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“A LOOK THROUGH THE EYES OF OTHER SEEKERS, OTHER TRADITIONS, IS INFORMATIVE, HELPFUL, AND ENCOURAGING TO OUR OWN THEOLOGICAL JOURNEY.”

Predestination and free will

Thank you for Daniel Xisto's article ("Free Will and Choice: A Study of Jeremiah 1:5," May 2012) that provided a clear biblical window through which to examine the issue of predestination and free will. Coming from a strong Wesleyan-Arminian background, and thoroughly convinced already, a look through the eyes of other seekers, other traditions, is informative, helpful, and encouraging to our own theological journey. I appreciate your balanced approach.

—Larry D. Morgan, email

Without entering into a discussion of the complexities of the doctrine of predestination (some may prefer the term *divine election*) that forms the basis for seminarian Daniel Xisto's award-winning article, "Free Will and Choice: A Study of Jeremiah 1:5" (and without implying that our Creator-Redeemer God made us robots particularly regarding such mundane matters as what we daily choose to eat or

wear), I respectfully still wait to be shown clear biblical evidence for the almost universally accepted, yet peculiarly nebulous concept of free will that nevertheless appears as an unquestioned "given" among believers and unbelievers alike.

Particularly in *spiritual* matters, including conversion and a God-pleasing life of sanctification, behind such actions is our Triune God as the expressed (sometimes implied) Actor who enables us both truly to believe *and* do His saving will. In the final analysis, it may be sufficient to note that a double portion of divine love is bestowed upon this questioning but restored major Old Testament prophet to the effect that God's grace to Jeremiah is indicated precisely by His refusing to accept his (and our) prior refusal.

Thank you for your informative magazine.

—Kenneth M. Ballas, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pastor, Parma, Ohio, United States

Proper priorities

I am grateful for Larry Yeagley's timely article ("Watch Your

Priorities," March 2012). It provided valuable counsel that I wish all members of the clergy would read. One area of the article that touched my heart was the section on loving one's family. It is true that pastors who build and enjoy happy families will not be eager to leave the ministry since "their families will stand behind them as they set good priorities."

—Tom Obuya, Kisumu, Kenya

Kudos

I have been in pastoral ministry for more than 30 years, and I have never asked for additional copies of a magazine. But your March 2012 issue, which focused on the authority of the Word, was incredible. It had good articles from the first one on: "Who Authored the Bible?" through "Archaeology and the Authority of the Bible" to the final article "Watch Your Priorities," which should be required reading in all seminaries and Bible schools.

Thank you for putting together such a fine edition and magazine.

—Michael Kelly, senior pastor, Grace Community Church, Bryan, Ohio, United States



Marriage: An earthly microcosm of heaven

Picture yourself as a part of the congregation attending the wedding ceremony of Adam and Eve—witnessing the bride and groom exchanging their vows. Just before the grand event reaches its high point, with God pronouncing them husband and wife, Adam lovingly looks into Eve’s eyes and says, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man” (Gen. 2:23).^{*} One thing becomes perfectly clear: a successful marriage is not composed of just two individuals (certainly not male and male or female and female); rather marriage includes three individuals: the man, the woman, and God.

Years ago, I often said that no one should write books on marriage and parenting until they celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary and had at least two children in high school or higher education. My wife and I have reached those milestones; yet I still don’t feel qualified to speak on those topics. Nevertheless, I’ll venture to share a few unoriginal thoughts about marriage—especially marriages that involve a pastor and spouse (although most, if not all, of the principles apply to other marriages as well):

- 1. Marriage is not a 50-50 proposition; instead, it is a 100-100 proposition.** The 50-50 concept has often been based on the premise that couples frequently have to meet halfway, especially in resolving conflicts. And while this may be true, marriage must be lived in the context of total giving of one partner to the other—selflessly expressing oneself for the complete joy of the other.
- 2. The husband must consistently display true leadership.**


Who among us hasn’t heard horror stories of male misapplication of Paul’s counsel to wives in Ephesus to submit to their husbands? Paul very clearly says, “For the husband is the head of the wife *as Christ is the head of the church*” (Eph. 5:23; emphasis added), and “Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*” (v. 25; emphasis added). No question, it remains the role of the husband to set the tone for a happy home; to lay a Christ-based foundation for a domicile that serves as a microcosm of heaven.

- 3. Learn to sincerely say, “I’m sorry.”** Apologizing for one’s shortcomings, mistakes, and errors in judgments does not denigrate oneself—even if others choose to think less of you. Instead, confessing one’s faults often proves that one recognizes his or her fallibility and desire to grow in Christ. I learned many years ago that apologizing paves the way for a stronger marriage and has also provided ample practice for the next time I have had to say, “I’m sorry”!
- 4. Don’t attempt to change your spouse into something he or she is not.** This and the following point strike more so at the heart of pastoral marriages because pastors often bring expectations into their marriages as to the image the “perfect” pastor’s family should present. At other times, they have bought into the perceptions that church members possess regarding what the wife (often the pastor’s spouse is female) should contribute to church life—failing to recognize or acknowledge that she is answerable to God for

her spiritual gifts just as are the other church members. Allow the spouse to serve God in the way the Holy Spirit has equipped her or him!

- 5. Remember that your spouse always should remain more important to you than your congregation.** This applies not only to pastors, but university professors, church administrators, and journal editors too! Even if one served as a pastor before getting married (as was the case with me), God’s institution, created in Eden, predates and supercedes the pastor’s admittedly high responsibilities to his or her ministerial calling. That, of course, does not give permission to ignore professional responsibilities because all things should still be done for the glory of God (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31).

In this month’s lead article, Karen and Bernie Holford address how Christian marriages enable us to grow into God’s image, and in the process, we become more loving spouses and caring pastors. They are quick to add that this does not imply that single pastors should marry or singles ought to avoid entering the gospel ministry. Throughout their article they share great wisdom on this subject through stories, statements, and questions.

I’ve merely shared five thoughts on this subject; I know many of you have great wisdom that I, and others, need so our marriages can grow stronger and our lives can reflect God’s image. Please send your suggestions to Feedback@ministrymagazine.org. We will post selected ones on our Web site. 

^{*} All Bible references are from the New International Version.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.

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How **your marriage** helps you grow more like **God**

Laura just finished serving dessert when her husband, Jon, a retired pastor and church administrator, turned to us and said, “I have something to say to you that comes deep from my heart. As a married person and as a pastor, the biggest mistake I ever made was to buy into the idea that the priorities of ministry ought to be God, church, and family—in that order. That attitude destroyed my marriage and spiritually hurt my children. When a pastor’s marriage breaks down, it has far-reaching consequences. A broken marriage hurts God, their families, their ministry, their congregation, and many others. This causes people to lose trust in God, pastors, love, and people.

“Whatever you do, take care of your love for each other, and try not to let your work as a pastor come between you and those you love.” He paused, then continued. “Sometimes things happen in ministry, and you have to make difficult decisions between your priorities. If ever your family is hurt by your work or by the choices you’ve had to make, you must do all you can, with God, to help heal and comfort the hurt that they feel. Otherwise the accumulated hurts, disappointments, and resentments

will eventually come between them and you, and worse, between them and God. Don’t feel you have to put every need of your church members before the needs of your family. The church is best when it is a body and there are others who will be blessed by the opportunity to care until you can get there. But you, Bernie, are the one most called to meet the needs of your own family. You can’t delegate that God-given responsibility. If you’re not sure about putting your family’s needs before your ministry, well, read 1 Timothy 3:1–5.”

Is your marriage at risk?

This article explores how growing in love and togetherness in your marriage can help you nurture your love for God and others. A vibrant and intimate marriage will help you to become a more effective pastor and more loving and supportive spouse. This is not to say that single pastors ought to get married or ought not to enter ministry. But this article provides a fresh perspective on the pastor’s marriage, and looks for the special gifts and opportunities that God has tucked into its folds.

Church administrators have always had good intentions for their pastors. Ministry remains a high spiritual calling, and pastors have

busy agendas. Some leaders are concerned that pastors might spend too much time taking care of their children rather than ministering to their congregations. Years ago, while pastors spent full time in caring for their flock and the ministry, their wives were expected to take care of everyday duties at home. Wives managed everything at home, took care of the children, were involved in the church, and their husbands did the “important work” of ministry. But, as the years have passed, we have experienced many extremely sad consequences of positioning church work between the pastor and his or her family.

Today, many ministerial marriages face severe and insidious threats. Life and ministry are busier than ever. Both the pastor and the spouse may be employed. Life is many times more complex and demanding than it was 50 years ago. Congregational and leadership expectations may be much higher than they were before. Children’s schedules are hectic. Internet, email, and cell phones mean that pastors can be constantly on call. Spouses sometimes pick up extra duties at home to compensate for overworked pastors. The pastor may even be too busy to find time for a healthy devotional life, to exercise,

relax, and talk with his or her spouse about anything other than the latest home emergency. Other professionals learn to leave their work at the door when they come home, but ministry can enter every aspect of family relationships. As one pastor's wife said with a wry smile, "I've

The time spent in nurturing a healthy, loving, communicating, happy, and intimate marriage is vital to develop a healthy relationship with God, with our ministry, and those with whom we come into contact. Our marriages are the "discovery centers" for exploring

God pronounced "not good" (Gen. 2:18), that was the aloneness of man. If being alone in paradise was "not good," being alone today, in this broken world, is surely not at all good, either. When we take our marriage vows, God gives us a serious responsibility: He entrusts us with



WHEN WE LEARN TO ANTICIPATE AND MEET OUR PARTNER'S RELATIONAL NEEDS IN AN UNSELFISH WAY, WE UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THE WAY GOD TIRELESSLY TAKES CARE OF OUR NEEDS.

come to accept he's really married to the church. I'm just the domestic."

Pressing "pause"

We need to press the pause button as a couple, reconnect, discuss our values and priorities, and talk about how ministry affects our relationship. We need to rediscover the "one-flesh" ideal of marriage that God intended us to experience. We need to understand the emotional, relational, and spiritual impact of ministry on our marriages and each other, and discover how practical theology can enrich our relationships at home and in our congregations.

the multidimensional wonder of God's love. The more we learn about deep, committed, intimate love, the more we learn about how God loves us. And the more we learn about God's love, the more easily we will understand how to love each other well. Then the community around us will truly know that we are Christians.

The harmfulness of aloneness

In the beginning of the world's history, when Adam lived in the freshly created Garden of Eden and walked and talked face-to-face with God, there was just one thing that

the special task of protecting each other—husband and wife—from the harmful experience of aloneness.

Aloneness is the opposite of oneness and oneness is God's intention for marriage. "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24, NIV). True oneness, however, is not just about sexual intimacy but also expects spiritual closeness; friendly, happy times together; support and comfort from each other; and open, warm, straightforward, and honest communication. All of these aspects of closeness blend to build a strong,

well-rounded, and intimate bond within the relationship. If any one of these aspects is missing or limited, the “one-fleshness” will be lacking a vital ingredient—like leaving eggs, butter, or flour out of a cake batter; you can try it, but you just will not get the cake you wanted.

Just because we are married does not mean that either of us will

unsupported we can easily become discouraged, resentful, depressed, angry, or hungry for someone else’s love.

Oneness: Next to godliness?

The more intimately we know another person, the closer we come to him or her. It takes time to know

make great sacrifices for our members, but we may unconsciously expect our families to make all kinds of sacrifices for us.

Running on empty

Dave drove many miles across his two distant parishes. He helped Mrs. Taylor by chopping wood for her log pile, sat with Fred while his wife

“YOU...ARE THE ONE MOST CALLED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUR OWN FAMILY. YOU CAN’T DELEGATE THAT GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY.”

never feel alone. Marriage can be one of the loneliest places in the world when each person is lost in his or her own busy, struggling, sad, and self-absorbed world. When the one person God has provided to be your closest human companion is not meeting your deep needs for physical, spiritual, social, and emotional connection or letting you meet the other’s needs, you can feel very alone. And when we feel alone and

another person well, and we never fully arrive at total knowing because we are both growing and changing through our life experiences and spiritual journeys.

One of the most profound ways in which we develop intimacy with our spouses is by sacrificing our own needs and wants to meet theirs. When someone delights in making sacrifices for us, we experience their deepest love. As pastors we often

went to the store, and stayed late in the church office writing sermons and sending emails. At home Sally struggled with four children under six years of age. She shopped for groceries, did all the yard work, managed the home, answered phone calls from members, and cared for all of the children’s needs.

When Dave and Sally managed to snatch some time together, they were both exhausted and empty

For your prayerful reflection

Ask yourself:

- How alone is my spouse in our marriage?
- What do I do that contributes to his or her sense of aloneness at times?
- What could I do that would help my spouse feel closer to me?
- What requests has my spouse been making for my help, time, and other things, that I have been putting off and ignoring?
- What can I do to show my spouse how much I appreciate his or her support of my ministry?

Ask each other:

- What do I do that especially helps you to feel loved and close to me? What else would you like me to do?
- What are you struggling with, and how can I support you?
- What is the best thing I could do for you today to show you my love and let you know how special you are to me?

from struggling on their own. Both of them longed for the other person to reach out and support them, but neither had the energy to do so. In each of their minds, they had spent all day emptying themselves into other people's lives, and now it was their partner's turn to support them. But their partner was thinking exactly the same thing and so neither of them had the energy to reach out to help the other and their sense of aloneness and sadness grew. Sally was so exhausted she even wondered about taking the children and moving in with her parents.

Their marriage began to be transformed when Dave watched the Christian movie *Fireproof** and was inspired to do one significant thing each day to show Sally how much he loved her. Sally said, "The night Dave canceled an important church meeting to stay with me when I was sick, touched my heart. Knowing that I was his priority when I really needed him, gave me hope

that we could turn our marriage around."

Spiritual growth through loving relationships

As we learn to love our partner with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we learn what it means to love God with all that we have. And the more we love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, the more richly we can love each other.

When we learn to anticipate and meet our partner's relational needs in an unselfish way, we understand more about the way God tirelessly takes care of our needs.


When we accept another person's help and support, we wisely accept that we cannot do it all on our own nor were we meant to, and we experience an opportunity to develop greater humility and trust in God.

When we learn how to protect each other from the danger, sadness, and pain of feeling alone and unsupported, we learn important

and transferable skills that enrich our caring ministry to others.

When we notice and appreciate the many great and small things our partners are doing to support us, we can give thanks for them with a grateful heart, and we learn to appreciate the multitude of ways in which God shows His love to us.

When we willingly make sacrifices to support, encourage, appreciate, love, and comfort our partners, we taste something of the loving sacrifice Jesus willingly made for us.

Through exercising our love, we become more skilled at working together with God to help us have a richer, deeper, and wider experience of His love. And as we become better lovers, in the godly sense of the word, we will naturally become more like God from whose heart all love flows. 

* For a resource center to download or purchase materials that will help your marriage and the couples in your church and community, see www.fireproofmy marriage.com.

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Elusive gifts

Like the prodigal son, I traveled to a far country. In time, my life spiraled out of control. I found in myself addictive and destructive behaviors. I often prayed for forgiveness and healing, but these gifts were elusive as I was not ready to trust God and believe He would care for me.

Looking back, I see, even in the darkest moments, that God kept a corner of my heart safe. God revived me in His time. When fully consumed by guilt, depression, anxiety, and life-ending thoughts, God began to restore my heart and change my life.

God placed within me the courage to openly and honestly acknowledge my sins. He gave me the willingness to let go of the thoughts and behaviors I mistakenly believed would make my life better. In their place, God instilled within me a desire for faith, intimacy with my family, true friendship, and healthy recreation. God reforms me as I trust Him and act on His call to this new, and often unfamiliar, way of living.

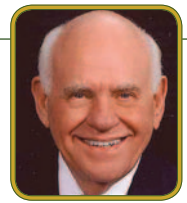
I am grateful that God continues to revive my heart and reform my life. Though not perfect, I now experience joy and happiness.

When I am tempted to return to the far country, I remember that I am God's precious child, much loved, and forgiven.

For me, the goal of ministry is to help others find this wonderful gift, patiently remembering it will come to them in God's time and according to His plan.

—DERRIS O. KRAUSE, VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT, HOPE CHANNEL.





The church is worth the effort

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you (2 Cor. 4:7–11, NIV).

While my wife, Carolyn, and I were in London to participate in the International Congress of Preaching, we were walking near Buckingham Palace and noticed a church; actually, the shell of a church building that was being rebuilt. There was nothing standing but the four walls—no windows, doors, or pews. Scaffolding was up on the inside of the walls and the craftsmen were eating their lunch in the nave.

Around the church was a chain-link fence with barbed wire across the top. Near the opening that served as a door was a large sign written for all to see: “Danger! Enter at your own risk.” Those words were designed to protect the general public from construction accidents. As I read the sign, I could not resist thinking of the many church people, both clergy and laymen, who have been chewed up by the institutional church and would testify to the truth of that sign.

A scene early in Margaret Mitchell’s classic novel of the

Old South, *Gone With the Wind*, describes the barbecue at Twelve Oaks plantation. Many young people were there, dressed in their best party attire, flirting, bragging, and having a genuinely good time. During the barbecue, word came that the War between the States had started. The young men donned their uniforms, mounted their horses, and rode off to fight for the Confederacy. They fully believed the war would soon be over, and they would come home victorious as heroes. Not so! Four years later they came home wounded, hungry, disillusioned, and defeated to a South that had been burned and looted; all was gone.

This was much like my experience ten to fifteen years after seminary graduation. My phone started ringing with calls from classmates who had entered church ministry with high energy and strong idealism. They were full of Niebuhr, Barth, Brunner, and Tillich, not to mention Greek and Hebrew. They believed that once they explained these theologians to their churches,

all would be right in the kingdom. They thought that there was nothing in the church or denomination that would not be better once they were in control.

These same young men, now older and wiser, called and told me about their brokenness; of churches that would not do the right thing about the race issue, organizational change, or community involvement; of church leaders who were masters of political intrigue; of families who were selfish in their demands; of old men and women who excelled in controlling the church and pastor with gossip and innuendo. They told me of their families being harassed by these same people and of the unfair demands placed upon them. They also recited incidents when the denomination and seminaries had abandoned them. The recurrent refrain was “the church is the only army that shoots its wounded.” One pastor lamented that *being a pastor is to be abandoned by the denomination*. I asked myself, “Is the church worth the effort?”

The apostle Paul reminds us that “we have this treasure in earthen jars.” We are (1) hard pressed on every side—but not crushed; (2) perplexed but not in despair; (3) persecuted but not abandoned; (4) struck down but not destroyed. We carry His death so that His life may be “revealed in our body” (2 Cor. 4:11).

These words may provide help if they are exegeted, but they also may be understood from another perspective. They are words of feeling. Let them roll over you. These are not words of glory but of struggle. This reality did not start with the modern church; it has always been with us. I had to remember that they crucified Jesus; they did not elect Him chairman of the board. Kingdom work, church work, is tough, demanding, and frustrating. This work does have its rewards, but not for the faint of heart. We are educated to understand and preach the treasure, but, in reality, we spend most of our time on the earthen vessel.

While taking our grandchildren swimming one summer, I noticed that the deep end was occupied by experienced swimmers who were improving their skills, respectful of others, and of the posted rules. The shallow end was dominated by young, inexperienced swimmers who made strong demands on the lifeguard by breaking or challenging the rules made for their safety and the safety of the larger groups of swimmers. All of the noise was coming from the shallow end of the pool. This resembles a church where the immature Christians, regardless of age, are usually the most demanding and manipulative. They are constantly challenging or threatening the authority of the lifeguard and dominating the entire pool. It takes special gifts to become a pastor in the swimming pool that we call “church” (Eph. 4:11).

However, in spite of these issues, I still love the church. I love the church universal, as well as

the church local (red brick, white-columned, with deacons arguing in the parking lot). With all of its dysfunction and flesh marks, with all of its confusion and humanity, the church remains the best thing God has going in this world. We do have this treasure in earthen vessels.

A close reading of history will show that when God does anything in this world, it is done through the church, and most of us have been formed spiritually by our childhood churches.

Like the tree that Zacchaeus was in when he met Jesus—the church holds us so Jesus can find us. We must remember that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Most of the New Testament was addressed to churches, not individuals. The church is pivotal to God’s plan for the world (Ephesians), and is the bride of Christ.

We can easily introduce people to Christ, but it takes a church to help them to grow in grace and knowledge

A scholarly conference recorded at Andrews University exploring the biblical beliefs and political issues relating to Religious Liberty, Civil Rights, and the Church.



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of our Lord and Savior. Let us not forget that the church was in the ghettos before the current crop of activists—like William Booth and the Salvation Army. The church was into education before the government. Note the large number of universities, such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, that were started with the express purpose of educating clergy. The

Serving through the church is a matter of the call and claims of God on your life. The only way one survives and thrives in the church is to know that God has called you to serve this way, and that the church is the bride of Christ.

To those who are believers and have given up on the church and those on the outside who do not

“I’ve seen a dozen churches just like this, and besides, I’m hungry, and we have a dinner reservation. If we stop, we’ll be late,” I explained. Carolyn insisted, and so we stopped.

As we walked up to the church door, I was like a pouting child being forced to do something he did not want to do. We opened the door and the entire atmosphere changed.

A CLOSE READING OF HISTORY WILL SHOW
THAT WHEN GOD DOES ANYTHING IN THIS
WORLD, IT IS DONE THROUGH THE CHURCH.

church has been feeding the hungry and providing community while the general culture was debating political agendas and power. It was the church that broke down the Berlin Wall, led the march on Selma, produced Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights movement, and it was the church that led the war on poverty.

The church is a solid oak tree, not a fragile teacup. It has withstood Roman imperialism, Jewish legalism, pagan optimism, medieval institutionalism, the excesses of the Reformers, wars and rumors of wars, youth quake, modern skepticism, provincialism, resurgent fundamentalism, and heresies in each generation that seem never to die. It can withstand anything our generation can throw at it too.

The church has been victimized by unprepared and selfish clergy, tone-deaf musicians, manipulative members, argumentative deacons, demanding denominations, unloving reformers, and greedy politicians. Still it continues to provide love, affirmation, and community to the fallen in the face of alienation.

understand it, I offer this final word. While taking a short vacation to St. Simons Island on the Georgia coast after a very stressful period of ministry, Carolyn and I had an experience that made this very clear to us. We were tired and in need of rest. Preaching, fund-raising, a building program, and the usual daily responsibility of church leadership had taken its toll on us. We were staying at a small motel on the island and spending our time reading, walking on the beach, and visiting the abundant historical sites on the island.

We had made a reservation for an early dinner one evening and were driving along the marshes on the island made famous by the noted Georgia poet Sidney Lanier, in his famous poem, “The Marshes of Glenn.” We passed Christ Church, a picturesque white church located on the north end of the island. An oak tree stands in a spot near where Charles Wesley had preached, and bears a marker placed there by the state of Georgia. Carolyn insisted that we stop and look at the church.

The sun was setting and the evening light was coming through the beautiful stained-glass windows at just the right angle. The colors in the ancient wooden pews were deep and mellow, and the reflection on the antique silver Communion service at the altar was stunning. We sat on the front pew for a while in total silence, captivated by the entire experience inside this church. As we drove to the restaurant for dinner, neither of us spoke for several minutes. My attitude had changed, and I apologized for the way I had acted. We both concluded from that chance experience that you really cannot understand the church from the outside. To know its real meaning you must be inside; in fact, it must get inside of you.

And now I say to all of the critics of the church—and there are many—if you do not have a church, where do you assemble people to teach them to live by the highest summoning of the human spirit? What do you read that can be called Scripture? How do you sing? How do you celebrate?

The church *is* worth the effort. **M**

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A Christian understanding of **in vitro** fertilization

Editor's note: In an effort to address critical life issues that people face today, Ministry occasionally publishes articles such as this. The goal of such articles is to promote conversation about topics—keeping in mind that the thoughts expressed therein do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or publishers.

Research testifies that the desire to have a baby remains one of the most primal and deep-seated desires of women.¹ Without the biological urge to reproduce, our God-created species would die out. Many women grow up emulating their mothers and planning for their own family: how many kids they want, what they will name them, how they will raise them. Then, once married, many couples desire to raise a family of their own and have biological children. However, now more than ever, some couples find their desires and plans thwarted by infertility. As pressure mounts to have children (from society, family, and even church members), frustrations escalate within themselves and their marriage.

Infertility and the media

Our society has spoken loud and clear about infertility, bombarding

us with advertisements for solutions, setting up icons that miraculously become pregnant, and focusing a significant amount of attention on the glorification of motherhood.

The quick fix to infertility in this “fast food” nation centers around assisted reproduction technologies (ART). Just look at the cover of many magazines and you will see features of otherwise infertile women using surrogates to become pregnant or undergoing in vitro fertilization or artificial insemination. With all the attention on the end result of pregnancy by any means possible, the medical and entertainment industries have not regarded the physical, emotional, and spiritual ramifications of scientifically produced children on the everyday woman. These women are our wives, sisters, and friends. As Christians we want to support them in infertility or get straight answers if we ourselves are dealing with this problem.

The IVF procedure

The goal of in vitro fertilization (IVF) consists of a straightforward process: to take a woman's eggs and a man's sperm, fertilize them outside the body, and then implant them back into the woman's womb

with the goal of pregnancy;² but the process has many complicated steps in between.

Once a couple has concluded that they want to experiment with IVF, the woman will be set up with hormone therapy—taking fertility drugs through injection.³ This can be done from home, and the purpose of injecting these hormones is to stimulate multiple eggs to be produced. Known as “hyperovulation,” a woman begins to produce the many eggs needed for multiple fertilizations. During this time she goes into the clinic for checkups to see how her fertility levels are progressing. Once the doctor is satisfied that more than one egg can be removed, a woman then goes in for minor surgery requiring anesthesia, and the eggs are removed from both ovaries by inserting a long, thin needle through the vagina. Suction on the needle allows the eggs and fluid to be removed.

Semen is obtained from the husband most often through masturbation, although aspiration of the testis with a needle or punctation with an automatic biopsy gun⁴ are also methods of collecting sperm. Once this has been accomplished, the doctor combines the sperm with the newly harvested eggs in hopes

of fertilization, though, in some cases, sperm is injected directly into the eggs. Once the fertilized egg divides, it becomes an embryo. Some embryos are frozen for further use or eventually discarded.⁵ Other “fitter” embryos will be transferred into the woman’s womb. The number of embryos to be transferred is decided between the doctor and the couple. While two to three embryos are recommended, as few as one or as many as six can be transferred. The embryos are then placed in the

should all be considered while making this decision.

Emotional costs are great as well. For most women, IVF is the final attempt to conceive biologically and expectations can be inflated. While a lot of pressure for this costly and unpredictable service exists, stress can occur if spouses differ on how many rounds of in vitro to pursue, how many eggs should be implanted, how many should be frozen, and how many should be brought to term. In addition to

interrupted sex life can destroy the much needed, and God-given, physical bond between husband and wife.

Beyond all this, however, at any step along the way, failure of IVF is possible, forcing the couple to start back at the beginning with hormone therapy. Even after six complete rounds of IVF treatments, the take-home rate of a live baby remains at only 23–70 percent, according to the *New England Journal of Medicine*.⁹ That means 30–77 percent of women

IN WHATEVER PATHS CHRISTIANS CHOOSE
TO TAKE ON THE EMOTIONAL ROAD OF
INFERTILITY, THEY ARE NOT ALONE.

womb by inserting a long, thin tube through the vagina and cervix while the woman is awake.

If the embryos implant into the womb, pregnancy is achieved. At this point, the doctor will advise how many of the implanted embryos should remain and how many should be “selectively reduced” or aborted in favor of healthier embryos. The remaining embryos will then either come to term as infants or be lost in miscarriage.

The drawbacks of IVF

Medical clinics advertise IVF with the emotionally laden promises of taking home a new baby, but what they do not reveal are the long, painful procedures that lead to complete fertilization. Drug therapy, invasive and time-consuming treatments, the ethical considerations of masturbation, destroying fertilized embryos, aborting implanted embryos, and a low success rate

stress, which negatively impacts libido,⁶ the focus taken off natural conception often results in sexual relations either subsiding or ceasing altogether. There are a few reasons for this. If fertility treatments involve injection of hormones into the body, then soreness in the abdomen can make intercourse painful or uncomfortable. Drugs taken to stimulate ovulation amplify emotions, causing mood swings, outbursts, and premenstrual syndromelike symptoms. Also, if progesterone suppositories are being inserted vaginally, one must wait both before and after insertion for sex to make the hormones most efficacious. Leaking suppositories during sex might also affect romance.⁷

However, due to concerns over becoming pregnant “twice” — through IVF and natural sex — and thus carrying too many fetuses, doctors tell patients to avoid sex during IVF treatment.⁸ An

who have invested months of painful and body-altering treatments will not get to hold a biological baby in their arms.

God’s temple, your body

IVF can wreak havoc on a woman’s body and reproductive organs. The body was not made to endure hyperovulation, multiple pregnancies at the same time, and hormonal drugs. In the case of twins or higher-order multiple pregnancies, the mother will more likely develop high blood pressure or anemia,¹⁰ as well as having a higher risk for miscarriage, induced high blood pressure, preeclampsia (protein in the uterus), or gestational diabetes during pregnancy. Women carrying multiple fetuses are also more likely to have hemorrhaging, anemia, or die in childbirth compared with women who are only pregnant with one child at a time.¹¹ The Bible tells us that our “bodies are temples of

the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19, NIV), and although in this specific context Paul addresses sexual union with someone outside of your spouse, this could be relevant to IVF, especially in the case of gamete donors.¹² Even without donors, the Bible gives precedence for treating the body as a place worthy of God. Second Corinthians 6:16 says, “we are the temple of the living God” (NIV), and Jesus, too, refers to His body as a temple (John 2:19). Most Christians believe that taking care of their bodies reflects the image of God, but in vitro may compromise the physical body.

Despite these concerns, women, with their amazing sacrificial instincts, are willing to go through much suffering for the sake of love, and, therefore, even painful events like hormone shots, high blood pressure, fluctuating hormones, natural or caesarean birth, and the after-recovery of childbirth may seem worth the afflictions. These considerations must be weighed by the woman, for she owns her body, but the decision for IVF is not just for the wife to make.

The Bible tells us that in marriage, our bodies are not ours alone but our spouse’s as well (1 Cor. 7:4). Through marriage God unites two different people and makes them “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24, NIV). In marriage, spouses put each other first, attend to physical, emotional, and sexual needs and always seek the best for each other. Husbands are admonished to “love their wives as their own bodies” (Eph. 5:28, NIV), ensuring that their wife honors her body. We take care of our own bodies through proper nutrition, getting enough sleep and exercise, taking time for relaxation and community, and not intentionally harming ourselves with drugs or unnecessary procedures. If the husband would not be willing to put his own body through suffering, biblically he would not want his wife to attempt the same physical suffering. IVF does not just affect the woman; husbands must also determine how in vitro fits

into their obligation to care for their wives as well. But beyond the matrimonial relationship, both spouses should be aware of additional risks to babies born through in vitro.

In the IVF process, embryos may be damaged through handling and exposure. Even if the baby comes to term, a strong likelihood exists that he or she will be born prematurely, with a low birth rate and complications.¹³ This is especially true of multiple births. Premature babies are usually characterized by slower development, a susceptibility to illness, and a higher chance of infant mortality.¹⁴ In addition to these medical complications, girl babies may have higher rates of infertility because of the use of fertility drugs during conception.¹⁵

In the end, couples must come to a unified decision for each other, themselves, and their potential children. Both spouses need to determine if IVF and the results of the process are glorifying to God, and consider if the physical risks of IVF—for the wife and the potential children—seem appropriate and wise.

Biblical stewardship

Fertility clinics are not quick to advertise the financial cost of IVF. These clinics subsist as for-profit organizations in an industry that can make a lot of money on the pain of couples wanting children. Each round of IVF treatments costs about US\$15,000.¹⁶ While not uncommon to undergo several cycles of in vitro, many couples simply cannot afford to invest the US\$90,000 that six rounds of in vitro demand in order to have a moderately successful chance of conceiving.

Couples may feel stress due to financial considerations. As more time and money goes into the quest for a biological baby, it is not unusual for couples to dip into savings accounts, retirement plans, or other funds to pay for treatment. Tithing, charitable giving, and support of extended family members can fall by the wayside.

Of course, one cannot put a price tag on love and family, but one can measure their spending against a biblical background. Christians might consider the biblical principle of stewardship and determine how their use of money stands up against Jesus’ own words about giving to the needy and serving God above money (Matt. 6).

God’s sovereignty

All this comes down to a fundamental question: *Do I believe that God’s plan and purpose for my life can include infertility?* I think many times we try to force God’s hand into a different path for ourselves by altering circumstances beyond our control. Our feeling of entitlement—to better health, a different personality, a certain lifestyle—blocks the potential that God has for us to utilize whatever He has given us, even if this potential goes beyond our understanding.

The Bible reassures us that God does have a plan for our lives. Romans 8:28 says, “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (NIV). This does not mean that we will get everything we want, but it does mean that we are secure in the plans of God. When the pain and isolation involved in infertility comes into the lives of a Christian couple, an appropriate response can be found in the Scriptures.


The Bible tells many stories of infertile couples: Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 16; 18; 21), Rachel and Jacob (Gen. 29:31–30:24; 35:16–25), Hannah and Elkanah (1 Sam. 1), and Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1), but the Bible also has beautiful promises for those who could not have children. The Lord will not shame women for being unable to produce biologically but will treat them as equals (see Isa. 54:4). At a time when a husband could divorce a woman for not giving him children, this passage demonstrates that God’s love and acceptance transcends worldly values. Later in Isaiah, God says that it is better to

receive an eternal heavenly status than have a worldly legacy that will pass away (Isa. 56:3b–5). For this reason, God promises those who cannot have children an eternal legacy in the Lord. God knows that the desire to leave a “name” after one dies is a goal for many people, and we are reassured that in heaven, we will have that legacy; the Lord magnificently provides for us in His eternal plan.

Conclusion

Yet we live on earth right now, and even an eternal promise may not dull the yearning for children. So some couples choose to bypass the frustration of IVF and seek more reliable routes to satisfy the desire for raising children, such as adoption, fostering, acting as a sponsor parent to children in need, or a change in their vocation so they are around children more. Others decide to live child-free and invest their time and

money in spiritual progeny through contributions to the church and missions.

In whatever paths Christians choose to take on the emotional road of infertility, they are not alone. Not only should the couple sort out the issues and options surrounding the desire to have a family, but all people—couples and singles, male and female—in the congregation and church body at large need to support the mission of Christ by not reducing a person’s worth to if or how many children they can have biologically, but by supporting couples in producing many children spiritually. We are all called to make new disciples for Christ. 

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Transformed by His Word

On January 1, 2012, I began to study the books of Ezra and Nehemiah for 60 days, studying for 60 minutes each day. I learned the following important lessons.

If I, and I or the family of God at large, need to experience spiritual revival and reformation, we need to study the Word of God seriously. I do not mean just reading the Word of God but studying God’s Word. Studying involves listening, internalizing the meaning, and applying the lessons to our lives. When the Israelites studied the Word of God, they began to experience a

desire to return to the ways of the Lord (Neh. 8:1–8, 13–18). The outcome will result in individual reformation.

Reformation changes our desire to live what is written in the Bible (Ezra 10:3). The Word of God is the standard. Practical experience in the process of reformation includes (1) asking for forgiveness, (2) choosing to give up sin, and (3) starting to obey the will of God.

In the times of Nehemiah, the areas that most needed reformation were (1) avoiding associations leading to conformity to worldly patterns and

practices, thus forsaking the will of God, (2) observing the seventh-day Sabbath by doing only those things that are good, and (3) not forsaking the house of God, supporting it with our gifts of offerings and tithes (Neh. 10; 13).

O God of Israel, please bring a revival and reformation in me and in us as Your children. Amen.

—PARDON MWANSA IS A VICE PRESIDENT FOR THE WORLD CHURCH OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS, SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES.





The reality of **spiritualistic manifestations**: An interview with **Kwabena Donkor**

Willie Hucks (WH): Dr. Donkor, thank you so much for taking the time to be interviewed by *Ministry*. You edited the book *The Church, Culture, and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*.^{*} What was the motivation for publishing this book? And could you tell us a bit about what went into selecting the authors?

Kwabena Donkor (KD): This all began when the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists held the Faith and Science Conference during the early part of the last decade. There were meetings in Africa, and the former director of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI), Ángel Rodríguez, happened to attend one. At this particular meeting, one of our theologians, Brempong Owusu-Antwi, who wrote one of the chapters of the book, made a presentation on an unusual topic. I think it was on something like “magic and the end times” or something to that effect. The response from the audience was amazing. So, subsequent to the presentations, Owusu-Antwi and the associate ministerial secretary of the West-Central Africa Division (WAD), Andrews Ewoo, spoke to

Dr. Rodríguez and said, “Listen, we have some issues here in Africa.” They presented a plethora of issues, problems about members dabbling in spirits, even ministers confronting spirits—all kinds of things. So, Dr. Rodríguez came back to the Institute and decided that something had to be done about the issues raised. This was about the same time I was coming on board at the BRI. So we decided to meet and see what we can do about it.

We had the first meeting in Africa, on the compound of Valley View University in Ghana. We invited many theologians and some administrators. We really didn’t know where we were going with this whole thing because there was really no precedent for it. So we met, spoke, shared, and outlined some topics that could address the problem being described to us. As the topics were being outlined, we asked ourselves, “Who can address this or that topic?” Some of the people who met with us volunteered to write on some topics or suggested other scholars who eventually became partners in this writing project.

WH: How pervasive is the reality of spiritualistic manifestations on the African continent?

KD: You’ll notice how we have tried to describe the issue with the phrase *spiritualistic manifestations*. We are talking about a very complex phenomenon that includes witchcraft, magic, voodoo, spells, curses, demon possessions, and several other kinds of things that can be included under this umbrella of spiritualistic manifestations. How pervasive are these phenomena in Africa? Quite pervasive. Permit me to answer the question by making this general observation. For a typical African, these things have real currency in daily life. I mean, it’s not like I have to sit and ask myself, “Are these things really true? Are they really real?” This is just a part of life in Africa. So, it’s quite pervasive. Let me illustrate. In disposing of articles like hair cuttings and nail clippings, the African is not just mindful of issues of hygiene but also of the possibility of someone laying their hands on them and thereby causing them spiritual harm. Many Christians, including Adventists living in

Europe or America, when visiting their native countries will keep their dates of arrival and departure secret for fear that they may be harmed by spiritual forces. This is not to say that spiritualistic manifestations are on the minds of Africans all the time, but their occurrence does not come as a surprise to your typical African south of the Sahara desert.

WH: Is it solely an African issue?

KD: It is not, really. Not too long ago, I was surprised, while on assignment overseas, when a union ministerial secretary came to me, and asked me whether I could recommend an exorcist for his field, because it was an important issue there. When we launched the book at the world headquarters this past fall, the reaction from delegates from East Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Latin America reassured me that the problem of spiritualistic manifestations is evident around the world, not just in Africa.

WH: Are there differences between the manifestations of demonic activity that we see in events recorded in Scripture and what is seen in modern-day settings?

KD: I think we are looking at pretty much the same phenomena. Take, for example, demon possession, which is one of the phenomena we talk about in the book. We described this phenomenon as we see it in the Bible and outlined its symptoms. They include demonstration of unusual strength, foaming at

the mouth, wailing, and crying out loud. We then provided a few cases of demon possession as we experienced them in Africa, and compared them to the Bible accounts. It is clear it's about the same thing. The Bible talks about sorcery, which includes magic and witchcraft, and this looks



KD: There is a whole chapter in the book devoted to this question of casting out of demons. But let me make a few fundamental remarks here about some things we can learn. First, in Scripture, demons are presented as real. For a long time, I think because even as a church, we had not faced these issues squarely, there had been the tendency among many to relegate demons to the realm of superstition. Superstition was modernity's response to spiritualistic manifestations but it flies in the face of biblical evidence and the real-life experiences of many Africans. There are some who still cling to the notion of superstition. I am not denying that some reports of spiritualistic manifestations may border on the superstitious but to bracket them all out as superstition is really a modern thing.

The Bible provides the needed corrective, and we can learn from Scripture that this is all part of reality. How can Scripture then help us deal with these phenomena? It's interesting that when you look, for instance, at encounters with demon possession

and casting out demons, the Bible never really gives a technique or formula. And that, I think, is something important we can learn. See, most practitioners of deliverance ministries we see have techniques and formulas that they develop and follow. Not so in Scripture. It's amazing. Never a set formula, methodology, or prescribed technique. All that happened with the disciples is that they were endued with power, and they went out in the name of

like what we are seeing in Africa. Another biblical experience very rampant on the African continent is apparitions such as ghosts. The notion of ancestors and ancestor veneration in Africa makes the issue of ghosts a very live and persistent spiritualistic manifestation.

WH: What lessons can we learn from Scripture as it relates to casting out demons today, in the twenty-first century?

Jesus and cast out demons and evil spirits. So, as we relate to this issue in the twenty-first century, Scripture will teach us first and foremost that spiritualistic manifestations are real. It will also teach us the biblical way of understanding and confronting these issues, and that is what the book is all about.

WH: What can pastors, who read this interview, do about such manifestations that they encounter? If possible, how can we, as pastors,

think pastors can take a look at and adopt or adapt as necessary. In the guidelines, we have identified specific phenomena. For example, we take witchcraft, and say, "Suppose a member would come to you and say, 'I have witchcraft.' Or suppose one came and said, 'I have been a victim of a curse.' How would you go about understanding what is going on?" We provide some kind of diagnosis, and then give specific guidelines as to how you would go about ministering and helping such

one sign that tells me we are in the last days is the phenomenal spread of spiritualism and the charismatic influence throughout churches in Africa and elsewhere. This is a huge thing. So in Africa, we see spiritualism expressing itself in forms akin to the traditional religion. In the West, what are we seeing? There is talk about the new spirituality, New Age spirituality, contemplative spirituality, emergent spirituality, and things like this. And see how the whole phenomenon is growing! What is

THE BIBLE PROVIDES THE NEEDED
CORRECTIVE, AND WE CAN LEARN
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PART OF REALITY.

instruct or assist our churches in addressing such manifestations?


KD: I think that, first of all, pastors should help our members understand that these forces, these phenomena, are real. Beyond this affirmation, however, pastors should help our members internalize the truth that at the Cross all demonic powers were defeated and subjected to the sovereignty of Christ. But I suspect your question has to do with practical ways in which pastors can address the problem of spiritualistic manifestations among their members. I have said that there isn't a set formula or technique to address these things. But throughout the book, and especially in an appendix at the back of the book, we have a set of guidelines that I

a person. And we have done this for all kinds of phenomena in the set of guidelines we have provided in the appendix.

WH: Do you have any closing thoughts for our pastors and other ministers?

KD: What I find significant is that we understand from prophecy that towards the closing scenes of earth's history, spiritualism is going to be a big issue. I find it quite interesting and instructive that in Africa, for some strange reason, even though these issues have been with us and within the church all the time, it is beginning to rear its head in a quite unique way—a way that we had not known before. I have said in some places that for me the

this but the growth of spiritualism? And I could go on and on, not to talk about the growing alliances between science and spirituality in the new physics. So, what I have to say is that this issue we are addressing in Africa is beginning to tell us what Adventism has believed all these years, that spiritualism will be a last-day event. I think those times are upon us.

WH: Dr. Donkor, thank you very much for spending this time with us and helping our readers understand the reality of spiritualistic manifestations—that this is truly a spiritual battle. 

* Kwabena Donkor, ed., *The Church, Culture, and Spirits: Adventism in Africa* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2011).

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How should we interpret the opening chapters of Genesis?

Some of the most controversial chapters in the Bible are Genesis 1–11. Many scientists have argued that everything in the universe, including planet Earth and the life on it, came about by purely natural means—that God had nothing to do with its origins. In direct contrast, the first 11 chapters of Genesis assert that God, by the power of His spoken word, created everything—the sun, moon, stars, this planet, and all life on it.

The key challenge to the Genesis claim comes as a result of the scientific study of nature—what believers refer to as “God’s Second Book.” As modern scientists have studied the earth—particularly through the disciplines of geology and paleontology—they have observed phenomena in the layers of the earth’s crust that they interpret as requiring millions of years to form. In addition, scientists have noticed a sequence of fossils in the geologic column that they suggest shows change or evolution from simple life forms to more complex, modern ones. Finally, as scientists have studied certain radioactive elements in the geologic strata, they have seen that the lowest rocks seem to be very old—some hundreds of millions of years—and that the upper layers gradually show less age. (It should be remembered that most scientists work within a

worldview that rejects the idea of God *a priori*—before reaching any conclusion whatsoever—so the explanation for all phenomena encountered are interpreted within a purely naturalistic philosophy.)

Putting these observations together—the large number of thick strata, fossil sequences, and radiometric dating—scientists have concluded that the earth and life on it took millions of years to form. This broadly accepted conclusion contradicts the common understanding of the biblical account of origins: God created life on the world by the power of His spoken word in six literal days a few thousand years ago.

Influence of modern scientific concepts on biblical scholars

Since the 1800s, many biblical scholars have been strongly influenced by the findings of science in the areas of geology and paleontology as well as by the naturalistic philosophy for understanding the world in a manner that removes God from the picture. These scholars have concluded that the Bible should likewise be viewed through a naturalistic lens. Thus, disregarding Scripture’s own description of the revelation/inspiration process, they do not study the Bible as a book of divine origin, but rather consider

it a book of purely human origin. Consequently, the Bible is viewed or understood as unreliable since humans are clearly capable of making mistakes. For these scholars, the fact that the Bible was composed in antiquity—before the advent of modern science—makes it even more likely that the Bible’s description of origins is erroneous. In view of this critical understanding of the Bible, biblical historical critics proposed an alternate process by which the Bible came into existence. This alternate process denied the Bible’s self-claim of supernatural origin, replacing it with the view that the text was the outcome of a purely natural, human process.

In the case of Genesis, scholars suggested that the book was *not* written sometime before 1450 B.C. by Moses under inspiration. Rather, Genesis was written and edited by a number of unnamed authors (often referred to as J, E, and P) and “redactors” over a period of several centuries between 1100 and 450 B.C. Scholars who promote this view—often referred to as “historical critics”—have offered several lines of evidence for their reconstructions of Genesis. They point to phenomena in the Genesis text such as apparent doublets, contradictions, and anachronisms in an attempt to show the complex, diachronic manner in

which Genesis was composed. The identification of these purported phenomena in the text has led them to suggest, for example, that Genesis 1 and 2 present contradictory Creation accounts written at different times and for different purposes.

Their rejection of the supernatural manifested in the world has also led these critics to reject any supernatural or miraculous claims in the Bible, such as the idea that God could create the earth and its life-forms merely by speaking and that this occurred over the course of only six days. The critics prefer to accept the conclusions reached by the bulk of contemporary science—that the earth and its life-forms came into existence through purely natural processes over millions of years. Also rejected is the idea that the entire surface of the earth, as we know it, was destroyed by a divinely initiated flood. For them, no global flood occurred. And if there was any flood at all, it was only local in nature.

The biblical critics also argue that the Creation account in Genesis is full of naive ideas that prove the account cannot be historically true or scientifically plausible. For example, they claim the Hebrews possessed a naive cosmology—an unscientific understanding of the structure of the universe. Pulling together different biblical texts, and making some assumptions about what neighboring ancient Near Eastern peoples thought, the biblical critics reconstructed what they thought the Hebrews would have actually believed about the nature of the universe. In this reconstructed Hebrew cosmos, the heavens were seen to be like a hollow upside-down metal bowl resting over a flat earth, with the sun, moon, and stars fixed to the underside of the dome where humans could see them at night. The dome was also thought to have gates allowing for the occasional flow of water (rain) from the waters above the heavens. The critics assumed as well that the ancient Hebrews believed in large subterranean seas and a literal hell.

Impact on evangelical Christian interpretation

Modern scientific concepts also made a significant impact on certain schools of evangelical interpretation of Genesis. The dilemma for these evangelicals is to maintain a high view of Scripture (contra the historical critics) while acknowledging the conclusions of modern science. The approach these evangelicals have taken has been to “de-literalize” the early chapters of Genesis. For these individuals the days of Creation are not literal; the Flood is only local if it happened at all. This allows these evangelicals to avoid pitting the truthfulness of the Bible against the understandings of modern science.

This evangelical, nonliteral interpretive approach to Genesis has been roundly and severely criticized by liberal historical critics. For example, the respected Old Testament scholar James Barr (who does not accept the biblical Creation account, but thought that the writer of Genesis did), wrote

so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that:

1. creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience;
2. the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the biblical story,
3. Noah’s flood was understood to be world-wide and extinguished all human and animal life except for those in the ark.¹

Barr’s comments show that, in his opinion, the evangelical attempt to “de-literalize” the creation account in Genesis was not acceptable.

Responding to critical arguments

Each of the arguments put forth by the historical critics for the noninspired, alternate origin of Genesis has been thoroughly critiqued by biblical scholars who reject the historical-critical method. For example, careful analysis of the word for “day” (*yom*) in the Creation account shows it does not mean an indefinite period of time, but rather, a literal day of about 24 hours such as we know today.² Thus, the Bible does, indeed, state that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Similarly, an analysis of the Hebrew word for “flood” (*mabbul*) shows it to be a unique word for a global water catastrophe leading to the literal destruction of the entire world—a “de-creation” of the work God executed during Creation week.³ As for the idea that the Hebrews had a naive view of the cosmos, recent studies of the Hebrew word for “firmament” (*raqia*) show it does not mean an upside-down metal bowl.⁴ Indeed, a review of the history of critical biblical scholarship shows that nineteenth-century scholars were the inventors of the belief that the ancient peoples (Hebrews and others) conceived of a flat earth with a metallic, half-domed sky.⁵

Other challenges concerning the unity and antiquity of the Creation/Flood account have also been addressed. For example, the presence of doublets (two different names for God [*Elohim* and *Yahweh*]⁶ and the telling of the Creation story twice in Genesis 1 and 2) has been shown to be a common narrative technique in ancient Near Eastern literature, and thus does not necessarily reflect the existence of more than one author.⁷ Apparent contradictions—such as whether plants were created on day four of Creation week (Genesis 1) or were not added until after the Creation week was finished (Genesis 2)—have been convincingly explained. In the example mentioned, the Hebrew words for “plants” in chapter 1 are different from those used in chapter 2.⁸ The

plants created on day four in chapter 1 are those of fruit trees suitable for food. In contrast, the plants found in chapter 2 include thorns and thistles or certain grasslike plants requiring considerable work to bring to harvest. The context of chapter 2 clearly shows this second group of plants came about as the result of sin.

Finally, the appearance of the so-called anachronisms in Genesis—for example, the appearance of tents and camels in the second millennium B.C.—has been shown, in many cases, not to be anachronisms at all. Renowned Egyptologist and scholar Dr. Kenneth Kitchen has shown that tents were common in the ancient Near East in the second millennium—just as the Bible describes.⁹ Similarly, the presence of camels prior to the time of David has also been well documented in recent times.¹⁰ I had the privilege of contributing to this conclusion upon discovering an ancient petroglyph (rock carving) of a man leading a camel by a rope in a Bronze Age context (pre-1400 B.C.) north of the traditional location of Mount Sinai (Wadi Nasib).


A number of literary features in Genesis, such as the structure of Genesis 1–11, are more typical of the second millennium before the Christian era than the first—suggesting that much of Genesis reflects earlier times. For example, several second millennium “primeval histories” exist—origin stories such as the Akkadian “Atrahasis Epic” and the Sumerian “Eridu Genesis” with which Genesis 1–11 have much in common. Among these featured is a clear organization by parts—all three of these primeval history stories contain three sections—a creation story, the rise of a problem, and a judgment by flood.

While ancient Mesopotamian cultures produced later flood stories (like the Gilgamesh Epic) and creation stories (like the Enuma Elish), these later versions were no longer “complete” primeval histories containing all three elements—creation, problem, and

flood.¹¹ The fact that all three exist in Genesis would indicate that Genesis was composed at the same time as its Mesopotamian counterparts—in the second millennium. That fits with the biblical view that Moses wrote the book of Genesis sometime before 1400 B.C. Of course, the Genesis version differs significantly from its Mesopotamian counterparts. In fact, several scholars have noted that the author of Genesis was deliberately challenging the Mesopotamian version by being “polemical.”¹² That is, the author of Genesis was disagreeing with the Mesopotamian version of creation and claiming to provide the correct version of how things came into being.

It is worth noting that a number of literary features in Genesis 1–11 suggest the author intended to provide a historical narrative of earth’s early history—not simply a theological statement or a nonliteral, literary depiction of Creation, such as a poem, parable, saga, myth, or other ways of writing. First, for example, the unity of the narrative of Genesis 1–11 continues into the rest of Genesis and, indeed, runs into the book of Exodus. Together, these books tell a continuous story from Creation, through Abraham, Joseph, the descent down to Egypt, and the Exodus. In fact, many scholars have identified the Creation story of Genesis 1–11 as a prologue to the rest of the Pentateuch. Second, a certain Hebrew verbal form exists—the waw-consecutive—that is typically used for historical narratives (such as is found in books like the Chronicles and Kings). The waw-consecutive is found in the Creation account as well, suggesting historical intent and purpose for the narrative. A third literary feature clearly points to the “historical impulse” of these chapters: the appearance of *toledoth* formulas, usually translated as “these are the generations of . . .” Finally, many elements in ancient Near East parallels of primeval histories can be shown to be historical.¹³

Summary

Taken together, the evidence suggests that it remains eminently reasonable to conclude that (1) Genesis is in fact an early literary work—the product of the second millennium before the Christian era, (2) the text was composed as a unified account, although there may have been some minor editorial work at a later time, and (3) the text was intended to be understood by its authors as an authentic account of earth’s origins in which the world was created in six literal days and later destroyed by a global flood. 

- 1 James Barr, Oriël professor of the interpretation of the Holy Scripture, Oxford University, England, in a letter to David C. C. Watson, April 23, 1984. Barr, consistent with his neo-orthodox views, does not believe Genesis, but he understood what the Hebrew so clearly taught. It was only the perceived need to harmonize with the alleged age of the earth that led people to think anything different—it was nothing to do with the text itself.
- 2 See Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time?” *Origins* 21, 1 (1994): 5–38. Hasel shows that the Hebrew clearly means literal days in Genesis 1.
- 3 See Kenneth A. Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1–11:26* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 365, 366, where he argues that the author is using *mabbul* to refer to a cataclysm that was worldwide in scope.
- 4 See Robert C. Newman, *The Biblical Firmament: Vault or Vapor?* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 2000), 150. Newman’s position is supported by commentators such as Mathews.
- 5 Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991). For an exhaustive discussion about what the ancients since the time of Christ thought about the heavens, see Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 6 See Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1966), 121–123.
- 7 See Isaac M. Kikawada, “The Double Creation of Mankind in Enki and Ninmah, Atrahasis 11–351, and Genesis 1–2,” *Iraq* 45 (1983): 43–45; and Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 21–25.
- 8 See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), especially his discussion of plants in Genesis 1 and 2.
- 9 Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1977), 58, 59. See also James Hoffmeier, “Tents in Egypt and the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 7, 3 (1977): 13–28, and Newman (2000).
- 10 Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 338, 339.
- 11 See Kitchen (1977), 31–36, and Kitchen (2003), 422–427 for a more extensive discussion.
- 12 Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81–102.
- 13 For a discussion of the historicity of the Genesis narratives, see Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 49, 50; again, see Kitchen (2003), 422–427, who discusses the historical aspects of the early Genesis accounts in their ancient Near Eastern literary contexts. However, it should be noted that Longman and Kitchen do not accept the literal Creation account in Genesis 1–11.

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Strong in the broken places: Why do the innocent suffer?

I can't let go! I can't let go!"

The lifeguard on the tower snapped his head to the sound of the voice. There, to his horror, he saw a young man being electrocuted, hands frozen on an ungrounded turnstile leading into the swimming pool. In two leaps, he was at his side. First, he tried to pry the hands loose, but the electric jolt made him quickly let go. He then gave a hard shove and broke him loose. He began applying CPR—no response. When the paramedics arrived, they tried electroshocks to revive his heart—no response. They rushed him to the hospital, and emergency measures were taken—no response. He was dead.

So died my nephew, Josué Andrés Rosado, a freshman physics major, at the swimming pool of a Christian college on May 17, 1992. He was 18 years old.

How do we relate to God when an unexpected tragedy or catastrophe suddenly strikes in our lives: be it a tsunami, financial collapse, unemployment, death, divorce, disfigurement, injury, or other disaster?

I would suggest that it is not primarily the events themselves in our lives that get us down but the emotions due to these events.

Looking even closer, it is not only the emotions but the *energy* itself powering the emotions.

So what can be done about the negative energy and overwhelming emotions that arise, even within us as Christians, when tragedy (as it inevitably does) strikes? Is there any way to get past a negative event that may seem so devastating that we do not think we will ever get over it?

Is life fair?

Why do bad things happen to good people? persists as the perennial question at the heart of human existence and the one which makes many people express anger at God.¹

Is life fair? This is one area where most Christians still struggle in their faith-walk with God. Even many pastors, life counselors, and medical staff have not been able to adequately address this question. I had no acceptable answer to this question even when I led out at Josué's funeral. Only recently, more than 20 years later, have I come to grips with the truth of what lies behind this dilemma.

The issue of the innocent suffering is so important that the oldest book in the Holy Scriptures, the

book of Job, deals with this human query. This is the oldest question ever raised to the face of God, and at the heart of this question lies a deeper issue, the question of the character of God.

As Christians, we believe that divinity is expressed as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Godhead is omnipotent—all powerful; omnipresent—all places; and omniscient—all knowing. Now, these three divine, interconnected qualities give us problems. In the face of catastrophe, we often focus on God's omnipotence and omnipresence: If God is omnipotent then *why* did He not stop it? If God is omnipresent then *where* was He when I needed Him? *Ultimately, how can I trust such a God?*

We must also examine the third quality of the character of God, the one that we tend to overlook: God's omniscience, His all-encompassing knowledge of all the factors and forces at play in any given event or circumstance.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways my ways,"
declares the LORD.

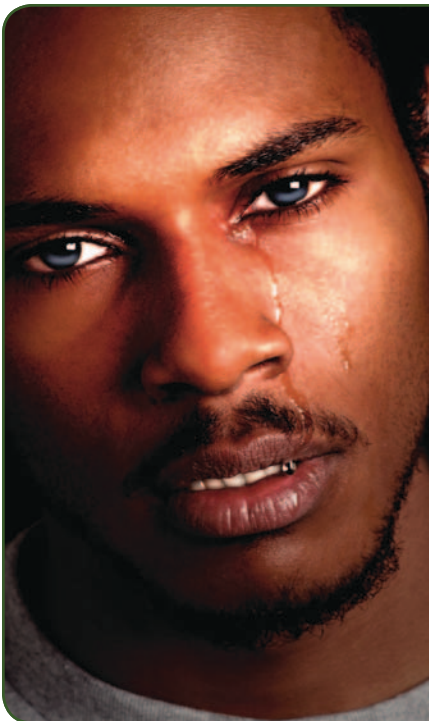
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts”
(Isa. 55:8, 9, NASB).

If God always answered the Why questions at every life detour, disaster, and doubt, what would be the need for faith? Where would free

Consider Job, who, more than anyone else, could have cried out, “Life isn’t fair!” and done as his wife suggested, “ ‘Curse God, and die’ ” (Job 2:9, NIV). He exclaimed instead, “ ‘The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD’ ” (1:21, NASB). Therefore, “ ‘though he slay me, yet will I hope in him’ ” (13:15, NIV). The difficulties Job experienced led him to the inner recesses of his soul, and he surren-

years. The closer people get to 100 when they die, the fairer life is; the closer to birth, the more unfair. At what point on this continuum are we willing to accept death as a normal aspect of life? At age 80? At 70? 50? 35? Or 18, the age my nephew died? For sure, anything below this makes life unfair, right?

On the other hand, if we say, “Life is fair,” what are we saying other than that evil people, including



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will be if God’s plan for us was so airtight that there was no room for doubt, and we only had to follow a prescribed drama? God does, though, promise this: “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you’ ” (Jer. 29:11, NIV).

God has no intention to bring us harm. He does not take pleasure in seeing humans suffer. So, *did something slip past God, which took Him by surprise?* No. *Can we then put our trust in a loving, sovereign, and all-knowing God, who has our best interest at heart, and accept the realization that He sees the end from the beginning?*

dered at the deepest level to God’s wisdom, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and love. In the end, he declared, “ ‘I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You’ ” (42:5, NASB). Job went from knowing *about* God to *experiencing* God. People who respond to life’s hard experiences with faith often come out on the other side as nominal believers no longer, despite life’s unfairness.

Continuum of life

Also, where does the idea that life is not fair come from? It seems to be from setting up a false continuum of life, an age range from birth to 100

children, get what they deserve? Who believes that?

Instead, what they mean is that, in the larger scheme of things, beyond our limited human perspective, divine forces are at play that will ultimately override the manifested evil for the highest good, even though this may not be immediately evident. Surrendering to the sovereignty of God means accepting the truth that ultimately goodness will prevail even when there is no present evidence for such a conclusion. This is faith.

There is justice in the universe; no one gets away with anything. “Do not be deceived [do not think

you can get away with it], God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7, NKJV). God ultimately will have the last word. That is what the death of Christ was all about—love triumphing over evil.

In the story of Joseph and his brothers, the brothers’ intention was evil, to kill him, but when a financial opportunity arose, they sold him as a slave instead. Years later, Joseph forgave his brothers and said, “‘You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good’” (Gen. 50:20, NKJV). Joseph’s surrender and trust in God opened the potentiality of miracles so that God was able to work through him to bring about His desired purposes. What if Joseph had become bitter over his shattered dreams and life setbacks, and had turned his back on God? However, because of his full trust in the sovereignty of God, Joseph recognized the larger purposes of God and told his brothers, “It was not you who sent me here, but God” (Gen. 45:8, NIV). What a powerful statement of faith and insight!²

Jesus and the death of Lazarus

Let us not propose that God does not understand—take the case of Jesus and Lazarus. Jesus knew that Lazarus was gravely ill, and He could have rushed to his side when He first received the news. Yet He chose to linger for four days until Lazarus died, and only then did He go to the side of Mary and Martha.

Why had He not intervened earlier? After all, they were His closest friends. God often allows events to happen for the highest good—things of which we may have no understanding. So, Jesus delayed His coming in order to bring them, and us, to that same choice point to which He brought Job, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, the three Hebrew worthies, and all the “faith heroes” in the faith chapter of Hebrews 11.

The choice is to put our total trust in Him for He is God, even when His purposes and plans conflict with our expectations of a loving God. God desires faith and trust, and this faith changes our experience of brokenness.

This shows why he told Martha, “‘Your brother will rise again,’” (John 11:23, NKJV). “Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’” (v. 24, NKJV). Jesus looks directly at her and says, *Martha, focus! Look at Me! I am not talking about the final resurrection; I am talking about right now! Your brother will rise again. But you need to experience a “mini” death and resurrection right now, dying to erroneous ideas about life not being fair and all those “if onlys,” and resurrect to a trust in Me. Look at Me!* “‘I am the resurrection and the life. . . . Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe’” (v. 25–27, NKJV).

And this is the same question that God asks of us in our darkest hours. *Do you still regard Me as a Friend—am I still Lord of your life? Does your faith still hold in the face of unexplainable events?*

The resurrection of Jesus proves that life is fair, that God is in control, even over death. For that reason, the doctrine of the Resurrection is arguably the greatest in all of Christianity. If it were not for the Resurrection, Christ’s death on the cross would have been a meaningless act of martyrdom. Everything He taught about God would have been a lie. “If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised” (1 Cor. 15:14, 15, NRSV).

The doctrine of the Resurrection confirms the veracity of the gospel and makes clear the truth that life is

indeed fair. This is why Paul is able to say with confidence, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 57, NRSV). Victory over what? Victory over *doubt* that God is in charge, victory over *despair* for not fully trusting God, victory over *death* as the last enemy, and finally, victory over *disbelief* in the truth of God.

Conclusion

Hemingway said, “The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places.”³ How? At times like this we have but two choices: “Curse God and die,” as Job’s wife recommended, or Job’s response, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” That’s it. In the moment of brokenness, we must ultimately come to our own decision on whether life is fair or not, whether God is love or not, and whether He is all powerful or not. Suddenly, our faith must be examined. We find out we can no longer rely on what we may have heard secondhand about God. We must find it for ourselves in that decisive moment, since “Truth is verifiable only by identity with it and not by knowing about it.”⁴

There can be no faith or surrender unless we make the leap to put our trust in Him, who is invisible and in a situation not understandable. No one can surrender for us, and no one can have faith for us. Jesus will reveal Himself as Infinite Love just as He did to Joseph, Mary, Martha, and countless others who have turned to Him at such moments and declared, “Lord, I believe,” even when 18-year-olds are electrocuted. **M**

1 Julie J. Exline, Crystal L. Park, Joshua M. Smyth, and Michael P. Carey, “Anger Toward God: Social-Cognitive Predictors, Prevalence, and Links With Adjustment to Bereavement and Cancer,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100, no. 1, (2011): 129–148.
 2 The implications of the story of Joseph to the African American experience and slavery, as well as to the Native American experience, are mind-boggling.
 3 Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929).
 4 David R. Hawkins, *I: Reality and Subjectivity* (West Sedona, AZ: Veritas Publishing, 2003), 164.

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Redemption in Genesis: The Crossroads of Faith and Reason

by John S. Nixon.

Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2011.

John Nixon's book *Redemption in Genesis* has given me a faith lift. His introduction and the eight chapters germinated new sermon

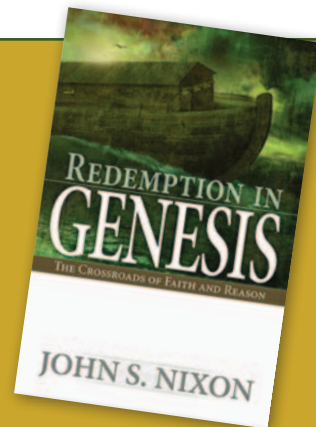
Nixon challenged my thinking when he observed that "faith and reason are interrelated and interdependent, and they cooperate in the search for truth" (15). Citing Job's painful losses, the author admits that sin has clouded our reasoning. Job's victimization seemed unreasonable. "Had Job relied on his faculties of reason to deal with what had become of his life, he would have taken his wife's advice" (16).

Of note is Nixon's premise regarding Job's comprehension of God. Can God be trusted? Yes, by the testimony from Job's own life. "Job was a faith giant. He didn't need to

permit our reasoning to be subject to divine revelation? Nixon offers four guidelines for faithful reasoning: (1) "humbly acknowledge the limits of human reason," (2) "maintain consistent faithfulness to God," (3) "offer complete obedience to God," and (4) "give priority to faith" (17, 18).

The eight chapters of *Redemption in Genesis* speak to matters of theological import. Nixon has carefully woven into his discussion a literal six-day Creation week, the punishment of the wicked, the judgment motif, Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice, God's wrath, the obedience of

NIXON CHALLENGED MY THINKING WHEN HE OBSERVED THAT "FAITH AND REASON ARE INTERRELATED AND INTERDEPENDENT, AND THEY COOPERATE IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH."



seed thoughts in my mind. The author clearly addresses faith's pre-eminence over reason. His balanced appeal calls for "faithful reasoning" as his readers pursue Bible study (13). There are those who would trump faith with reason; however, Nixon stands firmly for faith as "essential to pleasing Him (see Hebrews 11:6)" (13). He explains that the believer's challenge is not faith versus reason nor the rational versus the irrational but a category of the spiritual realm, the superrational (14).

know all that was going on in order to maintain his integrity" (16). He trusted God "because he knew that God was bigger than he could comprehend, and that was all he needed to know" (17). Nixon posits that faith is "ready to admit that some things happen only by the providence of God" while "reason may be arrogant and sure of itself" (17).

How do we approach a document expressing God's thoughts? Do we charge into our study from the laboratory of science or do we

grace, the Spirit-filled life, and the community of believers.

Nixon addresses contemporary issues in theology—issues that polarize individuals. This book has motivated me to pursue more of the redemptive principles in Genesis. It has brought me cause to pause and consider my personal journey to Canaan. **M**

—Reviewed by Steven Poenitz, MDiv, evangelism coordinator and ministerial secretary, Cicero, Indiana, United States.

Inter-American Division's first Urban Ministries Summit

Miami, Florida, United States—During the Seventh-day Adventist Church's first Urban Ministries Summit, May 7, 2012, in Inter-America, the church leadership pledged to better connect with the more than 36 million people living in three of the region's largest cities: Mexico City, Mexico; Bogota, Colombia; and Caracas, Venezuela.

Experts from the Office of Adventist Mission and international authorities on urban evangelism met in Miami to train more than 100 church leaders from the Inter-American Division (IAD) on best metropolitan ministry practices. "Our intention for this summit is to equip church leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary for unique focus on the cities," said **Samuel Telemaque**, Adventist Mission coordinator for the church in Inter-America.

For a church with more than 150 years of existence, "our methods have not been working in the large cities," said **Gary Krause**, Adventist Mission director for the world church. Krause suggested that Adventist churches and institutions located in urban regions should serve as centers of influence in the community. "Instead of expecting them to come to us, we go to

them like Jesus did," Krause said. Evangelism is not a spectator sport, Krause suggested. "Jesus mingled, showed sympathy. He ministered to needs, won confidence, and bid people to follow Him," he said.

Participating in marathons, health summits, and urban evangelism series have connected with residents of Bogota over the past several years. In Caracas, one Adventist outreach group performs cultural presentations in plazas. Other ministry teams reached the community through health outreach, a church-planting movement, and even a vegetarian restaurant.



Adventist Mission director Gary Krause

Krause encouraged summit attendees to challenge local leadership to commit to identifying the needs of the community. Then, local leaders should join forces with church ministries to ensure that centers of influence are created within each urban community. "Those churches involved in the community are the ones that are growing and in contact with the world," Krause explained. *[Libna Stevens/ANN staff]*

Implication of aging ministers could challenge future staffing

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—A recent review of pastoral demographics in the United

States reveals that nearly 50 percent of Seventh-day Adventist ministers will reach retirement age within ten years; a discovery that is prompting ministry officials to examine potential scenarios to address the coming dilemma. Namely, will the denomination hire a new crop to replace retiring ministers or will it urge much of its experienced, aging workforce to continue working longer than previously planned? Each option has its own advantages, and church leaders say they are exploring a mix of both possible solutions.

Retirement age is considered 66.5 for the year 2022, according to the U.S. Social Security Administration. The choice of whether to retain ministers past retirement age into their late 60s and early 70s keeps experienced ministers on staff, church leaders say, but it leaves several generations between pastors and the young adults and teens to whom they minister. How leaders address the situation could affect everything from hiring requirements and remuneration policies to seminary tuition and the cultural needs of the region's diverse congregants.

"We're going to be looking at how we can have top-level quality pastors in this opportunity that's presenting itself," said **Dave Gemmell**, an associate director of the Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's North American Division (NAD). What's certain is that leaders will explore how to renew recruiting efforts, sponsor more graduate students for theological training, and develop the recently formed Board of Ministerial and Theological Education.

Church leaders noted that the above statistics on retirement age do not include "regional" conferences or church administrative units that




oversee historically African American congregations in the central and eastern United States (U.S.). There are nine regional conferences within the division's total of 58 conferences and one attached field. About 25 percent of NAD members belong to regional conferences, according to statistics from the office of the NAD executive secretary.* Addressing future staffing challenges in the U.S. also presents opportunities to examine other factors in hiring pastors. Ministerial leaders say they would like remuneration practices to better reflect a candidate's training. Currently, wages are similar

for a pastor who has a doctorate in ministry compared to a pastor who doesn't have a college degree. That fact could lead NAD officials to consider making an adjustment in salary policies.

Denis Fortin, dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, says a trend in the past decade is the increased hiring of pastors who do not have a master's degree in theology, and sometimes no college degree at all. Seminary leaders say an increasingly educated membership deserves educated pastors. "Why would the ministry not need

good, solid education when other professions in North America require good, solid education whether it's a lawyer or someone in the medical field?" Fortin said.

The seminary graduate program has about 350 to 400 students enrolled, depending on the semester, with approximately 100 graduates each year. Church leaders estimate that about 200 pastors per year will be needed to fill future vacancies. *[Ansel Oliver/ANN]* 

* Statistics for this survey were gleaned from records in the NAD Retirement office. Regional conferences operate under a separate retirement structure and comparable stats are not available as of yet.

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Fred Hardinge, DrPH, RD, is associate director, Health Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

Grace-empowered choices still needed

Recently, I ate lunch with a pastor who was seeking some nutrition advice. Turns out his wife had been nagging him for years to eat more slowly! Like all loving wives, she was concerned about his health. He admitted that he almost always ate his meals very quickly because, “I never have enough time to relax and enjoy my food. You know what it is like with sermons to prepare, saints to visit, funds to raise, and complainers to pacify. I don’t have time to eat slowly!”

I asked him if he thought his health was suffering from rushing his meals. He thought a moment and then replied, “In recent years, I have been putting on extra weight. My wife has been telling me that eating slower will help me feel full before I have eaten too much. But I really don’t know why I am tempted to snack between my meals.”

Yes, we can swallow a lot of calories so quickly that we still think we’re hungry even though our stomachs are full. So, it makes sense to eat more leisurely meals. But does eating more slowly deter us from snacking between meals? Research suggests it may not. A Dutch research team fed 38 men and women, ages 23–30, the exact same meal on two different days. One day they got the food all at once and finished eating within 30 minutes. The next time, the food was served with up to 25 minutes between courses.

On each day, blood samples were taken to measure the levels of ghrelin, a hormone that stimulates appetite. Each volunteer was quizzed about his or her feelings of fullness or hunger.



After the staggered meal, participants felt less hunger and higher fullness, and their ghrelin levels were lower than after the quick meal. What was surprising, though, was that those differences did not influence their eating behavior two and a half hours later when the diners were presented with a feast of snacks that included cake, chocolate-covered marshmallows, chips, nuts, and waffles. There was no significant difference in the number of calories they consumed from their favorite goodies!*

Common sense, physiology, and reason were overcome by the presentation of delectable, mouth-watering morsels. Eating slowly was no guarantee they would abstain from snacks just two and a half hours after they finished their meal.

I can easily assume I have greater self-control than those participants did. If I were full, why would I snack when I *know* I don’t need the calories? Yet, I can think of times when my mouth has watered at the sight of a juicy morsel when I knew I had eaten plenty. The Bible describes this dilemma in Romans 7:19: “I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway” (NLT).

What can those of us who fight the “battle of the bulge” do? Often we need to eat less at meals, and eating more slowly can help with this. We also need to resist unneeded calories between meals. Taking the time to get at least 30 to 60 minutes of moderate exercise every day helps too.

We still need grace in order to exercise our God-given power of choice to do what we know is right. While we quote these texts to our parishioners frequently, we need to internalize them ourselves. “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13, NASB). “I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13, NLT).

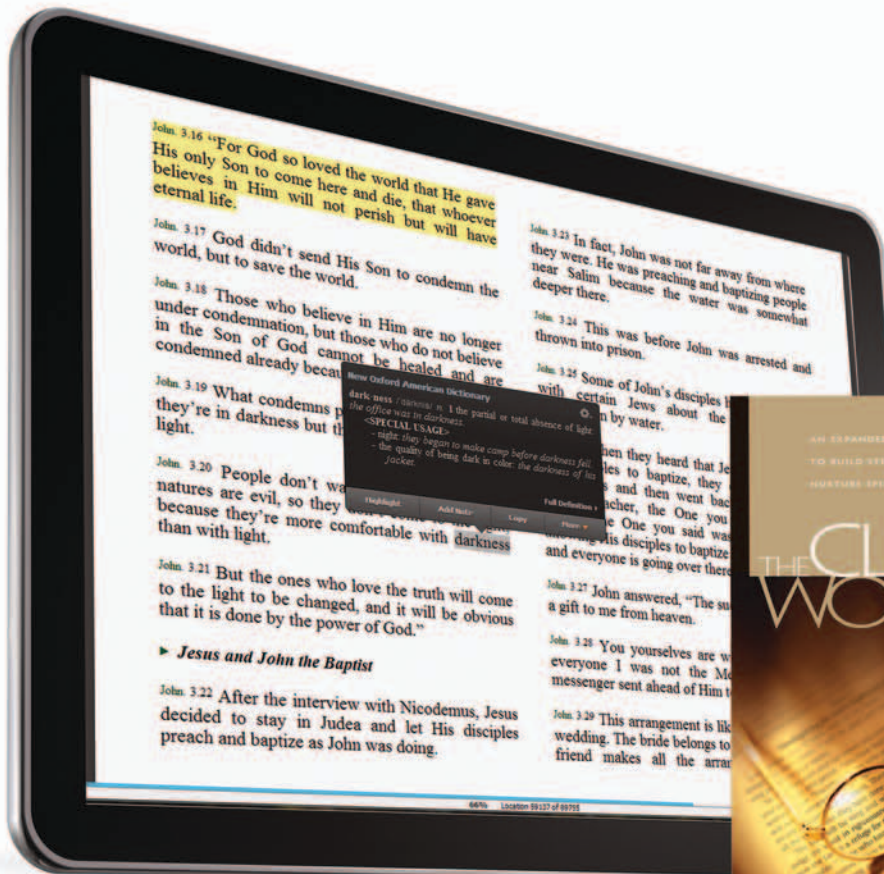
I need that strength every day to eat slower, avoid snacks, and exercise more. 🍴

* Sofie G. Lemmens et al., “Staggered Meal Consumption Facilitates Appetite Control Without Affecting Postprandial Energy Intake,” *Journal of Nutrition* 141, no. 3 (2011): 482–488.

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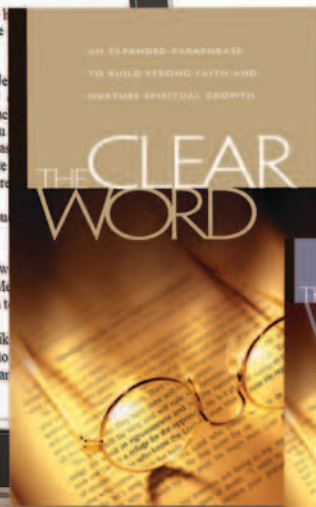
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