

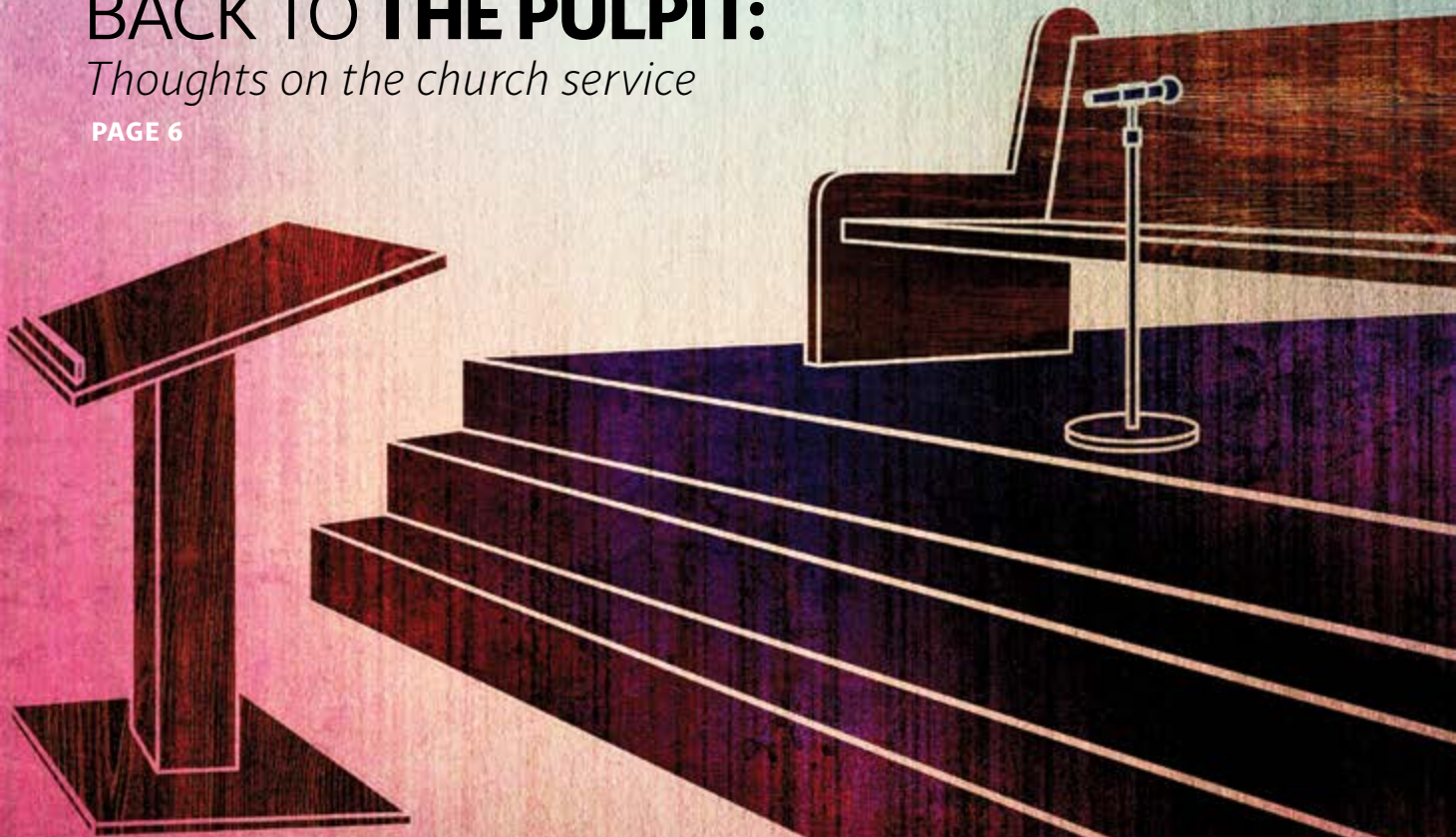
# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

## THE PEW TALKS BACK TO THE PULPIT:

*Thoughts on the church service*

PAGE 6



10

ENOUGH: DO YOU LIVE  
WITH A MINDSET OF  
SCARCITY OR ABUNDANCE?

18

BUILDING A CULTURE  
OF LIBERALITY IN THE  
LOCAL CHURCH

22

TEACHING, PREACHING,  
AND HEALING IN THE  
GOSPEL OF MARK

# TELL STORIES. CREATE CHANGE.

Earn your **Master of Arts in Cinema, Religion, and Worldview**.

The master of arts in cinema, religion, and worldview explores the common ground between film and related media, theological studies, and the art of communicating with a variety of audiences. This unique program focuses on creating skilled storytellers with a powerful message to share.

## 4 reasons this degree enhances your ministry:

- 1 It gives you the skills needed to connect with today's audiences.
- 2 It connects you with a supportive network that shares your passion.
- 3 It teaches you relevant filmmaking techniques.
- 4 It bridges the gap between theology and on-screen storytelling.

Join the two-year, online program and let our experienced faculty mentor you to tell stories that matter and achieve your career goals.

Learn more about our program at [film4him.org](http://film4him.org) where you can also view our films. Applications for the summer 2021 cohort will be accepted through May 1, 2021.

Seating is limited, apply today for free using discount code: **Ministry**

► Read the blog: [film4him.org/news/pastor](http://film4him.org/news/pastor)



06

## The pew talks back to the pulpit: Thoughts on the church service

NIELS-ERIK ANDREASEN

Renowned educator encourages two-way communication in church worship.

10

## ENOUGH: Do you live with a mindset of scarcity or abundance?

BONITA SHIELDS

“For he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27, NKJV). Do you have an endurance mentality in times of crisis?

14

## Stewards of this gift

SKIP BELL

“Be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, And, yes, Earth itself” (Gen. 1:28, *The Message*). Will we do our part?

18

## Building a culture of liberality in the local church

ANIEL BARBE

Pastors are encouraged to view members’ financial giving not as a duty of the administration but as a privilege of the shepherd.

22

## Our high calling: Teaching, preaching, and healing in the Gospel of Mark

KIM PAPAIOANNOU

The ministry of Jesus is in evidence when the message of health supports, not supplants, the gospel.



4 | REVIVAL & REFORMATION



5 | EDITORIAL



24 | LETTERS



26 | DATELINE



29 | RESOURCES



30 | PRACTICAL POINTERS

### Ministry

International Journal for Pastors  
12501 Old Columbia Pike,  
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA  
[www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org)  
[ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org)  
[@MinistryMagazine](https://www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine)  
[@minmag](https://www.instagram.com/minmag)  
[@ministrymagazine](https://www.instagram.com/ministrymagazine)  
[ministrymagazine.org/podcast](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

Vol. 92, No. 9 © 2020

### EDITOR

Pavel Goia

### ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Jeffrey O. Brown

### CONSULTANTS TO EDITOR

John Fowler, Clifford Goldstein,  
Gerald Wheeler

### EDITORIAL SPECIALIST

Sheryl Beck

### FINANCE AND TECHNOLOGY MANAGER

John Feezer IV

### MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Jonathan Walter

### SUBSCRIPTION ASSISTANT

Gloria Massenbourg

### INTERNATIONAL EDITORS

Chinese—Robert Wong  
French—Bernard Sauvagnat  
Japanese—Masaki Shoji  
Korean—Soon Ki Kang  
Portuguese—Wellington Barbosa  
Russian—Michael Kaminsky  
Spanish (Inter-America)—Saúl Ortiz  
Spanish (South America)—Marcos Blanco

### INTERNATIONAL ADVISORS

Lucas Alves Bezerra, Ron Clouzet,  
Darius Jankiewicz, Patrick Johnson,  
Thadi Johnson Jacob, Victor Kozakov,  
Wendell Wilcox Mandolang, Geoffrey  
G. Mbwana, Musa Mitekaro, Passmore  
Mulambo, Daniel Opoku-Boateng,  
Josney Rodriguez, Rainer Wanitschek,  
Ivan Williams, Ted N. C. Wilson

### LEGAL ADVISOR

Todd R. McFarland

### ADVERTISING

[advertising@ministrymagazine.org](mailto:advertising@ministrymagazine.org)

### SUBSCRIPTIONS/ RENEWALS/ADDRESS CHANGES

[subscriptions@ministrymagazine.org](mailto:subscriptions@ministrymagazine.org)  
+1 301-680-6511  
+1 301-680-6502 (fax)

### COVER

316 Creative

### LAYOUT

316 Creative

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

12 issues: United States US\$32.99;  
Canada and overseas US\$47.00.  
To order: send name, address, and  
payment to Ministry® Subscriptions,  
12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver  
Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA.  
[www.ministrymagazine.org/subscribe](http://www.ministrymagazine.org/subscribe).

### DIGITAL DELIVERY

Print subscribers can sign  
up for digital delivery at  
[www.ministrymagazine.org/digital](http://www.ministrymagazine.org/digital).

### TO WRITERS

We welcome unsolicited manuscripts.  
Before submitting, review the writers’  
guidelines at [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org).  
Please send manuscripts via email to  
[ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org).

## Ministry in Motion

Host: Anthony Kent  
Cohost: Ivan Williams  
[www.MinistryinMotion.tv](http://www.MinistryinMotion.tv)

Ministry® has been published monthly  
since 1928 by the Ministerial Association,  
General Conference of Seventh-day  
Adventists®. Ministry is a peer-reviewed

journal.

### MINISTERIAL SECRETARY

Jerry N. Page

### ASSOCIATE MINISTERIAL SECRETARIES

Jonas Arrais, Jeffrey O. Brown,  
Robert Costa, Pavel Goia, Anthony  
Kent, Janet Page

Printed by Pacific Press® Pub. Assn.,  
1350 N. Kings Rd., Nampa, ID 83687

Standard mail postage paid at Nampa,  
Idaho. (ISSN 0026-5314)

Member of Associated Church Press.

Adventist®, Seventh-day Adventist®, and  
Ministry® are the registered trademarks  
of the General Conference Corporation of  
Seventh-day Adventists®.

PRINTED IN THE USA.

**BIBLE CREDITS** Scripture quotations marked ESV are from  
The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright  
© 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News  
Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture  
quotations marked NASB are taken from the NEW AMERICAN  
STANDARD BIBLE®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971,  
1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.  
Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked NIV are  
from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®.  
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by  
permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture marked  
NKJV is taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright  
© 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights  
reserved. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from  
the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996,  
2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by  
permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream,  
Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations  
marked KJV are from the King James Version.



**Sebastien J. Braxton, MA in Communication**, is the CEO of Fiat Lux, a Christian mentorship and creative agency, and The New Life Challenge, a corporate wellness start-up, in Fayetteville, North Carolina, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

## Do you smell like an angel?

**A**s I knocked on the door, a small-framed, middle-aged woman opened it slightly to greet me. I began explaining that I was going door-to-door selling Christian literature. She quickly interrupted me and asked if I could come back tomorrow. She appeared emotionally disturbed. I leaned upon my own experience and replied, “Ma’am, we don’t usually come back. So, if you’re not interested, it’s perfectly fine. We have some sample books I can offer you for about ten to twenty dollars . . .” Again, she dismissed my comment and requested I come back the next day. I acquiesced and promised to return. The door rapidly closed.

### The miracle

Despite my stubborn resistance to the Spirit, I returned to her home. Before I could even finish knocking, the door opened, and she invited me inside to wait in the kitchen. I was so utterly convinced that this would be a waste of time that I did not even bring all my books inside with me. I soon regretted that decision. Sitting in plain sight was a blank bank check, already signed. This meant that she was ready to purchase the books; she just needed to know the price. I began apologizing to the Spirit for my lack of faith.

Upon her return, she noticed the display I created on her countertop and said, “I will purchase every book you have if you can answer me one question.”

In shock, I said, “Of course, anything!”

“Are you an angel?” she asked.

I shook my head. “No ma’am, I am not an angel.”

“Are you sure you’re not an angel?” she asked suspiciously, squinting.

“Yes, I am positive. You can ask my mother. She’ll tell you,” I said with a slight chuckle. I then asked curiously, “Why would you ask me that?”

### The angel in her dream

Her response changed my entire understanding of how involved God had been in bringing us together. The


woman told me that one year prior, she had a dream in which she dialogued with an angel whose face she could not see due to its brightness. When she woke up, thinking it was *just a dream*, she sat up and realized that the same angel was at the foot of her bed! The angel rapidly flew out the window, and as quickly as she could, she ran to the window to catch a glimpse of him—but to no avail.

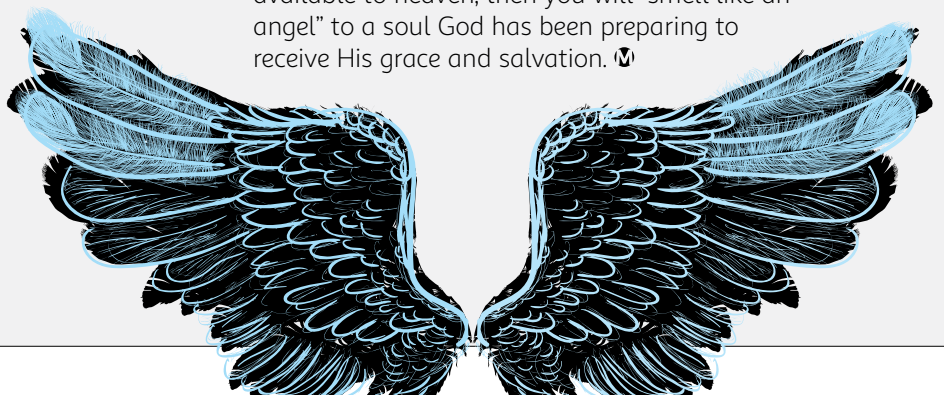
As she pulled her head back inside the window, an overpowering smell rested in the room. The smell was pleasant but unfamiliar. She began a search for the source of the smell. She smelled every perfume, cologne, herb, essence, air freshener, any scent she could find. None of them matched. Until I showed up at her door. The woman told me, “You had the smell! I was so overwhelmed that I panicked and asked if you could come back tomorrow. I figured, if you were an angel from God, you would come back. You wouldn’t lie.”

And to think I almost did not return! I nearly missed an opportunity to be a part of a miracle of God by losing my heart for souls in the routine of service.

She went on to say, “Even right now, you still have the smell.” We prayed together and embraced, and she requested Bible studies.

### Do you smell like an angel?

Like a modern-day Cornelius experience (Acts 10), God is preparing someone right now for you. I believe God left that scent over a year before for her to confirm the heavenly authority of whoever bore it again. Thankfully, God is no respecter of persons, and He will gladly give the same experience to anyone willing to offer themselves for the salvation of others. If you are willing to submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit and make yourself available to heaven, then you will “smell like an angel” to a soul God has been preparing to receive His grace and salvation. 





**Anthony Kent, MA in Theology,** is the editor of *Elder's Digest* and a General Conference associate ministerial secretary, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



## One certainty prevails

**T**he year 2020 will be remembered, without a need for explanation, like 1914, 1929, 1939, 1968, and 2001.

When 2020 dawned, who could have imagined the changes we would see? It is rather ironic that the phrase *twenty-twenty* is typically associated with excellence in human vision, yet no human envisioned 2020 unfolding as it has.

It is not just the changes that have occurred—it is the speed of those changes. In previous eras, transitions took decades. Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876. It took more than a century to move from his invention to the smartphones we carry in our pockets today. The luxury of gentle, incremental change belongs to a previous time.

One weekend, pastors were preaching in churches, and we had the unappreciated pleasure of receiving immediate feedback from the expressions on the faces of attendees. The next moment, we were preaching alone to a phone or camera—and we were left wondering whether there was any real connection with those on the other side of the device. We went from numbers in the pews to the number of views.

Yes, ministry has changed. We cannot enjoy warm handshakes, the literal embraces of fellowship, and united voices singing praises to Jesus. Now we have masks and (social) distance. Committee meetings, prayer meetings, Bible study groups, visitations, Communion services, ordinations, weddings, funerals, are all different now. Immediate change to ministry was necessary and remains essential. This global pandemic is a killer. We are not changing ministry as a charade but because gathering has caused death for many, grief for multitudes, and anxiety for all.

Fear and pain have been partners with the pandemic. The threat or the reality of the loss of life, health, family, friends, and/or income has changed our lives and ministries. Pastors are not just ministering to others sleepless with worry; they are suffering with no immunity to the hardships. And, to state the obvious, the *normal* challenges of life—cancer, strokes, paying the bills—are all still happening.

What is next? Writing this in June for a September publication, it is difficult to say, but I do have a hunch—there will probably be more changes requiring us to adapt and refine our ministries and lives.

One certainty prevails. And more certain than death and taxes—the Jesus who called you into the ministry; blessed you with the Holy Spirit; and gifted you with talents, resourcefulness, opportunities, and intelligence will be near you.

***We are not changing ministry as a charade but because gathering has caused death for many, grief for multitudes, and anxiety for all.***

God's promises, found in His Word, linger. "I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you" (Josh. 1:5).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Hebrews 13:5, 6 "I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear.' "

Minnie Louise Haskins, a young dedicated missionary in 1908, ministering in arduous circumstances, penned the words of a poem that has comforted and inspired the masses and royalty alike:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

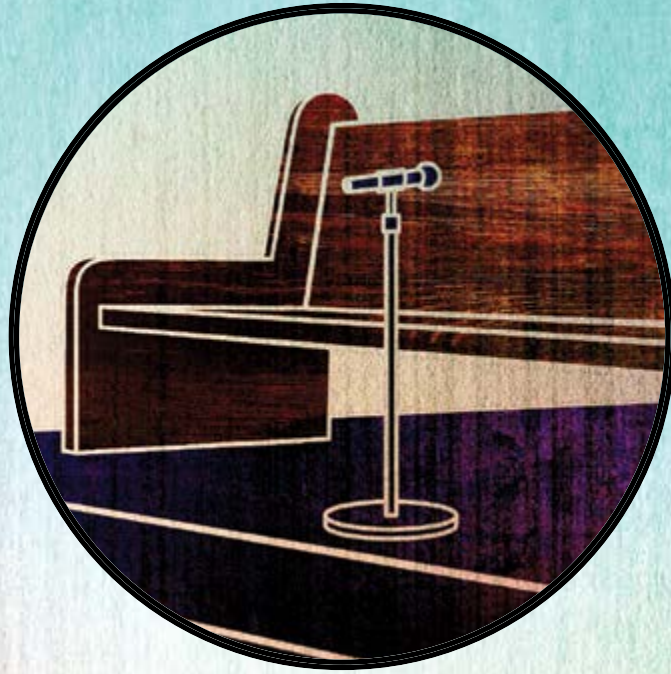
"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."<sup>2</sup>



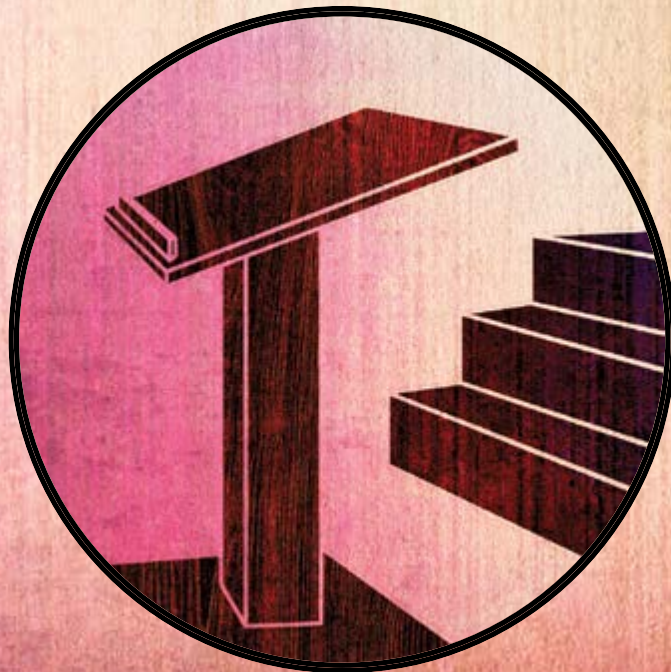
1 Scripture is from the English Standard Version.

2 "'God Knows' by Minnie Louise Haskins," *Along the Beam* (blog), Dec. 31, 2017, [alongthebeam.com/2017/12/31/god-knows-by-minnie-louise-haskins/](http://alongthebeam.com/2017/12/31/god-knows-by-minnie-louise-haskins/).



# THE PEW TALKS BACK TO THE PULPIT:

*Thoughts on the church service*



**Niels-Erik Andreasen, PhD**, is president emeritus of Andrews University, residing now in Helena, California, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

**B**efore retirement, I generally sat in church near the front or even stood in the pulpit. Now I sit in the middle, surrounded by others who, like me, occupy their seats in the pew. That is as it should be, and my wife and I are blessed to have a welcoming pew in a church not far from our home and we are thankful to have a pastor occupying the pulpit. That transition from pulpit to pew has reminded me vividly that the pulpit is for speaking and the pew for listening.

I am surrounded in church by worshipers who, like me, have come to listen. Of course, I have noticed that some worshipers express themselves from their seats with raised hands or, at times, calling out “Amen!” or another exclamation. However, that does not change the fact that the pulpit is for speaking, just as the pew is for listening. The apostle Paul would be proud of us for maintaining such good order in church (1 Cor. 14:40), and I would not wish to change that.

However, I do sometimes wonder what the pew would say if it could talk back to the pulpit, not in a rude and disruptive way—but quietly and thoughtfully. Here are some thoughts I believe the pew would share with the pulpit about the sermon, prayers, hymns, and the rest if it could talk to the pulpit.

## The sermon

Most sermons are prepared in the pastor’s study one or more days before the service during an intense period of study, prayer, and meditation. Meanwhile, the worshipers make their way to church on Sabbath morning expecting to hear a word from God. How can the pastor’s preparation meet the worshiper’s expectations?

The best answers to this question are obtained by visiting those who occupy the pew and listening to them. So, I have concluded that sermon preparation begins with getting to know the parishioners. Most of them sitting in the pew from week to week look very much like me, next to my

spouse, dressed up (or down as the custom may be nowadays), respectable, and generally attentive. Some are younger and perhaps giggle a bit now and then. Others are older and apt to close their eyes for a minute now and again. However, we all are where we want to be, and we do listen.

A visiting pastor would soon learn that the daily life of a Christian, appearances notwithstanding, is not always easy. College students and young adults face huge pressures from studies or work or dealing with big student loans on top of other expenses. Then follows the struggle to keep up with friends or colleagues who are better off or smarter or better looking or more popular.

Parents always worry about their children, whether they are young or grown. Spouses watch their first honeymoon happiness vanish under the daily grind at work and home, or over budgets or job security. And the older members see life slipping away gradually under the burden of age and illness. Underneath all the respectability, good manners, and pleasant appearance, the comfortable homes we live in, the fine cars we drive, prosperity and achievement on display, lurk the familiar fears, uncertainties, and disappointments or just worries of which we all have our share.

So, what to preach about? The gospel is a winner every time. Once, after an especially good sermon, I complimented our pastor and added this: “When you preach about important issues in the life of the church, society, and the world, we are benefited; but when you preach the gospel, we are blessed.”

If the sermon is for preaching the gospel, it cannot be built upon personal experiences or anecdotes, no matter how charming and sweet. These may serve as illustrations, but the sermon is to be built upon Scripture.

The first step in preparing such a sermon is visiting and getting to know the worshipers. The next steps are reading, prayer, and meditation in the pastor’s study. Many a time while preparing

a sermon, I stopped, looked over my sermon notes while recalling conversations with church members, and then asked myself: *Is that really what Mr. Smith and Mrs. Brown need to hear tomorrow? Is this my sermon or theirs?* The brutal answer to that question ended up in the pile of misguided sermon notes at the bottom of my wastepaper basket! The pew would say to the pulpit: “Get to know us, preach the gospel; let us hear the Word of God.”

## The prayer

Once, when I was attending a church with several other visiting church leaders, the local pastor distributed assignments to each guest, and I landed the pastoral prayer. *It would be better for a local elder who knows the congregation to lead it in prayer*, I thought. The concern is not that the morning prayer is a prayer for the people, so the one who leads out must know their needs. Rather the morning prayer is a prayer to God by the people, spoken on their behalf. During the morning prayer, the leader makes the congregation’s innermost thoughts to be spoken to God from the pew.

Therefore, the morning prayer should be prepared carefully to express the people’s thoughts toward God. They include praise and adoration; thanksgiving and joy; confessions and forgiveness; and, of course, petitions and commitment. But they have to come from the heart of the worshipers, express what they really feel—things they have talked about, shared, worried about, felt sorry for, and been glad of. Some public prayers have become very personal and specific. That may be embarrassing and unnecessary. It is far better to pray in such a way that individual worshipers quietly and invisibly nod their hearts in recognition and agreement, thinking, *Yes, that is my prayer too.*

When the morning prayer is formal—either because it is simply read from a prayer book or because it is improvised on the spot with all our familiar prayer clichés—it easily degenerates into a mere interlude in the worship service. Thereby a particularly important part of it is lost, namely a moment to speak with God honestly and collectively. Thus, what the pew says to the pulpit is: “Prepare the prayer, make it our prayer (you know us), speak honestly—and not too long.”

## The hymns

It is probably impossible to find an agreement on music. For starters, it appears that, by and large in churches I have attended, the people in the pew have stopped speaking about the use

of hymns. It is just too complicated and divisive, and many worshipers read the bulletin while the music is playing.

Nevertheless, a few comments on this subject are heard from time to time. Traditional hymns in the hymnal are used infrequently in many places, and when one is selected, it is generally sung off a projection screen, indicating that the screen, not surprisingly, has replaced the book. Participation is generally good if the hymn is an “old favorite.”

However, I have found that there is a growing resistance to traditional hymns. Some have noted that since the hymnal was published, we have seen a variety of new Bible translations to make it easier for new generations to read Scriptures with understanding. We have not seen a similar effort to renew the hymn book and hymn singing in church. Newer hymns in the traditional style, using contemporary wording with newer, updated hymn tunes, do exist but are rarely chosen, with the result that the best older hymns are also omitted. In their place, more popular praise songs are chosen and generally “performed,” nearly always with amplification and accompanied by a variety of instruments, often but not always led by younger members.

However, in many places, relatively few worshipers participate by singing along. It could be argued that our hymnology has failed our churches, leaving a vacuum, and the praise songs have simply filled it with something new and appealing to many. The words of the praise songs, for the most part, are familiar and direct, and they belong to the everyday discourse they communicate. The lyrics tend toward the emotional, sentimental, deeply personal, sensual, or even seductive but are full of grace, passion, friendship, and love. They are set to simple melodies and harmonies, repetitive, easy enough to sing. Even so, they have not penetrated all the way back to the pews, even in churches with a strong band of musicians up front driving the singing forward. Is that because of resistance on the part of some worshipers to this type of music? Or do many of the songs lack the spiritual depth they are seeking? Or is the ubiquitous presence of background music making us casual listeners? I do not know whether we have ever asked the “pew” about it.

Christian worship has always included singing. It is participatory. That does not exclude performed music, of course, but it always includes participatory singing. Therefore, both words and music must be suitable for congregational use, even if that requires a little instruction to get



started. Christian churches throughout the centuries have drawn from good music belonging to its own age or even written specifically for worship. No period in the long Christian history has a monopoly on church music. Instead, each period has contributed hymns and music of lasting value. Our hymns must connect with worshipers so that they can readily participate. That goes for the music, but the words also must convey their meaning clearly for our time and not simply be carried forward by a fetching or familiar tune. So, yes, music in worship must be renewed and revived in every generation.

Also, singing in church is designed to make us “fellow travelers.” Worshipers sing together; in fact, it is the only communal activity during worship. Hymns and songs bind the worshipers to one another and to God. The words should

online, many, perhaps most, continue to place their gifts in the plate during services. That practice has linked the financial support of the church with the weekly service, and church leadership knows that. It is hard to prove this, but it is likely that the level of church support, therefore, is related to the degree to which the worshipers feel connected with and blessed by the worship service. It would be reckless for church leaders to assume that in our time, church members, especially the younger set, simply support their church on principle and percentages alone, no matter what happens in the church service. An uplifting service inspires church support in this generation of believers.

Finally, there is fellowship during the worship hour. Meeting fellow believers, greeting them, having a brief conversation, enjoying spiritual

**“WHEN YOU PREACH ABOUT IMPORTANT ISSUES IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH, SOCIETY, AND THE WORLD, WE ARE BENEFITED; BUT WHEN YOU PREACH THE GOSPEL, WE ARE BLESSED.”**

describe what the worshipers do and think or hope to do when they arrive at their destination or describe what God has done or promised to do for them. They should have action words, whether physical (working, guiding) or spiritual (believing, longing) or the like. It may take some education on the part of the minister of music, but what the pew says to the pulpit is: “The singing in worship should be community-building, faith-affirming, and motivating in our Christian life.”

### **Scripture, offering, fellowship**

The Scripture the sermon is based upon should be read during worship. The passage, whether read responsively or by a solo voice, should be spoken clearly so that the listeners can understand it without looking it up in a pew Bible or following it on the screen. Either way, the Scripture should be read clearly and beautifully in a strong voice. After all, it is the Word of God.

Meanwhile, although a growing number of members return their tithe and give offerings

family fellowship—these are all important to those who occupy the pew. I especially have found that senior worshipers always participate in an invitation to meet and greet members in the pews nearby, although it does interrupt the service. Inviting members to come early and meet and greet in the church lobby (narthex) or even outside over a cup of juice or tea seems to work well and be more inclusive of all generations, especially the children and young adults. Eating together before or after the service is a millennia-old Christian practice that can provide good fellowship, especially if the meal includes everyone.

Above all, the entire worship event is to be enveloped in a spiritual experience that lifts us out of the daily life with all its mixture of joy and sadness, assurance and fear, into a higher experience that will cast a glow on the whole week to come. These, then, are a few things that, I believe, the pew would say to the pulpit. Thus, I end with this question: *Pulpit, are you listening?* 🙏

# ENOUGH

## Do you live with a mindset of scarcity or abundance?

**H**ow much more money would you need in order to have “enough”? According to research, the magical number is \$10,000. However, after many of those people who said that \$10,000 would be “enough” received raises, they were asked the same question again and said that \$10,000 more would be enough. Bottom line: they never had enough, no matter how much they had.<sup>1</sup>

During the COVID-19 crisis, many people have lost their livelihoods, savings, or financial security. However, what the \$10,000 magical number illustration shows is that, whatever our circumstances, we often focus on what we do not have rather than on what we do. Rather than believe God has blessed us immensely—and continues to do so through crisis after crisis—and then express gratitude for those blessings, big or small, we often talk and live as if we never have enough.

What difference would it make in our personal lives if we were to look through a lens of abundance, focusing on what we have rather than what we do not?

### A mindset of scarcity

This lie that we do not have enough, that God is withholding from us—just like in the Garden of Eden, when Satan made Adam and Eve think that they did not have enough, that God was withholding from them a fruit that was “good for food . . . pleasant to the eyes, and . . . desirable to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6)<sup>2</sup>—is insidious. It is subtle. It sneaks inside of us, in various forms, when we least expect it.

For example, we might hear: “I don’t have enough ability.” It sounds so humble, does it not? Actually, it is one of the most faithless statements believers make.

During Sabbath School class one morning, the teacher asked the members, “What are you good at?” How would people respond? No one did. As we sat there in silence, I decided to break it. “I’m good at writing.” I thought that was a safe one. I was a writer and editor with the *Adventist Review* at the time. I had to have a modicum of ability for that role. Nevertheless, the silence continued. You would have thought I declared myself Maya Angelou.


Finally, Jean<sup>3</sup> responded, “You know, Donna is really gifted at decorating.” Then, Donna said, “You know, James is excellent at woodworking.” And so it went.

Do you see what happened? They were willing to affirm others—which is a good thing—but they were unwilling to share how God had gifted them. They confused humility with a denial of our God-given giftedness.

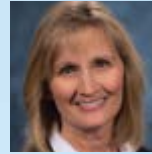
I have also been challenged by this concept anew during COVID-19. It has been so inspiring to hear and read about people who have found ways to minister to others from home. One person from my church sent out cards of encouragement; others have been making masks. Some are doing yardwork for their elderly neighbor; others are working at local food pantries to distribute food.

Sometimes we hear, “I don’t have enough money.” I have worked throughout the church structures for more than 33 years. As a local church pastor, I remember thinking, “If only the conference would give us more money at the local church, we’d be fine.” The conference staff often say, “If only the union or division would give us more money, we’d be OK.” And the division looks to the General Conference for more money.

No question, many of these needs are real, and we should regularly reevaluate our distribution



**Bonita Shields, MPM**, is vice president for ministries, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Columbia, Maryland, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

of God's funds throughout His church. But even after funds have been distributed, there is never enough. "We need more!" is the cry from the scarcity mindset.

Make no mistake about it, many of our members, churches, and conferences are struggling financially during this crisis. Many conferences have had to lay off people. However, our God is bigger than COVID-19. When we view life through a lens of scarcity—we never have enough—it reflects on the character of God. It tells the world that our God is *not* greater than a virus. It tells the world that our God is insufficient to meet our needs. It tells the world that since our God is not generous, we cannot be generous with others.

### A mindset of abundance

In contrast to the mindset of scarcity, there is the mindset of abundance. I am not talking about abundance in the sense of acquiring more stuff. That is consumerism. Rather, I am talking about living our lives with the knowledge that God can meet *all* our needs—physical and emotional.

A mindset of abundance is rooted in the belief that *we have* enough. That *we are* enough. It does not deny our legitimate needs. What it does is operate from a stance of gratitude for those things that *we do* have. When we have this mindset, that we have an abundance, we are ready to share it with others. When we view life through a mindset of abundance and live generously, it reflects on the character of God. Our generosity reflects the type of God we serve. Our generosity impacts how others view us as believers. Our generosity reflects whether or not we *believe* God's Word.

This is *not* to say that we mindlessly give of our resources of time, abilities, and finances to those who will misuse and abuse them—or that we must succumb to the pressure to give to those who do not need it, or that we must fall prey to the consumeristic mindset of our society, which says you are not generous if you do not give "stuff."

Being generous can take place even during a crisis. Being generous not only with our finances but also with our time, talents, praise, grace, forgiveness, and acceptance reflects the generosity of our God.

### Generosity: The new evangelism

Generosity has been called the "new evangelism." Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard write, "Generous behavior is the best validation that Christians believe what they profess about God,

faith, the Bible, and eternity. This practice of generosity is authentic and becomes magnetic to people who do not accept the Christian faith."<sup>4</sup>

If generosity reveals to the world God's character, and one cannot be generous living in a scarcity mindset, how can we learn to live a life of faithful stewardship through the lens of abundance and "enough"?

1. *We receive graciously* ("We are enough"). We have such a difficult time receiving gifts from others—even with receiving the gift of salvation. It takes humility to receive and not feel obligated.

At Christmas, when someone gives you a gift, more often than not, do you say, "Oh, thank you for your thoughtfulness and generosity," even though you might also think, *Oh my, how can I get them a gift in exchange for this one in a way that they won't realize that I'm giving them a gift only because they gave me one?*

Have we learned to receive from God in gratitude rather than refuse to receive because we cannot repay Him? When we are able to receive blessings from God in gratitude without feeling the need to pay Him back, we can operate from a mindset of abundance and generosity and then can cheerfully return to Him what is rightfully His.

2. *We return cheerfully* ("God is enough"). Returning to God what is rightfully His—whether returning praise for His generous gifts to us, returning a gift of increase through tithe, or returning from our gift of time through observing Sabbath—is not a legal transaction. It is a relational transaction. Returning to God what is rightfully His involves the release of control, letting go.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel speaks about this letting go: "To gain control of the world of space is certainly one of our tasks. The danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time. There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern."<sup>5</sup>

As we experience this releasing, this letting go of control, we find that we can manage what we do have. We find that we do have enough.

3. *We manage faithfully* ("We have enough"). Do we have enough time to share with others? Do we have enough talents to share through service? Have we embraced God's grace so that we can share it with others? Do we have enough financial resources to share with others?

Statistics tell us that 70 percent of US households would have difficulty if only one paycheck was delayed.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, about 25 percent of US families spend more than they earn.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to be generous when you are oppressed by debt. Faithfully managing one's finances first blesses you and your life, which, in turn, allows you to bless someone else's life. Billy Graham stated, "If a person gets his attitude about money straight, it will help straighten out almost every area of his life."<sup>8</sup>

4. *We give generously* ("God has enough"). A beggar by the roadside asked for alms from Alexander the Great as he passed by. The Emperor threw him several gold coins. A courtier was astonished at his generosity and commented, "Sir, copper coins would adequately meet a beggar's need. Why give him gold?" Alexander responded in royal fashion, "Copper coins would suit the beggar's need, but gold coins suit Alexander's giving."<sup>9</sup>

What suits God's giving?

"Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood' " (Mark 12:41–44; see also Luke 21:1–4).

Many came and gave out of their abundance, but they were giving from a scarcity mindset. The widow gave from her poverty. She had every reason not to give. Some would consider what she gave a pittance. Some would have told her that she did not have enough to give. But she gave from a mindset of abundance. She had enough.

## Like Jesus

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). We give to be like Jesus, who gave of Himself. We give to fulfill our mission to reach a lost world. We give to show the world who our God is and that He is *more than sufficient* to meet our needs—and theirs. Whether we have \$10,000, or less, it does not matter. What matters for us is to be like Jesus, who can meet all our needs—and then some.

**Our generosity reflects the type of God we serve. Our generosity impacts how others view us as believers. Our generosity reflects whether or not we believe God's Word.**



- 1 See, for example, Mattie Kahn, "The \$10,000 Salary Jump That Will Actually Make a Difference in Your Life," *Glamour*, April 9, 2019, <https://www.glamour.com/story/the-dollar10000-salary-jump-that-will-actually-make-a-difference-in-your-life>.
- 2 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 3 Not her real name.
- 4 Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity: Creating a Culture of Giving in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), chapter 10 description.
- 5 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1951), prologue.
- 6 American Payroll Association, "Survey Finds Majority of Americans Live Paycheck to Paycheck," Cision, PR Newswire, September 10, 2019, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/survey-finds-majority-of-americans-live-paycheck-to-paycheck-300915266.html>.
- 7 Research from the Association of Young Americans and the American Association of Retired Persons. See Liz Stevens, "What Percentage of Americans Spend More Than They Earn?" *Best Money Moves*, Oct. 3, 2018. <https://bestmoneymoves.com/blog/2018/10/03/what-percentage-of-americans-spend-more-than-they-earn/>.
- 8 Billy Graham, *Unto the Hills: A Daily Devotional* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 141.
- 9 "Generosity," Sermon Illustrations, <http://sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/generosity.htm>.

# Stewards of this

# gift

It was New Year's Day, 1970. I was about to give the most important gift of my life to someone whom I loved. How I hoped she would like it! I also hoped that she would say yes to my proposal for marriage. I lifted the top from the case holding the gift, a beautiful watch with four diamonds. She threw her arms around me and, with joyous laughter, exclaimed "Yes!"

What seems now to be a somewhat childish verbal exchange followed. After tears and hugs subsided, I asked, "Do you like it?"

"Like it? I love it!" she replied.

I confirmed, "You love it?"

"Yes! Wow! I love it!" she exclaimed.

However great that response was, the most important response in all of history was that of the first man and woman who opened their eyes, and, for the first time, observed their gift—the created world. I imagine hearing in that narrative a hopeful Creator inquiring, "Do you like it?"

"Like it? We love it!" they respond with the joy of a child receiving a prized gift on Christmas morning. "You love it?"

"Yes! Wow! We love it!"

And God said: "Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground" (Gen. 1:28).<sup>1</sup> It is yours—My gift to you. Accompanying the gift was a privilege, a responsibility of sorts. It is an expression of trust and

stewardship that continues, for us, today.

## Rejoicing in the gift

We find ourselves surrounded by beauty. Yes, there are scars on this creation everywhere, but remarkable beauty remains. We still enjoy this amazing planet.

We worship and experience spiritual connection, thanking God for the beauty of His gift. We do that each day, of course, and especially on Sabbath, when we affirm His creation.

The psalmist shared our joy in the gift of creation:

You formed the mountains by your power. . . .

You quieted the raging oceans  
with their pounding waves. . . .

Those who live at the ends of the earth  
stand in awe of your wonders.

From where the sun rises to where it sets,  
you inspire shouts of joy.

You take care of the earth and water it,  
making it rich and fertile. . . .

You soften the earth with showers  
and bless its abundant crops. . . .

The grasslands of the wilderness become a  
lush pasture,  
and the hillsides blossom with joy. . . .

**Skip Bell, DMin**, is professor emeritus of Christian leadership, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

They all shout and sing for joy!"  
(Psalm 65:6–10, 12, 13).

On the first Sabbath, the Creator smiled at us, delighted to share His gift. "And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation" (Gen. 2:3).

What a gift, this planet. The sun gives energy and light. Our planet turns, providing day and night. There is oxygen for plants and animals. Water moves from the atmosphere to the ground; to rivers, lakes, and oceans; and back to the atmosphere. Everything in creation is connected to something else. The complexity of Earth inspires awe and humility.

The soil supports plants and trees with minerals, fungi, and microbes. The sun enables plants to convert solar energy into nutrients and oxygen. Plants return organic matter to the soil, feeding the organisms of the forest floor. The ecosystem provides for all living creatures.

Maltbie Babcock said it well:

This is my Father's world.  
E'en yet to my listening ears  
All nature sings, and around me rings  
The music of the spheres.<sup>2</sup>

### Temperature rising?

However, we no longer listen to the music of the water, the earth, the air. We were created with

the knowledge and skill to protect and preserve as God asked, but our fallen nature means we defer to distraction, indifference, or silence. We are neglecting the gift, and we are abandoning our stewardship.

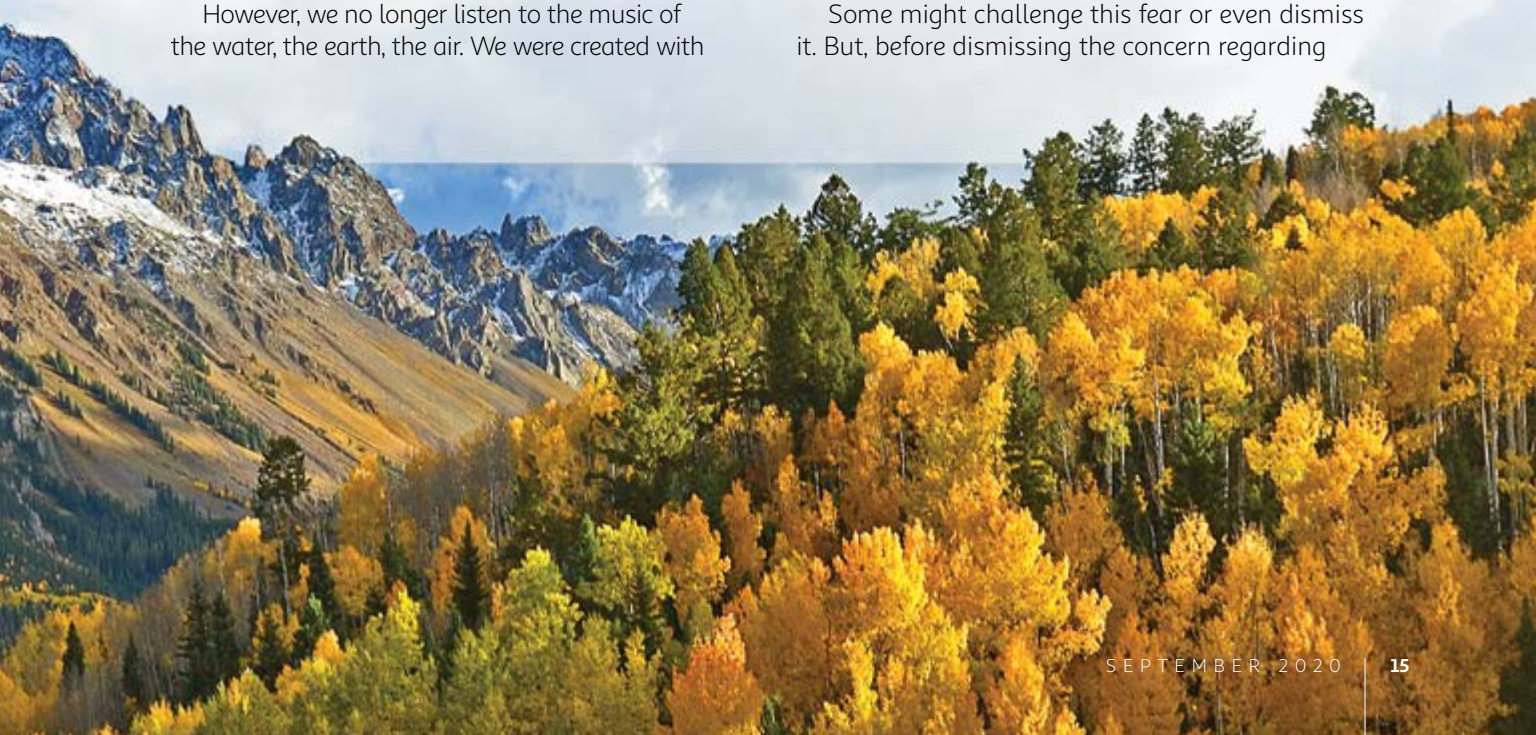
According to a study conducted by NASA's Goddard Institute, as affirmed by numerous other reliable studies, the Earth's average annual global temperature has continually risen for 100 years. We are now about 1.6 degrees (Fahrenheit) warmer. The warming of the Earth is quickening. The 10 warmest years on record have all occurred in the last 20 years, and the 4 warmest years have all occurred since 2014.

Why should we be concerned about a 1.6-degree increase? Because it is an enormous feat to warm all the oceans, land, and the atmosphere by even 1 degree. All those elements have to go through tremendous change for the global temperature to rise. Global temperature is driven by the amount of energy from the sun that our atmosphere allows to pass through or to radiate back. That process is dependent upon the atmosphere's chemical composition. Unfortunately, human activities emit large amounts of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) that are changing this chemical process.

We have come to a dangerous place. A tipping point, perhaps?

### Three points

Some might challenge this fear or even dismiss it. But, before dismissing the concern regarding



our stewardship of God's gift, consider three things.

First, facts do not cease to be facts just because we ignore them. Of course, 50,000 people may ignore a fact, but it is still a fact. This information may be inconvenient or differ from what our group confirms, but it is still a fact. We often prefer to ignore facts, create an alternate reality, or remain in step with those we wish to identify with. We sometimes deny data, reason, or good research in preference for the bias of our crowd. We note some regretful moments in history in which we have gone so far as to vilify scientists or academics because they contradict an alternate reality we chose to identify with.

Second, we can observe with our own eyes the impact of human activity in the death of fish in polluted rivers, sterility of soils, or disease in animals from pesticides. We can see it. We may deny the science that tells us of the damage being done to creation; but we can hardly deny what we see.

Third, we confirm the value of stewardship in our daily lives. Every time we pick up, clean up, care for the soil and water where we live, or worry about the air in our homes, we are expressing stewardship. In doing that, we acknowledge the damage that can be done, that is inevitable, if we fail. There have been many reports also indicating the healing of the Earth during the COVID-19 pandemic. While people have driven and flown less, air pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> have decreased rapidly.<sup>3</sup>

### Where is the voice?

This is our Father's world. The mountains of British Columbia, the coast of California, the islands of the Pacific, the soaring peaks of Asia, and the forests of South America all are a gift of God. In the beginning, He designed us for relationship, to live in proximity with others, and to care for the human family. Thus, the stewardship of His creation includes the air, oceans, rivers, parks, and even the streets and alleyways of our great cities. We are His stewards.

The world needs a clear prophetic voice defending God's creation. Prophets are not popular. They have often been the object of ridicule and criticism. It should not surprise us that in the context of worry about jobs, suspicion of government regulation, and pursuit of financial gain, the prophetic voice of concern for creation is unpopular today.

Where is the voice of the church? Martin Luther King Jr., in his letter from a jail cell in

Birmingham, lamented the silence of the church regarding human rights. "There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society."<sup>4</sup> I believe that lament can be shared regarding the silence of the church today in the matter of creation stewardship.

Where is the voice of the church? It is not so much the silence of the organization I lament. Seminaries and church entities publish position papers and statements that call for stewardship of the earth. However, people of the church too often remain silent in their daily lives.

### Four things we can do

This inaction needs to change. Let us challenge ourselves as Sabbath-celebrating, Creation-affirming Christians to fulfill our stewardship of creation in four distinct ways.

First, confirm the creation of our world as a precious gift. The disciple John modeled that witness in his gospel:

In the beginning the Word already existed.  
The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He existed in the beginning with God.  
God created everything through him  
(John 1:1–3).

We seem to be able to do this. We can find places of beauty and exclaim, "Wow! Thank You for the gift!"

Second, connect to the land, water, and air. We will love the earth when we come to know it. Study and interact with creation. Consider, for example, our connection to and dependence on water. We are forever linked, really intertwined, with every drop of water. So, learn the science of your watershed: the creeks, rivers, lakes, underground aquifers, and ocean. In enjoying the natural wonders of rivers, lakes, and oceans, we become familiar with animal and fish habitats, their fragile nature, and determine to protect them. Then we become stewards.

The third fulfillment of stewardship, we find more difficult. Confess and repent. We will be unable to sacrifice and act to protect the earth until we confess the damage that we have done, the damage that we do, and then—repent.



I have been saddened to see a reduction of the number of waterways protected from pollution, pained to see the scrapping of clean emissions plans aimed to cut down carbon emissions, and hurt by the rolling back of regulations requiring methane emitters to reduce methane pollution. I have been heartbroken to observe bans on the use of hydrofluorocarbons eliminated and that automobile fuel efficiency standards have been lowered.

However, we all share culpability. As good stewards, we must consider our role; our choices; and how we might, by God's grace, reverse direction.

The fourth fulfillment is the most difficult. Act! Protect the environment and stand up for it. Pollute the waters? Stand up and say no. Pollute the air? Stand up and say no. Poison the soil with pesticides and chemicals? Stand up and say no.

It may not be popular to oppose pesticides, to lobby for renewable energy, to reduce carbon emissions, or to regulate industrial pollution—but it is Christian stewardship. The crowd we identify with may ridicule such efforts. However, we are servants of God, stewards of His gift. We should act.

### “Do you like it?”

This is our Father's world! Do you believe He created the earth? Then care for it. Let your creation stewardship be a witness. Some care for the earth because it means human survival. We care for the earth because it is a gift from God. We share His concern. It rings very hollow to confess the Christian faith and ignore the pollution of the earth.

My wife rejoiced in the gift that I gave her. We, too, need to rejoice in the gift God that gave us.

“Do you like it?”

“Like it? I love it!”

“You love it?”

“Yes! Wow! I love it.”

Good, now go take care of it, as good stewards must do.



- 1 Scripture is from the New Living Translation.
- 2 Maltbie Davenport Babcock, *Thoughts for Every-Day Living* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 180. Retrievable at <https://archive.org/details/thoughtsforever00babc>.
- 3 One example news release is Matt McGrath, “Coronavirus: Air Pollution and CO2 Fall Rapidly as Virus Spreads,” BBC News, March 19, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-51944780>.
- 4 Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963), 80.

**PREACHING**

PREACHING CONCENTRATION DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

**LEADING FOR GROWTH AND CHURCH MULTIPLICATION**

*Doing Something Extraordinary!*  
**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**  
*Changing the People Who Change The World*

**APPLY NOW**  
 for new cohorts starting in 2021!  
[www.andrews.edu/apply](http://www.andrews.edu/apply)

Visit the DMin website for more concentrations.  
[www.andrews.edu/dmin](http://www.andrews.edu/dmin)

Phone: 1-269-471-3544  
 Email: [dmin@andrews.edu](mailto:dmin@andrews.edu)

Doctor of Ministry Program  
 Andrews University

# Building a culture of **LIBERALITY** in the local church

**A**fter I had given a stewardship lecture, a pastor once asked me, “What is the one thing that I should do for my congregation to help them become generous?”

Unfortunately—or, perhaps, fortunately—there is no single answer. However, one key idea emerges from studies on the subject: religious giving is a rational behavior that can be explained, affected, and changed.<sup>1</sup>

Liberality is about giving good things to others freely and abundantly. If you give an allowance to your child, a good tip to a porter, or a donation to a beggar, most people would probably consider you a person of liberality. For this article, we view liberality as the application of a plan of systematic benevolence to a church, comprising three elements: tithing, proportional offerings, and donations.<sup>2</sup> After considering the how and why of religious giving, we will propose a research-based model to help pastors inspire a growth in liberality in their churches.



**Aniel Barbe, MA**, is an associate director of Stewardship Ministries for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

## Facts and factors influencing religious giving

Several factors affect religious giving. Christian Smith, Michael Emerson, and Patricia Snell reveal that 20 percent of all Christians in the US donate nothing to the church, and most of those who do contribute very little. The majority of a church's money comes from a minority of its members: 20 percent provides 75 percent of the financial resources. Paradoxically, those with higher incomes donate less as a percentage than those with lower incomes. Religious giving is inversely proportional to growth in income. When income rises, religious giving declines. Also, Christians increasingly give just to their local communities of faith.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, Seventh-day Adventists have conducted few studies on their religious giving. It seems that our primary interest is more about accounting and less about uncovering the profile of givers and the factors that influence them. One exception is the work of Robert McIver, a research specialist at Avondale University College. Based on an analysis of more than 118,000 separate tithe receipts and the responses of over 8,000 surveys collected in five countries, McIver's study reveals that the absolute dollar amount returned as tithe within our denomination has increased. However, the percentage of income given has fallen in the past 40 years.<sup>4</sup> This situation, coupled with the general decline in mission offerings and the impending economic crisis, represents a threat to mission, especially to our commitment to a worldwide mission.

Because the factors that determine religious giving are many, it would be unwise to zero in on a single aspect. Theology, faith, church involvement, and church attendance affect the level of religious giving. Individuals who have a strong faith and a conservative theology<sup>5</sup> and who are active in church involvement and attendance are more likely to give at a higher level.<sup>6</sup> Good management of personal finances (comprising planning and pledging) will also strongly shape religious giving.<sup>7</sup> Another positive element is adequate emphasis by the local church on the value of religious giving.<sup>8</sup> Finally, a commitment to wise and transparent

financial management on the part of the church or religious organization also definitely influences giving.<sup>9</sup>

## The growing liberality model

Our approach to growing the level of liberality rests on some key assumptions: the church is a living organism, liberality does not happen in a vacuum, humans can partner with God to create the conditions for the emergence of faithfulness and liberality, and the local congregation is the best place to grow liberality. The model is articulated around three main components: empowering members, mainstreaming the stewardship message, and creating a conducive church culture.

## Empowering members

The thrust for empowering members is to help members grow in all aspects of their lives (3 John 2). The focus is on both spiritual and financial empowerment.

Spiritual empowerment implies that the church encourages its members to establish and maintain a daily connection with God. It is founded on the principle that contemplation creates transformation (2 Cor. 3:18). Interaction with the greatest Giver of all is the surest means to transform self-oriented individuals. McIver's study found that people who pray regularly, study the Bible and their Sabbath School lesson daily, and attend church services are more likely to tithe faithfully.<sup>10</sup> From the same perspective, the certainty that the particular teachings of one's faith are true,<sup>11</sup> a strong sense of mission,<sup>12</sup> and the practice of giving as a spiritual discipline are strong predictors of liberality. The association between spirituality and liberality is undeniable.

Some local initiatives can contribute to the spiritual empowerment of members:

- Help members follow a daily Bible reading plan. The "Believe His Prophets" initiative could be an interesting option.<sup>13</sup>
- Explore ways to encourage more members to study their Sabbath School lesson and attend Sabbath School.

- Make the weekly prayer meeting appealing and accessible to members.

Financial empowerment is a process during which a member develops his or her potential to generate and manage personal financial resources. Ellen White speaks about the alarming situation prevailing in the area of financial literacy: “Many lack wise management and economy. They do not weigh matters well, and move cautiously.”<sup>14</sup> As a result, “when there is a call made for the advancement of the work in home and foreign missions, they have nothing to give, or even have overdrawn their account.”<sup>15</sup> Many sincere believers fail to partner in God’s mission because their finances are in disarray.

Some areas of financial empowerment need special attention. First, members should develop the right mindset about financial resources: God is the Provider, and He gives us the power to generate wealth. Hence, our pockets are not empty. Second, all need to develop wise spending habits, resisting the appeal of commercials that drive us to spend by appealing to our senses. Jesus instructs His followers to “sit down and calculate the cost” (Luke 14:28, NASB). Third, believers need to understand the implications of indebtedness. How can one avoid using others’ money, and, if already in debt, how does one get out of it? Fourth, we should clarify the importance of savings and help members to be knowledgeable about the best practices. Fifth, teach and challenge members to experience the principle “Whatever He receives, He multiplies” through the practice of tithing and giving offerings and donations. Last—but highly correlated to religious giving—offer an explanation and appeal to members to pledge a percentage-based offering. Individuals who commit themselves to give a regular percentage of their income as offerings end up giving more than those who respond only to the prompting of specific circumstances.

### Mainstreaming the stewardship message

The next component of the model ensures that the stewardship message reaches all segments of the church membership. New members and the children learn about liberality through both example and intentional teaching (Rom. 10:14; Ps. 78:5, 6). Stewardship is both caught and taught.

However, widespread ignorance exists regarding religious giving. Many Christians do not think of liberality as a primary expression of

discipleship. They are not aware of the biblical teaching of 10-percent tithing and that sacrificial, proportionate financial giving is the norm of Christian stewardship. What could be the reasons for such unawareness? One cause could be the dichotomy that often exists between evangelism and stewardship. When we introduce people to Christ, we hesitate to instruct them in matters of giving. Author Ellen White warns about this omission: “Some refuse to accept the tithing system; they turn away, and no longer walk with those who believe and love the truth. When other lines are opened before them, they answer, ‘It was not so taught us,’ and they hesitate to move forward.”<sup>16</sup>

Another factor related to such ignorance is the phenomenon of “reluctant stewards” of church finances. Daniel Conway describes the clergy as being uncomfortable in talking about finances.<sup>17</sup> They do not want to give the impression that they are pleading for their own income or being insensitive to people’s economic conditions. In a few instances, I have received invitations to give a stewardship talk or seminar with the recommendation from the leadership not to discuss finances. As a result, financial stewardship becomes a rarely addressed subject in church circles.

One effective way to share the stewardship message is to adopt an undercover strategy of including it in existing programs and church initiatives. Such an approach is usually less costly and taxing for the church schedule. Some “undercover” initiatives could effectively bring the stewardship message to the various segments of the church:

- Revitalize the mission story and the call to tithe and offerings during the Sabbath service.
- Help Adventurers and Pathfinders earn the Wise Steward Award and Stewardship Honor, respectively.
- Instruct prospective members about stewardship during evangelistic campaigns and Bible studies.
- Nurture members in stewardship through systematic home-visitation programs.
- Preach a stewardship-related sermon once every quarter in the local church.

### Creating conducive church culture

This component of the model focuses on the characteristics of the recipient of giving, the church itself. Catherine Eckel and Philip Grossman speak about the “deservingness” of the recipient:

Is the church context encouraging the liberality of its members?<sup>18</sup>

Jared Peifer observes that people who consider that “budget is appropriate,” have “trust in leadership,” and are “enthusiastic about programs” usually elevate their giving rate by 8 to 11 percent.<sup>19</sup> Nine percent of nongivers mentioned trust in financial management as their most important reason for not giving.<sup>20</sup> It appears that issues related to congregational spending, expenses, disbursements, and financial conflict influence members’ giving, and trust (or lack of it) is a major contributive factor.

Scripture reveals that Paul invested in creating the right church culture to encourage giving (1 Cor. 16:1–4). The apostle not only emphasized planned and proportional giving but also elaborated on the responsibility of the church as the recipient of the giving. It must do everything possible to ensure that givers will have full confidence in its financial management.

Some actions can improve the deservingness of the local church:

- Have an effective internal control system that members recognize.

## THEY [THE CLERGY] DO NOT WANT TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY ARE PLEADING FOR THEIR OWN INCOME OR BEING INSENSITIVE TO PEOPLE’S ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.

- Provide regular and accessible information about church finances.
- Assess and improve the quality of programs and services.
- Prioritize investment in mission.

Growth in liberality results from how we do church. Teaching the theology of liberality and conducting stewardship programs are foundational. However, they have a limited impact unless we empower believers and increase their perception of the “deservingness” of the church.



1 A version of this article was published in *Dynamic Stewards* 23, no. 2 (April 2020): 6–8.

2 See Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1940), 80, 81.

3 Christian Smith, Michael O. Emerson, and Patricia Snell, *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), locs. 976, 982 of 4932, Kindle.

4 Robert K. McIver, *Tithing Practices Among Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed. (Cooranbong, Australia: Avondale Academic Press, 2016), 22, 23.

5 Laurence R. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong,” *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 5 (March 1994): 1180–1211, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2781147>; Dean R. Hoge, Charles Zech, Patrick McNamara, and Michael Donahue, *Money Matters: Personal Giving in American Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 91; Daniel V. A. Olson and Paul Perl, “Free and Cheap Riding in Strict, ConservativeSpace Churches,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 2 (June 2005): 123–142.

6 Dean R. Hoge and Yang Fenggang, “Determinants of Religious Giving in American Denominations: Data From Two Nationwide Surveys,” *Review of Religious Research* 36, no. 2 (December 1994): 136, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3511404>.

7 Smith, Emerson, and Snell, *Passing the Plate*, 90.

8 Brandon Vaidyanathan and Patricia Snell, “Motivations for and Obstacles to Religious Financial Giving,” *Sociology of Religion* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 201, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41288568>.

9 Jared L. Peifer, “The Economics and Sociology of Religious Giving: Instrumental Rationality or Communal Bonding?” *Social Forces* 88, no. 4 (June 2010): 1583, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2010.0004>.

10 McIver, *Tithing Practices*, 22, 23.

11 Olson and Perl, “Free and Cheap,” 126.

12 Peter Munday, David P. King, and Brad R. Fulton, “The Economic Practices of U.S. Congregations: A Review of Current Research and Future Opportunities,” *Social Compass* 66, no. 3 (September 2019): 406, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/scp>.

13 “Believe His Prophets: A Five-Year Program Reading Through the Bible and Selected Ellen White Writings,” *Revival and Reformation*, <https://revivalandreformation.org/bhp>.

14 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press. Pub. Assn., 1948), 224.

15 Ellen G. White, “Represent Christ in Self-Denial,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 19, 1893, 1.

16 White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 105.

17 Daniel Conway, Saint Meinrad School of Theology, and Lilly Endowment, *The Reluctant Steward Revisited: Preparing Pastors for Administrative and Financial Duties: A Report and Commentary on a Study Conducted by Saint Meinrad School of Theology With Funding From Lilly Endowment Inc.* (Saint Meinrad, IN: Saint Meinrad School of Theology, 2002), 21.

18 Catherine Eckel and Philip Grossman, “Altruism in Anonymous Dictator Games,” *Games and Economic Behavior* 16, no. 2 (1996): 181, <https://econpapers.repec.org/RePEc:eee:gamebe:v:16:y:1996:i:2:p:181-191>.

19 Peifer, “Economics and Sociology,” 1583.

20 Smith, Emerson, and Snell, *Passing the Plate*, loc. 1506 of 4932, Kindle.



# OUR HIGH CALLING:

## Teaching, preaching, and healing in the Gospel of Mark

**H**ow many people have you healed?" The tone of the question suggested a challenge, implying that if I am a true minister of the gospel, then I should be able to offer healing from sickness. Or so the person thought. In my 51 years as a believer, while I have seen the hand of God countless times intervening in my life and ministry, I have not participated in healing with just a word or a slight touch.

An emphasis on physical healing is becoming pervasive in our society, across the religious landscape. Any promise of healing is sure to attract large numbers, especially if it seems to involve supernatural elements. As is evident in all four Gospels, the desire for healing and supernatural manifestations also was strong during the time of Jesus. Our study will focus on the Gospel of Mark. His outlook has much to say to the contemporary minister of the gospel.

### A story sets the tone

One Sabbath morning, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was in Capernaum and went to the synagogue to worship God as was His weekly practice.<sup>1</sup> There He began to teach. As He did, a

man with an unclean spirit challenged Him. Jesus promptly cast out the demon (Mark 1:26).<sup>2</sup>

Both the quality of Jesus' teaching (*ekplēssomai*, amazed, astounded)<sup>3</sup> and the casting out of the demon (*thamveomai*, amazed, astonished) gripped the attention of people in the synagogue.<sup>4</sup> The news spread quickly and that evening the whole city gathered around Peter's house where Jesus was staying. People brought their sick, and Jesus compassionately healed them (Mark 1:32–34).

### Peter and the disciples versus Jesus

Before sunrise the next morning, however, Jesus departed to a deserted place to pray (verse 35). Crowds began to gather outside Peter's house. When the disciples awakened, they did not find Jesus.<sup>5</sup> "And Simon and those who were with him searched for him" (verse 36).<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, modern translations miss the force of the statement. The Greek word translated "searched" is *katadiōkō*. It only appears here in the New Testament but is used extensively in the Septuagint (LXX). It means "to search for (eagerly), to hunt,"<sup>7</sup> with the latter more reflective of its inherent connotation.<sup>8</sup> The LXX uses it, for example, in the story of

**Kim  
Papaioannou,**  
PhD, pastors in  
Cyprus.



Abraham and his armed servants searching for Chedorlaomer and his army (Gen. 14:14) or in the story of the Egyptians pursuing the Israelites before drowning in the Red Sea (Exod. 14:9).

Clearly the disciples were not just casually looking for Jesus. His absence greatly frustrated them.<sup>9</sup> They probably had seen Him leave for pre-dawn prayer, as He often did, yet had expected Him to be back in time to meet the crowd. But as people began to gather and Jesus had not yet returned, they set out to find Him, feeling rather irate. We sense their frustration in their abrupt words when they do find Him: “Everyone is looking for you” (Mark 1:37).<sup>10</sup> No “Good morning,” no “How did you sleep?” Just a statement that highlights their conviction that Jesus should have been at the house, ministering to the gathering crowd. It was their first rebuke to Him—but not their last.<sup>11</sup>

Who can blame the disciples? A minister of the gospel loves to see people coming to church programs. The disciples had heard the message of Jesus. They had seen Him cast out the demon. They had witnessed many healings the night before, watched crowds collect around the house, and they were excited! That is what gospel ministry is all about, right? The air smells of success. Now they feel right to be unhappy with Jesus’ absence.

### **The mission statement of Jesus**

To their rebuke, Jesus responds with a profound mission statement: “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (verse 38). This was His mission—to preach. His reply alludes to verses 14 and 15,<sup>12</sup> which similarly describe the focus of Jesus’ ministry: “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”

But Jesus declares that He “came out” in order to “preach”—“came out” from where? What place did Jesus emerge from in order to accomplish His mission to preach? I see three possible answers. First, the “came out” could refer to His incarnation. Jesus came out from heaven to the earth. He left His exalted position, His glory and splendor, so

that He could minister to us on the earth. Second, the “came out” could point back to Joseph’s carpentry shop in Nazareth. Jesus spent His first 30 years content to work as a carpenter. But the time arrived when God called Him to public ministry and Jesus “came out” from the carpentry workshop and began to preach and teach publicly.

But there exists a third possibility. The “came out” might refer to Peter’s house in Capernaum. If this third possibility is correct, then what Jesus is saying is that He would not be able to preach the gospel effectively when surrounded by people interested primarily in physical healing or, worse still, just curious to see a supernatural manifestation. And in order to accomplish His mission, He would need to leave such crowds behind and focus His attention elsewhere, on those interested in His message.

All three possibilities are not mutually exclusive. But the fact that Jesus makes His statement shortly after He has left Peter’s house, and after His refusal to return there and greet the crowds, renders the third possibility contextually valid.

### **Wrong type of excitement**

Can excitement be a hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel? It appears so. Such a crowd was not to be found in the synagogue that morning. The foundations for the synagogue in Capernaum dating to Jesus’ times indicate that it could not contain large crowds, certainly not “the whole city” (verse 33). They apparently had little interest in the Word of God. But they gathered en masse when they realized that Jesus could do miraculous things.<sup>13</sup> Such wrong motivation and excitement Jesus considered a hindrance rather than a blessing.

It is, perhaps, for this reason that even when He did heal individuals, He often admonished them not to tell anyone (Mark 1:44; 7:24, 25; 8:26; 9:9, 30, 31). He wanted to help their condition of need but knew that the wrong publicity could be detrimental to His mission.

### **Teaching and preaching in Mark**

The incident outlined in Mark 1 sets the tone for the rest of the Gospel, in which Jesus’ focus is teaching and preaching.<sup>14</sup> Robert Meyer has

noted that while the emphasis in chapter 1 is on preaching, in subsequent chapters, it shifts to teaching.<sup>15</sup> Though not identical, preaching and teaching are parallel ministries that focus on spiritual edification and transformation through the Word of God.

In the 15 instances that the verb “to teach,” *didaskō*, appears in Mark in relation to Jesus, Jesus is always the one who purposefully takes the initiative. A few examples demonstrate the point.

“Again he began to teach beside the sea” (Mark 4:1).

“And he was teaching them many things in parables” (verse 2).

“And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished” (Mark 6:2).

“And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching” (verse 6).

“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things” (verse 34).

“And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, ‘How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?’” (Mark 12:35).

“Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled” (Mark 14:49).

Similarly, the verb *kērussō*, “to preach” appears 14 times, always either with Jesus preaching or His followers doing so. A few examples are,

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God” (Mark 1:14).

“And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons” (verse 39).

“And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14).

“So they [disciples] went out and proclaimed that people should repent” (Mark 6:12).

“And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation’” (Mark 16:15).

Interestingly, the one instance in which preaching appears in a somewhat negative hue is in Mark 1:45. Jesus healed a leper (verses 40–43) and specifically told him not to tell anyone (verse 44). Instead, the cleansed leper begins “to talk freely [*kērussō*, “to preach”] about it, and to spread the news” (verse 45), with the result that crowds throng around Jesus, making His ministry more difficult.

## Healing in Mark

In contrast to teaching and preaching—the activities that Jesus takes the initiative to carry out and does so consistently, persistently, and with a missional focus—healings, in Mark, always come as a response to human entreaty. In other words, others take the initiative, never Jesus. He simply responds to human need.

“And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I will; be clean’” (verses 40, 41).

“And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men” (Mark 2:3).



## LETTERS

I must pen these lines to let you know how refreshing it was to read the article, “The Inseparable Duo: The Holy Spirit and Preaching” (January 2020).

Dr. Rodney Anthony Palmer’s article was a necessary reminder to me personally and, I do pray, to

several others involved in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. Preaching is so essential to the overall growth and development of us as preachers and so central to the faith development of the members of our congregation that a reminder of the role that the Holy Spirit

plays, as well as our constant dependence on Him, was indeed timely. As preachers, we should constantly seek to grow in our understanding of the seven roles mentioned in this article, so that we can be fully empowered to carry out this sacred work.

—Onesi La Fleur, by email



“Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet and implored him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live’ ” (Mark 5:23).

“And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was” (Mark 6:55).

“And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him” (Mark 7:32).

“And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him” (Mark 8:22).

## Synthesis

Living in a world racked with suffering, we long for better health and an improved quality of life. Jesus outlined how His disciples were to minister to the town and city: “Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’ ” (Luke 10:9). The ministry of healing is biblically sound when it offers training in disease prevention and emphasizes Scripture’s manifold directives to help maintain health. The ministry of healing is also biblically sound when it is consistent with peer-reviewed, evidence-based health science and the best practices in medicine, including medication, surgery and rehabilitation, as needed. Beyond that, we should beware of practices that create undue publicity and excite the human desire for spectacle and the supernatural, understanding that supernatural manifestations will be a tool used by the enemy in the last days to deceive if possible even the elect (Matt. 24:24).

How did the followers of Jesus interpret their Master’s words and actions? For Paul, the gifts of the Spirit, including teaching, preaching, and healing, engender reciprocity (1 Cor. 12:25-30). For James, both healing the sick and admonishing the sinner lead to forgiveness and salvation (James 5:14-16; 19, 20). For John, he desired nothing more than for the enhancement of physical health to parallel the blessing of spiritual health (3 John 2).

Ministers of the gospel need to remember that the primary mission of any ministry of the church is to preach the gospel and teach sinners the path of salvation. Any ministry that focuses on the body will, by definition, have limited effect, because the bodies we presently have will come to an end. Only at the second coming of Jesus will we be wholly changed.

Perhaps in the final analysis, it is not one ministry versus another, but one ministry alongside another. The healing ministry of Jesus went hand in hand with His teaching and preaching ministry. Thus Matthew could declare, “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction” (Matt. 9:35). The gospel’s unique contribution lies embracing cooperation over competition, complementarity over disparity, and diversity over hierarchy.



- 1 John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 111.
- 2 The book of Mark distinguishes between physical healing and the casting out of demons. Whereas the former affects primarily the body, the latter has a strong soteriological dimension. William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 79: “Twice in this passage (Ch. 1:32, 34) and in Ch. 6:13 a clear distinction is observed between general sickness and demonic possession.”
- 3 Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), s.v. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 76: “The people were utterly astonished and alarmed at Jesus’ word.”
- 4 Friberg, s.v.
- 5 The disciples in question are probably Peter, Andrew, James, and John. See Mark 1:16, 19, and John G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: Mark* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2008), 17.
- 6 Scripture is from the English Standard Version.
- 7 Friberg, s.v. Michael H. Burer and Jeffrey E. Miller, *A New Reader’s Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), s.v. Cf. M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 68, who opts for the softer but still forceful “pursue.”
- 8 E.g. Gen. 31:36; 35:5; Deut. 1:44; 11:4; 28:22; Joshua 2:5; 8:16; 10:10; 1 Sam. 7:11; 24:15; Ps. 7:6; 34:6; Jer. 15:15; Hosea 8:3; Micah 2:11; Joel 2:4.
- 9 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 112: “The compound form... is not common, and often has a hostile sense. Here it presumably expresses the eager (and concerned, even disgruntled?) search of the disciples; they ‘tracked him down.’ ”
- 10 Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 82: “There is a note of reproach in the statement, ‘All are seeking for you,’ which means, What are you doing here when you should be in the midst of the multitude who are clamoring for you?”
- 11 E.g. Matt. 15:23; Mark 5:31; 8:32; Luke 8:24.
- 12 France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 113: “The good news needs to be heard, and people summoned to respond, as widely as possible. This is the specific purpose of Jesus’ mission.”
- 13 Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 82: “The crowds that gathered in Capernaum had made their decision, but it could not be the appropriate one because it involved not repentance but attraction to Jesus as a performer of miracles.”
- 14 Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 82: “Verse 38 exalts the ministry of the word; this emphasis is substantial throughout Mark’s Gospel.”
- 15 Robert P. Meye, “Messianic Secret and Messianic Didache in Mark’s Gospel” in F. Christ, ed. *Oikonomia* (Hamburg: Herbert Reich, 1967), 52-60.



# Lest We Forget: New Adventist encyclopedia maps church history, guides church's future

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES

**F**ive years. Twenty-five regional editors. Thirty consultant editors. One thousand international authors. One final product: The Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists (ESDA).

"Today [July 1, 2020] is a historic day in the history of the church," says **Artur Stele**, vice president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. "Today we witness a moment Adventist scholars have been waiting to see for over 40 years. The significance of this new reality cannot be overstated."

It all started in 2014, when General Conference administrators realized it had been decades since the printed *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* had been updated. Originally published in the 1960s, the in-depth book had been updated in the 70s and again in the mid-90s. As a result, the encyclopedia didn't reflect the growth and development of the church over the past 25 years.

"I believe the Bible has very specific historical information, which has been shown by archaeology to be accurate," points out **Ted Wilson**, president of the Adventist world church. "It gives us a picture of why history is so important."

"For some people, the word 'encyclopedia' can be quite intimidating," says **Dragoslava Santrac**, managing editor for the new Encyclopedia. "It

sounds scholarly and advanced, and full of dry information. With this version of ESDA, we had in mind the everyday person who wants to learn more about Adventists and Adventism."

"I'm feeling both relief and elation at reaching this milestone," says **David Trim**, director of the Archives, Statistics, and Research Department for the Adventist church, and overall editor of the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists project. "We want church members to be inspired by the stories of how God has led and the incredible commitment and sacrifice of many



men and women who built up this church around the world," says Trim.

The ESDA isn't just for Adventists, however; both Santrac and Trim feel strongly that the encyclopedia could be a powerful and insightful resource for those not yet familiar with the church. "They will find truthfulness and honesty,

and they will find extraordinary men and women who were completely committed to God and the mission of the church,” Trim says.

**G. Alexander Bryant**, president of the North American Division, points out the importance of the ESDA to understanding a lesser known part of the church’s history: the contribution of the African American community to the church’s development. “This is a very important thing for Adventists to understand today,”

Bryant says. “This encyclopedia will help share this important and vital part of our past.”

**Erton Kohler**, president of the South American Division, sums up the resulting benefits of the Encyclopedia perfectly: “This resource can be used for not only inspiring sermons and seminars for the church, but in helping church members learn how pioneers overcame challenges and crises similar to those we face today.” [Adventist News Network]

## Inter-faith, multi-conference “virtual freedom ride” champions prayer and activism

COLUMBIA, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES

**F**aith leaders, government officials, and activists advocated for prayer, social justice, and community empowerment through a virtual freedom ride in response to the national outcry over the death of **George Floyd** by law enforcement. From June 14 to 21, 2020, “Miles to Minneapolis” took viewers on Facebook and YouTube on the virtual journey from the east coast to the Midwest. The “stops” included Columbia, Maryland; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; and Minneapolis, Minnesota, where Floyd was killed.

Leaders from the Potomac Conference, Allegheny East Conference, Allegheny West

Conference, Lake Region Conference, Central States Conference, Minnesota Conference, Mid-America and Lake Union Conferences, and the North American Division (NAD) Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department collaborated to find speakers for the campaign. It began in Columbia, Maryland, where the NAD headquarters is located.

Every stop featured representatives of different faiths, including Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. Ministers of various protestant denominations also participated along with Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders.

“There is a problem in this land, and that problem is systemic racism. There is no intellectual construct that’ll help us understand how

that happened,” said **Daniel R. Jackson**, retired NAD president, speaking of Floyd’s death. “I’m a strong believer that in order to make lasting change, communities must pull together, regardless of race and faith.”

Each of the Miles to Minneapolis originators—**Yolanda Banfield**, **Rockefeller Twyman**,





and **Bill Ellis**, assisted by the Emmanuel-Brinklow church pastor, **Anthony Medley**—expressed how the event enthusiasm, sincerity, and participation of the faith and community leaders from every location of all ages inspired them and gave hope for the future.

“What excited me about each stop was the willingness of the interfaith leaders to collectively lend a voice to the current movement led by young people,” said Banfield. “This is truly the Joshua generation. This time is bringing out the youth. They are taking the lead and asking questions. To hear and see the support and engagement of this interracial, multigenerational, and interfaith movement makes me so excited.”



“It’s great to have a cause, but it’s important to keep your heart clean, pure, and forgiving. If you don’t, you’ll get caught up in the hatred and madness of society,” said Banfield. “We have to stay connected to the God of love and peace.” [Mylon Medley, NAD News]

**NO TIME TO READ?**

**NO PROBLEM!**

**Ministry Magazine Podcast** 🔍

Listen to articles!  
On the go. For free.

Subscribe in your podcast app.  
Search for 'Ministry Magazine Podcast' or scan the QR code.

[ministrymagazine.org/podcast](https://ministrymagazine.org/podcast)



**Laszlo Gallusz, PhD**, is a senior lecturer in New Testament Studies, Newbold College of Higher Education, United Kingdom.



## *A Week in the Life of a Slave*

by John Byron, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

Pastors who engage in exegesis while preparing their sermons regularly face the challenge of understanding the historical-cultural background of New Testament texts. Although the cultural milieu of the first century is very complex, the responsible application of the biblical texts to our contemporary context necessitates a profound knowledge of the horizon of the original context. The *Week in the Life Of* series by InterVarsity Press is a creative resource that uses storytelling to help pastors, seminary students, and lay readers overcome the obstacle of cultural distance. The approach of blending expertise and imagination through storytelling is a winsome combination.

One of the latest volumes in the series comes from John Byron, a professor of New Testament at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio. An expert on slavery in antiquity and Pauline literature, Byron brings a fresh and informed perspective on one of the shortest and often overlooked New Testament writings, Paul's letter to Philemon. It brings, however, much more: it introduces the readers to the world of the early Christian house churches and the dynamics of everyday life in a society in which a clear line was drawn between free people and slaves. Clearly articulated are some of the pastoral challenges that the early Christian leaders faced in helping their church members live contra-culturally in a society that was driven by different values.

The novella narrates the actions of historical characters mentioned in the letter to Philemon. The scene shifts from chapter to chapter between Ephesus, Colossae, and Laodicea. The focal point is Onesimus, a slave from Colossae who flees from his master, Philemon, stealing a large amount of money to travel to Rome and study under Stoic teachers. In Ephesus, he meets the apostle Paul and other early Christian leaders. Onesimus experiences the radical character of Christian fellowship, which convinces him that dividing walls are broken down in Jesus Christ.

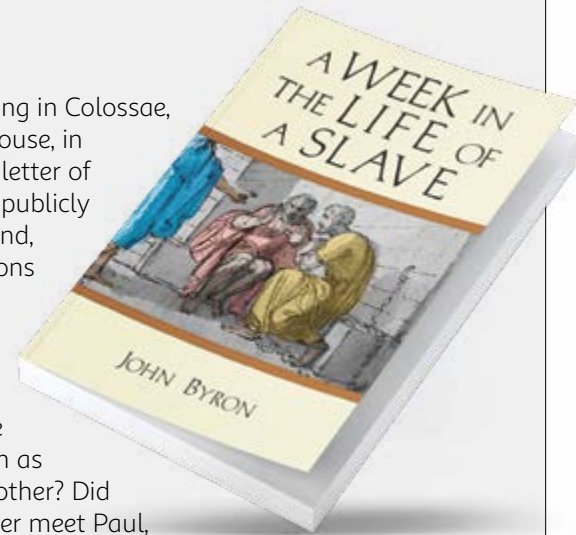
The scenario builds up to his return to the house of Philemon. It climaxes in his baptism and his unexpected appearance at a house

church meeting in Colossae, Philemon's house, in which Paul's letter of mediation is publicly read. In the end, many questions remain open: Did Philemon forgive his fugitive slave and treat him as a beloved brother? Did Onesimus ever meet Paul, his spiritual father, again? Why was the letter to Philemon preserved in the New Testament canon, despite its personal character? The book does not attempt to answer these questions and Paul's letter to Philemon itself ends without resolution.

The novella is not only imaginative but also historically well informed. The numerous sidebars provide insights into the vital aspects of life, culture, and interactions encountered in the narrative. These sidebars, accompanied often by photos, throw light on matters such as the location of Paul's imprisonment (20, 21), patron-client relationship (33), wool production in the Lycus Valley (52, 53), sexuality and marriage among slaves (62, 63), slave names (68, 69), apprehending fugitive slaves (82, 83), and letters of mediation in antiquity (142, 143).

While historically thoroughly researched, the novella also contains imaginative, but certainly plausible elements, such as the healing cloths coming from Paul's prison, the cruel and quick-tempered character of Philemon, and the baptism of Onesimus in Paul's prison..

This superbly-written book may revolutionize one's reading of Paul's letter to Philemon and help the reader understand the world of Paul's imprisonment and the ministry in early Christian churches. It is an invitation to enter the world of early Christians and take the historical-cultural context in exegesis seriously. I highly recommend it.





## Pastor, use the arts!

**W**hy does a painting, novel, photograph, or film evoke such emotion and connection in us? Why do we spend so much time expressing how we feel through various arts? There are many surface answers, but the bottom line is that it is a God connection.

### Creativity in the garden

In Genesis 1, God set creativity into motion when He created us in His image. God ingrained creativity into our DNA. Our impulse to create and express ourselves is divinely inspired. When we create, it pleases God because He loves to see His image shine through each of us. Whether through gardening, painting, singing, writing, knitting, shaping pottery, can all be potentially prayerful pursuits, we are encouraged to express our creativity in different ways and to various degrees, even if we are not born with a genetic bent to a particular talent.

### The arts in the Bible

*Language.* The Bible is rich in artistic use of metaphor and poetry written with much skill and sophistication. The Psalms, Job, and Song of Songs are the most prominent examples of biblical poetry. The nature of scripture itself affirms the importance of creativity in language.

God chose to reveal Himself through the writings of various authors over many hundreds of years in just about every literature then known to humanity. There are historical stories, laws, poems, songs, proverbs, prophetic oracles, parables, letters, apocalyptic literature, and even genealogies. In producing our literature, we are following the example of God, who gave us a rich heritage in His word.

*Drama.* Drama is first mentioned when God tells Ezekiel to “act out” the siege of Jerusalem. He even drew the city skyline and used it as a familiar backdrop (Ezek. 4). Jesus often spoke in parables and told colorful and intriguing stories that had their fair share of drama.

*Art.* The visual arts played a major role in building the tabernacle (Exod. 31:1–11) and the temple. First Kings 6:4 says, “He made narrow windows high up in the temple walls.” Recessed

windows were near the tops of the walls to help light be the center of the temple.

Some of the artwork in the temple, like the pillars, had no utilitarian purpose but simply to reveal beauty. Second Chronicles 3:15–17 provides a beautiful visual image: “For the front of the temple . . . He made interwoven chains and put them on top of the pillars. He also made a hundred pomegranates and attached them to the chains. He erected the pillars in the front of the temple, one to the south and one to the north. The one to the south he named Jakin and the one to the north Boaz.”<sup>1</sup>

*Music.* Singing was a big part of Hebrew culture. The hymnbook of Psalms continually encourages us to sing to the Lord (Ps. 149:1). The Psalms include songs of praise, laments, pleas for help, introspection, prayers of repentance. It provides examples of how to sing our heart cries to God. Jesus and the apostles sang hymns. Paul even suggests that music is a sign of being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18–20).

*Dance.* Psalm 149:3 says, “Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp.” Psalm 150:4 says, “Praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe.”

### Practical application

Gavin Richardson suggests that you ask yourself, what arts do you wish to cultivate? “Photography, painted arts, writing, improv/theater, filmmaking, dance, design, graphics, ceramics and sculpture are possibilities.”<sup>2</sup> He urges that one take time to determine the “why” and “what” of infusing ministry with the arts.

The arts can have a powerful impact, awaken us to truth, and change lives if they are produced by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Creativity can teach and inspire in a way that connects people with the God who loves them.

**Julie Guirgis** is a freelance writer and caregiver in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.



1 Scripture is from the New International Version.

2 Gavin Richardson, “Art needs the church: How to create artisan communities.” United Methodist Communications. <http://www.umcom.org/learn/art-needs-the-church-how-to-create-artisan-communities>

New Release:

# Digital Discipleship & Evangelism Guide

By Jamie Domm

**A practical guide for using technology to spread the gospel.**

The North American Division has released its first guide to digital discipleship and evangelism! This book is a practical guide for outreach, community service, growth, and evangelism for conferences, local churches, and personal ministries. It digs deep into content evangelism, effective writing for online audiences, and practical tips for community care and engagement. This comprehensive resource is packed with practical “how-to” nuts and bolts that will help you establish or grow your digital ministry.

Learn more & get the book at [SDAdata.blog/book](http://SDAdata.blog/book)

Print: **\$19.95\***

Kindle and ePub: **\$11.95**

\*Quantity discounts are available.



AdventSource



BIG DATA +  
SOCIAL MEDIA

Seventh-day Adventist Church  
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

# Ministry®

1350 N. KINGS ROAD  
NAMPA, ID 83687-3193

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Nonprofit Organization

U.S. Postage

PAID

Nampa, ID

Permit No. 147



# COME SPEAK IN ISRAEL

Dear Pastor:

Would you like to teach God's Word on-site in the steps of Jesus—Galilee, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the Judean desert? Do you know at least 20 friends and church members who would like to come along? If so, we can fully cover your trip cost.

We are currently scheduling Israel tours for 2021-22. Everything is organized and planned for you, and a local Christian guide leads the tour group. Your focus as pastor is teaching Scripture on-site, and ministering to the travelers.

**To sign up for this opportunity, email [tabghatours@gmail.com](mailto:tabghatours@gmail.com), go to [facebook.com/tabghatours](https://facebook.com/tabghatours), or call 423-298-2169.**

