Your guide to the GC session agenda

The 60th General Conference session will offer several firsts: electronic voting, a mobile app called GC Session 2015, an electronic agenda for delegates, and, most crucially for the rest of us, an opportunity to review the agenda in advance.

Andrew "Fishtail" Fisher: Burning rubber for Jesus

How is it that petrolhead Andrew Fisher sees racing V8 utes as a legitimate Christian ministry activity? Watch the interview with Record InFocus host Kent Kingston.
Lifestyle the best medicine

Avondale College of Higher Education has launched a new Lifestyle Research Centre to combat the growing epidemic of chronic disease.

One month: snapshots from Nepal

Simon Lewis and his family lived and worked for ADRA in Nepal for four-and-a-half years before coming to work for ADRA New Zealand in late 2014. Following last month's devastating earthquake he was rushed to Nepal to help with ADRA's response.

Watch/download InFocus

Making headlines:
• Same-sex marriage changes in Ireland, Scotland and France
• Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution
• Rodeo religion reaches hundreds

Have churches gone quiet on Christian persecution? Outspoken columnist Andrew Bolt has accused the churches of being muted in their support of Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere who are being killed and persecuted for their faith. Fair point? Human rights lawyer James Standish weighs in.

For love or money: does it have to be a choice? Family life educator Trafford Fischer explains how money management can be a huge source of stress in a relationship.
Sigh of the Saviour

We all use non-verbal vocalisations such as laughter, cries and sighs to express our emotions. We let out sighs of frustration, despair, disgust and yearning. Jesus was no different.

Attrition

Did you know the Beach Boys’ classic song “Surfin’ USA” was a copy? Well, it was. And why does that matter? Because authorship determines value.
Your guide to the GC session agenda

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

The 60th General Conference session will offer several firsts: electronic voting, a mobile app called GC Session 2015, an electronic agenda for delegates, and, most crucially for the rest of us, an opportunity to review the agenda in advance.

Usually the General Conference Secretariat, which sets the agenda, provides the information only to the delegates. But for the first time it is making details of the plan available to the world church before the July 2-11 business meeting starts at the Alamodome stadium in San Antonio, Texas.

"Normally only the delegates would get this," Myron Iseminger, undersecretary of the General Conference, said in an interview in his office, holding up a sheaf of papers with the session’s agenda. "But it doesn’t cost us any extra to put it up on the website and this gives the non-delegates an opportunity to better understand the proceedings."

The agenda, which was published on the official GCsession.org website on Wednesday, May 20, contains items to elect world church officers and vote changes to the Fundamental Beliefs, policies for the Church Manual, and changes to Constitution and Bylaws. Attendees also hear reports from each of the 13 divisions, or administrative regions of the church.

With the exception of Sabbaths, the daily public meeting starts with worship (8 am) and is followed by two business sessions (9:30 am to noon, and 2 to 5 pm). A 2 ½-hour evening program consists of a 30-minute musical concert (6:30 to 7 pm) and division reports, ending at 9 pm.

The following agenda schedule, shared by Secretariat, is preliminary and could change if discussions on some items last longer than scheduled. A steering committee will determine the final items for the daily agenda early each morning during the session.

Watch the What Might Have Been short film that delegates will view on the opening day of the General Conference session on July 2. Only the first half of the film will be shown, up to the point where the interviews begin.
Day 1, Thursday, July 2

Morning worship: “History’s Glorious Climax: The Promise of His Return” by Janos Kovacs-Biro, secretary of the Ministerial Association for the Trans-European Division.

The business session will open with a series of brief formalities: an official call to order, a check to make sure that all the constitutional requirements of the meeting are met, and the formal adoption of the daily program.

Attendees will watch a new Ministerial Association-produced short film, What Might Have Been, about church cofounder Ellen G White’s 1903 vision on what could have happened at the 1901 General Conference session if delegates had humbled themselves and allowed an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

“A lot of people are praying that this session will not be only about business but a time for revival and spiritual renewal,” Iseminger said.

Delegates may vote on a resolution on the Holy Bible and a statement of confidence in the writings of church cofounder Ellen G White. If time doesn’t permit, the vote is to be moved to an undetermined day.

The first major item on the agenda focuses on church mission. Delegates will vote to officially approve the record 35 unions that have been organised since the last General Conference session in 2010.

“The high number of new unions is unprecedented in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” said G T Ng, executive secretary of the General Conference. “It is a reflection of the church growing with breakneck speed around the world, particularly in Latin America and the African continent.”

Many of these unions are new, being created from a larger union with huge membership. Zambia, whose membership passed 1 million in April, is an example of this. Others have advanced from union mission to union conference, indicating maturity in finance and leadership.

The Adventist world church now has a membership of 18.5 million compared to the 16.3 million reported at the 2010 General Conference session.

A total of 22 unions were added in 2010, while 22 unions also were added in 2005. Only nine unions were added in 2000.

After lunch, the focus will shift to the leadership of the Adventist world church for the next five years. A nominating committee will be appointed to choose church leaders, starting with the General Conference president.

In the evening, General Conference president Dr Ted Wilson will give his “President’s Report” about his five years in office.

Day 2, Friday, July 3

Morning worship: “Tomorrow’s Headlines Today: The Signs of His Return” by Sikhu Hlatshwayo, a Zimbabwean missionary in the United States who helps lead public campus ministry.

The business session will begin with General Conference executive secretary G T Ng giving the “Secretary’s Report” summarising his office’s work over the past five years.

He will be followed by David Trim, director of the General Conference’s Office of Statistics, Archives, and Research, who will crunch the numbers with his “Statistical Report”.
After that, General Conference treasurer Robert Lemon will offer an overview of the church’s financial state with his “Treasurer’s Report”.

At some point during the day, the nominating committee is likely to interrupt the business session to announce its nomination of the General Conference president for 2015 to 2020. The candidate, like all nominated candidates, must be approved by the delegates in session.

“The nominating committee starts its work on Friday, and we should have at least their nomination for the General Conference president sometime on Friday,” Iseminger said. “If they are really ambitious, we might get one or both of the other executive officers as well.”

At the 2010 session, the election of the president was announced on Friday morning, while the General Conference’s other two senior positions, executive secretary and treasurer, were announced in the afternoon.

The nominating committee interrupts the business session whenever it has a major decision to announce.

“As soon as they get a block of names, they come into the business session and give their report,” Iseminger said.

The afternoon business session will wrap up early, at 4 pm, in preparation for Sabbath.

Day 3, Sabbath, July 4

Following a sermon by executive secretary G T Ng on Sabbath morning, people will be invited to attend an afternoon program titled, “The Church in Mission”.

In the evening, reports will be delivered by the North American Division (NAD) and the Middle East and North Africa Union (MENA).

Day 4, Sunday, July 5

Morning worship: “The Amazing Event: The Manner of His Return” by Neale Schofield, CEO of Adventist Media Network in Australia

The day’s business sessions will likely be dominated by a discussion and vote on editorial changes to the Church Manual, most significantly to the disciplinary protocol for sexual misconduct.

No changes have been recommended to the 13 reasons over which church members can be disciplined, including disloyalty to the church and physical violence. But delegates will consider expanding the section dealing most closely with extramarital relationships to include details on specific definitions relating to sexual conduct.

[Read more about the proposed changes in “Revisions to Church Manual Include Matters on Discipline”]

Also on Sunday, delegates may vote on technical changes to the General Conference’s Constitution and Bylaws.

Discussions on the Church Manual or Constitution could start earlier than Sunday, Iseminger said.

“If we have time to work them in on Thursday or Friday, we’ll start on them then,” he said.

The nominating committee is expected to stop Sunday’s proceedings to announce its nominations for the General Conference’s general vice presidents, associate secretaries, and associate treasurers.

“By the end of Sunday during the last session, we had all these General Conference officers,” Iseminger said.
In the evening, reports will be delivered by the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) and the Euro-Asia Division (ESD).

**Day 5, Monday, July 6**

Morning worship: "Faithful End-time Living: Preparation for His Return" by Shian O'Connor, president of Cayman Islands Conference in the Inter-American Division

The entire day’s business session will be dedicated to proposed wording changes to the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“We expect that to be a rather lengthy discussion. It’s an important one,” Iseminger said.

One significant proposed change is the addition of the phrase "a recent six-day creation" to the statement on “Creation”.

The fundamental beliefs have remained unedited since their unveiling at the 1980 General Conference session, with the exception of the addition of a 28th Fundamental Belief in 2005.

[Read more about the proposed revisions in “28 Fundamental Beliefs Get an Update”]

[Read the final marked-up copy of the final draft of the fundamental beliefs (PDF)]

The nominating committee will be in recess during the discussion on Fundamental Beliefs. But it may have time to recommend its nominations for division-level presidents, secretaries, and treasurers, and possibly several General Conference department directors.

In the evening, reports will be delivered by the Inter-European Division (EUD) and the Inter-American Division (IAD).

**Day 6, Tuesday, July 7**


The day’s business sessions will consist of a general business meeting and a corporate meeting—legal gatherings that the General Conference is obliged to hold as an organisation and that have been announced in the pages of the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World*, the official magazines of the Adventist world church.

Also on Tuesday, the nominating committee is expected to name the majority of the General Conference department directors.

In the evening, reports will be delivered by the Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD) and the South American Division (SAD).

**Day 7, Wednesday, July 8**


The entire day’s business session will be dedicated to the question of whether divisions should make provision for the ordination of women in their respective territories.
The question that delegates will be asked to vote on is:

"After your prayerful study on ordination from the Bible, the writings of Ellen G White, and the reports of the study commissions, and; after your careful consideration of what is best for the church and the fulfillment of its mission, is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No."

[Read “Women’s ordination question goes to GC Session”]

Ted N.C. Wilson, president of the Adventist world church, has appealed to delegates to read what the Bible says about women's ordination and to pray that all will humbly follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance on the matter.

[Read “Adventists urged to study women's ordination for themselves”]

The nominating committee will be in recess during the ordination discussion on Wednesday.

In the evening, reports will be delivered by the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID), South Pacific Division (SPD), and the Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD).

**Day 8, Thursday, July 9**

Morning worship: "Into All the World: The Proclamation of the Gospel and His Return" by Taj Pacleb, evangelist for the Central California Conference.

The General Conference session is expected to start wrapping up on Thursday. Any unresolved agenda items will be discussed at the morning and afternoon business sessions.

The nominating committee is expected to name General Conference auditors and the leadership team for the Ministerial Association.

In the evening, reports will be delivered by the Southern Asia Division (SUD), Trans-European (TED), and the West-Central Africa Division (WAD).

**Day 9, Friday, July 10**

Morning worship: "Home at Last: The Joy and Fullness of His Return" by Ron Smith, president of the Southern Union in the North American Division.

This last day of business sessions will be left open to any outstanding agenda items.

“If we finish the business items early, we may choose to have a prayer session,” Iseminger said.

*Watch a video about the GC session mission offering. Churches are encouraged to show the video before the General Conference session and can download it by clicking HERE.*

**Day 10, Sabbath, July 11**

A special mission offering will be collected during Sabbath worship services to fund thousands of youth-driven mission projects around the world.

The Sabbath morning message at 11 am will be delivered by the elected president of the General Conference.
People will be invited to attend an afternoon program titled “The Church in Mission”.

The closing evening program is “Mission on the Move”, formerly known as the “Parade of Nations”.

“It’s always been the climax of the session, with delegates representing their countries in colorful costume,” Iseminger said. “The name change at this session represents a change in focus from patriotism for one’s country of origin to a focus on mission. The program will review by decade when the first Adventist believers were baptised in each country and highlight the continuing mission challenges.”

One of the world’s leading health and exercise scientists describes it as one of the most exciting medical discoveries of the past few decades: the power of “low tech” for remedying problems created by “high tech”.

“Scientific evidence is showing that returning to a simple lifestyle is often the best way to manage and treat chronic disease,” says Dr Darren Morton, a senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education whose doctorate is in human physiology. “It seems lifestyle is the best medicine.”

Seventh-day Adventists have known and practiced this since their beginnings as a church more than 150 years ago. So, it is fitting Adventists are continuing to make a prominent contribution to the emerging discipline of lifestyle medicine. For example, the founder of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, Dr John Kelly, is an Adventist. As are several of the college’s presidents, including the incoming president.

Avondale, as one of three Adventist tertiary institutions in the South Pacific, is also making a contribution through its new Lifestyle Research Centre. The centre brings together academics from Avondale—Dr Morton, a lead researcher described by The Wall Street Journal as the world’s “most-published authority” on the stitch, is one—and at other entities. Their motto: “optimising health outcomes.”

“Thomas Edison once said the doctor of the future will give no medicine but interest his patients in the cause and prevention of disease,” says director Dr Brett Mitchell, an associate professor of nursing. “This is exactly what the centre’s about and why its work is so important.”

That work includes partnering with Sanitarium Health and Wellbeing to relaunch and study the Complete Health Improvement Programs (CHIP). Dr Paul Rankin used the lifestyle intervention as the basis for his PhD, which he completed through Avondale. He found the delivery of CHIP by volunteer facilitators in their communities significantly improves the health of participants. “I can now stand up when I train CHIP facilitators [Rankin is CHIP in Churches program director for the church in the South Pacific] and say, ‘We know that by running this program, you will be making a difference to people’s lives.’”

The research by Dr Rankin and others in the Lifestyle Research Centre is establishing credibility in the medical
community. Published papers have appeared in academic journals such as the British Medical Journal Open, the New Zealand Medical Journal and the Medical Journal of Australia.

Research presented in the latter measured an increase in hospital-identified Clostridium difficile infections. The message: we need to standardise cleaning practices and products.

Dr Mitchell, a co-author of the paper, is a chief investigator on a National Health and Medical Research Council grant implementing and evaluating the effectiveness and the cost-effectiveness of targeted environmental cleaning practices in 20 Australian hospitals. “I’ve gone into research to make a difference,” he says. “That’s why the work of the Lifestyle Research Centre is important—our projects are sustainable, cost effective and improve lives. And because we have a range of academics working on projects, we consider a number of different perspectives.”

The centre is also growing its contribution to the church’s health message by studying the effectiveness of a modified CHIP for illiterate communities in the South Pacific and by offering postgraduate degrees in lifestyle medicine. Other areas of interest include avoidable blindness, education programs addressing non-communicable diseases, medical humanities, mental health and wellbeing and nutrition.

Giving to the Avondale Annual Appeal this year will support—by employing research assistants and providing scholarships—two of the centre’s projects. The first, Lifestyle Intervention, is improving wellbeing by reducing the burden of chronic disease. The second, Infection Prevention, is reducing the impact of preventable infections.

If the evidence is showing lifestyle is the best medicine, then the Adventist health message “is arguably more relevant today than when it was conceived,” says Dr Morton. “And that’s exciting because we have the potential to help others become healthier and happier.”

Give to the Avondale Annual Appeal at <www.avondale.edu.au/egiving>. Donations above $2 are tax deductible in Australia.
Simon Lewis and his family lived and worked for ADRA in Nepal for four-and-a-half years before coming to work for ADRA New Zealand late in 2014. Following last month’s devastating earthquake he was rushed to Nepal to help with ADRA’s response. Simon returned last week. One month on from the disaster he writes below.

We lived through a number of earthquakes during our time in Nepal. They were small, but the jolts were enough to remind you that “the big one” could happen at any time. So, we were always prepared.

My girls, my wife and I would make sure there was a clear path from our beds to the doors in case we had to run in the night. We had a metal box outside that stored a tent, sleeping bags, water filters, three weeks of food and other emergency items including a pick and shovel for any search and rescue that might be needed.

We also kept a ‘grab bag’ beside the door with passports, money, spare clothes, torches, food and other things should we need to make an escape.

Through my work with ADRA over the years I’ve responded to numerous disasters and seen their life-shattering results. That experience along with the fact that the three people I love most were under my care guaranteed our family was certainly the most prepared of any of our friends for a disaster.

My personal mantra became "You can never be too prepared"—although many of our friends begged to differ!

Fortunately we never had to seriously enact our emergency plans. I say fortunately with mixed feelings of relief, dread and guilt. We had the knowledge and the resources to have these kits on stand-by. Most people in Nepal do not.

Nine months after we left Nepal—and packed up our emergency supplies—the country was brought to its knees by the 7.8 magnitude "big one" that has filled our thoughts and prayers ever since.

It was an emotional experience landing in Kathmandu. I’d had many hours on planes from New Zealand to imagine the devastation and play-out the scenes in my mind, but as I hit the tarmac I soon realised those imagined landscapes and faces were now very real.
Arriving at the ADRA office tears welled in my eyes. My friends and former colleagues were working tirelessly to provide support to others, but I knew without even speaking that many had been affected themselves. Their selfless service continues to be an inspiration.

Responding to a disaster is a job too massive for "work days". ADRA's team, which comprised of many high-capacity Nepalese staff, along with an expatriate team rushed in by the global ADRA network, worked around the clock. We, along with the government, UN and other responding agencies, were focussed on one thin—ensuring those who needed help got it as quickly and effectively as possible.

In the midst of this frantic work were the constant aftershocks that rolled through. We were never sure how big or how long they were going to be—or how much peace we’d have until the next one. They disrupted our work, but more so our thoughts. Each rumble reminded us of the urgency of our work. Every shake a reminder that there were millions living exposed to the elements, with livelihoods and food sources destroyed.

It was their unseen faces and unknown names that kept us going despite the unease.

At the end of every day I went back to the guesthouse and turned to email and social media. I must stay a huge thanks to all those who sent amazing messages of support. It was the best way to end each day. Though the ground was moving and the work load ever growing there was a constant in my life—those who were at home who were thinking and praying for me. I cannot say thank you enough. Nor can I encourage you enough to continue praying for the people of Nepal and for the ADRA team who continue to work there—you may have already given more than you could afford, but prayers comes at no cost and with immense power.

Please continue to pray for Nepal.

Many statistics have been shared about this disaster, but below are a few that really hit home for me:

- Nearly 25,000 school classrooms have been destroyed and 10,000 damaged.
- Over 650,000 houses have been destroyed or damaged (basically the entire city of Perth when the population of Australia is of a similar size to the population of Nepal)
- More than 1000 health posts have been destroyed or damaged.
- The entire district of Dolakha was destroyed or damaged beyond repair.

ADRA, or any one of the NGO's and other agencies on the ground, simply cannot meet the needs that exist alone. It is only through coordination and collaboration that great things happen.

Similarly, we cannot do anything without your support. To date ADRA has touched the lives of more than 29,000 people. Your generosity has ensured ADRA could be on the ground before this disaster struck and have supplies on hand in order to respond quickly. I cannot say thank you enough for this.

One of the hardest things to do was leave Nepal again. As I packed my bags last week I realised I would be returning home to a house that was standing, a job and a secure future; but I was leaving those who could not leave.

I was leaving behind millions who had destroyed houses, family who may have been injured and a future that was...
uncertain. Sadly, the only certainty many have is that the monsoon will soon arrive, and with it a downpour of new challenges.

We all use non-verbal vocalisations such as laughter, cries and sighs to express our emotions. We let out sighs of frustration, despair, disgust and yearning. Research suggests that there are a total of 388 negative and 114 positive emotional sighs. The undeniable fact is that we all sigh to express our deep feelings and emotions.

Jesus sighed too. Of the four gospels only Mark records Jesus’ deep sighs (Mark 7:31-37; 8:11-13). It was most probably during the summer of A.D. 30 when Jesus and His disciples landed at Gennesaret and throughout the region people carried the sick on mats to wherever He went (Mark 6:53). The Pharisees and some teachers of the law also followed Jesus but as usual they didn’t come to be healed; rather they were trying to entrap Him (7:1-23).

After an encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus left and went to the vicinity of Tyre where He healed the demon-possessed daughter of a Syrophoenician woman. Then He went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of Decapolis. It was the same region where Jesus had previously healed a demon-possessed man by sending evil spirits into a herd of pigs. At that time the residents of Decapolis pleaded with Jesus to leave. The man who had been possessed by demons begged to go with Him. But Jesus said, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed” (Mark 5:19,20).

When Jesus returned to Decapolis the people were not begging Him to leave. Instead they were there to welcome Him. Quite a change wasn’t it? Could this be the result of a formerly demon-possessed man’s faithful ministry? (Mark 5:1-20; Matthew 8:28-9:1; Luke 8:26-39).

Zoom in and observe. Slowly Mark catches our attention as he deliberately records Jesus moving away from the crowd with a deaf man. Who knows when the last time was that the deaf man heard anyone's voice? Could it be that Jesus took him away so that the first voice he would ever hear was the voice of the Saviour? If this was the case the application is loud and clear. Perhaps Jesus wants us to do the same: to move away from the crowd so there’s no-one else but Him and us.

Jesus stretched out His arms, singled out two fingers and pressed them into the man’s ears. The same fingers that once laid out heavens (Psalm 8:3), inscribed 10 commandments on tablets of stone (Exodus 8:19), wrote the destiny of Babylon on a wall (Daniel 5:5) and outlined the sins of Pharisees on the ground were now going to open
the ears of a deaf man. Jesus took it even further. He spat and touched the man’s tongue. The spit that helped
the blind man of Bethsaida to see (Mark 8:23; John 9:6) was now going to make the mute speak.

Ever wondered why Jesus used saliva to heal? Got Questions Ministries founder S Michael Houdmann says: “One possible reason for Jesus’ use of His saliva has to do with the beliefs of His contemporary culture. Several Roman writers and Jewish rabbis considered saliva to be a valid treatment for blindness. Since the people of that day had a high view of saliva’s healing properties, Jesus used spuit to communicate His intention to heal. Those being healed would have naturally interpreted Jesus’ spitting as a sign that they would soon be cured. The greater need of each of those healed was the need for increased faith. Jesus recognised this spiritual need and offered a physical action as a means of raising their expectations and focusing their faith on Himself.”

Follow the sequence of Jesus’ actions. He inserted His fingers into the man’s ears. He spat and touched the man’s
tongue. He looked up to heaven and gave a deep sigh. He also looked up to heaven at the feeding of the 5000
when blessing the loaves and the fish (Mark 6:41), at the raising of Lazarus (John 11:41) and at the time of
intercessory prayer for His disciples (John 17:1).

Jesus looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to the deaf-mute, “Ephphatha!” (be opened). I wonder why
Jesus took a deep sigh? Was He tired? Was the deaf-mute’s health condition so poor that it pained His heart?

The Greek word translated as sigh is stenazo. Depending on the context, this word can be translated as “to sigh,
groan or moan”. In Mark 7:34 the word describes sighing as an expression of a deep inward emotion. As a human,
this was Jesus’ reaction to human suffering and weakness (John 1:14). Jesus had been healing many sick people
throughout the day and by looking up and releasing a deep sigh it communicated that the whole of heaven was
concerned with what Jesus was going through and what the deaf-mute was experiencing.

Another mention of stenazo is in Mark 8:12. While Jesus was in Dalmanutha, on the western shore of the Sea of
Galilee, some Pharisees came and began to question Him. In order to test Him, they asked for a sign from heaven.
At the beginning of Mark 6, Jesus had already spoken with them and tried to address their unending questions.
Once again they followed Him all the way to Dalmanutha and asked Him for a sign from heaven. They wanted proof
of His divine authority rather than miracles. Jesus sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a
miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it” (verse 12). Then He left them, got back into the boat
and crossed over to the other side.

In Mark 7:34 Jesus gave a deep sigh in reaction to the suffering and weakness of the deaf-mute but in Mark 8:12 He
sighed in reaction to a pathetic picture of the hardness of the Pharisees’ hearts to His message. Jesus was
disappointed at their slowness to perceive spiritual truth. I hope He isn’t still sighing in heaven when He sees our
slow response to the gospel message!

In the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament, LXX) stenazo is translated on several occasions as "to sigh or groan",
suggesting grief as a result of physical suffering, loss or distress (Isaiah 19:8; 24:7; Lamentations 1:8, 21; Ezekiel
21:6,7).

In Psalm 38:8 it describes the groaning of the psalmist in distress while in Jeremiah 4:31 it describes the anguish of
a woman in labour.

The apostle Paul further expands on this word in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2,4. Here the same word implies
sighing in a sense of deep longing for something. In Romans 8:26 the word refers to the Holy Spirit’s groaning. In
the same chapter, in verse 23, the word expresses groaning of Christians.

Mark presents to us a Saviour who sighed. Jesus sighed when He saw a deaf-mute’s suffering. He sighed when He
was disappointed at the Pharisees’ slowness to perceive spiritual truth. The Old Testament records sighs and
groans of people as a result of suffering loss or because of distress. The Epistles show us the Holy Spirit is sighing
and groaning on our behalf; that God hears and knows our innermost feelings.
I am comforted to know that my Saviour once sighed and hence He knows how it feels when I sigh. He knows how it feels when my heart is broken. He knows when I am disappointed. He can feel our deepest groaning and sighing. Are you groaning? Are you passing through the sighing moments in your life? Hang on! We have a Saviour who is able to understand us and is willing to embrace us in His comforting arms. Let's approach Him.


Younis Masih is a pastor in Invercargill, New Zealand.
I bet there’s something you don’t know about the Beach Boys’ classic song, “Surfin’ USA”. Sandwiched among the American beaches they cheerfully list off in perfect pop harmonies is “Australia’s Narrabeen”.

Why would an Australian beach be listed in a song about “surfin’ USA”? Did they confuse surfin’ USA with surfin’ AUS? And if you were going to list an Australian surf beach, why Narrabeen? That I don’t know. But here’s something I do know: that song’s a copy.

A copy? Yes. The music is taken from Chuck Berry’s “Sweet Little Sixteen”. Pull the two songs up on YouTube and you’ll see the duck-walking rocker singing a raucous little tune about a girl who wants to go dancing in a list of American cities. Close your eyes, add some harmonies and exchange “Sweet Little Sixteen” with “Surfin’ USA” and you have the Beach Boys classic. It’s so close that the writing credits for “Surfin’ USA” were, after a little legal threat, shared between the Beach Boys’ Brian Wilson and the man himself, Chuck Berry.

Of course, it’s hardly the first musical copying act—or the last. Baby Boomers might recall George Harrison’s “My Sweet Lord”, which was awfully close to The Chiffons’ hit “He’s So Fine”. More recently, Robin Thicke, TI and Pharrell Williams ran into a little legal trouble over their hit “Blurred Lines”, which “borrowed” heavily from Marvin Gaye’s hit “Got to Give it Up”. Well, if you are going to copy, you may as well copy from the best! But when you do, don’t be surprised when lawyers roll up and you see your royalties roll out.

In the world of fine art, attribution is also a make or break issue. There’s a great TV show exploring the mysteries of art provenance, called Fake or Fortune. The show explores the drama, emotions and painstaking process of determining who the artist is behind a painting. The paintings may be worthless or they may be worth millions; it all depends on who applied the paint.

The problem of determining attribution for a work is not simply a challenge in the arts; it also leaches into the sciences and theology. And who we determine is the author directly impacts the value we place on the creation.

Atheists often point out the human rights abuses of the religious and claim a causal relationship. But there are problems with this hypothesis. The first and most obvious is that “religion” is not a monolithic idea. Some religions
tend to create peace and societal stability more than others. It’s no coincidence that in the UN’s list of the happiest
nations on earth, 10 of the top 10 nations have a long Protestant Christian heritage, nine of the top 10 nations in the
Human Development Index similarly have long Protestant histories, as do eight of the top ten in the gender equality
index.

The second problem with the atheists’ hypothesis is that actions that are directly contrary to a faith tradition cannot
by definition be an expression of that faith tradition. Sinful humanity is flawed and conflicted, and it is not rare for
people to act against their own highest ideals.

But it’s the third that is worth considering carefully: the secular devaluation of human life. Atheistic Communism is
estimated to have killed between 65 and 100 million people. And imprisoned tens of millions more. Nazism, which
based its views of racial superiority explicitly on Darwinian evolution, similarly is estimated to have deliberately
exterminated 11 to 20 million people and started a war that is estimated to have killed in the range of another 50
million. But it isn’t just these two toxic ideologies that have devalued human life; even “enlightened” modern
secularity tracks with a disregard for human life.

It’s not a coincidence that Pew researchers have found the more secular you are, the more likely you are to support
euthanasia and abortion on demand. Abortion ends an estimated 40 million young human lives across the globe
every year. And despite stereotypes to the contrary, according to Gallop, the more often you go to church the less
likely you are to support the death penalty. Why? Because authorship determines value.

When we forget the Artist behind creation we don’t just walk away from our faith, we walk away from the foundation
of our own value. And the consequence is inevitably the devaluation of human life. Secular humanism is, it turns out,
itself undoing.

James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.
In the Lutherhaus in Wittenberg hangs a painting by Julius Hubner. It depicts the day Martin Luther marched to the doors of the Castle Cathedral. There he nailed 95 objections to the selling of indulgences and the assumed role of the Pope.

In the centre is Martin Luther with a Bible under his arm. He challenged anyone to come along and have a scholarly debate on the issues. To his left is a group of excited students but on his right is a church scholar doing all he can to hose down the joy among the onlookers.

Then we find the artist depicting the problems in the church. He has a fat monk up the front with his hand being kissed in worship. Then we have a mother, her child and a cripple in the centre. Meanwhile two monks are running from the scene with a money box under their arms. No doubt taking the money they had raised from selling indulgences to the ignorant churchgoers.

So how did Martin Luther gain such a conviction on these issues?

Luther was an earnest monk. He once said, “If ever a monk could win heaven by monkery, I must have reached it.”

But as he compared the Bible with the teachings of the church he was horrified. One of the issues that most upset him was the selling of indulgences. The way it worked was this. The poor Christian paid money to the church and in return the punishment for sin being suffered by dead relatives was downgraded or taken away.

A German rhyme went this way: “place your penny on the drum, the pearly gates open and in strolls mum.”

For me this painting is not just about Martin Luther. It’s not just about nailing his objections to a door. This painting is the turning point in Christianity.

As Luther later said, “I am bound by the Scriptures which I have quoted, my conscience is thirled [bound] to the Word of God . . .”

This painting is so special because it reflects a return to the Bible and the Bible only. There is nothing more radical and important than that.