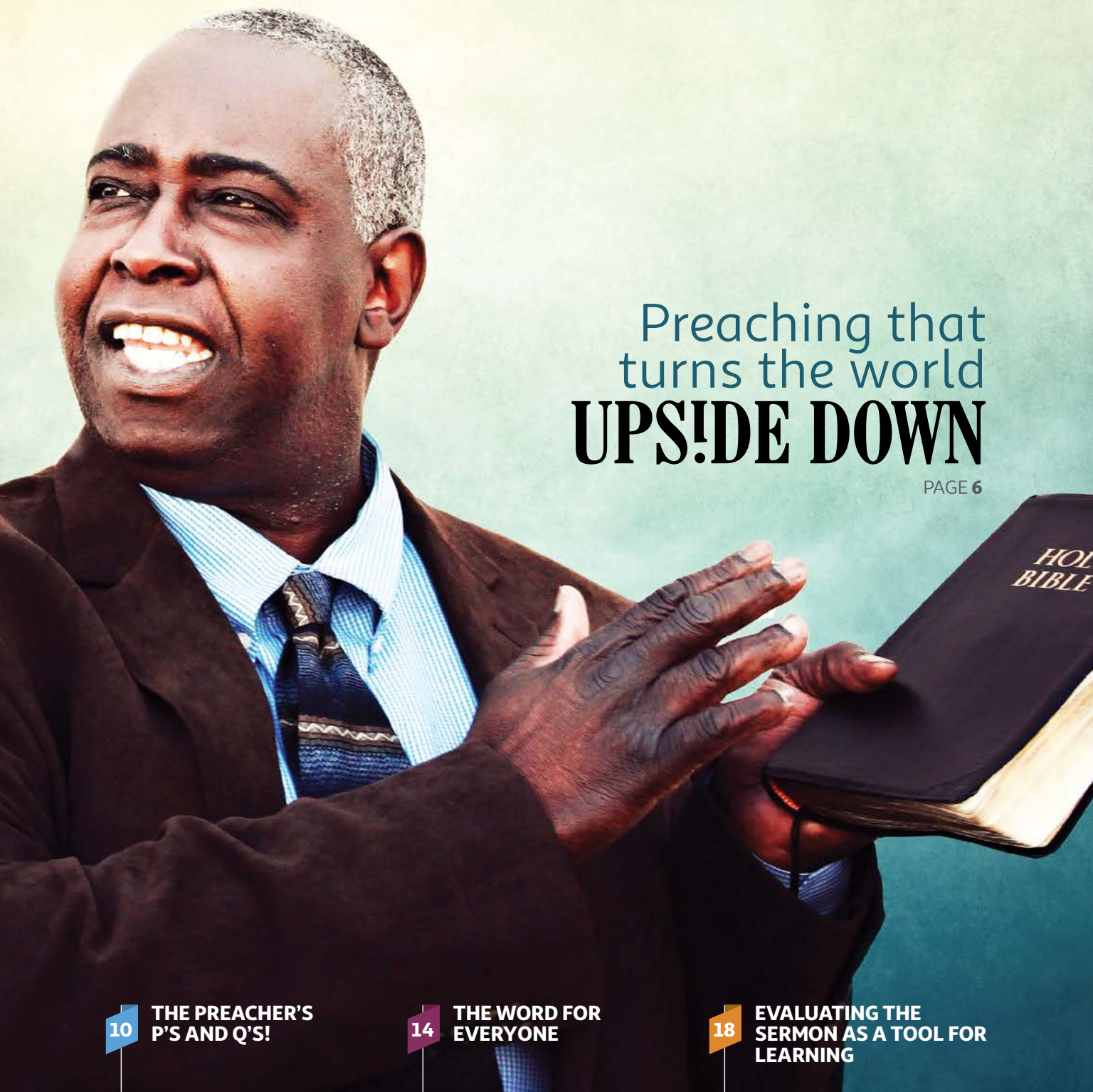




APRIL 2022

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**UPS!DE DOWN**

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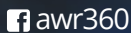
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# Preaching that turns the world upside down

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I appreciated the article “Daniel 12:13 and Early Adventist Interpretations” (Artur Stele, December 2021). Unfortunately, the author missed the doctrinal interpretation Ellen White gave to this text in support of the investigative judgment, like the interpretation of James White and the early pioneers. Toward the end of her doctrinal exposition on the investigative judgment, White explained the significance of Daniel 12:13. “Each has a case pending at the bar of God. Each must meet the great Judge face to face. How important, then, that every mind contemplate often the solemn scene when the Judgment shall sit and the books be opened, when, with Daniel, every individual must stand in his lot at the end of the days” (“Workers With Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, October 8, 1885).

There is a mistake made in the interpretation of the word “days” that has led to the confusion of the interpretation of Daniel 12:13. Most interpreters refer the “end of the days” to the 1,335 days in verse 12. That would mean that the 1,335 years end in 1843. In verse 12, the 1,335 years are associated with those who are alive in 1843 who would receive a blessing. The 1,335 do not refer to Daniel standing “in his lot”!

To solve the meaning of “the end of the days,” we need to look at the context of “the end of the days.” The context is Daniel standing in his lot. The Adventist pioneers discovered that Daniel standing in his lot was a reference to Daniel

standing in the decisions of the investigative judgment, a view also supported by Ellen White (see *The Great Controversy*, [1911], 488). This means that the “days” should relate to the time prophecy of the investigative judgment and 2,300 years. This means the 2,300 years is the only viable time prophecy connected to the “days.” Other time calculations of 1,290 and 1,260 years would not work because neither prophecy has a connection with the investigative judgment. Interpreters who see the connection of Daniel in verse 13 to the investigative judgment fail to see the proper connection of “days” to the time of the 2,300 years and 1844. Those who use the 1,335 days arrive in 1843, a day with no relation to the investigative judgment (see also Uriah Smith, *Daniel and Revelation*, [1897], 316, 317).

—P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Dr. Theol.*

**From the author:** In response to Dr. Damsteegt, I humbly offer three points.

First, let me state that article length limits have not permitted me to expand upon the clear and compelling connection between the resurrection and the investigative judgment.

Second, to state that the wording of Daniel 12:13, “at the end of the days,” refers back to the end of 2,300 “evenings and mornings” would be to overlook the specific wording used in the book of Daniel. Although the expression “evening and morning” refers to a “day,” one still must ask the question, why did the heavenly Messenger use the expression “evening and morning” (*‘ereb boqer*) in Daniel 8:14? We have

to take seriously the actual original biblical text. If Daniel wanted to connect Daniel 12:13 with Daniel 8:14, he could have written in Daniel 12:13, “at the end of the evenings and mornings.” However, he chose a different phrase! It is of interest to note that as Gabriel explains the meaning of the vision to Daniel in Daniel 8:26, he refers back to Daniel 8:14 by saying, “the vision of the evening and morning (*‘ereb boqer*)” (KJV). One can try to argue that Gabriel then asks Daniel to “seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now” and thus connect it to the “end of days.” However, in Daniel 12:13, Daniel uses a unique construction of the word for “days,” which is found only in Daniel 12:13.

Third, the statement by Ellen White found in the *Signs of the Times* and *The Great Controversy* is actually supporting the conclusions of the article. One just needs to ask the following questions: When did Ellen G. White write this statement—before or after 1844? Is her statement pointing back or into the future? It is very clear that Ellen White wrote the statement decades after 1844, referring to the future. If this is the case, then the phrase “when, with Daniel, every individual must stand in his lot at the end of the days” clearly points to the event that is to take place in the future.

Finally, the suggestion that Ellen White supported the view of James White and other pioneers on Daniel 12:12, 13 does not correspond with the facts presented in the article. One can find only partial agreement. The quoted words of the pioneers make it obvious.

—Artur Stele, PhD



**Pavel Goia, DMin,** is the editor of *Ministry*.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

## Come and see, then go and tell

**Y**ou will not be able to move to your seminary—at least not today!” So spoke Mr. Clark, our neighbor from across the street. Like Caleb and Joshua, Daniela and I could see the giants that Mr. Clark and everyone else saw. Cumulus clouds, sometimes called cumulus congestus and cumulonimbus clouds, sometimes called thunderheads.

“You will not be able to load your stuff into the truck—at least not today!” So said the moving truck driver. He spoke the obvious. By now there was thunder, there was lightning, the wind became strong, and rain started to fall.

“In seconds, there will be heavy rain. It will destroy your furniture, your books, and everything you have!”

But there was something our neighbor didn't know. Like Caleb and Joshua, Daniela and I had already seen God at work. Following graduation, our money was gone, so was our student housing. A friend, Mr. Ralph, accommodated us and our furnishings—free of charge. There was something our truck driver didn't know. We had been accepted into seminary with no money for moving expenses. A truck moving two pastors to the seminary was scheduled to pass through our town. The moving company notified us that one of the pastors had canceled but fully paid. They said they could take us and all our belongings—free of charge. We knew what God could do.

So, I told the truck driver, “Let's act in faith. The rain is not heavy yet. Let's load!” The clouds got darker, and Mr. Clark stood shaking his head.

“I agree with your neighbor!” exclaimed our truck driver. “We can't pack in the rain, and I have a schedule to keep, so I'll have to leave without your items.”

At that moment, Daniela and I knelt behind the truck. Right there in the street, we asked God to hold back the floodgates until we could load all our furniture and all our boxes. It took four hours with not one drop of rain. The second Mr. Russell closed the truck's back doors, the heavens opened. Rain poured down in buckets. Our truck driver and our neighbor stood spellbound. They told everyone who came by that they had

witnessed a miracle. We smiled. Now they could see what we had seen.

### Firsthand

In Matthew 28:6, 7, women went to Jesus' grave with some spices prepared for His body. The angel there first told them not to be afraid, and second to “come and see” that Jesus was alive. We often emphasize the third command the angel gave them, “Then go quickly and tell his disciples.”<sup>1</sup> But we often miss that before the angel told them to go and tell, he bid them come and see.

You have nothing to tell others unless you have seen it yourself. Nothing to give unless you receive it first. Nothing to share unless you experience it first. Isaiah 43:10 says, “You are my witnesses.” You cannot be a witness in a court of law based on what someone else has seen. You must have seen it yourself.

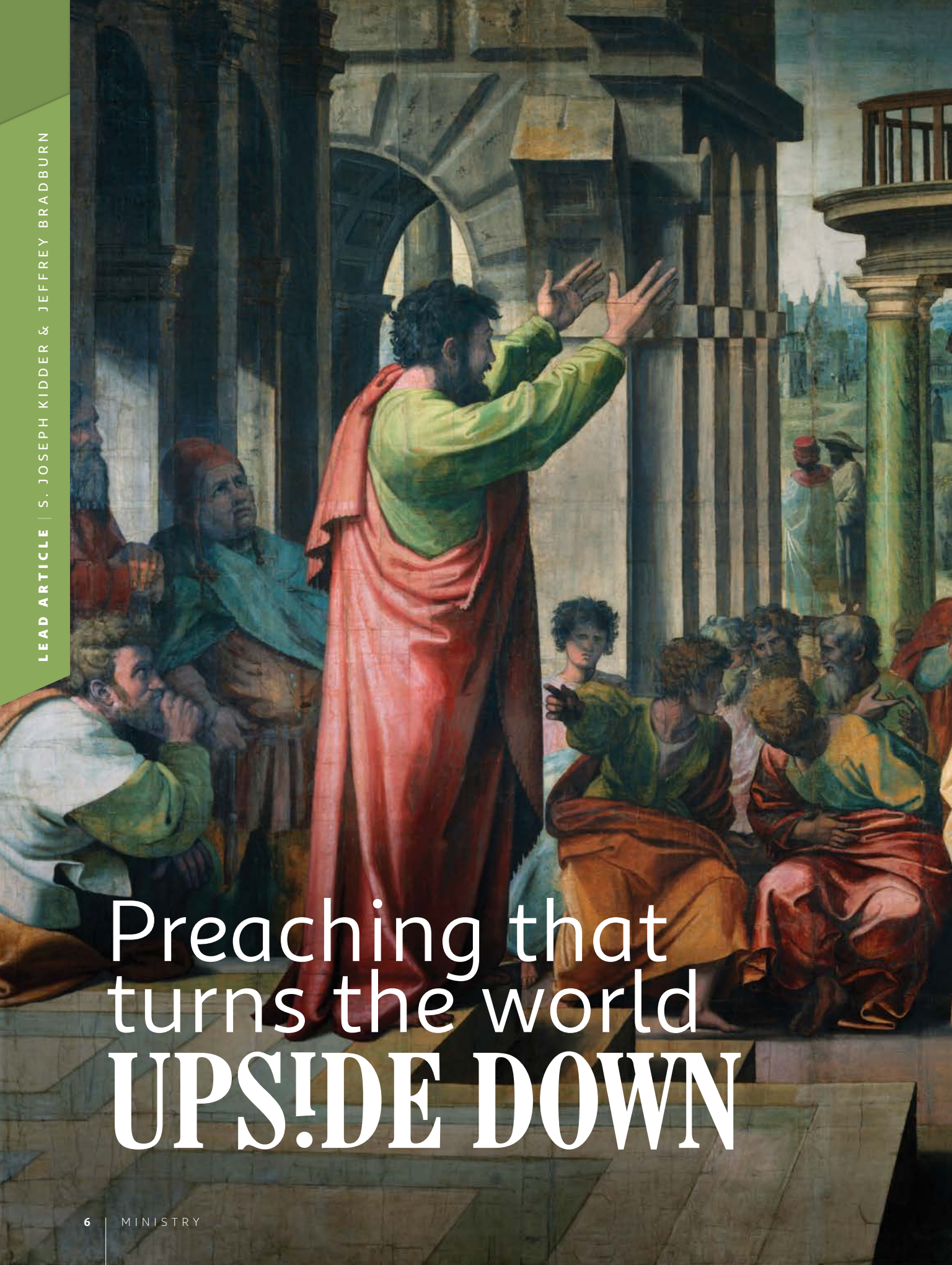
Isaiah saw the Lord, and it changed his life. He shared the story and worked powerfully as a witness for God. Two demoniacs saw Jesus, and they told the whole city. A woman at a well saw Jesus, and she told her whole town. Zacchaeus saw Jesus, and he called all his friends and shared his experience. Paul on the road to Damascus saw Jesus, and his ministry turned the world upside down.

### Taste and see

The essential preparation needed for any sermon is to taste and experience God for ourselves. John says, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (John 1:1). Unless we experience His transforming grace in our own lives, we cannot preach with power and witness with success. God is calling us to spend time in His presence in order to have a firsthand experience of Him. He's calling us to come and see—then go and tell.



1 Scripture is from the New International Version.



# Preaching that turns the world **UPSIDE DOWN**

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SCAN FOR AUDIO



**T**wenty-first century Christianity has at its disposal technology, specialized ministries, leadership experts—and Zoom. What it lacks is the preaching power of the early church. That's why the early Christian church, as revealed in the book of Acts, presents a vastly different picture of preaching than what we present today. This article offers seven transformational lessons that we can learn from their preaching, lessons that could revitalize our preaching and, ideally, our churches as well.

## 1. Preaching had Jesus at the center

A common thread unites the sermons in the book of Acts, and that is the “strict uncompromising nature of the early evangelist’s message—Christ crucified.”<sup>1</sup> Christ remained the focus of the preaching. By declaring, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32, NKJV), Jesus testified to His ability to draw all men unto Himself. The early Christian church followed His example, keeping Him the central theme. Following is a sample of how Christ remained the Center of their sermons:

“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus” (Acts 5:42, ESV).

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35, ESV).

“But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20, ESV).

One Christian writer talked about why Christ should be the center of every sermon: “The theme that attracts the heart of the sinner is Christ, and him crucified. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus stands revealed to the world in unparalleled love. Present him thus to the hungering multitudes, and the light of his love will win men from darkness to light, from transgression to obedience

and true holiness. Beholding Jesus upon the cross of Calvary arouses the conscience to the heinous character of sin as nothing else can do.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Preaching targeted diverse audiences (men, women, kings, Jews, Gentiles, Greeks, Romans)

Christian preaching today happens mostly within a religious setting in one place, at one time, to one group. The book of Acts tells a radically different story. Men and women, rich and poor, educated and not, received the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter preached to Jews and Gentiles, military officers (Acts 10), and devoutly religious people (Acts 3). Philip spoke to religious outcasts in Samaria and to those unworthy of entering a synagogue (Acts 8). Paul spoke to Christians, Greeks, and Romans and before politicians and kings. No matter the titles a person holds, he or she needs Jesus’ salvation because only God can satisfy the longings of the heart.

## 3. Preaching was contextualized by the audience

The sermons in Acts are as different as were their audiences. Sermons preached to the Jews contain many Old Testament references, drawing on biblical prophecies and imagery. Those preached to the Greeks incorporate philosophy, logic, and quotes from popular authors. While the central aspect of preaching begins with Christ, the early church was not ignorant about their audiences or what their audiences knew or didn’t know. Although each sermon is theologically sound, it was communicated in a way that the people could understand.

Knowledge of an audience is necessary to communicate the gospel effectively. The book of Acts reveals that the church leaders skillfully used contextualization to reach and change their hearers. This is the genius of the apostle Paul, not only to use familiar terminology but also to use it to transform the audience’s worldview.<sup>3</sup>

Here are the types of sermons in the book of Acts:

- 12 evangelistic; 2 strictly apologetic; 2 apologetic and self-defense; 4 apologetic and evangelistic; 1 exhortation, 3 exhortation, evangelism, and worldview change; 1 apologetic, evangelistic, worldview change.
- 17 of the 25 sermons are evangelistic (68 percent)
- 4 of the 25 sermons are exhortation (16 percent)
- 4 of 25 are apologetic (16 percent)

About 68 percent of the preaching in the book of Acts was to people outside the church; 16 percent, to believers inside. Today, preachers spend most of their time ministering to those within the church. Maybe we need to focus more on outreach than inreach?

## 4. Preaching was varied in its approach (evangelistic, apologetic, exhortation)

There is a refreshing variety in the sermons preached in Acts. By far, the most common sermons are evangelistic (68 percent), aimed at persuading the Jewish and Gentile hearers to follow Jesus the Messiah. The early Christian apostles carried a burden to bring the gospel to those who had never heard it, which is why those sermons focus predominantly on nonbelievers.

At other times, the apostles presented the gospel apologetically, defending it from skeptical audiences. The term *apologetics* comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning “a speech in defense.”<sup>4</sup> Steven’s speech before the Sanhedrin and Paul’s before the Roman authorities are examples of where each man was “focused on defending the growing community of Jesus the Messiah. In Stephen’s preaching one hears that there is continuity from the [patriarchs] to Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

A third category is exhortation, or sermons preached specifically to believers. To exhort means to “warn,” “urge,” or “encourage,”<sup>6</sup> and these types encompass 16 percent of the sermons in Acts.

## 5. Preaching had evangelism as the focus

Most sermons in Acts contain some missional evangelistic component, but today, Christian churches have reversed the focus: most preaching is aimed at Christians. As already stated, a minority of the sermons recorded in Acts focused on the Christian. Perhaps Christianity has faltered as a movement because the approach is no longer focused outward on mission.

Ellen White strongly believed that the goal of preachers was to spend their energy on “new fields” instead of focusing on people who are already Christian. Her statements are as needed today as they were 100 years ago. “They [pastors] should feel that it is not their duty to hover over the churches already raised up, but that they should be doing aggressive evangelistic work, preaching the Word and doing house-to-house work in places that have not yet heard the truth. . . . They will find that nothing is so



encouraging as doing evangelistic work in new fields.”<sup>7</sup>

## 6. Preaching was grounded in the Holy Spirit and prayer

The Holy Spirit and prayer play pivotal roles in the book of Acts, a lesson that Christians today should remember. Both the Holy Spirit and prayer were not mere doctrines but transformational forces. Prayer was a necessity. It is referenced 32 times in the book of Acts. The book states that the early church was “devoted” to prayer (Acts 2:42, ESV; cf. 1:14; 6:4).

What about the church today? How much praying do we do? How much of the Holy Spirit do we experience?

The Christian movement started in a prayer meeting, and as it continued its progress, it always depended on the Holy Spirit. One preacher quipped that it took him 3,000 sermons to convert one person while Peter preached one sermon and converted 3,000 people. What made the difference, he learned, was that Peter’s sermon was 100 percent bathed in the Holy Spirit.

It was the Holy Spirit who made the preaching of Steven so powerful (Acts 6:3, 8). By the power of the Holy Spirit, Philip met the Ethiopian in the middle of the desert, which led to his conversion (Acts 8:26–40). Barnabas is described as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24, ESV). The Holy Spirit also took a direct role in sending the disciples to the places where there was a need for preaching (Acts 13:2–4; 16:7).

## 7. Preaching took place anywhere, anytime

In Acts, the preaching of the gospel was not confined to eleven o’clock on a Saturday morning. It took place any time of the day and any day of the week, including a midnight worship service (Acts 16:25). Nor was the preaching limited to within the four walls of a temple or synagogue. They preached in the marketplace, by the river, in the desert, on a boat in the middle of a storm, in homes, in jails, in front of royal courts, and many other places.

Peter, Paul, and the other great evangelists did not wait for people to wander into a building but, instead, went to where the people were. Christ was mainly preached outside the places where believers were gathered: synagogues, marketplaces, town halls, jails, and far-flung islands. Jesus set an example for going to where the people were, whether at a tax booth, a fishing

vessel, or a seashore. Jesus also mingled with people at weddings and funerals, in crowds and synagogues, on hillsides and city streets, and at public wells.<sup>8</sup>

## It can happen again

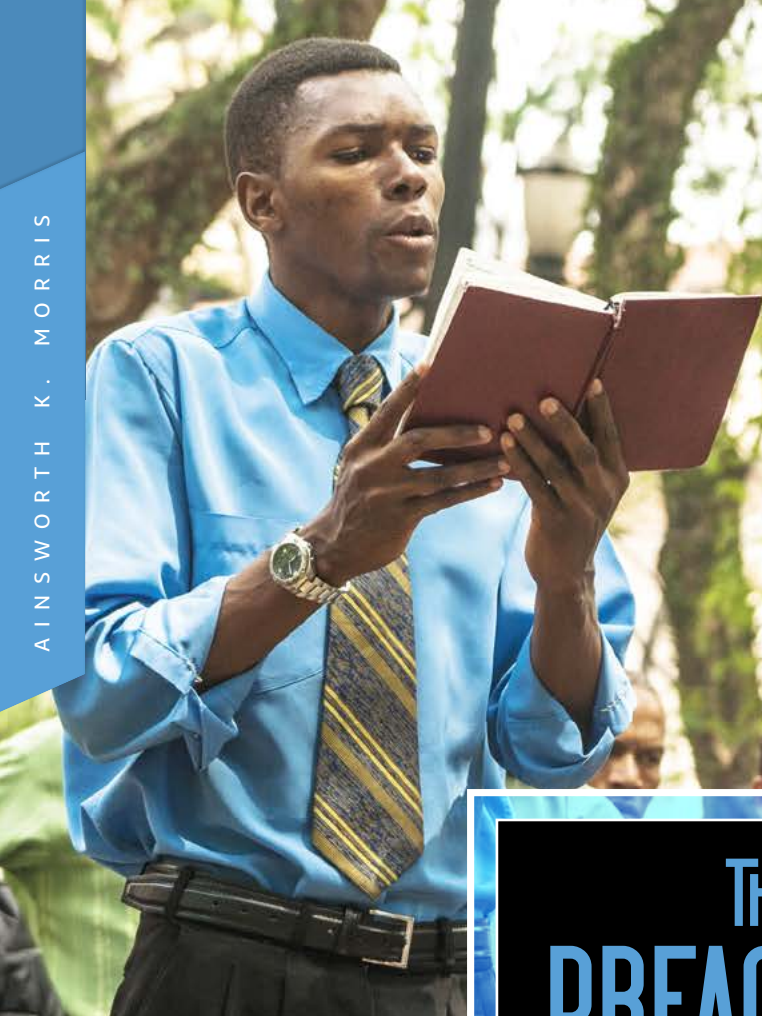
The first focus of effective preaching in the book of Acts was centered on Christ. They knew that if they lifted up Jesus, He would draw all men unto Himself. They took His message seriously by contextualizing the good news to a diverse audience. Wherever they were, this message was heavily focused on evangelism and powered by prayer and the Holy Spirit. These evangelists seized every opportunity to talk to a diverse audience in any place and under any circumstance.

Surely churches today would do well to follow such a template. What would happen if the concept of “church” was bigger than the four walls of a building and, instead, encompassed the common, everyday places where people live? The same Holy Spirit who “turned the world upside down” then would turn the world upside down now.



- 1 Glenn Fluegge, “The Dual Nature of Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 308.
- 2 Ellen G. White, “The Perils and Privileges of the Last Days,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 22, 1892, 3. See also Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2004), 158; Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 826, 827; Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1970), 186, 187.
- 3 Dean Flemming, “Contextualizing the Gospel in Athens: Paul’s Areopagus Address as a Paradigm for Missionary Communication,” *Missiology* 30, no. 2 (April 2002): 205, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182960203000206>.
- 4 Lexicon, Blue Letter Bible, s.v. Strong’s G627—*apologia*, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G627>.
- 5 Luke Gerarty, “The Types of Sermons in the Book of Acts,” *Think Theology*, March 6, 2014, <https://thinktheology.org/2014/03/06/types-sermons-acts/>.
- 6 “Dictionaries,” Blue Letter Bible, s.v. “exhort, exhortation,” <https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/dictionary/viewtopic.cfm?topic=VT0000959>.
- 7 White, *Evangelism*, 382.
- 8 For more information on successful approaches that other churches are using, refer to Arthur B. Rutledge, “Evangelistic Methods in Acts,” *Preaching Source*, accessed March 1, 2022, <https://preachingsource.com/journal/evangelistic-methods-in-acts/>.

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THE  
PREACHER'S  
P'S AND Q'S!



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1–5, KJV).

Many individuals downplay preaching as an archaic, outdated method of communicating the gospel. They suggest replacing it with dialogue, dramatizations, and other approaches that will compete with current social practices and trends. However, I contend that preaching is vital to keep a congregation growing and healthy.<sup>1</sup>

## Biblical examples

The Bible is replete with examples of preachers and the injunction to preach. In the Old Testament, God called upon prophets to warn “the people” and give them His messages. Isaiah’s counsel to the bearer of God’s message is, “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet” (Isa. 58:1, RSV). Ezekiel affirms that the message should be presented “whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear” (Ezek. 2:5, KJV). He further describes the preacher’s solemn responsibility in Ezekiel 3:17–19.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus emphasized the significance of preaching by word and action. The synoptic Gospels describe Him as constantly engaged in preaching. He said of Himself: “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME (the Messiah) BECAUSE HE HAS ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS” (Luke 4:18, AMP). He also spoke of the importance of preaching as a precursor to His

second coming: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14, KJV).

Preaching the good news was prominent in the ministry of the apostles. It was apparent at Pentecost and integral in the establishment of the early church. Paul, arguably the most dominant of all the apostles in the New Testament, also emphasized the importance of preaching. He constantly preached during his travels as he raised and nurtured churches.

In 2 Timothy 4:1–5, Paul shared with his protégé, Timothy, one of the most critical pastoral injunctions concerning preaching. He called upon Timothy to do what I classify as ‘passionate pastoral preaching.’ To be sure, we should not identify it as loud, emotional, or unrestrained. It is not about suave vocal inflections, fad expressions, or choreographed gestures. Instead, Paul was counseling preachers both then and today to model the greatest example in history—Jesus Christ. Author Ellen G. White states, “The lessons of Christ should be carefully studied, and the subjects, manner, and form of discourses should be modeled after the divine Pattern. Oratorical display, flashy rhetoric, and fine gestures do not constitute a fine discourse. . . . He did not sermonize as men do today. Instead, in intensely earnest tones, He assured them of the truths of the life to come, of the way of salvation.”<sup>2</sup>

We can view passionate pastoral preaching, such as Jesus demonstrated and Paul admonished Timothy to, as revolving around some important p’s and q’s.

## P’s and q’s of passionate pastoral preaching

*Purpose.* The apostle Paul is so concerned about the church that he braces his counsel with the disturbing observation that people will resist

sound doctrine. Therefore, he implores Timothy to preach the Word with purpose. The purpose for which Jesus preached was to announce the arrival of the kingdom and offer its divine citizenship to believers, something evident in His every discourse.

Paul declares that we need to “preach the word.” We can understand the Word (*logos*) as the divine expression in the Person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14) or the divine expression of God’s will through the Scriptures (Heb. 4:12; 1 Thess. 2:13). The apostle is very clear about the parameters of our preaching. He consistently spoke about what he was called to preach: “the boundless riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8, NIV); “Him” (Gal. 1:16, NKJV); “the gospel” (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:17; Col. 1:23); “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23); and “the mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:3). It is clear then that the Word he speaks of is the “good news of salvation.”

The example of Jesus commissions us to preach “this gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 24:14, KJV). Therefore, as Seventh-day Adventist preachers, God calls upon us to proclaim with clarity the unique understanding of biblical prophecy focusing on Jesus. It is incumbent upon the

preacher to share that purpose, announce with urgency the imminence of Christ’s second coming, and declare the inescapable reality that we are living in the judgment hour.

*Preparation.* The passage we began with appropriately shows that Timothy must be “ready in season and out of season.” The word *epistēthi* indicates that he must always be prepared. Preaching is not an occasion but a process. And preaching with passion in this postmodern society demands diligent discipline in preparation.

*Personality.* One definition of preaching is communicating through personality. And Paul’s admonition was that Timothy’s preaching needed to convince, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and teaching. In a real sense, he was suggesting that a preacher must not be arrogant and overbearing. People are often turned off not because of the piercing truth but because of the bombastic condescension seen in the preacher. Therefore, at times, it is not the sermon that needs modifying but the attitude or personality of the preacher that requires adjusting.

*Prayer.* It may seem strange to mention that prayer is essential for the preparation and

## Preaching Resources

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presentation of the Word, but it must never be overlooked. Many individuals are talented speakers and orators who are able, simply on those abilities, to make powerful presentations. However, those who desire to communicate the message from God must continuously listen to what God is saying. I read this statement from Pastor Jonas Arrais some time ago, and it bears noting: “The pastor who depends on his own strength, who preaches and serves from his own resources, will soon find himself weak, discouraged, and ready to quit. No one has the wisdom for all of life’s decisions. No one has the patience to overcome all the problems encountered. No one has the time for all the tasks, energy for all the meetings, inspiration for all the messages, and enough compassion for all the people who need him. Being a pastor doesn’t change these truths. Pray or quit. That is the choice.”<sup>3</sup>

*Qualification.* When Paul admonishes Timothy to preach the Word, he is summoning him to stand with holy boldness and declare the Word of God. However, to do so, the preacher must have credibility. The listener has the right to question the authority from which the preacher speaks. People are more comfortable listening when they feel the preacher is credible. Credibility is affected by three things: (1) Ability—Can they trust your skills? (2) Reliability—Do they have confidence through previous experience with you? (3) Spirituality—Do they see you as a spiritual person?

*Quality.* The preacher is responsible for being disciplined in preparing messages of the highest quality. The Seventh-day Adventist preacher cannot assume the posture of doctrinal superiority, believing that prophetic insights and eschatological understanding alone will force people to listen. The obstacles faced, plus the fact that we “wrestle not against flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12, KJV), must compel the preacher to seek the Lord’s strength and wisdom to come forth with messages of the highest quality.

In a busy ministry, it can be challenging to maintain consistent quality. But we must challenge ourselves by learning new methods and exploring new themes. Personal development calls for discipline. Resist the temptation to stay within your comfort zone.

*Question.* To capture the attention of distracted and self-absorbed listeners, the passionate preacher must raise questions of eternal significance. Therefore, both in preparation and presentation, asking questions is necessary. Raise

questions that the listener may be asking, that will confront your hearers, that elicit answers for felt needs. Asking questions can be vital in creating challenges and thoughts in the minds of your congregants.

The primary or starting exegetical questions are Why? What? When? Who? How? Nevertheless, the preacher must dig even deeper by asking such questions as Why now? Why here? What next? The type of questions mined from the text or asked by the preacher will determine whether the congregation will decide to change their hearts and lives.

## Targeting the heart

Ellen G. White emphasizes the sacred responsibility that rests upon every minister of the Word: “A man [or woman] may preach in a spirited manner and please the ear, but convey no new idea or real intelligence to the mind. The impressions received through such preaching last no longer than while the speaker’s voice is heard. When search is made for the fruit of such labor, there is little to be found.”<sup>4</sup>

Since preachers are often described as men and women who minister between the living and the dead, great is their responsibility to transform lives and secure destinies while probation lingers. Therefore, the heart is the preacher’s target for every moment of the sermonic period.

Passionate pastoral preaching that is Spirit-empowered is an essential pathway to the heart. By following the p’s and q’s of purpose, preparation, personality, prayer, qualification, quality, and question, we may discover the gateway to a higher level of preaching, opening the pathway to our listeners’ hearts.



- 1 A version of this article first appeared at <https://seccministerial.org/blog>.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Voice in Speech and Song: As Outlined in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1988), 111.
- 3 Jonas Arrais, *Wanted, a Good Pastor: The Characteristics, Skills, and Attitudes Every Effective Church Leader Needs* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Ministerial Association, 2011), 43.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn, 1948), 447.

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# The Word for everyone

**M**inistering to an intergenerational congregation requires a conscientious effort to clearly communicate the message to the listeners. Not limited to a single style or type of sermon, intergenerational preaching involves first understanding the congregation's needs and then responding to them in a way that everyone can understand.

“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen,” Moses wrote, “and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren” (Deut. 4:9).<sup>1</sup> He wanted succeeding generations not to forget what Israel had already experienced.

Author Ellen G. White describes the teaching of Jesus: “Old and young, ignorant and learned,

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could catch the full meaning of His words.”<sup>2</sup> She indicates that the way He taught employed language that every generation could clearly understand. Both passages emphasize that generations that did not walk through the desert or listen to Jesus teach can still learn from the past. Today’s teachers and pastors must present God’s Word in a manner that our hearers can not only understand but also apply to their own lives.

Before getting into the basics of preaching to the intergenerational church, it is important to clarify that the following principles do not mandate only one type of sermon. Also, every generation has its own cultural setting and learning style. However, certain basic elements should be present when preaching in an intergenerational context.

### **Preaching to the intergenerational church**

The fact that younger generations are losing interest in church is due, in part, to the way much preaching is done. Most of the topics and the language used mainly target adults. But John Roberto, editor of *Lifelong Faith*, maintains that “children will benefit greatly by learning together with their parents and the other generations of the Christian community.”<sup>3</sup>

Speaking of children should remind us of one of the most effective preaching tools: stories. More than just illustrations, stories capture the listener’s attention, make ideas come alive, and linger in the mind long after whatever else the minister might have said. No matter how young or old people are, we love stories. But such stories, along with the rest of a sermon, must have certain fundamental aspects.

Effective intergenerational preaching has three basic elements: theological, relational, and practical. When we center those components on the person of Jesus Christ, the message will become real and personal to everyone.

### **The theological component**

The theological component deals with what the text means. A simple definition of preaching

is that it teaches the meaning of the Scriptures in a contemporary setting. It is fundamental that all sermons preached in our churches are based on the Bible. Traditionally, Adventist preaching has focused on prophecy and lifestyle. Unfortunately, that kind of preaching has often led to fear and a futile search for perfection. Such content has resonated better with older generations than with younger ones. Compounding the problem, the younger generation may not understand the language used. Does that mean we water down intergenerational messages? The answer is an absolute *no*.

What the theological content pleads for, first, is to make the truths of the Bible part of one overarching story. Second, we must present them in a language that all people can grasp. Jere Phillips, editor of *The Journal of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary*, states, “Preachers cannot assume everyone understands the terminology we use when preaching. . . . Biblical illiteracy extends to every age group.”<sup>4</sup>

When God spoke to Moses about health principles for the Israelite camp, He used simple language to describe the new sanitary laws and offered concrete illustrations. For instance, when dealing with clothing and furniture stained by bodily fluids, God said, “ ‘Whoever touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening’ ” (Lev. 15:5).

It is interesting that God did not tell Moses, “Those who touch clothing stained with such fluids need to be treated with antibiotics to prevent infection by microscopic bacteria.” If the Lord had, Moses’ first reaction may have been, “Micro . . . what?” Neither did God announce, “Make sure to have alcohol and penicillin in your first aid kit.” The microscope had not yet been invented. God’s intention was not to confuse but to give a clear message that anyone could understand during that time and in that place. By telling the people they would be impure in that situation, God was preventing further infections among the people. We know, through recent scientific discoveries,

that microbes have a lifespan outside of organic matter of about 24 hours. By telling them that they should remain outside the camp until the next evening (the next day), God was making sure infective agents would die and not spread throughout the camp.

Every message preached should have a theological element. Such a biblical foundation does not need to be shallow. In fact, we should always strive for biblical depth. Ellen White says, "The third angel's message reveals the great saving truth for this time. Its truths are constantly unfolding, and it is God's design that even the children and youth shall understand intelligently what God requires, that they may distinguish between righteousness and sin, between obedience and disobedience."<sup>5</sup>

All theological content needs to be presented in clear, simple language that all generations can grasp.

### The relational component

The relational component addresses the question, "What does the passage have to do with me?" Unfortunately, at times, sermons have become lectures on theology. When that happens, far from being a channel that can lead the people closer to God, they have become a display of the preacher's knowledge on a topic, often with little relationship to the listener. When Jesus preached, He employed elements from the lives of His audience. He told stories and used illustrations that captured their interest, made things clearer, and left lasting impressions on their minds.

The Sermon on the Mount is one example. Warning of the danger of wrong teachings and false prophets, Jesus declared, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15). Jesus uses an illustration embedded in Jewish history. Abraham was a shepherd; his descendants in the time of Joseph were shepherds; and even prominent historical figures, such as David, had been shepherds. Life among the sheep was familiar for the Jewish people. Seeking to drive the lesson home, Jesus did so with an image everyone in His audience was acquainted with.

Every message preached should have an element that its listeners can relate to. It helps guide the audience to discover their personal relationship with God and with others in their own context.

### The practical component

The practical component demonstrates how the message of a sermon speaks to daily life. Often, sermons share beautiful and insightful information, but they are just information because they include little or no practical application. Gospel preaching seeks to change lives. That means that the message needs to show how the biblical and relational elements affect actual life. It can be said that the theological and relational components meet when the application in real life happens.

Scripture offers many examples of how to relate its messages to real life. Jesus speaks about walking a second mile (Matt. 5:41); paying Caesar what belongs to Caesar (Matt. 22:21); and, of course, the well-known golden rule. It is said of Paul that "he illustrated in a practical way what might be done by consecrated laymen in many places where the people were unacquainted with the truths of the gospel."<sup>6</sup> Constantly, the apostle used elements that his readers could apply in the life of the church.

### His story

When the theological component is solid, the message has value. When the relational component is present, people of all generations become engaged. When the practical component is applied, the message becomes part of life. Stories and other illustrations make these more vivid. When all three components are present in a sermon centered on the Person of Jesus, the message becomes especially alive. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. It is His wonderful story. In Him, all Scripture receives its meaning, making it possible to preach the Word to everyone.



- 1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1913), 240.
- 3 John Roberto, "Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational: Models and Strategies," *Lifelong Faith* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 44.
- 4 Jere Phillips, "Multigenerational Preaching," *Journal of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary*, 5 (2018), 87.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 292.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 355.

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# Evaluating the sermon as a tool for learning

One day, I left church wondering how much I truly had learned from the sermon.<sup>1</sup> Don't get me wrong—the message was carefully constructed and had a sense of direction that made it easy to follow and comprehend. The speaker was passionate and knowledgeable about the topic. Her anecdotes and examples built a strong connection between her story and my lived experience. And theologically sound, it was packed with relevant biblical evidence. Without hesitation, I can say that she intended to feed the souls of her audience. But when I looked back, I still felt my hunger to learn unsatisfied.

Through the years, I have heard many great messages. The methods employed, the tone and posture, and the content all conveyed the speakers' intent to teach. While the knowledge I gained from them fleetingly stimulated my interest, unfortunately, it produced little learning in me.

My experience is not atypical. I have informally asked several church members to tell me five things they had learned from the last sermon they had heard. Most of them could only recall one or two examples, and usually, what they most remembered was the speaker's personal story.

While sermons seek to inspire and fortify the soul, they must also edify. Such experiences as the church members' reflect various findings that



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sermons generate little cognitive development in congregants.<sup>2</sup> That is worrisome because Christ calls us to go and teach all nations, and the sermon is one of the main tools that the church employs to fulfill this commission.<sup>3</sup> Teaching is an important function of the sermon. Jesus, the Master Teacher, employed it in this capacity. For example, He used His sermon on the mount to instruct people. Author Ellen G. White identified preachers as “teachers of the Bible.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, it seems that the sermon has not effectively met this purpose.

### **The active learner**

I have learned from several sermons, but it happened when they were less of a monologue

and more of a dialogue. I learn when the speaker interacts with congregants, asking them questions and eliciting responses. Unfortunately, in my experience, few sermons follow such a format. As an educator, I believe it is important to be actively engaged in learning. That occurs when people collaborate with others, discuss ideas, inquire about and discover principles, and solve conundrums.

I have drawn the conclusions I present in this article from a range of learning theories. Their proponents suggest that passive students are less likely to retain knowledge than those actively involved in the process of learning. They are more likely to retain and critically assess what is

taught to them than are passive learners. Active learning is critical because it motivates students and improves their communication and relational skills.<sup>5</sup>

Teachers are increasingly abandoning the schoolmaster approach for approaches that involve students. Also, students are now collaborators in learning. John Dewey beautifully articulates, “Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and [when] the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking . . . learning naturally results.”<sup>6</sup>

Our classrooms are changing, but are our church sanctuaries?

### The sermon as a pedagogical tool

The sermon has been evolving in its presentation methods. Multimedia technology has become a standard feature. In my experience, many ministers mimic TED Talks presenters, employing, for example, open-ended questions, intentional contrasts, and dramatic pauses. Yet, could it be that the more things change, the more they remain the same? In my opinion, this evolution has glamorized but not transformed the sermon. It still has a speaker at a podium providing information to a passive congregation. The irony is that contemporary worship singing has been critiqued for its lack of congregational involvement, but we are unwilling to lay the same charge against the sermon.

A friend once remarked to me, “Carla, you can’t have church without a sermon.” Many cannot conceive of anything else. To me, it seems as if the sermon has become the master over the message rather than a tool for learning. A former teacher of mine often said, “A tool is just a tool. Its purpose is to mediate learning, not govern it.” Jesus employed a variety of instructional approaches with His disciples. Asking and answering questions, He discussed concepts, told parables, healed the sick, engaged in arguments, and preached.

While the sermon was one of the many tools Jesus employed, it was not the one He most frequently used. One of the advantages of such an eclectic approach was that Jesus’ teaching was always contextually relevant—it effectively targeted specific needs. For example, He discussed what it meant to be “born again” with Nicodemus, and because the religious leader could ask questions, it enhanced his understanding of the concept. The parable of the good Samaritan, in which Jesus presented a problem

to the religious expert, actively involved him in his learning. Jesus employed drama to convict the accusers of the woman caught in adultery and at the same time to convey His message of mercy to onlookers. His encounter with the woman at the well demonstrates how effective an open and frank interaction could be. Jesus’ pedagogical approach provided His disciples with ample opportunity to observe, inquire, discuss, and minister to others. Christ engaged those He taught, thus creating a learning environment. Since we are called to be imitators of Christ, I believe that this includes how we minister to others.

### A possible way forward

Perhaps in reconceptualizing the sermon, we can follow in the footsteps of those universities who recognize that just possessing specialized knowledge is not sufficient to impart it meaningfully. Today, universities have established teaching and learning centers that offer training and support in the art of curriculum design and delivery. As a result, such pedagogical tools as inquiry-based learning, team-based learning, flipped classrooms, problem-based learning, blended learning, collaborative learning, and formative assessment have been successfully applied in large classroom settings with adult learners.<sup>7</sup>

I offer two recommendations before adopting such approaches, however. First, we need to reexamine how we train prospective ministers. Teaching involves developing expertise in both content knowledge and instructional method. The latter is especially important for equipping educators with the tools necessary for the creation of meaningful learning environments. Teaching tools are complicated, and using them without adequate training can result in ineffective learning environments. If ministers are to motivate members to learn and provide them with the expertise to share it, the ministers must be educated in the art of pedagogy.

Second, ministers must be prepared for the long haul because reconceptualizing the sermon may be a bitter pill for many members to swallow. Change takes time. I interviewed a teacher who successfully practices formative assessment in his classroom. For him, it involved student “buy-in.” To do this, he incrementally implemented the method over time. He noted that the successful adoption of any activity required time. It not only allowed students to understand the

nature of the activity but also gave them a period during which they could reorient their thinking to consider and accept change. A long-term implementation plan also provided room for trial and error so that his approach could become relevant. I believe the same principles could be applied when creating active church learning environments. Members will need time to allow new methods to become culturally relevant and acceptable.

## Integration

With this in mind, I suggest two ways to integrate active learning into the worship service. Do not seek to drastically change the format of the existing worship service but, rather, gently introduce the idea of active learning to church members.

One approach is to pair the lesson study and sermon. First, switch their order: message first, followed by the lesson study. Second, redesign them to have a symbiotic relationship. Let them feed off each other.

Another method is to insert moments of active learning in the sermon, such as asking the congregation to write responses to questions or distributing handouts to fill out. These can be seamlessly integrated into sermons as tools for member participation.

Such approaches can gently invite congregants to participate in their learning process and serve as a bridge to other activities that require greater congregational involvement. More important, they could provide conduits for congregants to access the expert knowledge of a minister while simultaneously fostering an environment for the congregants' active involvement.

## The Master Teacher

I write not as a homiletical expert but from the perspective of church members who love God and hunger for the Sabbath morning corporate worship experience to motivate them to know and love God even more fully and to equip and encourage them to share that knowledge with others. My purpose is not to advocate one particular approach to sermon preparation and delivery. Rather, I argue for modeling ourselves after the Master Teacher, Jesus, and adopting a variety of methods. A cornucopia of pedagogical tools can foster active learning. The more we use, the greater chances we have of meeting the diverse learning needs of the congregation and fulfilling the divine commission.



- 1 *Sermon* is used in its modern sense usually as a mono-voiced oration presented in a religious assembly. It is mono-voiced in that a speaker presents a message without listener input or response.
- 2 S. A. Joseph and T. L. Thompson, "The Effect of Vividness on the Memorability and Persuasiveness of a Sermon: A Test of the Elaboration Likelihood Model," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 27, no. 2 (2004); K. I. Pargament and D. V. DeRosa, "What Was That Sermon About? Predicting Memory for Religious Messages From Cognitive Psychology Theory," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1985), 180–193; D. L. Price, W. R. Terry, and B. C. Johnston, "The Measurement of the Effect of Preaching and Preaching Plus Small Group Dialogue in One Baptist Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1980), 186–197.
- 3 Examples of such tools include sermons, lectures, discussions, videos, books, team-based learning, and tests.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), 243.
- 5 Elizabeth F. Barkley, *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass); Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991); M. Prince, "Does Active Learning Work? A Review of the Research," *Journal of Engineering Education* 93, no. 3 (2004), 223–231; R. Roy, "Active Learning," *Mathematics Teaching* 211 (2008), 36.
- 6 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1916), 191.
- 7 These learning techniques are defined as follows:

Inquiry-based learning is using a student-centered approach in which they learn through inquiry and exploration.

Team-based learning is "a structured form of small-group learning that emphasizes student preparation out of class and application of knowledge in class," "Team-Based Learning," Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/team-based-learning/>.

Flipped classroom refers to "a reversal of traditional teaching where students gain first exposure to new material outside of class, usually via reading or lecture videos, and then class time is used to do the harder work of assimilating that knowledge through strategies such as problem-solving, discussion or debates." "Flipping the Classroom," Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/flipping-the-classroom/>.

Problem-based learning occurs when "students engage complex, challenging problems and collaboratively work toward their resolution." "Problem Based Learning," Institute for Transforming University Education, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://www.itue.udel.edu/pbl>.

Blended learning is teaching that includes both face-to-face teaching and online instruction.

Collaborative learning consists of educational experiences in which students work together to construct knowledge.

Formative assessment is an assessment task in which the teacher facilitates students' successful completion of the task. The teacher judges the quality of the students' progress, provides them with feedback, and adapts their teaching so as to bridge the gap in the students' understanding of the task.

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# What I have learned from **Jesus** about **preaching**

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People call Jesus the Master Communicator. He taught crowds exceeding 10,000<sup>1</sup> in the open air without any means of amplifying His voice. People flocked to Him to hear His memorable discourses that have endured and transformed the world.

Some have called Him a bad Communicator because His disciples were slow to understand Him.<sup>2</sup> But His contemporaries would disagree. Though not a graduate of their rabbinical schools, even the rabbinically trained called Him Rabbi, a title reserved for the rabbinically trained.<sup>3</sup> “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7:28).<sup>4</sup> Such an assessment has profound implications.

Although scribes taught the Torah, they derived their authority from former rabbis.<sup>5</sup> “Scribal authority arose from the learned interpretation of Torah and the citation of earlier rabbis.”<sup>6</sup> “The teaching of the scribes and elders was cold and formal, like a lesson learned by rote.” “The rabbis spoke with doubt and hesitancy, as if the Scriptures might be interpreted to mean one thing or exactly the opposite.”<sup>7</sup> But effective preaching shouldn’t be hesitant or doubtful. Truth must be believed and presented with earnestness, sincerity, enthusiasm, passion, and conviction.<sup>8</sup>

When compared with even the greatest rabbis, Jesus taught with a difference. His authority did not depend on others.<sup>9</sup> He spoke in His own name with four distinctive kinds of authority.

**1. Sapiential authority.** Sapiential authority is derived from knowledge. Jesus knew the Hebrew Bible. When He was 12, His scriptural knowledge amazed the elders.<sup>10</sup> Preachers should not only acquire the best knowledge but also commit to lifelong learning. Some preachers spend insufficient time with Scripture, being too busy with the Lord’s work to have time for the Lord of the work.

Consequently, their sermons lack substance or plagiarize others.

Many preachers read the Bible sermonically, not devotionally. They aim at getting content for their congregants, not blessings for themselves. Yet, sermons emerging from those devotional encounters that first bless self are more potent and provide enormous blessings to others.

**2. Moral authority.** The beauty of Jesus’ personal life enhanced His preaching. Precept and example coincided, creating constancy between teaching and behavior. His life exemplified His teaching. Preachers need high moral standards for themselves. My life must reflect what I teach so that others cannot say, “What you do shouts so loudly, I can’t hear what you say.”

By their actions, some preachers say, “Do as I say, not as I do.” Jesus was not like that. Others justify questionable behaviors, arguing that preachers are humans like parishioners and thus equally sinners. While true, such an excuse rests on faulty reasoning. Since preachers represent God, we expect more of them. Scripture says to whom much is given, much is expected.<sup>11</sup> Holding preachers to high standards is valid. Some take their obligations too casually. Not merely a profession, preaching is a calling that summons to holiness, “For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. . . . You shall be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44, 45).<sup>12</sup> Remember, people learn more from what they see than what they hear.<sup>13</sup>

**3. Personal authority.** When people said Jesus spoke with authority, not as the scribes, they also meant He had personal authority. Those who possess sapiential and moral authority will earn respect, which yields personal authority—something that cannot be purchased or commanded. It is only earned.

**4. Charismatic authority.** Crowds flocked to Jesus (Mark 3:31, 32; 1:35–36; John 6:22–24). At times,

the crowds did not leave Him time to eat (Mark 3:19, 20). Jesus had the ability to build rapport and attract people. Rapport is another trait that one cannot command or demand. It is God's gift. Pastors can develop and exercise good people skills that grant authority. People especially appreciate those who know and call them by name and do not pretend, but genuinely love and care. Jesus did this. These are qualities every pastor, charismatic or not, can develop for more effective preaching.

People respond to those who care about them as individuals. They love caregivers who are authentic and sincere.

### Jesus the Great Communicator

Evans Crawford calls preaching "an oral event,"<sup>14</sup> emphasizing its communal nature because preaching involves interaction between the speaker and the listener.<sup>15</sup> Communication is the transmittal of information from sender to receiver. It requires that transmitters and receivers be on the same frequency, speaking the same language. Thus, good communication is a two-way process requiring a complete feedback loop.

With that in mind, what made Jesus a great communicator? We have said His knowledge, life, authoritative teaching, and effective preaching powered His success. What of His delivery skills?

Jesus mastered reading an audience and adjusting to its needs. He knew people learned in different ways. Some are visual, others tactile, auditory, conceptual, or cognitive learners. Jesus adapted His delivery to meet various needs. His parables dealt with the visual. To the blind who depended on hearing, He spoke words of comfort. And for Nicodemus, He utilized the theoretical and conceptual. His feeding and healing miracles were tactile. We should emulate Him and use appropriate tools to meet the various learning styles.

### He used parables

Jesus made extensive use of parables. In the Synoptics Gospels, parables comprise one-third of His teaching.<sup>16</sup> Using parables was a well-known and popular discourse method. Rabbis used parables to confirm traditional values. But Jesus transformed them by applying them in other ways:<sup>17</sup>

*Turning conventional values upside-down.*<sup>18</sup> The rabbis employed parables to confirm the status quo. Jesus used them to shatter traditional ideals. Rabbis saw the Jews as God's special representatives in the world from the beginning, thus deserving the highest reward. They illustrated

this in a parable about a farmer who gave those beginning their work in the early morning more pay than those starting later.

But Jesus told the same parable with a twist (Matt. 20:1–16). The farmer agreed to pay a denarius to those he hired early in the morning. Then, as the day went on, he hired more workers and promised to pay them what was right. At day's end, each got a denarius. Those who had worked all day became angry, claiming that they deserved more than the others. The farmer said it was his money to use as he pleased.

Jesus' punchline said, "So the last will be first and the first will be last" (v. 16). The rabbis' parable confirmed conventional thinking that as God's special people, Jews were called first and consequently deserved more. On the other hand, Jesus' parable said there was equal opportunity and pay for all—without rank nor priority.

I learned Spirit-prompted independent thinking and sensitivity to new ideas from Jesus. That means while some preaching has no relevance to the issues that listeners actually confront, my preaching must present right, justice, and equality for the oppressed, dispossessed, and marginalized—those whom Jesus constantly defended.

*Communicating the unknown through the known, the heavenly through the earthly.* Since sin entered the world, humans have had limited thoughts and imaginations. Accordingly, Jesus employed what humans already knew to illustrate what they still needed to know. He had to use earthly concepts to communicate heavenly realities.

When Jesus compared the kingdom to the yeast that a woman placed in dough and mixed until the leaven permeated the whole thing, He used something people were familiar with to teach essential truth. To make new dough rise, a piece of old dough was used to leaven it. It showed His listeners that though His kingdom might seem insignificant, it would eventually transform society. It motivated them to keep faith and anticipate the fulfillment of Jesus' words. Fulfillment came when Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman Empire.

Jesus demonstrated that preaching should be contextual, utilizing familiar illustrations to teach spiritual truths. I have adapted sermons to meet the needs and experiences of people in various parts of the world. In Korea, I preached at a 1,000-member Presbyterian church. Although I met the pastor only minutes beforehand, he thanked me for addressing his congregation's needs in the sermon.



*Capturing attention through current events and everyday experiences.* Jesus mastered the art of using current events and common experiences. The parable of the good Samaritan related a recent occurrence known to His listeners. He used it to grab attention and teach truth. Rabbinic pedagogy utilized a triadic style. When Jesus presented the first two passersby as religious leaders, listeners expected the third to be a cleric. Instead, Jesus made him the least likely candidate—a Samaritan—and the hero to grab attention and teach lessons on neighborliness, pride, bigotry, and prejudice. It indicates that we can employ current events, to capture an audience's interest.

*Awakening inquiry.* Jesus enjoyed asking leading questions to grab attention and prepare hearts for deeper truths. The stories of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman offer examples. The questions that Jesus raised pointed to gaps in their knowledge and led them to seek further truth. Jesus then used the teachable moment to inform their minds and move their emotions. Ask leading questions in sermons to encourage listeners to think deeper, weigh issues, and make decisions.

*Making His preaching memorable.* Jesus used things from everyday life to teach. When His hearers later encountered them, they recalled His words and learned vital lessons even in His absence.<sup>19</sup> He employed items such as leaven, seeds, oil, lamps, salt, meal, and bread; people such as farmers, fishermen, priests, Levites, Samaritans; and ceremonies such as weddings. Perhaps when Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins, they were just then viewing a wedding procession. When they later encountered more wedding processions, the experience became a reinforced teachable moment.

This technique motivates me to use memorable images that will teach even in my absence. Years ago, a usually reserved student excitedly approached me. That weekend while driving, she saw an illustration I had used and wanted to tell me. I shared her delight for it indicated that I had succeeded in awakening interest and teaching while absent.

### **He used figures of speech**

Jesus' mastery of figures of speech to illuminate sermons made Him a superb preacher. He used hyperbole, puns, similes, metaphors, paradoxes, and epigrams. We see hyperbole, a slightly exaggerated statement to prove a point, memorably illustrated in His sermon on the mount: "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do

## **Jesus did not always give the full details of what people might have wanted to know. Instead, He encouraged them to use their imagination.**

not notice the log in your own eye?" (Matt. 7:3). The pun, a play on words similar in sound but different in meaning, is exemplified in Jesus' words to the scribes and Pharisees: "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!" (Matt. 23:24). It involves an Aramaic play on words in which "camel" is *gamla*,<sup>20</sup> and "gnat" is *galma*.<sup>21</sup>

A simile compares like things. Jesus' parables are extended similes using what the people already knew to illustrate what they must yet learn. Thus, He likened the kingdom of heaven to the things with which people were accustomed to teach them lessons about heavenly things. The parables of Matthew 13 and Mark 4 illustrate His practice.

Related to similes are metaphors. For example, Jesus said, "I am the door;" "I am the Bread of life;" "I am the light of the world."<sup>22</sup> The paradox, a statement presenting a dilemma or seeming contradiction, appears in such passages as "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all" (Mark 9:35). He used epigrams, terse, witty, pointed, and often antithetical statements not meant to be taken literally, as seen in "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted" (Matt. 23:12).

### **He used imagination**

If Jesus' contemporaries did not have recording devices to capture His sermons, how did they so clearly remember them? It was precisely because of His use of images, rhetorical devices, and delivery techniques.

Jesus did not always give the full details of what people might have wanted to know. Instead, He encouraged them to use their imagination. He features a blind man leading another blind person (Luke 6:39) but leaves any details of the ensuing catastrophe to their imagination.

### **He used sensory images**

People learn more from what they perceive through their other senses than what they merely

hear. Because the Jews were primarily auditory, Jesus included as many senses as possible.

Taste: Matthew 5:13; 14:13–21; Mark 14:12–24

Hearing: Matthew 5:21, 27, 38, 43

Sight: Matthew 5:28, 29; 6:22; Mark 8:14–21; 9:1–8; Luke 6:39–42; 10:23; John 12:44–46

Touch: Matthew 8:3; Mark 5:26–34; Luke 6:1–5

## Transformation

As I have studied Jesus as a Preacher, I have garnered several admirable traits that have enlivened and improved my preaching.

1. Preach to meet the varying learning styles of your audiences
2. Keep temporal and eternal goals in view by using the known to illustrate the unknown.

3. Be creative and use the imagination in your delivery to enliven, illustrate, and grab attention.
4. Use the senses in sermon content and presentation to connect to learning styles.
5. Use familiar objects and current events to capture interest and illustrate truth.
6. Use figures of speech and other rhetorical devices.
7. Create mental images that will preach in absentia.
8. Maintain consistency between profession and practice, because authoritative preaching derives from cognitive, moral, and personal authority.

Let's model Jesus' communication and preaching techniques. They will transform our sermons, make them memorable, produce satisfied members, and expand God's kingdom.



- 1 The gospels say that 5,000 men besides women and children participated in the feeding of the 5,000. Thus, women and children were not counted. Since most audiences have more women and children than men, one can safely assume that 10,000 to 20,000 people were present that day.
- 2 See Bertram Melbourne, *Slow to Understand: The Disciples in Synoptic Perspective* (Lanham, MD: The University Press of America, 1988), 29, 160, 178.
- 3 See Matthew 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5; 10:51; John 1:38, 49; and 6:25. Rainer Riesner thinks the technical use of the term rabbi was a later development. R. Riesner, s.v. "Teacher," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall Reiner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).
- 4 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version.
- 5 Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 137. Compare *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, which says that Christ did not teach "dogmatically, but on His own authority rather than by quoting earlier expositors of the law, as the rabbis did" Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1956), 360.
- 6 G. S. Shogren, s.v. "Authority and Power," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 253.
- 8 Compare Ellen White, who says, "Never should they [preachers] sound one wavering, uncertain note. Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), 15.
- 9 Compare Shogren, "Authority and Power," 52.
- 10 This is the implication of Luke 2:46, 47. See White, *Desire of Ages*, 78–80.
- 11 See Luke 12:48.
- 12 Ellen White cautions that "the true minister will do nothing that would belittle his sacred office." White, *Gospel Workers*, 17.
- 13 Research suggests we retain only 10 percent of what we hear but as much as 80 percent of what we see, hear, feel, and taste. Because sight is so powerful a sense, we tend to learn more from what we see. Jesus' disciples had a problem with seeing and hearing, though. Though His miracles and what He did attracted them, they did not really listen to what He said. They did not grasp that what He was saying did not coincide with their messianic concepts. Even after the Voice from heaven, at the transfiguration, invited them to listen to Him, they had difficulty learning. For development of this concept, see Melbourne, *Slow to Understand*.
- 14 Evans E. Crawford with Thomas H. Troeger, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 17.
- 15 M. Chartier, *Preaching as Communication: An Interpersonal Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981).
- 16 Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 594.
- 17 See Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 17–27 for a listing of reasons why Jesus taught in parables.
- 18 See Robert Johnston, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI. Material from an unpublished paper.
- 19 Bertram Melbourne, "Still Teaching After Two Millennia: What Can We Learn From the Master Teacher?" *Journal of Adventist Education* 65, no. 5, (Summer 2003), 5–9.
- 20 David Noel Freedman, Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, John David Pleins, and Astrid Billes Beck, eds., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 1153.
- 21 Daniel Augsburger of Andrews University says this in his Life and Teachings class syllabus (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1977). See also Michael E. Lawrence, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 8 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 436. This is a double figure of speech because there is an implied contrast between the camel, one of the largest animals, and the gnat, one of the smallest creatures.
- 22 See John 10:7–10; 6:35; 8:12.

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to [ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org).



## Rwandan and Afghan refugees find warm welcome

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN, UNITED STATES

When **Karen Yang**, family ministries director of the Ann Arbor Adventist church in Michigan, recognized a young man, **Vincent**, a refugee from Rwanda who had been a regular Ann Arbor church attendee, she pulled over to offer a ride. Vincent was with **Sherif**, who was newly arrived from a Rwandan refugee camp. She took the teens to their temporary home, in a hotel, and met the new family. Yang invited them to church on Sabbath and offered to take them. They brightened at the invitation and quickly agreed to go.

The Ann Arbor church warmly welcomed the family and provided them with winter clothing, shoes, blankets, and more. Through the generous sponsorship of a church member, the youngest son enrolled in the Ann Arbor Adventist Elementary School.

Yang began to visit the Rwandan family more frequently at the hotel and met other refugees who had noticed that the Rwandan Adventist family seemed less distressed.

**Daniel Rodriguez**, the new pastor of the Ann Arbor church, suggested that the congregation



Photo: Ann Arbor Seventh-day Adventist Church, Lake Union Herald

provide a meal for the refugee families. Fifteen Rwandan and 17 Afghan refugees came for the dinner.

Later, a group took the Afghan refugee women to purchase clothing and other things from a secondhand store. Church members took the children to the public library to borrow books and play at the playground. An agency soon found apartments for the families.

Yang visited homes in the community around the church and offered the services of the refugee youth and others to rake leaves and shovel snow in exchange for donations. The neighbors not only gave generous donations but also brought out jackets, suits, winter shoes, hats, gloves, and good wishes for their resettlement. Yang says, "I rejoice in the refugee ministry. The new Rwandan family started a Bible study twice weekly. We open the Scripture and let the Holy Spirit move. If no translator is available, we use machine translation. The Holy Spirit may not call us to go to Rwanda or Afghanistan as a missionary, but He brought them close to our home to share the love of Jesus and the gospel." [Ann Arbor Seventh-day Adventist Church, for Lake Union *Herald*]

## First virtual church established in New York

LANCASTER, MASSACHUSETTS, UNITED STATES

On February 1, 2022, the Northeastern Conference (NEC), headquartered in New York City, United States, made history by establishing The Living Manna First Online Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**Abraham Jules**, NEC president, was exuberant about the new endeavor. "The pandemic has taught all of us some lessons, one of them being that we can have church while we are at home. There are many people who we will be reaching through this virtual congregation that we would not reach otherwise."

As a virtual church, Living Manna is intended to operate in the same manner as a church with members occupying a physical building, including having church elections and submitting tithes and offerings. "The only difference is [the members] will come from around the world," says Jules. "They will be indoctrinated in the teachings of the Adventist Church, and we will have elections like any other church—all of the typical auxiliaries will be represented in the virtual church." Living Manna members will utilize AdventistGiving online to return tithe and give offerings. As a virtual church, Living Manna will also operate seven days a week through varied online programming addressing daily living, finances, mental health, and more.

**Ivor Myers**, a pastor and dean at Oakwood University, has been appointed pastor of Living



Manna. Myers previously pastored a church in Campbell, California. During the pandemic, as many churches moved services online, Myers's programming with the online congregation developed. As he interacted with viewers, he noticed a significant increase in the reach and size of his online audience. "We were communicating directly with them. We saw their comments come up and responded in real time. That ended up being a real blessing."

Myers approached Northeastern Conference with the idea of forming a virtual church. "The difference between streaming services online and forming a virtual church is that the people online are not on the outside looking in; they are not just joining a service; they *are* the service," explains Myers.

When asked about possible impacts a virtual church may have on members choosing to support a virtual church and not attend their local church, Jules was not worried. "I have always said that if

a pastor is scared about losing members to any other congregation, any other preacher, or any other establishment in town, you should lose them. If you are doing what is right and people still leave, it is a free country. You do your best to minister."

**Nicardo Delahaye**, NEC associate secretary, agreed. "The online church is catering to a different audience. We are going after two different demographics."

"Online church isn't for everybody, but it is for some, and that number of people is pretty big," said Myers. "There are some people who won't walk into a church building, but they will watch online. We don't want to come off as competition or a threat to any church. That's why our emphasis is not on moving Adventist members into Living Manna but on getting new members who are not already in our churches. Hopefully, we will also help fill other churches." [Debra Cuadro, Atlantic Union *Gleaner*]

## First African American woman with MDiv degree in Adventist Church passes to rest

DETROIT, MICHIGAN, UNITED STATES

**Bernadine Archer**, a pioneer in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, passed away on January 27, 2022, at age 69. Archer graduated from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in 1987, becoming "the first black woman to receive a master of divinity degree in the Adventist church" and the first "credentialed female prison chaplain endorsed by the Seventh-day Adventist church," after completing clinical pastoral education in Detroit,



Michigan (Adventist News Network, October 17, 2016). Her call to serve at Macomb Regional Correctional Facility in New Haven, Michigan, made her "the first Adventist woman to be employed as a correctional chaplain" (*Adventist Review*, June 30, 1994).

Born in Detroit, Michigan, Archer was introduced to Adventism with the support and encouragement of **Earvin "Magic" Johnson's** grandmother. Archer was a commissioned minister in the Michigan Conference, and also received an ecclesiastical endorsement from Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries.

Archer was featured on the cover of the *Adventist Review*, February 20, 1986. She stated, "Wanting to work for God and not being able to is one of the worst forms of human suffering. It was a test of faith for me. This test of faith resulted in a mustard seed experience, and God has removed great mountains of difficulty."

[Jeffrey Brown, *Ministry*]



## The Big Idea Companion for Preaching and Teaching

edited by Matthew D. Kim and Scott M. Gibson,  
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021.

All who are familiar with and seek to practice Haddon Robinson's "big idea" approach for expository preaching struggle at some point in crafting the main or big idea of the assigned preaching passage. This recent volume, edited by Matthew D. Kim and Scott M. Gibson (professors of preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Baylor University, respectively), is a welcomed answer to prayer! *The Big Idea Companion for Preaching and Teaching* is a treasure trove of insights, examples, and resources for effectively crafting the main idea of a biblical book or passage.

According to Kim, the book was designed to provide readers with an "insider's view of the process of determining the main idea of a passage in its context (i.e., subject, complement, exegetical idea, and homiletical idea). In addition, for each book of the Bible you will have quick access to several features: (1) a brief introduction to the big idea of the entire book, (2) tips on how to divide the book into preaching and teaching pericopes, (3) guidance on difficult passages and verses, (4) cultural perspectives to facilitate faithful application, and (5) recommended resources for interpreting, preaching, and teaching each book" (1, 2).

The book follows the standard arrangement of the biblical books from Genesis to Revelation. "Each biblical book is divided into preachable and teachable units" (603), and a different evangelical preacher or scholar writes the content for


each biblical book. For example, Joel Gregory, in his exploration of the book of Amos, provides the following insights on Amos 7:10–17:

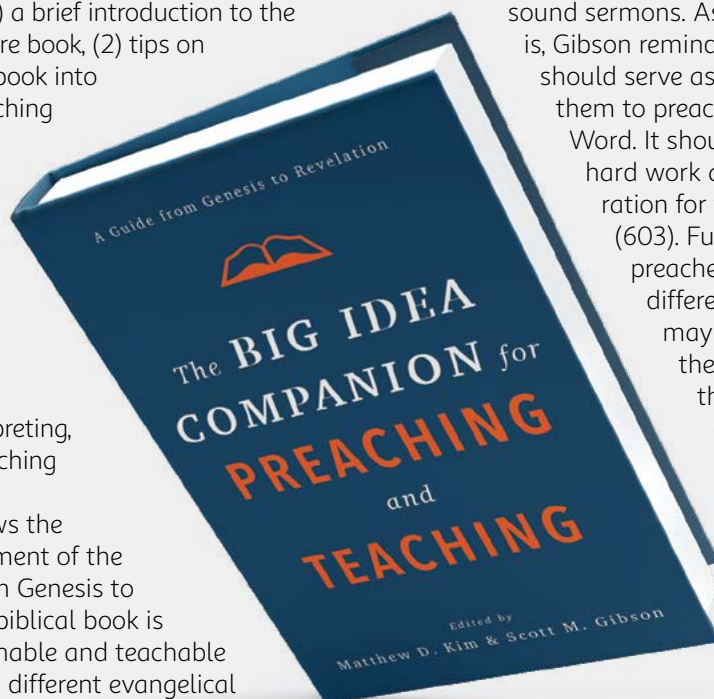
"SUBJECT: Who can God use to proclaim His word against corruption and injustice in religion and life?

"COMPLEMENT: Unlikely people from unlikely places.

"EXEGETICAL IDEA: God can use unlikely people from unusual places to proclaim His word against corruption and injustice in religion and life.

"HOMILETICAL IDEA: God can use us despite our unlikely background and personal history to speak His words in unexpected places" (348).

This practical minicommentary and handbook will benefit both seasoned and novice preachers who desire to preach clear and biblically sound sermons. As great as this volume is, Gibson reminds readers that the book should serve as a guide in helping them to preach and teach God's Word. It should "not replace good, hard work as one studies in preparation for teaching and preaching" (603). Furthermore, since some preachers' interpretation of different Scripture passages may vary based on their theological tradition, they are encouraged to change the homiletical ideas. However, they should ensure that these adaptations "do not alter the meaning of the biblical passage" (603). 



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## How to rely on the Holy Spirit in your preaching

If you created a checklist for sermon preparation, it might look like this: study the biblical passage—check; frame a big idea—check; outline the talk—check; expand the outline with textual data, illustrations, and applications—check. But what about prayer? What about the Holy Spirit? You might respond: “Well, yes. Of course. Without the Holy Spirit, our words are wood, hay, and stubble. But the Holy Spirit cannot be turned into a homiletical technique. The Spirit blows where He wills.”

### Trust

You are right. Relying on the Holy Spirit is more of an attitude of dependence than a method or homiletical art. But the question this article poses is not How can we package and dispense the Holy Spirit? but How can we pray and *depend* on the Spirit? If we are not careful, the weekly grind of sermon preparation can turn preaching into a mechanical art, dependent more on human effort than God’s sovereign Spirit.

The best tool I have found to help me rely on God in my preaching is from preacher John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*. I have adapted his advice to create this acronym: APCAT. I use APCAT while preparing sermons and often pray it while standing in the congregation just before walking to the platform.

*A* stands for *acknowledge*. State to God in plain terms something like, “Without You, my sermon will fall flat and never rise higher than the ceiling. This is true, and I confess it.” When we acknowledge our need early in the sermon preparation (and, indeed, at the end of our preparation), we remember that God is the Potter, and we are just clay in His hands.

*P* stands for *plead*. Considering the acknowledgment just made, we petition God: “Please move powerfully. Please convict, comfort, remind, teach, persuade, enlighten, or do whatever each heart requires.” We must plead with Him to unleash the power of His Word.

*C* stands for *claim*. Boldly latch on to God’s promise to use His Word and the preaching of

His Word to save and sanctify. I have found that my preaching text often contains a promise or an implication that I can claim for the upcoming sermon, but if not, we have plenty of promises to draw from. I also frequently claim Romans 10:17, “Faith comes from hearing,” and Hebrews 4:12, where the Word penetrates the conscience. Step out in faith, trusting in the confidence of the Holy Spirit.

*A* stands for *act*. This component of APCAT does not contradict the previous points. No, we do our part because He has told us to act. We study the text, analyze the audience, arrange the outline, gather the illustrations, and so forth, not in self-reliance as if the success of the sermon depends on us alone but because God has commanded us to act. We preach because we have faith in Him, not ourselves.

*T* stands for *thank*. When the sermon is over, rather than rehearsing your mistakes (*How did I do? Did they like me? Oh no, I forgot that illustration!*), praise God for using you. To use a phrase from Peter Scazzerro, an “emotionally healthy” preacher remembers that God can use even a crooked stick to perform miracles. Pastor Scazzerro advises, “If I’m too concerned about what people think of me and how the sermon is going to come off, I don’t think I’m ready to preach.”<sup>1</sup> A prayer of thanks while doing sermon preparation and then immediately after preaching reminds us that God saves and sanctifies through the foolishness of preaching.

### Truth

For your next sermon, give APCAT a try. In fact, why not pray through APCAT right now, as you finish this article? You may find, as I have found, that it helps align your heart with the truth of who God is and what He accomplishes through the mystery of preaching. He saves and sanctifies: “You have been born again . . . through the living and abiding word of God. . . . This word is the good news that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23–25, ESV).



<sup>1</sup> Peter Scazzerro, “The Importance of Being an Emotionally Healthy Preacher,” in *Sermon Preparation*, ed. Craig Brian Larson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 2012), 35.

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