

# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

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## Where are the miracles?

Stepping off the plane in August 2019, the reality finally hit us. We were aiming to reach people for Christ in one of the most secular, wealthy, postmodern, and progressive countries in the world—Iceland. How? Simply through the power of prayer. We knew there were hurting people in need of Christ. We had one question on our minds: would the God of the New Testament show up? Were the miracles of Acts 2 just that? Belonging in Acts 2?

Taking God at His Word and armed with gospel tracts and much united prayer, 50 missionaries from six continents spent hours interceding for this mission field, asking God to empty us of ourselves and fill us with the Holy Spirit. We didn't know any better. Like the disciples, when we lifted up our eyes we "saw no one but Jesus only" (Matt. 17:8).<sup>1</sup> Like the apostles, we acknowledged, "We are fools for Christ's sake" (1 Cor. 4:10). We went door-to-door praying with and for the people of Iceland.

Incredible divine appointments took place as we gave God the chance to lead this ministry of intercession. On fire to point this country to a prayer-answering God, after several days the group had not only been able to pray for and give tracts to thousands of Icelanders, including leaders of the country but had also collected countless prayer requests, which they shared with each other for constant prayer via WhatsApp. We haven't stopped praying for these requests since we returned. People will be running to know who this God is who answers prayers. It's nothing we have done—but what God did.

Sometimes, despite working hard and following well-laid plans, programs, and promising methods for congregational growth, baptismal numbers are meager. And even though you've modernized the worship service and are offering a variety of ministries, members don't seem to be growing spiritually.

Maybe reading the book of Acts makes you feel guilty or like a failure. Where are those thousands joining the church each day, *today*? Where are the miracles of transformation? Where is the success of the gospel in 2020? Have you not, after all, followed the advice

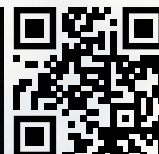
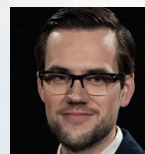
of ministry bestsellers and research, set up big community outreach events, and used the newest technological tools for ministry?

Too often, we rely on plans that might, from a human perspective, be brilliant. But while these have their place, we tend to forget that only the One who created the mind truly knows it. At Dwight L. Moody's funeral, Dr. C. I. Scofield, in summarizing the ingredients of Moody's impactful ministry, said: "He was baptized with the Holy Spirit, and he knew it. It was to him as definite an experience as his conversion."<sup>2</sup>

Experiencing Spirit-filled ministry boils down to a three-step process of faith:

1. Surrender yourself, your plans, methods, and ministry to God. Recognize that you are but dust without Him.
2. Daily ask for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Greek in Luke 11:13 indicates that the asking is an ongoing, continual process. This happens through a deep and regular prayer life.
3. Follow and believe God's Word and methods above human theories and

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

inventions. Then, with confidence and faith, do the works that Christ has prepared for you, always listening for God's still, small voice.

Do you desire more than just meager, statistical success primarily based on human methodology? Do you want to tap into the limitless power of God and have a Spirit-filled ministry? Do you want to see hurting people reached for Christ? Ask God every day to completely immerse you in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Watch Him transform your ministry into the next chapter of the book of Acts!



- 1 All Scripture in this article is taken from the New King James Version.
- 2 V. Raymond Edman, *They Found the Secret* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 105.



## LETTERS

I am a hospital chaplain/counselor and a teacher for health and wellness. I read with great interest your article "Dangerous Kissing Cousins: Pornography and Intimate Partner Violence" (Claudio and Pamela Consuegra, November 2019) and was pleasantly surprised to see such a level of transparency from your church regarding social issues. I shared this article with a couple of associates in ministry.

I thought the editors could strengthen the article by providing resources for helping those with a pornography addiction. I support a

Christian-based, interfaith weekly support group for those in my local community. We use the Conquer Series *The Battle Plan for Purity* produced by Kingdom Works Studios. I hope you will pass on this valuable information to your readers.

I get *Ministry* magazine from you from time to time. Thanks for all that *Ministry* does to serve pastors of all faiths. I file some of your articles for future reference. Please keep *Ministry* coming. It is a blessing to me on a personal level and also for my ministry.

—M. Thomas Jackson, PhD, chaplain/counselor, Pardee Hospital, Hendersonville, North Carolina

**EDITORS:** Thank you, Dr. Jackson! For more resources on the topic of pornography, see these *Ministry* articles:

- Eric and Ann Marie Bates, "Four Tactics of Attack Against Pornography," *Ministry* (March 2019), 30.
- Wellington Barbosa, "Vigilance and Freedom: An Interview With Bernie Anderson Regarding Pornography," *Ministry* (December 2018), 13, 14.
- Peter Powell, "Pornography: The Journey to Healing," *Ministry* (March 2004), 23–25.



# Emotional intelligence *for* effective ministry

*Awareness of  
our emotions  
vitality impacts  
mental health  
and ministry  
effectiveness.*

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**E**xperts in the field of leadership believe that truly effective leaders possess a high level of emotional intelligence (EQ). As an ingredient of excellent performance, EQ proved to be twice as important as IQ at all levels. EQ is the ability to work with others and effect change. Without EQ, a person can have the best training, an analytical mind, and technical expertise, but still won't make a great leader.<sup>1</sup>

Many believe EQ is innate; that is, you are born with it. However, I am a firm believer that EQ can be learned because I have witnessed this fact personally and professionally. According to research, EQ is the management of self and of relationships self-competence and social competence.<sup>2</sup> Many pastors have shared with me that they never received EQ training in their formal ministerial education. That should change, and here's why.

### **The relational level**

As humans, we crave connectedness because we were created with a relational identity. EQ is relational. God is relational; the Godhead is a prime example. His 10 commandments for us are relational: one section focuses on a relationship with God; the second, with other humans. God's greatest mandate for us is relational: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:36–40). Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie state, "It may help us to think of relationships as the connective tissue of the church."<sup>3</sup> Whether church ministry, missionary work, spiritual direction, or chaplaincy, every ministry is relational. Jesus' ministry, discipling, was relational. His character is that of relational qualities, which reveals the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23).

EQ can be developed through a personal understanding and application of the grace and mercy of the gospel.<sup>4</sup> Churches are now looking to train in EQ in order to minister more effectively. Studies show EQ is made up of five ingredients: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-regulation, (3) motivation, (4) empathy, and (5) social skill.<sup>5</sup> As I have trained leaders around these ingredients, I have further developed the five EQ principles specifically for effective ministry leadership.

### **Self-awareness**

Self-awareness is the gateway to transformation. We find our true self by seeking God, our Leader, first.<sup>6</sup> When we

seek God and attune ourselves to His presence, we change. The manifestation of His fruit, which then overflows into every aspect of our lives—that is, our relationships and ministries—is a natural process when we abide in Him (John 15:4, 5). Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up to abide with His heavenly Father (Mark 1:35). Intimacy with God overflowed into His relationships with His disciples. Our fruit depends on our intentional relationship with Jesus.

The effectiveness of our leadership hinges on the degree to which we are abiding in Christ.<sup>7</sup> This is foundational for every ministry. Many ministry leaders do not take time daily to abide. Does your abiding turn into planning a sermon, an object lesson, class, or counsel preparation? “Be still, and know that I am God” is an invitation to unhurried time with Him (Ps. 46:10, KJV),<sup>8</sup> a time of spiritual renewal. It’s restorative; my soul finds rest in God alone (Ps. 62:1).

Studies show only 1 in 10 pastors take a full day of rest regularly.<sup>9</sup> Many pastors find the Sabbath to be their most demanding day of ministry. Be intentional by scheduling a day free from work (at least a four-to six-hour block of time) simply to abide in Christ. Live well by giving mind, body, and soul a welcome respite from the cares of this world.

## Self-regulation

We have an average of 400 emotional experiences a day. Those with a high sense of self-awareness understand *how* their emotions impact others and their job performance. They can regulate their feelings successfully and are motivated intrinsically.

How we manage our emotions or regulate them makes the difference in leadership success.<sup>10</sup> Pastor Charles Swindoll states, “The longer I live the more convinced I become that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it.”<sup>11</sup>

Because we encounter so many emotional experiences in a day, it is imperative to understand *how* our emotions impact others and how we can regulate our behavior appropriately. Self-control takes spiritual discipline by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are called to examine our lives in order to determine what kind of fruit we are bearing.<sup>12</sup> Examine yourself to understand your triggers (Lam. 3:40). Go deeper to identify emotions by examining the root of your behavior. Examine the sins of the generations before you to understand

habitual patterns passed down. Do you have soul wounds needing to be examined, processed, and dealt with by seeking additional behavioral health counseling?

Growth in EQ requires reflection. Journaling, an effective discipline of reflection, can help you to process emotions. It is a safe way to express ourselves before God so that we do not inappropriately sound off to others. Feelings need to be processed in a safe way, allowing us to manage them rather than be engulfed in them.<sup>13</sup> Studies show that writing about feelings even has health benefits.<sup>14</sup>

Be specific by praying Scripture when putting on your armor before leaving home. I pray daily: *Lord, may I be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger* (James 1:19). I mindfully self-regulate my emotions during situations by taking a deep breath and then rating my emotions on a scale of 1 to 10. In most situations, I can respond calmly, kindly, and respectfully—and not impulsively; however, it takes self-control. Christ had self-control. “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats” (1 Pet. 2:23, NIV).

## Motivation and passion

Leaders are motivated intrinsically—by passion. Many of us enter the ministry because of our passion for serving God. Serving is at the core of God’s mission for us. Are you burned out and needing to reconnect and recommit to your call? Examine the passions of your heart. Reconnect by noticing His presence throughout the day. It will change your perspective as you start to experience your day as “worshipful” rather than “dutiful,” focused more on God’s presence than on your own performance. Leaders set the climate as followers reflect their leader’s passion.

Servant leaders go first; they serve the mission of the organization, not personal agendas. They model the mission and what they teach. Servant leaders develop other leaders; they place the welfare of others above profitability; they reflect mutual respect and honor, collaborating to discover the best solutions for all.<sup>15</sup> Jesus came to serve, not to be served. He developed His disciples into team players. Jesus knew that when He left, they would be well equipped to continue the Great Commission.

## Empathy

As a result of abiding in Christ, we are transformed into His likeness by the power of the Holy



Spirit. The greatest qualities Christ was known for were His empathy and compassion. Empathy is to enter into the feelings of another; to identify with them; and to understand their disappointments, joys, and sorrows.

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”<sup>16</sup> In my former life as an elementary schoolteacher, my only rule in the classroom was the golden rule (Luke 6:31). Empathy. My first graders got it. They were so well-behaved that the principal would bring other teachers of all grade levels into my classroom to observe. Empathy is a vital life skill.

In the book *Leading With Kindness*, the authors say, “Indeed, most of the leaders we spoke with invoked the Golden Rule as their management philosophy, noting that adherence to this principle is the surest way to build close-knit, high performing communities.” These leaders take the time to connect with staff, with words of encouragement and kindness. Staff feel valued and, as a result, they are motivated.<sup>17</sup> Take time to listen, to practice the gift of presence. Communicate empathetically that “I think I know how you are feeling.” Reflecting what we hear also provides clarity in a nonthreatening way, for example, “If I understand you correctly, you are saying . . .” We remain objective without taking on others’ anxiety.

### **Social skills**

“And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Col. 3:14, NIV).

We are living in an age of loneliness, an invisible epidemic affecting over 60 million people in the United States alone.<sup>18</sup> We were created for community. “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1, NIV). The Trinity is a wonderful example; God Himself is in community.

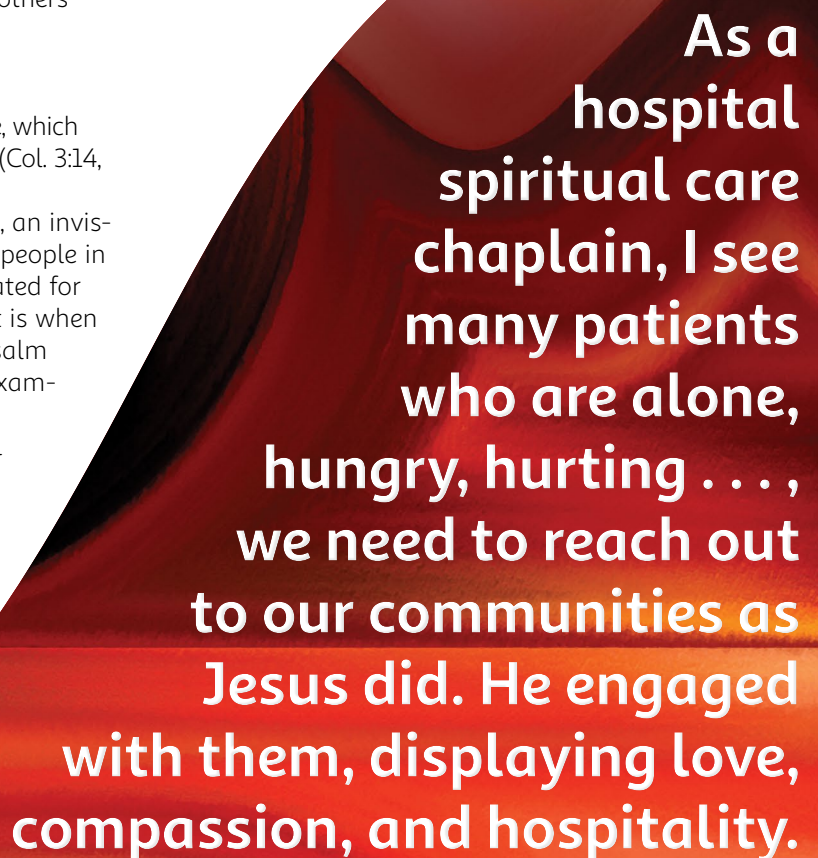
Research shows that a lack of social connection is a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking, and high blood pressure.<sup>19</sup> Dr. Robert Putnam, a political scientist and Harvard University professor, completed extensive research on “community” which showed that we are made to live in community because of our relational identity. He says if a person

were to join a community right now, it would literally cut in half the odds of that person dying within the next year.<sup>20</sup>

As a hospital spiritual care chaplain, I see many patients who are alone, hungry, hurting. Many say that they believe in God but do not attend church. Who, then, is reaching them? So often churches wait for people to come to them when, in fact, we need to reach out to our communities as Jesus did. He engaged with them, displaying love, compassion, and hospitality. He went door-to-door to visit the poor, the needy, the lonely. I view Jesus as our first and greatest social worker.

### **Best practices for emotional intelligence**

Best practices for emotional intelligence involve leading like Jesus. We are His ambassadors, representing Him (2 Cor. 5:20). “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15, NIV).



**As a hospital spiritual care chaplain, I see many patients who are alone, hungry, hurting . . . , we need to reach out to our communities as Jesus did. He engaged with them, displaying love, compassion, and hospitality.**

God's mission for each one of us, in partnership with the Holy Spirit, is to carry the gospel to the world and to advance God's kingdom by reflecting Him. When we reflect Christ, we are communicating the fruit of the Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

"A man's worth is not measured by the position of responsibility that he occupies but by the Christlike spirit that he reveals."<sup>22</sup> When we are transformed into the likeness of Christ, imitators of Him, and one in Spirit, then advancing His kingdom is a natural outcome.



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# Keeping our sense of **THE CALL**

*Knowing that God has called you replaces doubt and despair with healing and hope.*

**S**ome time ago, I heard a radio interview with a medical doctor who has written extensively on the topic of medical care as a calling. She argues that when doctors miss the sense of their work as a calling and see their function more as a job or a career, they lose their enthusiasm and eventually experience burnout.<sup>1</sup>

Our spiritual profession and the work connected to it are rightly deemed a calling. It has always been about a calling. The compound Greek word *ekklesia* (translated “church”) literally means an “assembly,” and the two root words are *ek* (out of), and *kaleo* (called). Therefore, the church is made up of those who have been called out.

We ministry professionals must retain our sense of calling. We must see every job performed in our daily lives, in churches and institutions, as part of our calling. Often, we refer to our

calls in terms of the moment when we felt God was telling us how He wanted us to serve. We speak about the moment of decision when we committed ourselves to Jesus or chose to serve Him in ministry. I happen to remember the moment when, while watching a Billy Graham Association evangelist preach to thousands on television, I felt strangely moved by the realization that my church was not reaching the world with such success. The compulsion was so strong that it brought me to tears, and within a year, I had abandoned my plans to be a biology teacher and enrolled in a ministerial program. For many, the call may be more of a process, which eventually leads to a commitment to ministry.

Could it be that with time we start allowing our sense of calling to be diluted by the perception that we are working a job like everybody else? For the past 20 years, I have had wooden statues of Don Quixote and his friend Sancho Panza on my desk. *Don Quixote*, published in two parts (1605 and 1615), is considered by many to be the most influential work in Spanish literary canon. This famous novel by Miguel de Cervantes, tells of a middle-aged *hidalgo* (gentleman) who decides to live out his fantasy of knighthood and pursues a life of honor to win the favor of a peasant girl he imagines as a noblewoman. It is a sense of calling that feeds healthy idealism.

The opposite also holds. While medical professionals who lose their sense of calling will eventually burn out, the ones who hold on to their calling will accomplish much more and have a higher sense of life satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> Ministry professionals can expect the same results.

We have a calling. God's call to you and me is as distinct as we are unique. In the Bible, people were called to come out, stay still, worship, hide, march, walk on water, repent, forgive, and trust. Your call is yours only, especially crafted in God's mind for you.

However individualized our callings may be, there are common elements in the call to ministry. Let us ponder a few of these:

**1** *The call comes to a person from a personal God.* God knows us; He knows our hearts, deepest fears, and fondest dreams. He knows if we are timid, gregarious, obsessive, or fearful. He also knows what we can accomplish in partnership with Him if we allow Him to lead in our lives.

Author Ellen White says, "The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The

## Pastors who have left the ministry report significant feelings of personal and professional inadequacy, feelings of professional entrapment, family problems, and illness.

heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon the Burden Bearer. The rest that Christ offers depends upon conditions, but these conditions are plainly specified. They are those with which all can comply. He tells us just how His rest is to be found."<sup>3</sup>

**2** *The call to ministers is for ministry.* There may be a specific angle to your ministry, but it is always about service and representing God's interests and character. You may have some criticisms of *The Purpose Driven Life*, but the beginning statement rings with biblical authenticity: "It's not about you."<sup>4</sup> Yes, our human envelope is fraught with needs and weaknesses and cries for affirmation, but we also have an all-consuming message filled with power and efficacy. Christian ministers are not meant for self or others' adulation. We are not to be corrupted by fame or its trappings. It is the love of self that produces fatigue; defending our egos can be exhausting work.

In a time of social media, likes, and followers, the cult of personality has become easier and more ubiquitous. Let's instead enjoy the reinforcement that comes from a job well done—the delivery of a strong and inspiring sermon, the tactful handling of a delicate issue, the sympathetic support of a grieving family.

The calling of the disciples by the Sea of Galilee was an invitation to "follow" and, as a consequence, they (the disciples) would be made into "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:18–21). Ministry should always be the result of following Jesus, the great Fisherman; that's our job. His job is to

make us fishers of humanity in His image. We are gatherers of fish, harvesters of precious souls to the side of salvation and hope.

**3** *He who calls us is in charge of the work.* For ministers, as with many other service professions, the possibility of debilitating stress is very real. I did an extensive study of clergy stress for my dissertation some years ago, and the literature review confirmed what I had surmised as a pastor. According to a study of 9,000 persons admitted to mental health centers in Tennessee, clergy ranked 36th among 130 professions represented; ahead of teachers at 47th, policemen at 70th, and physicians at 106th. Among professionals, clergy rank third in the number of divorces granted each year, and 75 percent of the pastorate experience periods of major stress.<sup>5</sup>

Pastors who have left the ministry report significant feelings of personal and professional inadequacy, feelings of professional entrapment, family problems, and illness.<sup>6</sup> One obvious difference between the ministry and other professions is the added pressures of spiritual expectations, such as modeling a strong faith, dealing with personal guilt, and feeling that recognizing failure is not an option for a representative of God.<sup>7</sup>

Let's remember that the healing message of the gospel is also for ministers. There are infinite grace and love in the arms of the Savior. He is responsible for saving, healing, and transforming lives, including ours.

**4** *The call to ministry is powerful.* Charles Spurgeon quoted Joseph Alleine, famed Corpus Christi College scholar and chaplain, as saying, "Do not enter the ministry *if you can help it*."<sup>8</sup> In other words, you should be in ministry only if you firmly believe you have been called. This compulsion is Spirit driven, and it calls us to a higher plane of love for God and His children. Ministry is a vocation, not a job; a holy calling, not a profession; a way of life, not a way to make a living.

This level of professional intensity in the ministry would be overwhelming if not for God's enabling power embedded in His call to pastors. There is power in living our lives in response and connection to our calling from God. We can do much more because we live in partnership with a powerful God. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31, NKJV).

Napoleon Bonaparte's archenemy, the Duke of Wellington, admitted that Napoleon's mere presence on the battlefield was worth 40,000

men.<sup>9</sup> The early disciples conquered the world with the battle cry "Christ is Lord!" Always remember who has entered the battlefield as our Commander. In Romans 8:35, we are told that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. The acceptance of our call allows us to bask in His love, to have blessings that only come from being with Him.

Disney World has what is called Fast Pass, an app-based system whereby you can reserve up to three fast passes per person or party on the app, which then allows you to wait in a much faster line. Our son-in-law Jason became our de facto leader by becoming the master of the Fast Pass. He registered our names on the app, chose the rides, and guided us through the maze of enchanted streets and throngs of people. He would come to the Fast Pass lane, scan his ticket, smile, and say to the Disney employee three magic words: "They are with me." As if on cue, we would appear next to Jason and go on to amusement-park grandparenting fun.

Ministry and life itself can be hectic, challenging, and sometimes disappointing, but "we are with Him." Let us remember that we have been called, we are being blessed, we are loved, and we are being empowered to accomplish what He is asking us to do.



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**Z**oe, a girl in my (Natalie’s) church, came to my office after the death of her grandma and asked why God had not answered her prayers to keep her grandma alive. She got the impression from church that prayer functioned as if God was a genie in a bottle. So, when her grandmother got sick, she prayed that God would heal her. But her grandma still died, and she felt the pain of that loss severely.

Because God did not come through for her, this nine-year-old questioned His goodness. This death caused her to question her entire religious experience. She didn’t want to be involved in church anymore, became depressed, and took on an overall negative view of God and the church. Even though Zoe was questioning God’s existence, she had a deep longing within her for things to be made right. Zoe’s grief response was completely normal for her age.

This sad story points to the important question of how we help grieving children. Many children in our churches and schools experience devastating losses, such as a death in the family, the divorce of parents, separation from a close friend, financial struggles, or even the death of a pet. In a pamphlet of expert advice for school counselors helping grieving students, this startling statistic appears: “Before they complete high school, nine in 10 children will experience the death of a family member or close friend. One in 20 will lose a parent. This means that in almost every class, every year, in every school, there’s likely to be at least one grieving student, if not more.”<sup>1</sup>

Children grieve internally just as much as adults, and they are far less equipped to handle their emotions. Children desperately need pastors and church members to pay attention to them and minister to their needs in times of grief. How

do we effectively do that, especially depending on their age group?

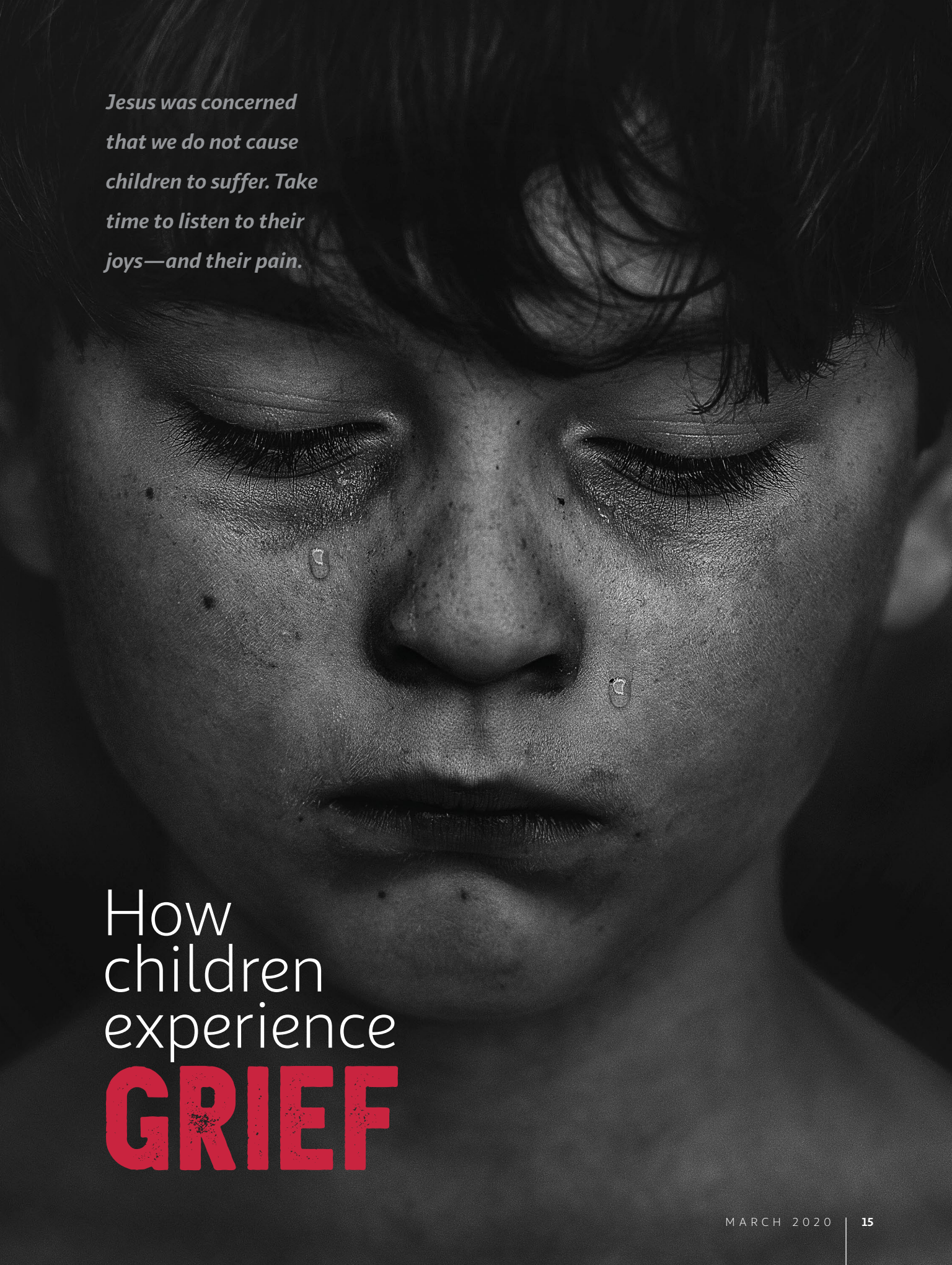
### The forgotten grief

Children express their grief differently based on their age. Personality, family dynamics, and spiritual life all play a role in how a child grieves.<sup>2</sup> Older children question God’s love and character, while younger children get confused about the emotions they are experiencing. During times of grief, most people focus on the adults. The question now is, Who notices the children and ministers to their needs?

When people don’t know what to say to a grieving child, they commonly say things like: “Don’t cry.” “God has a plan.” “They’re just sleeping, Jesus will wake them up when He comes back to take us to heaven.” “Pray, and maybe your parents will get back together.” “Just have faith.” These phrases make no sense to a young child and communicate the message that their grief is not important. Unfortunately, this lack of ministry to a child’s life can have detrimental long-term effects on their view of God and the church and even on their own psyche as they try to make sense of a loss.<sup>3</sup>

### Symptoms of grieving by age group

Often when children experience their first loss—a death in the family, the death of a pet, or the divorce of parents—they do not know how to handle their emotions. Many adults may miss the signs that children are grieving because their symptoms are different from those of the adults around them. While adults often stay consistently in a period of grieving for months after a loss, children are more fluid in their grieving and may feel strong emotional responses to grief



*Jesus was concerned  
that we do not cause  
children to suffer. Take  
time to listen to their  
joys—and their pain.*

How  
children  
experience  
**GRIEF**

for shorter periods, then go play happily until another short moment of overwhelming grief occurs. Much of what happens depends upon age. The following information is generalized per age group. Keep in mind that each child is his or her own person and may react differently.

*Infants to two years old—primary experience: Absence.* This age group shows signs of grieving through physiological symptoms, such as not sleeping well or having trouble eating. Young children do not understand abstract concepts like death. They just know someone they love is missing. Sometimes they look for the person that died, asking about them or waiting for them to come back to play.

*Three to six years old—primary experience: Denial.* During early childhood, death is seen as reversible. When death is explained biblically, as being ‘a sleep,’ children logically think the person who has died can be woken up. Children will not understand why you won’t wake up their loved one. They take on feelings of guilt and assume that the person went away because they did something wrong. Sometimes they will make a sort of shrine or do things like making their bed, cleaning their room, or preparing food for the dead loved one in hopes that the loved one will come back if the child is “good enough.”

I (Natalie) witnessed this with the young children of a family who had lost their grandmother. Two of the young daughters were in this age group, and after the death, they prepared a tea party for her, which had been their weekly tradition. The adults in their life lovingly did their best to explain that Grandma had been put in a casket to sleep until Jesus comes. When their grandfather came to visit without their grandmother, they asked when Grandpa would take Grandma out of the box! Why wouldn’t he wake her up so that

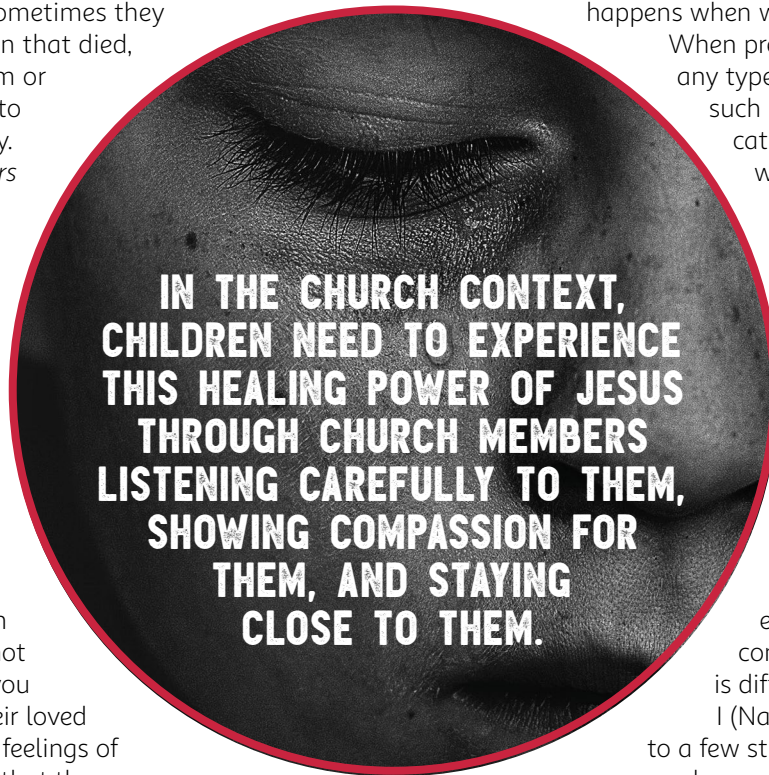
she could come to the tea party? They couldn’t understand the lack of her presence.

*Seven to 12 years old—primary experience: Fear.* Preteens begin to understand that death is final, and everyone will die. They see death as a concrete, physical thing. Ideas that make the most sense to them are the body of the person going to heaven, or a skeleton lying in a casket, or the person turning into a ghost or angel. Their views of death at this age are heavily influenced by the religious culture around them; they are curious about the afterlife and want to know what happens when we die.

When preteens experience any type of grief or loss, such as divorce or relocation, they will not want to talk about their feelings and will show signs of grief in physical ways, such as getting angry at school, causing drama with friends, getting sick frequently, or struggling with homework. Focusing on everyday tasks and controlling behavior is difficult.<sup>4</sup>

I (Natalie) ministered to a few students in this age group who experienced loss when their parents were divorcing, leaving one set of siblings with a parent who moved far away from anything familiar to them. Another child was sent to live with grandparents. Another was bounced around to different friends’ homes until the legal issues were resolved.

All of these children struggled with schoolwork, had problems with their friends, and would frequently come to my office either crying or angry, telling me how upset they were about something trivial at school. David J. Schonfeld and Marcia Quackenbush researched grief in students and discovered that many students experiencing grief have trouble concentrating, are easily overwhelmed in class, and have many questions that need honest answers from teachers and influential adults.<sup>5</sup>





Author Peter Wilcox addresses the importance of allowing grief to run its course. His comments are a reminder for us to sit in the grief with our children and experience it with them: “Grieving is not about forgetting. Rather, grieving allows us to heal and to remember with love rather than pain. It requires a sorting out process. One by one, you try to let go of the things that are gone and mourn for them. One by one, you take hold of the things that have become a part of who you are and gradually begin to build again. This is not to suggest that this process of grieving is easy, only that it is necessary.”<sup>6</sup>

### Five stages of grief in children

In the last church I (Joseph) pastored, I saw many children in my congregation go through traumatic experiences. In one instance, an infant died, causing his whole family, including his eight-year-old sister, deep despair. Not knowing how to minister to them, I did some research on the grief process.

The first thing I discovered was that I had a very shallow understanding of grief. One morning, in the midst of that research project, I received a call telling me that my mother had just died. I was thrust personally and traumatically into grief. I was suddenly going through the same stages of grief that I had been reading about.

Grief breaks our hearts and shakes our self-identity. But as Elisabeth Kubler Ross and David Kessler discovered in their famous research, there are typically five different stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.<sup>7</sup> We have used different descriptive terms as they relate to the grief experience of children to convey the same ideas:

*Denial.* The denial stage is characterized by numbness and shock as the idea settles in that a loss has occurred—almost as if God anesthetizes us to get us through those first few difficult hours and days after a loss. Older children will likely experience this stage similarly to adults, while young children will wonder what happened and not completely understand.

*Expressed emotions.* Kübler-Ross and Kessler typically name the second stage “anger,” but a variety of emotions will be experienced by both children and adults after a loss. Sometimes children, as well as adults, experience guilt. Children will especially wonder whether they could have done something to keep their loved one from moving away, leaving home, or whatever their loss is. Expressing emotion is important after a

loss. We need to cry it out, work it out, talk it out, and pray it out.

*Questioning.* Sometimes adults try to bargain with God over a loss, but because children may not understand the details of what happened, they tend to ask lots of questions as they try to understand what’s going on.

*Loneliness.* The loneliness stage is characterized in adults as depression, and while it is possible for children to experience depression, often after a loss, a sense of loneliness is experienced by a child as they miss the deceased. In this stage, children feel that no one can relate to them, so it is important to let them know God is with them even in their pain.

*Acceptance.* When the loss is finally accepted, the strength comes to go on with life. God helps you move on and live happily despite the pain of grieving you have gone through.

### Presence

Grief is a journey that takes time. As children go through this process, God will bring healing through many means. In the church context, children need to experience this healing power of Jesus through members listening carefully to them, showing compassion for them, and staying close to them. The good news of the Bible is that God is always there for them.

God has chosen young people to be His torchbearers, forging a path for truth to flourish.<sup>8</sup> He wants us to reach out to children in the spirit of Christ—as they grow, to be there for them in their joys and sorrows—as we have learned to be with our beloved Zoe.



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# Emotional hurt lurking in the pew



***Authentic church  
growth necessitates  
vigilance regarding  
the emotional  
health of your  
congregation.***

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

One afternoon I was conducting a Bible study session with young people in which we were exploring the issue of forgiveness. One young lady boldly shared that someone had offended her deeply and that she could not forgive the person. Quietly shocked, I inquired about her unwillingness. She shouted that the hurt was extensive and deep, and that was why the person did not deserve her forgiveness.

Her response created a troubling question: Why are some people unwilling or unable to forgive? Having researched over the past eight years topics on emotional health and well-being—in particular forgiveness, emotional freedom, and reconciliation—I have discovered that people are injured by one of four degrees of emotional hurt. They are bruised, wounded, broken, or damaged. And, without some degree of healing, they are unable to forgive. Furthermore, the deeper the emotional hurt, the more likely a person will be psychologically dysfunctional or, even, nonfunctional.

Thus, I advocate the following principle: in order for hurting individuals to forgive, they should experience some healing; and, in order to find this healing, these individuals must extend forgiveness to themselves and others.

So, what does each of these degrees of emotional hurt look like?

### **Bruised**

Human beings are born with a need for belonging, which motivates our relationships. The interactions based on this innate need play out between friends, siblings, church members, or in the workplace. But when individuals are deprived of this psychological fulfillment, they tend to feel rejected and isolated, which leads to emotional and social pain.

Various studies show that certain kinds of attachment can contribute to emotional hurt. One researcher observed that “individuals with

more secure attachment styles and higher self-esteem are buffered from” or could be less affected by socially disturbing situations.<sup>1</sup> Another study reveals that participants who had high scores “on avoidant attachment may be emotionally shielded from socially upsetting events.”<sup>2</sup> People with the latter kinds of attachment rarely display strong destructive emotions, such as aggression and anxiety. These *emotionally bruised* individuals generally undergo no intense emotional injury. Psychologically, they experience a dent in their feelings without any other negative impact.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, such individuals continue to display a high level of functionality, which includes socially allocated or church-related roles.<sup>4</sup> They also generally display *healthy* interpersonal behaviors and *persistent positive* attitudes and are often able to engage in wholesome interaction with an individual or a group. Any congregation containing bruised individuals would not experience any significant negative impact, either in the environment or in the interrelationships among congregants.

### Wounded

When, during an experimental study, 26 young-adult Japanese students engaged in a virtual ball-tossing game with computer players, they experienced issues such as exclusion and rejection. The study indicated that those “with lower

trait self-esteem show increased social pain . . . relative to people with higher trait self-esteem.”<sup>5</sup> Such individuals experienced a broken social bond, which can negatively affect their social survival. Such a ruptured social bond could create problems for them with interpersonal relationships, a key element of a healthy lifestyle.

Later research revealed that individuals such as these perceived their pain as being “associated with the threat to or loss of social connection.”<sup>6</sup> The high degree of pain and the perceived threat tend to contribute to emotional distress, which results in the “fight response.” This emotional battle leads to a person’s emotional defense being intensely pierced, symptomatic of being emotionally wounded.<sup>7</sup>

Other manifestations of this type of emotional wounding tend to be deep anguish and pain. Disgust or irritation can often be a by-product of their anguish and pain.

Wounded parishioners can give only what they possess. And, in this case, they tend to distribute pain and hurt. With such emotionally wounded people, it takes only a minor issue to make them explode. Consequently, congregations containing wounded people may have stunted church growth both numerically and spiritually.

### Broken

Similarly to broken glass, emotionally broken people find it hard to mend. Isabelle Ouellet-Morin and her colleagues found that women “exposed to partner violence carry a two- to three-fold increased risk of developing new-onset

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depression and . . . women who engage in intimate relationships with violent partners are at risk . . . of later psychological problems.”<sup>8</sup> Physical abuse brings about shame that can contribute to substance abuse. Also, abuse, as well as interpersonal conflicts and other emotionally related problems, can cause depression to begin and anxiety and other mental health issues to emerge. These severe difficulties cause such broken individuals to “lose the mental ability to perform [their] various tasks.”<sup>9</sup>

A congregation that consists of emotionally broken people, whether due to bad marriages, poor socialization, or violent situations, can have protracted issues that could contribute to its decline and result in spiritual unsustainability.

These experiences hinder the individuals’ acquisition of “training, skills, and self-efficacy necessary to pursue many careers,”<sup>10</sup> and, by extension, they are unable to engage effectively in ministry in the local congregation. Thus, emotionally broken people display psychological and social dysfunctionality, thereby having a negative impact on other people’s emotional and psychological well-being. The prevalence of these unresolved issues also affects the emotional and spiritual health of a congregation.

## Damaged

The most profound degree of emotional hurt is to be emotionally damaged. Google defines *damage* as “harm caused to something in such a way as to impair its value, usefulness, or normal function.” Furthermore, empirical studies show that prolonged abuse can contribute to a profound degree of emotional woundedness.

Previous research indicates that various types of abuse (e.g., bullying) can lead to emotional, physical, and psychological damage.<sup>11</sup> A recent study, involving spousal abuse and violence, reveals that these women “experienced more nuanced emotional consequences, including loss of confidence and self-esteem.”<sup>12</sup>

These indicators of emotional damage, including a lack of trust, also signal profound dysfunctionality, symptomatic of an emotionally damaged individual. Furthermore, they manifest tertiary emotions, such as hostility and resentment, even if not openly expressed. Congregations consisting of emotionally damaged individuals could create an environment not conducive to worship and, by extension, ministry. Emotionally affected people in the church can hinder a congregation’s progress.

## Healing

Various contexts such as abuse, violence, interpersonal conflict, and marital problems result in people becoming emotionally hurt, to some degree or another. Those affected tend to display different symptoms ranging from surprise to rage to hostility. Additionally, these parishioners tend to display behaviors, such as aggression or militancy, toward pastoral leadership. With this type of emotional state being the deepest type of emotional woundedness, the onus is on leaders to point out spiritual and professional avenues for healing and restoration.

Attitudes of this nature could also create an impasse. In essence, unresolved issues could result in psychological dysfunctionality and, by extension, hinder church growth. Thus, there is the need to be intentional and determined in addressing emotional and spiritual issues that, surely, are lurking in the pews—such as that young woman in the church who refused to forgive.



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MAKING ROOM FOR THOSE WITH  
**SPECIAL NEEDS**

SHAUN BROOKS

*How their first  
child taught a  
pastoral couple the  
true meaning of  
compassion.*



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

**T**he books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all share a familiar story of Jesus blessing little children. As their mothers eagerly journeyed to see Jesus, a tinge of excitement mingled with fear must have filled their hearts. Would Jesus accept their young ones? Would He really lay His hands on those often considered the least in society? Upon arrival, their fears intensified as the disciples dismissed them.

But Jesus was fully aware of the critical encounter between those seekers and His disciples. Author Ellen White highlights that “He waited to see how the disciples would treat them.”<sup>1</sup> It was indeed a test for them, and I believe we all can agree that they failed miserably.

### **Autism spectrum disorder**

A few years ago, my wife and I found ourselves introduced to the world of autism when we received the diagnosis of our firstborn child. Like many parents, we learned that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is an umbrella term used to describe a “developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges.”<sup>2</sup> Around the world, the rate of ASD has steadily increased, producing many questions and few answers.

Some symptoms include difficulty mingling with other children; resisting learning; having no fear of danger; avoiding eye contact; demonstrating strong attachments to objects; and having unusual reactions to the way

things smell, look, feel, or sound. As a spectrum disorder, it means that symptoms will vary from person to person and by degrees.

### **Look in the mirror**

After graduating with my undergraduate degree, I was a firm believer that wherever I pastored, our churches were going to be the friendliest in the neighborhood. Well, my perspective changed when we tried taking our autistic daughter to those “friendliest” churches a few years later. My wife and I felt the sting of embarrassment on a number of occasions when some members (not the majority) complained about our daughter’s behavior or our inability to control it. A reduction in invitations to social gatherings, alongside the fears and visible frustrations that accompany parenting a child with ASD, tore at us. Our frustration level, especially on the weekends, reached a high point.

The Lord has a powerful sense of humor. He brought back to my memory how, as a young pastor beginning my ministry, I had been a stickler about time and would often be disgruntled with a particular elder who frequently arrived late to services. He had a child with special needs and would attempt to share with me his reasons for being late. His explanations went over my head. I just was not *listening*. Now, a few years later, I was experiencing a similar situation. I longed for a word of understanding and a sympathetic ear. As those memories of my own lack of empathy flooded my mind, I dropped to my knees and asked God for forgiveness. I had acted like the disciples of old, who took no time to understand the hearts and motives of the mothers and showed little sympathy to those who

needed it the most. I had been acting as a barrier to this family, and now I knew how they felt.

The hurt and bitterness that I felt tempted to harbor against those who just did not understand our situation gave way to sympathy. The Lord softened my heart and encouraged me not to get angry with His disciples but to help educate them and make them aware. It started a journey for me as I decided to begin graduate studies focusing on how churches can better minister to those with ASD and other special needs. As I gained insights on the topic, the crucial point for church leadership boiled down to this: the church family cannot ignore anyone but must value all, moreover those with special needs.

Some estimates “suggest that almost 20% of the population has some type of disability and between 2%–3% of people in any community have intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, or other developmental disabilities. . . . Therefore, in a congregation of 400 people, you might expect as many as 12 children and adults with developmental disabilities to be in attendance.”<sup>3</sup> The increasing number of children being diagnosed with ASD also raises the likelihood that it may affect someone within your own immediate family.

### Compassion

One study reveals that 80 percent of marriages that have a child with autism may end in divorce due to the high level of stress and tension that may result.<sup>4</sup> Look at your congregation and observe for yourself the number of single parents who happen to have a child with a developmental disability. It may surprise you. Please understand that coming to church, hearing a message, fellowshiping with friends, and receiving encouragement from the body of Christ has often kept many marriages together. But a question begs to be answered: How do couples that have a child who has ASD manage to continue to attend when they encounter attitudinal barriers? Many studies have revealed the benefit of church attendance, but others show that two-thirds of parents with children who have autism claim that their children did not participate in any weekly spiritual events, and only slightly over 10 percent of children participated more than once or twice a month.<sup>5</sup>

Commenting on the story of Christ blessing the children, an author says that “He had heard their [the mothers’] prayers. He Himself had drawn them into His presence.”<sup>6</sup> Could it be that

God is also leading parents of children with special needs to your church family for them to receive His blessings? Could it be that they are simply obeying the promptings of the Spirit to help refresh their souls, marriages, and joy, but the indifference oftentimes shown them at our churches leaves them in despair?

The greatest barriers to those coming to see Jesus were His own disciples. They represent you and me—the leaders in God’s church. The pastor and elders, especially, set the emotional thermostat for a church. Once the membership realizes that the leader is disturbed and annoyed, the emotion transfers to the membership, and immediately a sea of eyes focuses upon that nervous family. I prefer the approach, shared by author Barbara Newman, that a certain pastor used. As he began to speak, someone started making noise in the back. Without missing a beat, the pastor calmly said, “Some of you might be hearing my friend, Marie. Marie’s mom and dad have asked me to tell you that she has autism spectrum disorder. Sometimes the tags in her clothes or a sound she hears really bother her. I appreciate that Marie is my cheering section today.”<sup>7</sup> That is the kind of relief pastors and elders can bring to their congregation each Sabbath, the kind of relief those with ASD and other special needs desire when they make their way to your congregation.

AS I GAINED GREAT INSIGHTS ON THE TOPIC, FOR ME, THE CRUCIAL POINT FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP BOILED DOWN TO THIS: OUR CHURCH FAMILY CANNOT IGNORE ANYONE BUT MUST VALUE ALL, MOREOVER THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.



## What can I do?

What can you, as a pastor, do? It matters not whether the building is large or small, fancy or plain; attitude is key. Think of when you are greeted with respect and kindness at a hotel. When problems arise, the staff has a keen desire to fix the issue and achieve great customer service. Everyone likes five-star service. How can you and your church leadership be that keenly aware of any needs and rise to help with those needs? Can some problems be anticipated and solutions implemented beforehand?

When we welcome families with ASD and other special needs, the question must always be, “How can we, as a church, serve you?” At first, you may not have a sensory room available, headphones to reduce the sound, or a sign language interpreter, but when it is known that the church will welcome and do whatever lies in their power to serve and empower those with ASD and other special needs, it sends a comforting message to the families attending.

People not only came to Jesus, but He also went to them. There is a powerful witnessing opportunity to minister to families unable to attend the services because of complications resulting from disabilities. As you do so, you will gain an entrance not only to their hearts but also to the hearts of all the family members connected with them.

## Education and awareness

My studies have revealed that when a church experiences a seminar on ASD and other special needs, their level of empathy and compassion generally increases. Sit down with your board and schedule a time when the church can conduct such a seminar. If your congregation or sister church already has experts in the discipline, employ their skills in making it a reality.

From the pulpit, let it be emphasized that all are welcomed. Apologize for where your church has gotten it wrong in times past, but also affirm the members each time they get it right. The global Seventh-day Adventist Church has made great strides in supporting those with special needs and disabilities through Adventist Possibility Ministries.<sup>8</sup> Across the world, there is a progressive movement in the church toward recognizing and affirming those who have special needs.

Learn as much as you can about the topic of disabilities and special needs to be as sensitive in your choice of terminology as possible. Hearing

words such as *retarded*, *imbecile*, and similar verbiage from the pulpit can be extremely offensive and harmful to those susceptible to being teased and bullied. Remember, you are inviting them to see Jesus, and your words and actions can either make that a reality or diminish the opportunity.

My wife and I have an awesome appreciation for our daughter. At times we pause and consider what life is like through her perspective, and it causes us to consider how strong she is. She is an integral part of our family. We are not complete without her, and the life and energy she brings to our home are what make it a Brooks household. Similarly, each family that comes to our church, including those with a special need, is a part of the family of God. Their very presence brings a richer experience while their absence creates a void. Adventist Possibility Ministries sums it up through their theme, which says, “All are gifted, needed, and treasured!”

Ellen White states it well when she says, “I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God’s test of our character.”<sup>9</sup> My prayer is that each church will meet and pass this test with flying colors.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 512.
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “What Is Autism Spectrum Disorder?” last reviewed August 27, 2019, [cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html).
- 3 Erik W. Carter, *Including People With Disabilities in Faith Communities* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), 54.
- 4 Chantal Sicile-Kira, “Autism—It’s a Family Thing,” *Psychology Today*, March 26, 2010, [psychologytoday.com/blog/the-autism-advocate/201003/autism-its-family-thing](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-autism-advocate/201003/autism-its-family-thing).
- 5 Gael I. Orsmond, Marty Wyngaarden Krauss, and Marsha Mailick Seltzer, “Peer Relationships and Social and Recreational Activities Among Adolescents and Adults With Autism,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 34, no. 3 (July 2004): 245–256.
- 6 White, *Desire of Ages*, 511.
- 7 Barbara J. Newman, *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People With Autism Spectrum Disorder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Friendship Ministries, 2011), 42.
- 8 For more information and resources on Adventist Possibility Ministries, visit [possibilityministries.org](https://possibilityministries.org).
- 9 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 511.



## Retired pastor assists during unprecedented bushfires in Australia

NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

As Australia reels from the ongoing destruction caused by multiple bushfires across the country, many, including Seventh-day Adventists, have rallied together to make a difference. New South Wales Rural Fire Service states that the fire has burned nearly 24,000 acres, trapping residents on the capital's outskirts in terrifying conditions. Retired Adventist pastor **Tony Campbell** contacted Orient Energy Systems, who helped him find donors to purchase and deliver portable generators at a discounted price. Further cash donations from Nunawading church members were sent with the generators to provide them with fuel.

"We had businessmen offer us warehouses," said ADRA Victoria volunteer manager **Merilyn Beveridge**. "Forklift drivers have offered us their forklifts [to transport goods onto trucks]. It's been amazing!"

Along with food and hygiene packs, ADRA is providing furniture and even temporary accommodation to people who have lost their homes. Adventists and friends in the city of Victoria banded together to sew pouches and wraps for countless animals burned in the bushfires.

PHOTO: ADRA VICTORIA FACEBOOK



ADRA volunteer coordinator Merilyn Beveridge (left) with a representative of Afri-Aus Care.

Seventh-day Adventist world church president **Ted Wilson** expressed profound appreciation for the work of ADRA and passionately urged a global prayer assault for this unprecedented tragedy. "Our hearts go out to our dear brothers and sisters down under, and to the entire country of Australia as they are experiencing a catastrophic situation with long-burning fires—resulting in enormous loss of life and property."

ADRA in Victoria, in conjunction with the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, has been supplying personal hygiene packs to relief centers and contributing food to families in need. "We've been able to respond and have a significant impact because, for a year now, we've been running a food bank program and reaching the community," **Andrew Wilson** said. "They trust us. We don't care if they're Christians or not; we just care for everyone."

Contributions may be sent to <https://adra.org/your-impact/emergency/> [Maryellen Fairfax, *Adventist Record* and *Adventist Review*]

## Religious freedom prayer breakfast hosted by North American Division

COLUMBIA, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES

People from diverse faith traditions attended the second annual religious freedom prayer breakfast hosted by the North American Division (NAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The event recognized Religious Freedom Day (January 16) in the United States and included prayer for elected officials, the community, and

the nation; for peace and places of worship; and for unity of spirit. Adventist, Jewish, Muslim, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and nondenominational Christian representatives offered the various petitions.

Special greetings from the governor's office were shared by **Boyd Rutherford**, lieutenant governor of Maryland. **Jonathan L. Weaver**, the senior pastor of the Greater Mt. Nebo African Methodist Episcopal Church and social justice advocate, delivered remarks during the prayer breakfast.

This commemorative day dates back to 1786, but, said **Orlan Johnson**, director of Public Affairs

and Religious Liberty for the NAD, “Religious freedom faces ongoing challenges in current public policy debates.”

Rutherford, during his remarks, talked about recent assaults on places of worship across the country. “We should all be willing to stand up for those who are subject to attacks, even if their views on religion are a little different from yours or mine. An attack on someone’s religious beliefs is an attack on all of us.”

Seven special prayers were offered during the event. “We express gratitude and thanks for the many churches in our community and for the men and women who lead them, and we ask You to bless them that their efforts might be sanctified and magnified by that Holy Spirit,” **Eric Baxter**, president of the Silver Spring Stake, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, said in prayer for the community.

“I pray that we will not think in terms of liberal or conservative, left wing or right wing, but that as one



body, we will focus on what is central and not what is peripheral. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:3 that we should endeavor to ‘keep the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace.’ We ask for that unity today,” NAD vice president **Tony Anobile** implored. [Kimberly Luste Maran, North American Division News]

## Hungarian church leader receives community award


BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

**Jenő Szigeti**, a former president of the Hungarian Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and a church historian, has been awarded a prize for his lifelong work in higher education and pastoral care focused on minorities. The award from the Wallenberg Association was presented at a ceremony hosted by the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities.

The prize is given to individuals or organizations that uplift high ethical standards and demonstrate serving minorities, underprivileged people, and those discriminated against in society.

In his acceptance speech, Szigeti highlighted that every human being is a minority because everyone is unique. “The core of our existence is to understand and accept others,” he said.

The annual award is in honor of **Raoul Wallenberg**, a Swedish diplomat who served in Budapest, Hungary, during World War II. He handed special passports to thousands of Jews in Nazi-occupied Hungary. Adventist pastor **László Michnay** then aided these refugees by hiding them in the central church building in Budapest

and other places. The membership helped to feed them and to smuggle them to safety. The prize is given to perpetuate Wallenberg’s humanitarian ideals and nonviolent courage. [Tamás Ócsai, Trans-European Division News] 



Jenő Szigeti and his wife

PHOTO: HUNGARIAN UNION CONFERENCE

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Sexual Identity, Orientation, and Relational Care

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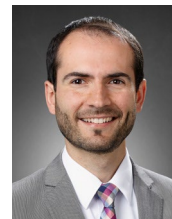
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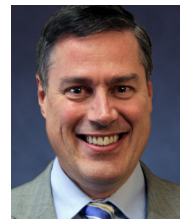
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# *The Myth of the Dying Church: How Christianity Is Actually Thriving in America and the World*

by Glenn T. Stanton (New York: Worthy Publishing, 2019).

**W**hat myth? Haven't we been reading and fretting over the slow death of the church for the last two decades? Have we not heard of the "graying of the church"? What about our consistent reliance on all the data that flowed from a well-known evangelical research company?

According to Glenn Stanton, the pending death of the Christian church is a myth—a huge myth. And it is not just Stanton who is attacking the myth. Other research scholars are saying it as well.

Stanton builds a solid case on the foundation of careful research from the Pew Research Center, the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, the Indiana/Harvard University study on religion in America, and many other research centers. This raises the question of how, for decades, have we been hearing about the demise of Christianity, yet the very opposite may be true?

Stanton admits that there has been a serious decline in the mainline churches in America. Yet, he takes us deeper into research clearly indicating that evangelical, conservative churches are either steady, thriving, or in some cases, exploding in growth. It is the liberal mainline churches that have experienced a loss of five million members since 2007 and which are, according to Pew, in deep trouble. Many of the liberal Protestant churches have abandoned their founding tenets for a "more enlightened" view of truth and faith.


This is not the case, he explains, for those churches who still preach and believe in the traditional truths of Scripture. Those solid biblical churches—that have vibrant and meaningful worship, practice and demonstrate their life in Christ, and reach out to meet the needs of the community—are growing! The growth, Stanton points out, is particularly noticeable among

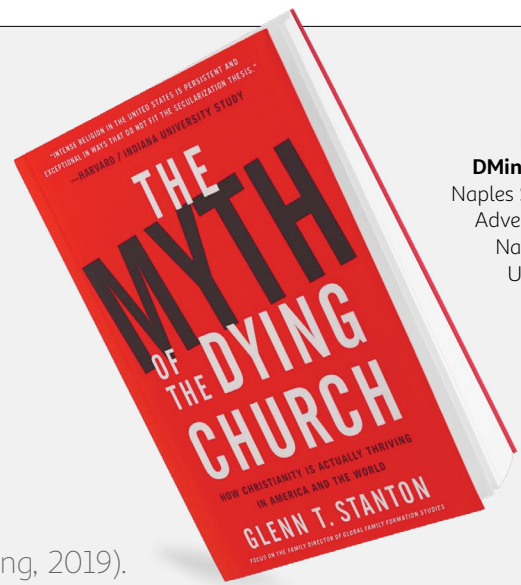
nondenominational churches who hold to a conservative, traditional view of the Bible.

In spite of what we may have heard, young adults are moving over to this type of church that puts the demands of the gospel upon them. The research Stanton cites indicates that this is a growing trend. That should be good news for every pastor, parent, and church leader. Then how could we have all been so wrong for so long?

Perhaps, Stanton suggests, media writers only grasped the headlines and failed to peer deeper into the research they were citing. Perhaps secular media failed to distinguish (or understand) the difference between liberal Protestant churches and the conservative Evangelical churches. The evidence seems to indicate that Christianity is not dying after all, rather it is reformulating or being clarified, a process that has occurred several times in the last two thousand years.

The church is particularly growing in the *global south* (people living below the earth's equator), where conservative, Bible-believing churches are doing especially well. Growth among such churches in Africa and South America is singled out for special note. But growth has also been explosive in China, where the government is trying to limit the spread of Christianity. Evidence from China indicates that the Christian faith is growing regardless of difficulties faced by believers there.

Stanton's book should give hope to all of us who are deeply concerned about the future of the church. The evidence presented indicates that Christianity is actually thriving in America and the world. Yet Stanton is not blind to widespread stagnancy in the church and is brave enough to challenge commonly held assumptions on cultures that we cherish, customs that we crave, and traditions that we treasure. His challenges cannot be ignored. 



**Bill Bossert, DMin**, pastors the Naples Seventh-day Adventist Church, Naples, Florida, United States.



# Involve the church in your call

**A**s an administrator, I do not have the privilege of being in the same church week after week. When pastoring, I spent over 13 years in one church, and in that time, we really got to know each other. I think that made me a better pastor. My leadership team knew the direction we were going and their part in our getting there.

Churches are filled with the walking wounded. I believe any church asks three questions of their pastor: (1) Can we trust you? (2) Do you know where you're going? (3) Can you get us there? Those questions are answered in the time spent together praying, listening, talking, laughing, modeling, mentoring, discipling, listening to them when their hearts are breaking, and rejoicing with them when their lives are well.

## I decided to involve my church in my decision to seriously consider the call that would remove me from being their pastor.

After nine years of pastoring this church family, I received a call from a conference to interview for their executive secretary position. It was a temptation due to several circumstances. One, it was a conference closer to my aging parents. Two, it was an opportunity to move from pastoring into administration. Three, it was with a conference president I had great respect for.

I decided to involve my church in my decision to seriously consider the call that would remove me from being their pastor.

I called a business meeting, advertising it as one they would not want to miss. I told the group at the meeting that they had a voice in my coming to this church, and I wanted to give them a voice if it was time for me to leave. After I

told them about the call to another conference, I said that maybe it was time for me to leave, and I wanted to get their opinion. I assured them they would not hurt my feelings or my love for them if, that night, they told me to leave.

As I moved toward a vote from them to encourage me to stay or go, some stood up and tried to delay the vote through several means. One said there had not been enough prayer to make a decision of this magnitude. I assured them there had been plenty of prayer regarding this meeting and the outcome. Others said that they had no right to determine my future as a conference employee. I agreed with them but then said, "How you feel about me continuing after nine years is an important part of our decision to move on or to stay."

We passed out slips of paper with the instruction to write "yes" to go and "no" to stay. I then prayed for their freedom to express their feelings with no fear of retribution. After collecting the papers, my elders totaled up the votes.

Ninety-seven percent of the votes turned in were for me to stay. That was important information for both my wife and me to have. We went and interviewed with the conference that had called me and enjoyed being in their company. On the flight home, my wife asked, "How do you feel about coming here?" I remember clearly saying to my partner in ministry and life that I felt perfectly at peace in staying where we were. She agreed, and we stayed for four more years. They were the best years the church ever had under my leadership.

This involvement with the church family enabled us to retool our vision and set goals and direction. It seemed that knowing I chose to stay with them and that they chose for us to stay helped us hit a new stride in our church. The church got answers to the three questions they ask of their pastor: they knew that I could be trusted, I knew where I was going and, by the grace of God, I could get them there.



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