes, style, and other features of the manuscript. Please carefully read the guidelines found at www.ministrymagazine.org.
3. Submit your manuscript in MS Word to www.MinistryMagazine.org/swc. Please include the following information at the top of the manuscript: your name, address, email address, telephone number, category for which you are submitting (see above), religious affiliation, name of college/university/seminary you are attending, and title of your manuscript.
4. Ministry will accept only one submission per writer.

Publication
1. All submissions become the property of Ministry and will not be returned.
2. Writers who are awarded a prize give the rights to Ministry as outlined in the Writer’s Guidelines. While the editors intend to publish such manuscripts, publication is not guaranteed.
3. Manuscripts that are not awarded a prize may be purchased at a price to be negotiated.
The social media is the fastest tool of communication in human history. It has changed the way people interact so much: tweeting, blogging, texting, live chatting, posting on Facebook and other social networks, sharing their views and opinions with the world. They share their minds instantly.

Social media gives you the opportunity to make new connections online. The world lies at your fingertips. You can reach out to a large number of users. Statistics show that the total number of Facebook users worldwide is 1.2 billion and that 98 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds use social media.¹

What is social media?

Social media “provides a way for people to share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media differs from so called ‘mainstream media’ in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content. It can take the form of text, audio, video, images, and communities.”²

It is “participatory online media where news, photos, videos, and podcasts are made public; typically accompanied with a voting process to signal items considered popular.”³

Here are some social media statistics:

- Three out of four people use social networks regularly.
- Social media has overtaken email as the number one activity on the Web.
- There are over 200 million blogs.
- Every day sees some 900,000 blog posts.
- Ninety-three percent of social media users believe companies should have a presence in social media.

The first years of the Internet revolution were all about getting computers connected to the World Wide Web. The following years have been all about getting people connected to one another. Social media communication tools have profoundly changed our lives, especially how we interact with one another and the world around us. Here are the top areas in which it has affected our daily lives:

1. Source of information. Friends on social media are increasingly becoming people’s trusted sources of information, even more than search engines. Furthermore, by getting your news from social media, you know who is recommending it and can easily communicate with that person about it. News is more social than ever.

2. Launching a business. While business in the past was generally conducted with those in one’s immediate environment, social media—everything from blogging to tweeting, to posting videos on YouTube—has opened new possibilities for both customers and clients. Who we do business with and how we promote that business has moved increasingly online, and for small businesses especially, social media has proved invaluable.

3. Connecting with people. Social media helps find and maintain both old and potentially new friendships.

4. Place for authenticity. The goal used to be to make sure that we always appeared to be in complete control; but this is shifting, in part, because of social media. The paradigm is now no longer to try to appear perfect but to be more transparent with your thoughts and feelings, to reveal your humanness.

5. Power to influence. Even if we have few followers on Twitter or friends on Facebook or subscribers to our blog, the average person’s influence increases as communication channels become more open and fluid. As the networks for sharing and amplifying information strengthen, so does the ability of each person to influence public opinion and policies. As a result, we feel much less like passive bystanders and much more like participants who have a voice in the events of our world.

“The Internet has brought media to a global audience. The Web has opened a tremendous opportunity to reach a
great number of participants directly with targeted messages.

Benefits
Let me share some of the benefits of social networking:

1. Tolerance. Networks are good for handling diversity. Behind our screen we can be any color, any nationality, without the fear of not being accepted.

2. Friendship. Networks are about connections of nodes. I have a friend who knows a friend who could recommend you for his company. Usually it goes that way, for we get connected to each other very easily and there are no limitations or lack of trust.

3. Change. Networks are so versatile that everything can still operate effectively whether on a large scale or for smaller, close-knit groups.

4. Communal. Groups are created so that people join and feel welcome in a community.

5. Equal, small versus big. For example Amazon.com vs. Waterstones. The latter is probably the biggest and most well-known bookstore in the United Kingdom and Europe at large. At one stage, nobody thought anything could surpass its size and reputation; especially not Amazon.com, which started offline on a much smaller scale. Now Amazon has become a multinational sensation. With social networking, both types of businesses can be put on the same footing.

6. Fair. In previous years, the television producers and radio executives decided what featured in the media. However, there has now been a redistribution of power; not only does the average person sitting at home get to have a say in what they experience in the media, but they also have the chance to actually participate.

7. Open. Those who are ready for experimentation are able to do so freely. They can reach other users open to new things around the globe. This is how simple “home videos” end up having a few million viewers on sites such as YouTube.

8. Authentic. Everyone has his or her own identity; no two “profiles” or blogs are ever exactly the same. People can express their individuality through personal touches, without the restrictions of conformity.

9. Global. There are no borders or obstacles in connecting.

10. Participator. Using their own online ID, everyone can participate in any discussion.

11. Seekers. The new rule of the information age: if you don’t, someone else will.

Challenges
Social networking is not all positive. There are challenges of which to be aware:

1. Internet addictions. The most common and dangerous addiction is pornography. Other dangers include Facebook, games, gambling, and many more addictions.

2. Less contact with family members. People on social networks often feel that they socialize enough on the Internet and seem to reduce the time they spend socializing offline, particularly with family members. As a result, they become less interested in family life and tend to lose contact.

3. Feelings of loneliness and depression. Research shows that people who are spending more time on the Internet are more depressed and lonely. They lose sight of living in the real world.

4. Less active in social life. People who spend more time on the Internet lose the will to get out and actively socialize.

5. Exposure to sexually explicit material. Sexually explicit material can be found everywhere on the Internet. Even accessing a simple Web site for information, whether it be for work or general research, exposes you to endless sex advertising pop-ups.

6. Online victimization. Piracy is one example of online victimization. Hackers can also do a lot of harm to Internet users.

7. Fluidity of the virtual identity. People can present themselves in an entirely different way from what they are really like by using a false identity.

Steps to social media success
Here are four simple steps to social media success:

1. Find interested people. Peer recommendation is the strongest type of marketing today. So, if you find people who are interested, that means they will bring even more.

2. Deliver quality content. Content is king. Good quality content on sites and social media is essential. Content has to be fresh and delivered regularly.

3. Capture information. Paying attention to every single detail will help capture the information.

4. Stay in touch. Last but not least, stay in touch with the people who came or were brought to you. A community is created when a group of people gathers; staying in touch will help you find new challenges, ideas, and relationships with the world at large.

Social media and evangelism
Social media evangelism is the new frontline of evangelism, based on Christ’s method to mingle with people where they are, sympathize with them, meet their needs, and invite them to follow Jesus.

Jesus’ method of spreading the gospel was through discipleship. We want to embody this method at all times in our Internet ministry. Digital missionaries should see the contacts they make as potential discipleship opportunities and the country Web pastor should certainly treat every visitor as a disciple in the making.

Discipleship on the Web looks just like discipleship on the ground. If we follow Christ’s method of reaching people, we can see that He spent time with people and wanted the best for them. He sympathized with what they were dealing with, and wherever possible, He met their needs. All of these factors gained the confidence of the people He was interacting with, and only after this happened would He then invite them to follow Him. Based on this method, here is a social media discipleship pathway:
mostly the psalms of praise, while neglecting the psalms of lament, the imprecatory psalms, and the complaint psalms. I wonder whether this is so because we tend to highlight mostly feelings of joy, victory, success, and blessedness in our liturgies. It seems that lament, complaint, disappointment, grief, and fear are perceived sometimes as resulting from a lack of faith, and so are not very welcome in liturgy. The selectiveness of psalms in liturgy, that is, employing mostly the psalms of praise and thanksgiving, seems to reflect that tendency.

The third quote, “often leaves us in bondage to our emotions and sin.” I believe that if we are not ready or willing to open ourselves completely and honestly to God, but pretend something that we are not—we stay in bondage to our own, only God can free us (see Ps. 32:1–5).

I hope that my answers have provided at least some clarification. Thank you very much for taking time to read and reflect upon my article.

This is a brief note of thanks for publishing Professor Santrac’s article on praying the psalms. I personally found it to be very enriching and encouraging!

—Kent Compton, email

The omnipotent God

As I read the article by Roy E. Gane in the November 2013 issue of Ministry (“Legal Substitution and Experiential Transformation in the Typology of Leviticus: Part 1”), it was refreshing to see an approach that is not limited to legalistic arguments, putting God Himself under the law. God is God and can do whatever He wants.

All we can know for sure is that all evidence points to God as Love. And of the Sacrifice, it is written: “Through Thine eternal Sacrifice, Thou dost continually uphold all creation, dying in very truth that we may live. Thus didst Thou offer Thyself as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

If the Sacrifice is not from the beginning, then we have to conclude that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others will never see heaven. Neither will any Jew, Muslim, Jain, Hindu, Buddhist, and so many others.

—Dean Bekken, email
and talking with them. With the use of Facebook (FB), the WP will be able to promote the site and open a fan page where the WP will interact with their fans on a daily basis. The WP will need to follow strategies and provide a monthly report using Google Analytics for measurable results and also collect interesting stories and testimonies.

The WP will look after the DMs in their area, empowering them in the tasks they have before them. The WP will guide, advise, counsel, and encourage their DMs with weekly communication and interaction.

The WP needs to serve as a resource for the DM in answering difficult questions and approaching difficult situations they may face along the way. Perhaps even more importantly, they will serve as a discipleship guide to disciple the DM’s contacts along the way.

The WP should be active on their DMs’ blogs and spaces to help establish relationships with the contacts the DMs are making in their area.

Now that you have heard about social media evangelism, the benefits it holds, and the challenges that may arise, I challenge you to develop an online community with the aim of creating a place where people can explore life together, share ideas and stories, discuss favorite topics, and be inspired for wholistic growth in their relationship with God.

**Books:**


**Electronic Sources:**


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**Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.**
Many pastors are familiar with C. S. Lewis’s famous apologetic work Mere Christianity. As a child, I enjoyed his Narnia books, which my teachers read to us in class. Later, during a church youth backpacking trip, I was surprised when some of my “kids” discussed his Mere Christianity, which convinced me of his far-reaching influence within Evangelicalism. McGrath argues that Lewis’s influence is, in large part due to “a vision of the Christian faith that . . . [was] found to be intellectually robust, imaginatively compelling, and ethically fertile” (373).

Alister McGrath divides up his compelling biography of Lewis into five parts: the prelude of his early life (chapters 1–3), his life as an Oxford don (chapters 4–10), the world of Narnia (chapters 11, 12), his years at Cambridge (chapters 13, 14), and, finally, some reflections on his legacy (chapter 15). His book contains a revisionist’s take on his life that significantly updates previous biographies, in addition to challenging some long-established notions about his life. McGrath, unlike many previous biographers who never knew Lewis, based his work upon Lewis’s writings.

McGrath presents the many challenges that Lewis went through, especially during his early life. Challenges, such as the loss of his mother and an increasingly distant relationship with his father, caused him to question the meaning of life. He ultimately became an atheist. Readers will enjoy the detailed narrative of Lewis’s conversion that includes a significant revision of the chronology of when and how this happened, based upon extant sources (131–159). Early on, Lewis dreamed of being a poet; but when no opportunities arose, he continued his studies at Oxford. He ultimately won a “first place” standing in three areas known as a “triple crown”—a rare honor. His failure as a poet allowed him to develop the ability to write prose with a poetic vision (108).

Lewis rose to fame largely as a result of a series of war talks that later became the book Mere Christianity. His rise to popular acclaim placed him “on the margins of academic culture” (247), and he was turned down for advancement within Oxford because his peers felt that such popular writing was not truly worthy of an academic. Even J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis’s close friend, who played a significant role in leading Lewis to Christ (146–151), later resented the fact that Lewis dedicated The Screwtape Letters to him as Tolkien viewed the book as a lightweight work (217) and later viewed his Narnia works as shallow (266). Despite this, Tolkien played an influential role in helping Lewis obtain a prestigious Cambridge position. Lewis held Tolkien in high regard and recommended Tolkien to receive the 1961 Nobel Prize in Literature (352). This complex relationship, symbolized by Lewis and Tolkien, led a group of Christian intellectuals known as the Inklings to model them and critique their ideas and writing.

Lewis shifted from apologetics to fiction after World War II (254). He saw “imagination as the primary means by which an individual is brought to a point of giving serious rational attention to the Christian faith” (174). This, in turn, led to the Ransom Trilogy (233–238) and later the Narnia series (263–305). “The Chronicles of Narnia,” suggests McGrath, “resonate strongly with the basic human intuition that our own story is part of something grander—which, once grasped, allows us to see our situation in a new and more meaningful way” (279). Now recognized as one of the best works of children’s literature, this book served a purpose: “The Chronicles of Narnia have a far greater scope and reach, using an imaginatively transposed version of the Christian narrative to enable its readers to understand and cope with the ambiguities and challenges of the life of faith” (282).

If you have ever wanted to know more about C. S. Lewis, then this is the book for you. Pastors will appreciate how Lewis struggled to take complex theological ideas and translate them into the vernacular (208). Clergy, like authors, need to know their audience. I hope that all Christians will be challenged by reading this biography of the continued need to share the reasonableness of Christianity with a secular world.

Reviewed by Michael W. Campbell, PhD, assistant professor of historical-theological studies, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines.
Creation film as a part of 2014 evangelism

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—The General Conference Executive Committee premiered a 27-minute, professionally produced film October 15, 2013, called The Creation: The Earth Is a Witness, which shows a day-by-day account of the Earth’s beginnings. It will be one of the denomination’s key evangelism efforts for 2014.

“This incredible project is going to be a blessing to every single church around the world that is able to show it,” President Ted N. C. Wilson told the gathering of 350 pastors and other Annual Council delegates who watched the film. Wilson added, “This, I believe, is going to be a magnificent tool to bring thousands of people to the foot of the Cross.”

The film was initially a project Henry Stober was preparing for his local congregation in Nuremberg, Germany. He studied photography for a year in Canada and then traveled to five continents to present God’s love and unique creative power. More than 70,000 people have viewed the film in nine countries. “I never realized it was going to be worldwide,” Stober, 46, said after the General Conference premiere.

The movie was introduced by Williams Costa Jr., director of the denomination’s Communication Department. “We need to proclaim to the world this prophetic truth,” he said, and later added, “I don’t know why many people of faith have difficulty believing that the world was created in six days.”

The Creation opens with music to a scene shot in Iceland, in which Moses shows his scroll to his son Gershom while teaching him about the Creation. A narrator, meanwhile, reads from Hebrews 11, explaining the meaning of faith. The next scenes focus on each creation day, using powerful images of nature that play out while the male narrator reads from Genesis 1:1–2:3.

The movie is the highlight of a multifaceted approach to teach creationism around the world. Other components of the educational initiative include the book Beyond Imagination, Bible studies, tracts, a Sabbath School curriculum, Hope Channel programming, and dozens of articles in various church publications.

Church officials believe the movie will captivate viewers and compel them to learn more about the denomination’s strong ties to other Bible-based beliefs. Vice President Ben Schoun made a direct appeal to the delegates, most of whom are officers of the 13 divisions and presidents of unions from every region of the globe. “We encourage you, we invite you, we challenge you, to be a part of this. Make the creation project a meaningful one in your territory,” he said. To see this movie and find more information regarding Creation, visit http://www.CreationSabbath.net.

[Edwin Manuel Garcia/ANN]
Family health: The pastor and the challenge of teens

Adolescence is a stage of life characterized by marked cognitive, social, and emotional change. Normally, as youngsters enter adolescence, they seek greater independence. This is indeed a time of change that can be difficult for family and church relationships. There are certainly ample reasons for pastoral and parental concerns. Not only do many pastors struggle with their own teens, but parents with teens from the congregation also seek pastoral advice.

The environment that surrounds our youth has many dangers. These include the easy availability of alcohol and other drugs, the eroticization of the everyday environment, and the opportunity for sexual encounters.

Research has given some insights into strategies that parents and responsible adults can use to reduce the risk of these behaviors. The key to success is parental monitoring. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says, “When parents make a habit of knowing about their adolescents’ activities and behaviors, they are engaged in parental monitoring.”

Parental monitoring includes communicating a clear message regarding the expected behavior and the actions that the parents will take to track their children’s activities. This may include calling their cell phones as well as agreeing on the location where they expect their children to be. Parents also need to carefully monitor their children’s use of electronic media and discuss the consequences of any breach of behavioral expectation.

Parents need to know with whom their children will be and when they will be home, and need to set a time when they expect them to be home. Parents should get to know their children’s friends and their friends’ parents. Discussions are needed about what choices they made while out and about any challenges they faced in making their decisions. Parents will find it critically important to set and enforce rules for teens’ behavior by clearly explaining the rules and consequences and following through with appropriate consequences when the rules are broken. Consistency is important; do not make rules that you are not willing to enforce.

The CDC states that “monitoring should start in early childhood and continue throughout the teen years, evolving as children grow and mature. As children develop into teenagers, adults might view them as more independent and less in need of monitoring. But, consistent monitoring throughout the teen years is critical—teens’ desire for independence can bring opportunities for unhealthy or unsafe behaviors.”

The CDC summarizes what parents and families can do to effectively monitor their teens:

- Talk with your teens about your rules and expectations, and explain the consequences for breaking the rules.
- Talk and listen to your teen about how he or she feels and what he or she is thinking.
- Know who your teen’s friends are, particularly girlfriend/boyfriend.
- Talk with your teen about the plans he or she has with friends, what he or she is doing after school, and where he or she will be going.
- Set expectations for when your teen will come home, and expect a call if he or she is going to be late.
- Ask whether an adult will be present when your teen is visiting a friend’s home.
- Get to know the parents of your teen’s friends.
- Talk with your relatives, your neighbors, your teen’s teachers, and other adults who know your teen. Ask them to share what they observe about your teen’s behaviors, moods, or friends.
- Watch how your teen spends money.
- Keep track of how your teen spends time online, and talk about using the Internet safely.
- Pay attention to your teen’s mood and behavior at home, and discuss any concerns you might have.
- If your teen does break a rule, enforce the consequences fairly and consistently.
- Make sure your teen knows how to contact you at all times.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Parental Monitoring.”
4 Ibid.
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New four-year scholarships make investing in a traditional Adventist education from Southern more affordable than ever, even when compared with public colleges and universities.

Worth the Investment  
Our students and parents regard Southern as a valuable spiritual and academic investment. While hearts and minds remain the highest priorities, we are a smart investment in other ways as well. Affordable Colleges Online ranked Southern fifth in Tennessee for schools with a solid combination of low cost and lifetime earnings after graduation.

Earn More, Pay Less  
Beginning in Fall 2014, Southern’s freshmen scholarships will be renewable at 100 percent for up to four years. With $10 million in financial aid awarded annually, Southern is committed to making traditional Adventist education available to everyone.

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