

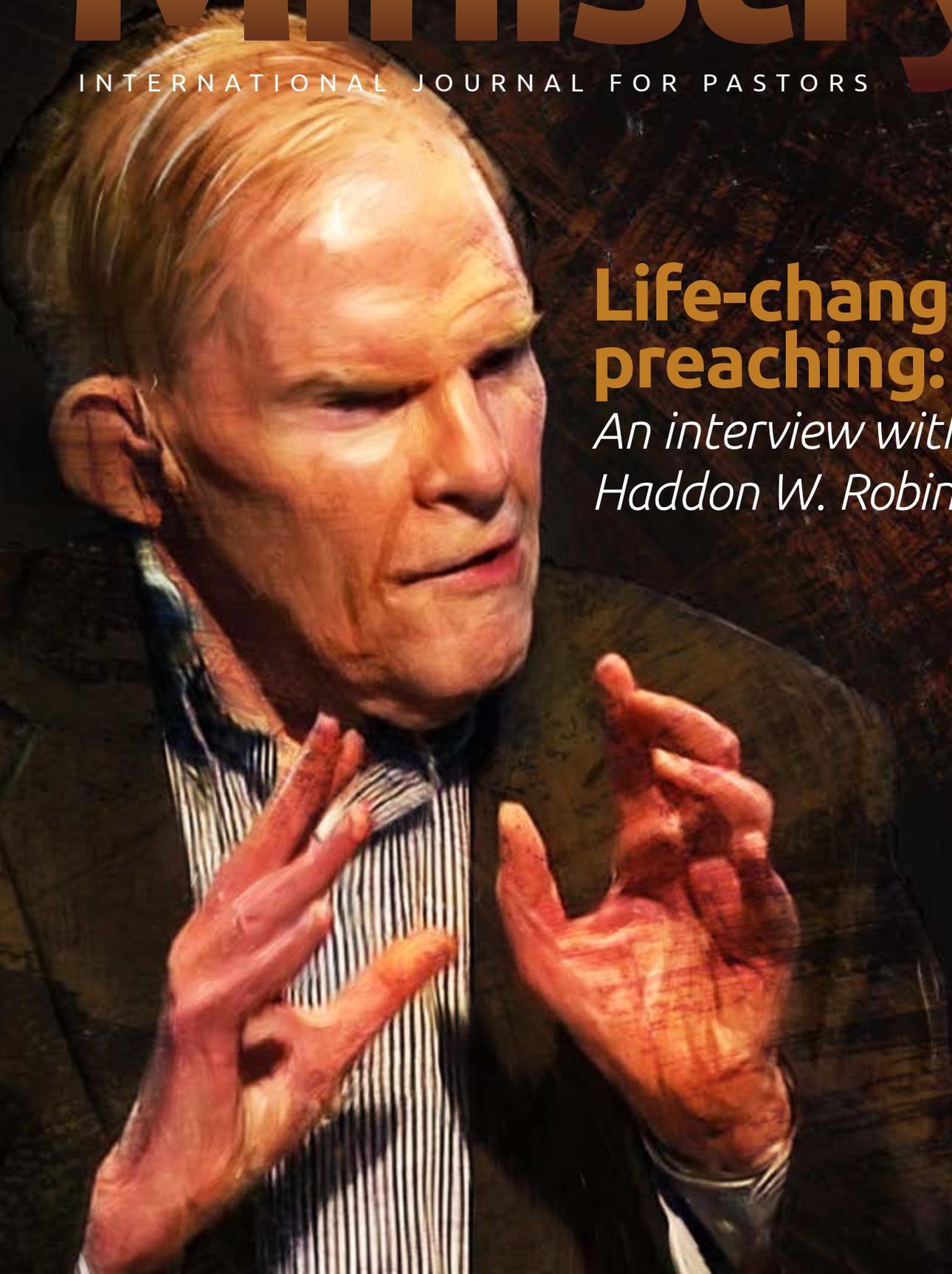
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Life-changing preaching:

*An interview with
Haddon W. Robinson*



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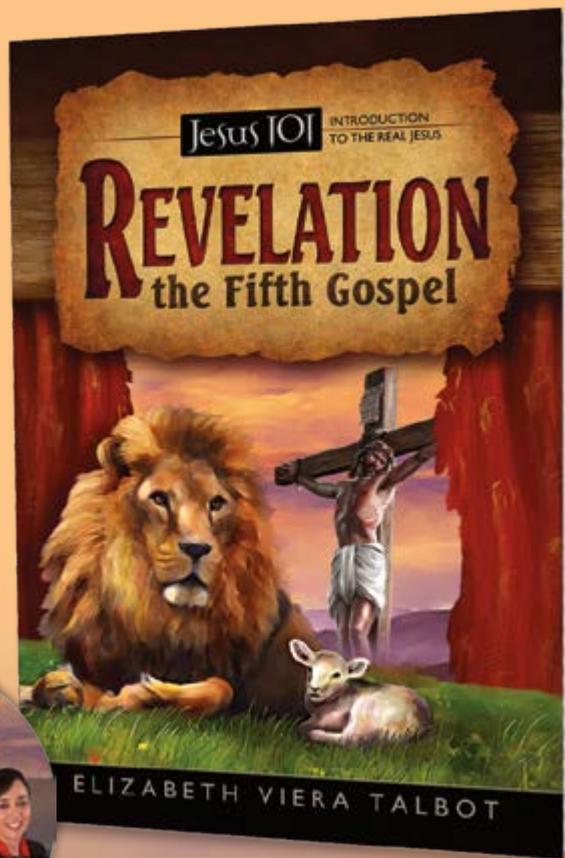
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A lesson in preaching from a 12-year-old

As was my custom at the conclusion of the morning worship service, I stood at the doors of the sanctuary to shake hands with my parishioners and guests. As always, 12-year-old Torey, along with her mother and two brothers, came to greet me. “Nice sermon, Pastor. But there was something you said that I didn’t understand. What did you mean when you said . . . ?”

Not accustomed to being asked questions like that immediately after preaching and wanting to greet others who were now waiting in the line, I attempted to hastily answer her question. However, in trying to respond to her query, I found myself struggling to explain what I stated in my sermon. Finally, I simplified my earlier assertion, to which she responded, “Now I understand. Why didn’t you just say that?”

Had she punched me in the stomach, her exclamation could not have hurt me more.

What people seek from our preaching

That innocent, well-intended critique, approximately 20 years ago, started an inventory of my preaching that I had not planned to conduct. I thought my sermons were clear and easy to understand; but now I doubted whether they were. As a result, I have learned a host of valuable lessons that I hope benefit those who read this, regardless of their age.

Jesus, as the Answer to one’s personal sin problem. While it remains critical to preach about the brokenness of humanity in general, as well as sin and sinful behavior that reside in each

of us in particular, I realize more and more that most of those who hear my sermons already know they are sinners who struggle with issues that would shock others if they knew of those internal battles. Guilt consumes them. They don’t need to be told the diagnosis over and over; they need to know the prescription! They need to hear that Christ loves them (Jer. 31:3), seeks to save them (Luke 19:10), and forgives and cleanses them when they respond to His invitation (1 John 1:9; John 6:37).

Jesus as Deliverer from all strife. On back-to-back days in April 2014, I heard two impactful sermons: one from Paul Ratsara; the other from Antônio Monteiro. Each preached powerful biblical expositions of how Christ carried them through the darkest days of their lives. We each face tribulations of personal and/or corporate dimensions. As gospel ministers, we present God through His Word to our listeners—the God who hears our cries when we grieve and notes our anguish when we are oppressed or otherwise mistreated.

A Word that helps people make sense of life in an imperfect world. I admire Job when I consider how he conducted his affairs in spite of a series of seemingly inexplicable events. Many lessons can be learned from the book that bears his name, and among those lessons is the truth that satanic forces have succeeded in poisoning every element of life and every fiber of society. Although we find our homes, churches, and other Christian institutions to be places of refuge, even these have been tainted.

However, in spite of the pain, sorrow, classism, sexism, and other evidences of the imperfections that

Had she punched me in the stomach, her exclamation could not have hurt me more.

surround and afflict us, we preach a message of victory—rooted in the realization that “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4, NIV). There is no space in our preaching for a sanitary gospel; that is, one that is free of the germs of our brokenness. Rather, the message of Christ shows us how to live on this infected planet while we wait for the complete fruits of eternal life.

My favorite homiletics professor

Many of you who are reading this editorial could tell stories of homiletic lessons you have learned—some in the classroom; others, in the church. I shall forever be indebted to my undergraduate professor of homiletics, the late Calvin E. Mosely, who taught me much more than preaching. He taught me Jesus. Some of you have either read or studied under Haddon Robinson. His interview, conducted by Derek Morris, shares from a wealth of experience gained over many decades of service.

But my favorite homiletics professor remains that 12-year-old girl. She, through her Spirit-led counsel, taught me how to keep the presentation simple, practical, useful, and understandable. Thank you, Torey. 🙏

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Derek J. Morris, DMin, is editor of *Ministry*.



Life-changing preaching: An interview with Haddon W. Robinson

Editor's note: Haddon W. Robinson has been recognized as one of the outstanding preachers and teachers of preaching in the twentieth century. He concluded his memorable career as the Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Derek Morris (DM): You have received many awards and recognitions as an outstanding preacher, including a Baylor University poll where you were identified as one of the twelve most effective preachers in the English-speaking world. What do you enjoy the most about preaching?

Haddon Robinson (HR): There is something about sensing the hand of God as you speak to a congregation, believing that, through you, He is talking to your listeners about His will for them. There is nothing that compares to that.

DM: What is the hardest part of the preaching process for you?

HR: The hardest part of the preaching process is learning how to take a passage from the Bible and make it apply to the twenty-first century. It never gets easy because you are dealing with two entities: a text written two thousand years ago and people today. Strong biblical sermons must be bifocal. They need to reflect the big idea of the text and also reflect the concerns, needs, and questions of the listeners today.

Through relevant biblical preaching, people can come to understand and experience what God has to say to them today. But working that process is challenging.

DM: When did you develop a passion for teaching people how to preach?

HR: I think I backed into it. I didn't really have a passion to teach people how to preach, but I did have a passion to preach well. When I was at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) years ago, I would go up to the library every Friday and read books on preaching. I didn't know much about preaching, but I wanted to learn. Then I had some students in my senior class who asked me if I would teach a class on preaching. They didn't have much homiletics at DTS in those days, let alone any seminary. So every week I taught a class to my classmates. I taught them what I knew and what I didn't know! But that was the beginning of my experience with teaching homiletics.

After graduating from DTS, I served as an assistant pastor in Medford,

Oregon. One day I got a letter from Dr. John Walvoord, asking me if I would come back to DTS and teach. He took a risk with me even though I had very little formal training in preaching. I went on to get an MA in communications from Southern Methodist University and a PhD in rhetoric and public address from the University of Illinois. When I went to the University of Illinois, they didn't know what to do with me. The advisor they suggested was Dr. Otto Dieter, a classics scholar. I first met him in the classics library on campus. He was sitting at the end of a long library table. He said to me, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "I need an advisor, and they thought you would help." "What do you plan to do in the future?" he asked. "Teach preachers," I replied. He said, "Do you think you need the Holy Spirit to preach?" "Yes," I said. "You're out of luck," he responded. "He hasn't been on this campus for fifty years."

On that library table was an old pulpit Bible. I have no idea where it came from. He pointed to the pulpit Bible and asked, "You plan to preach that?" I said, "Yes, I do." Then he said, "I've read

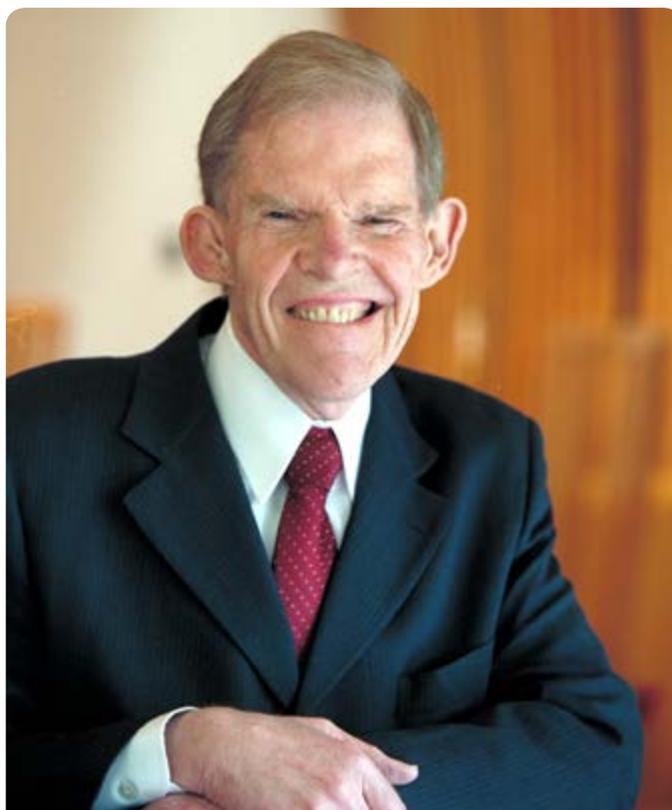
them all—Quintilian, Plato. I've never known anyone whose life was changed by reading the classics. But I do know some people whose lives have been changed by reading the Bible." I learned later that Dr. Dieter had two nephews who had really gone off the deep end but reading the Bible had changed their lives. So he was speaking out of his own experience.

DM: *Through your years as a teacher of preaching you have always continued to preach on a regular basis. Why is it important to stay connected as a practitioner and not simply work as a teacher of preaching?*

HR: It seems to me that it is not enough to teach about preaching. You have to do it. As you preach, you are involved in the text of the Bible and the lives of people. Your teaching is shaped, moved, and changed by your own preaching experience. My students have also helped me be a better preacher. For the past twenty years, I have been teaching doctor of ministry students at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. They come from the front line and don't let you get away with anything. They raise important questions about preaching, and if you are just spinning out some theory that doesn't really touch life, they will challenge you.

DM: *Since the publication of your best-selling book on preaching, Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages,* your instruction on preaching has made*

a significant impact on the field of homiletics, not only in English-speaking countries but also around the world. What do you see as the most significant



*If you don't preach
the Bible, you have
nothing to preach.*

contribution you have made to the training of Christian preachers in the past three decades?

HR: I believe every sermon is the communication of an idea. Every text in the Bible is about ideas. The challenge is to get an idea from the Bible, put it into a sermon, and preach it. That process of discovering the big idea is probably the key contribution I have made. It turned

out to be significant. What is so strange is that if you go back into antiquity—Quintilian, Plato, Aristotle—they all talk about the importance of the main idea. But somehow it got lost through the years or it never was applied to expository preaching. With the importance of the big idea in mind, I developed my working definition of biblical preaching as the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher to the hearer.

DM: *How have your thoughts about preaching changed through the years?*

HR: People used to think that preaching was yelling. If you didn't shout, you weren't preaching. What changed my approach to preaching was the time I spent as the general director of the Christian Medical and Dental Society, first in Texas and then for the whole country. You don't stand up in front of

a group of physicians and dentists and yell at them. You find yourself talking with them rather than at them. That was also the way communication was going, from an emphasis on monologue to dialogue. That's one major change I have seen.

I think there is also more importance placed on the audience. You need to be aware of your listeners. That wasn't a dominant theme years ago.

Are you speaking to a working-class congregation or a highly educated group of listeners? Understanding your audience is important when you preach.

I have also been impressed with the importance of effective sermon titles. Sometimes I visit a city over the weekend and go through the religious pages in the newspaper. I read sermon titles like “The Church in Corinth” and I think, Who cares? Other titles are very practical, like “How to Be a Leader.” There are certain churches that I have gone to as a guest preacher and they have asked me in advance for a sermon title. Sometimes when I have sent the title for my sermon, I get a response back saying, “We need a better title than that. People have to

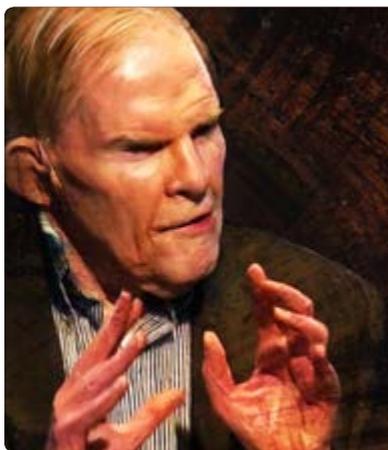
were reading the book, they couldn’t quite figure out all that I was saying. I use many exercises when I’m teaching, and students appreciate that approach. So we have added more, especially in regard to the task of finding the subject and complement in the text, and thus discovering the big idea of your preaching passage. It’s not enough just to read the theory. You have to work the process.

DM: *You have held various positions in your career. What factors helped you decide to become the Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary?*

involved all of the students in the teaching of preaching, because when you have to teach something, you learn it.

DM: *What counsel would you give to Christian preachers today?*

HR: Preach the Bible. If you don’t preach the Bible, you have nothing to preach. But don’t just preach the Bible. Preach the Bible to people. Understand your audience. Who are they? Pastors have a great advantage when they interact with their congregation. You know their hurts, problems, and questions. I think it is vitally important that the people in your congregation know that you love them. You want God’s



Through relevant biblical preaching, people can come to understand and experience what God has to say to them today.

drive by seven others churches to come here, so if you don’t have a good sermon title they might not even come to hear you.” Most people are asking, “If I go to hear that sermon, would I be helped?” Even if they only see the sermon title when they come to church, an effective title has already begun the process of connecting with your listeners.

DM: *Your book Biblical Preaching has recently been released in a third edition. What are some of the changes that you have made in this edition?*

HR: I have added many exercises. I found that when students of preaching

HR: I came to the conclusion that it’s hard to stay in one place for more than ten or twelve years without repeating yourself. When I was invited to go to Gordon-Conwell, I responded positively because it just seemed like the right thing for me to do. I had discovered through the years that many pastors believe the Bible, but they have no idea how to preach it. Our focus at Gordon-Conwell was simple—how to preach the Bible effectively. I’ve also discovered that learning how to preach is a group process. You can’t just stand in front of a group and teach. You need to involve the group—they need to interact. In the doctor of ministry program, we

best for them. When you do that, you capture something in your preaching that is vital and solid.

DM: *Great Christian leaders are remembered for a variety of reasons. As you reflect back on your life and ministry, how would you like to be remembered?*

HR: I am most gratified when something I teach impacts someone’s life and ministry. When I see that happening, it is a great delight. 🙌

* Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1980, 2001, 2014).

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Ecclesiastical deadlock: *James White solves a problem that had no answer*

Church organization was one of the hardest fought battles in Adventism’s early decades. Extending nearly 20 years, the struggle not only eventuated in aspects of church order not suggested in Scripture but provided a key hermeneutical principle for deciding other topics not made explicit in the Bible. In the process, James White, and many others, experienced a hermeneutical metamorphosis, a necessary transformation that allowed Seventh-day Adventism to develop into a worldwide force. Without the change, Adventism probably still would be a backwater religious group largely confined to the northeastern and midwestern United States.

What was the issue, and how can we learn from it today?

Deadlock

In 1844, George Storrs set forth the basic position for the Adventist struggle over organization when he proclaimed “no church can be organized by man’s invention but what it becomes Babylon *the moment it is organized.*”¹ That proclamation rang true to a generation of Adventists who had been persecuted by their denominations as Millerism reached its crest in 1843 and 1844.

Of course, some of the founders of what became Seventh-day Adventism did not need much help on the anti-organizational front. For James White and Joseph Bates, the stance came naturally, because they had come from the Christian Connexion, which had no effective church structure above the congregational level.² Even Ellen White, who came from the highly structured Methodist Episcopal Church, had seen the Babylonianish characteristics of her denomination as ministers were defrocked for advocating Millerism. They sought to silence members who would not be quiet on the topic and disellowshipped those who disobeyed that hierarchical order—including her own family, which faced a church trial and lost their church membership in 1843.³

It was no accident that the earliest Sabbatarian Adventists were suspicious of the persecuting power of Babylon. They had felt the power of church structures in a way that was not pleasurable or, they believed, even Christian.

But as the Sabbatarians began to develop their own congregations in the early 1850s, they soon realized that symbolic Babylon had more than one meaning in the Bible. Symbolic Babylon could represent not only a persecuting entity but also confusion.

James and Ellen White began to emphasize that latter definition by late 1853 as they faced the problems of a disorganized movement with little direction and no structure above the congregational level. “It is a lamentable fact,” James thundered through the pages of the *Review and Herald* in December 1853, “that many of our Advent brethren who made a timely escape from the bondage of the different churches [Babylon] . . . have since been in a more perfect Babylon than ever before. Gospel order has been too much overlooked by them. . . .

“ . . . Many in their zeal to come out of Babylon, partook of a rash, disorderly spirit, and were soon found in a perfect Babel of confusion. . . . To suppose that the church of Christ is free from restraint and discipline, is the wildest fanaticism.”⁴

James’s wife agreed. Basing her sentiments on a vision received during her and James’s eastern tour in the fall of 1852, Ellen wrote that “the Lord has shown that gospel order has been too much feared and neglected. Formality should be shunned; but, in so doing, order should not be neglected. There is order in heaven. There was order in the church when Christ was upon the earth, and after His departure order was

strictly observed among His apostles. And now in these last days, while God is bringing His children into the unity of the faith, there is more real need of order than ever before.”⁵

Even Bates was on board regarding the need for church order. In harmony with his Connexionist background, Bates claimed that biblical church order must be restored before the Second Advent. He argued that during the Middle Ages, the “law-breakers” “*deranged*” such essential elements of Christianity as the Sabbath and biblical church order. God had used the Sabbatarian Adventists to restore the seventh-day Sabbath, and it was “perfectly clear” to his mind “that God will employ law-keepers as instruments

order we mean that order in church association and discipline taught in the gospel of Jesus Christ by the writers of the New Testament.”⁷ A few months later he spoke of the “perfect system of order, set forth in the New Testament by inspiration of God. . . . The Scriptures present a perfect system, which, if carried out, will save the Church from imposters” and provide the ministers with an adequate platform for carrying out the work of the church.⁸

J. B. Frisbie, the most active writer in the *Review* in the mid-1850s on church order, agreed with Bates and White that every aspect of church order needed to be *explicitly spelled out in the Bible*. Thus he argued against any church name except the one given

ordination of deacons, local elders, and pastors. By the mid-1850s, they were ordaining all three classes.¹⁰

Gradually, they were strengthening gospel order at the level of the local church. In fact, the individual congregation was the only level of organization of which most Sabbatarians gave much thought. Thus such leaders as Bates could preface an extended article on “Church Order” with the following definition: “Church, signifies a particular congregation of believers in Christ, united together in the order of the gospel.”¹¹

But in the second half of the 1850s, the church-order debate among Sabbatarians would focus on what was meant for congregations to be “united

That shift was essential to the creative steps in church organization that he [James White] would advocate in the 1860s.

to restore . . . a ‘glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle.’ . . .

“This unity of the faith, and perfect church order, never has existed since the days of the apostles.”⁶

By 1853, the problem was not seeing the need for church structure but biblical justification for such a move. And that need takes us to early Adventist hermeneutics.

Hermeneutical transformation and the way forward

While Bates was clear that the apostolic order of the church needed to be restored, he made no room for any element of organization not found explicitly in the New Testament. James White, at this early period, shared a similar opinion. Thus, he could write in 1854 that “by gospel, or church

by God in the Bible. As he put it, “THE CHURCH OF GOD . . . is the only name that God has seen fit to give his church.” He then referred his readers to such texts as 2 Corinthians 1:1 (“the church of God which is at Corinth”), noting that “it is very evident that God never designed that his church should be called by any other name than the one he has given.” All other names, such as Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Methodist, were human inventions and “savors more of Babylon, confusion, mixture, than it does” of God’s church. By the same logic, Frisbie implied, along with other Adventists, that they should not keep church membership lists since the names of God’s children are recorded in the books of heaven.⁹

With their literalistic biblical approach to church order, Frisbie and others soon began to discuss the

together.” At least five issues would force leaders, such as James White, to look at church organization more globally. The first had to do with the legal ownership of property—especially the publishing office and church buildings. Other issues included the problems of paying preachers, the assignment of preachers to work locations, the transfer of membership between congregations, and the question of how independent congregations should relate to each other. The problems related to the paying and assigning of preachers were especially difficult because the Sabbatarians had no settled pastors. The issues the young movement faced led logically to thinking beyond the congregational level.

By 1859, those concerns were joined by others, including the need to extend missionary labor to new fields.

Those issues and others drove James White to progressively urge the need for a more complex and adequate form of church structure.

“We lack system,” he cried out in the *Review* on July 21, 1859. “Many of our brethren are in a scattered state. They observe the Sabbath, read with some interest the *REVIEW*; but beyond this they are doing but little or nothing for want of some method of united action among them.” To meet the situation, he called for regular meetings in each state (yearly in some and four or five times a year in others) to give guidance to the work of the Sabbatharians in that region.¹²

“We are aware,” he wrote, “that these suggestions, will not meet the minds of all. Bro. Over-cautious will be frightened, and will be ready to warn his brethren to be careful and not venture out too far; while Bro. Confusion will cry out, ‘O, this looks just like Babylon! Following the fallen church!’ Bro. Do-little will say, ‘The cause is the

Lord’s, and we had better leave it in his hands, he will take care of it.’ ‘Amen,’ says Love-this-world, Slothful, Selfish, and Stingy, ‘if God calls men to preach, let them go out and preach, he will take care of them, and those who believe their message;’ while Korah, Dathan and Abiram are ready to rebel against those who feel the weight of the cause [e.g., James White], and who watch for souls as those who must give account, and raise the cry, ‘You take too much upon you.’”¹³

White let it be known in the most descriptive language that he was sick and tired of the cry of Babylon every time that anyone mentioned organization. “Bro. Confusion,” he penned, “makes a most egregious blunder in calling system, which is in harmony with the Bible and good sense, Babylon. As Babylon signifies confusion, our erring brother has the very word stamped upon his own forehead. And we venture to say that there is not another people under heaven more worthy of the brand

of Babylon than those professing the Advent faith who reject Bible order. Is it not high time that we as a people heartily embrace everything that is good and right in the churches? Is it not blind folly to start back at the idea of system, found everywhere in the Bible, simply because it is observed in the fallen churches?”¹⁴

As one who had the “weight of the cause” upon him, James White felt impelled to take his stand for better organization among Sabbatharians. Castigating those who thought that “all that was necessary to run a train of cars was to use the brake well,”¹⁵ he firmly believed that in order to get the Advent movement moving, it had to organize. That task he would pursue with full vigor between 1860 and 1863.

Meanwhile, James’s strategic place in the Sabbatarian movement had given him perspective that not only separated him from the reasoning processes of many of his fellow believers but had transformed his own thinking.

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Three points White raised in 1859 are of special importance.

Three hermeneutical principles

First, he had moved beyond the biblical literalism of his earlier days, when he believed that the Bible must explicitly spell out each aspect of church organization. In 1859, he argued that “we should not be afraid of that system which is not opposed by the Bible, and is approved by sound sense.”¹⁶ Thus he had come to a new hermeneutic. He had moved from a principle of Bible interpretation that held that the only things Scripture allowed were those things it explicitly approved to a hermeneutic that approved of anything that did not contradict the Bible and good sense. That shift was essential to the creative steps in church organization that he would advocate in the 1860s.

That revised hermeneutic, however, put White in opposition to Frisbie, R. F. Cottrell, and others who continued to maintain a literalistic approach that demanded the Bible should explicitly spell out something before the church could accept it. In response, White noted that nowhere in the Bible did it say that Christians should have a weekly paper, a steam printing press, build places of worship, or publish books. He went on to argue that the “living church of God” needed to move forward with prayer and common sense.¹⁷

White’s second point involves a redefinition of “Babylon.” The earliest Adventists had approached the concept in relation to oppression and applied it to the existing denominations. As we saw above, White reinterpreted it in terms of confusion and applied it to his fellow Sabbatarians. By 1859, his goal had advanced to steering the Advent cause between the twin pitfalls of Babylon as oppressor and Babylon as confusion.

White’s third point concerned mission. Sabbatarians must organize if they were to fulfill their responsibility to preach the three angels’ messages.

Thus, between 1856 and 1859, White shifted from a literalistic perspective to

one much more pragmatic. Why, we might ask, did he make such a move while others among the Sabbatarian ministers remained rooted in their biblical (or, more accurately, unbiblical) literalism? The difference probably had to do with the fact that he felt the bulk of the responsibility for the Sabbatarian movement and, thus, had to make sure that it prospered in its mission in the real world.

A legal issue

A second round in the hermeneutical struggle took place when, in February 1860, James White raised the question of incorporating church property so that it could be legally held and insured. He refused to sign notes of responsibility for individuals who desired to lend their money to the publishing house. Thus, the movement needed to hold church property in a “proper manner.”¹⁸

White’s suggestion called forth a vigorous reaction from R. F. Cottrell—a corresponding editor of the *Review* and the leader of those opposed to church organization. Recognizing that a church could not incorporate unless it had a name, Cottrell wrote that he believed “it would be wrong to ‘make us a name,’ since that lies at the foundation of Babylon.” His suggestion was that Adventists needed to trust in the Lord, who would repay them for any unjust losses at the end of time. “If any man proves a Judas, we can still bear the loss and trust the Lord.”¹⁹

The next issue of the *Review* saw a spirited response from White, who expressed himself “not a little surprised” at Cottrell’s remarks. He pointed out that the publishing office alone had thousands of dollars invested “without one legal owner.” “The Devil is not dead,” he asserted, and under such circumstances he knew how to shut down the publishing house.

White went on to claim that he regarded “it dangerous to leave with the Lord what he has left with us, and thus sit down upon the stool of do little, or nothing.

“Now it is perfectly right to leave the sun, moon and stars with the Lord; also the earth with its revolutions, the ebbing and flowing of the tides. . . . But if God in his everlasting word calls on us to act the part of faithful stewards of his goods, we had better attend to these matters in a legal manner—the only way we can handle real estate in this world.”²⁰

On April 26, James White made a much more extensive reply to Cottrell, arguing that as long as “we are stewards of our Lord’s goods here in the land of the enemy, it is our duty to conform to the laws of the land necessary to the faithful performance of our stewardship, as long as human laws do not oppose the divine law.” White, significantly, also raised again the hermeneutical argument that he had used against the biblical literalists in 1859. Acknowledging that he could find no plain text of Scripture for holding property legally, he pointed out that the church did many things for which it could find no Bible text. He then moved on to Jesus’ command to let “your light so shine before men,” pointing out that He did “not give all the particulars how this shall be done.” At that point, he wrote that “we believe it safe to be governed by the following RULE.

“All means which, according to sound judgment, will advance the cause of truth, and are not forbidden by plain scripture declarations, should be employed.”²¹ With that declaration White placed himself fully on the platform of a pragmatic, common sense approach to all issues not definitely settled in the Bible. Ellen White supported her husband in his struggle with Cottrell.²²

The hermeneutical struggle, renewed in October 1860 as the property difficulty, came to a head at a conference James White called in Battle Creek in order to discuss the problem along with the related issues of legal incorporation and a formal name, a requirement for incorporation. Between September 29 and October 2, 1860, delegates from at least five states discussed the situation in detail. All

agreed that whatever they did should be according to the Bible but disagreed over the hermeneutical issue of whether something needed to be explicitly mentioned in the Bible. James White, as usual, argued that “every Christian duty is not given in the Scriptures.”²³ That essential point had to be recognized before they could make any progress toward legal organization. Gradually, as the various problems and options surfaced, the majority of the candidates accepted White’s hermeneutical rule.

The October 1860 conference accomplished several main goals. The first involved the adoption of a constitution for the legal incorporation of the publishing association. The second was that “individual churches so . . . organize as to hold their church property or church buildings legally.” James White, still fighting the hermeneutical battle with the proof-texters, twice called the objectors to produce “one text of scripture to show that this is wrong.” Not being able to find such a passage or to match his logic, the objectors surrendered and the motion carried.²⁴

Conclusion

Though these issues concerned church organization, something much more basic and important was at stake: hermeneutics.

The early 1850s found all of the Sabbatarians in a literalistic, proof-texting frame of mind. Without an explicit text on a topic, they would not and could not move forward.

By revising his hermeneutics, James White found his way out of this trap. He had come to realize that “we should not be afraid of that system which is not opposed to the Bible, and is approved by sound sense.”²⁵ With that hermeneutical breakthrough, he provided the means by which he and his wife could guide the young movement into a mission to the entire world. 

- 1 George Storrs, “Come Out of Her My People,” *Midnight Cry*, Feb. 15, 1844, 238.
- 2 See George R. Knight, *Organizing to Beat the Devil: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2001), 15–18.
- 3 Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827–1862* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), 43, 44.
- 4 James White, “Gospel Order,” *Review and Herald*, Dec. 6, 1853, 173.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald

Pub. Assn., 1945), 97.

- 6 Joseph Bates, “Church Order,” *Review and Herald*, Aug. 29, 1854, 22, 23.
- 7 James White, “Gospel Order,” *Review and Herald*, Mar. 28, 1854, 76.
- 8 James White, “Church Order,” *Review and Herald*, Jan. 23, 1855, 164.
- 9 J. B. Frisbie, “Church Order,” *Review and Herald*, Dec. 26, 1854, 147.
- 10 See George R. Knight, “Early Seventh-day Adventists and Ordination, 1844–1863,” in Nancy Vyhmeister, *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 101–14.
- 11 Bates, “Church Order,” 22.
- 12 James White, “Yearly Meetings,” *Review and Herald*, July 21, 1859, 68.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 James White, “Borrowed Money,” *Review and Herald*, Feb. 23, 1860, 108.
- 19 R. F. Cottrell, “Making Us a Name,” *Review and Herald*, Mar. 22, 1860, 140, 141.
- 20 James White, “Making Us a Name,” *Review and Herald*, Mar. 29, 1860, 152.
- 21 James White, “Making Us a Name,” *Review and Herald*, Apr. 26, 1860, 180–82.
- 22 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 211.
- 23 James White, “Business Proceedings of B. C. Conference,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 16, 1860, 169.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 170, 171.
- 25 James White, “Yearly Meetings,” 68.

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Finishing what was started

Almost 500 years have elapsed since the 33-year-old German monk nailed his humble, but exhaustive, 95 Theses to the door of the castle’s church in Wittenberg, Germany. He had no inkling on that Saturday, October 31, 1517, that his list of grievances would launch a movement unprecedented in history, with billions following his lead in protesting an unbiblical system and advancing in a clearer understanding of God’s will. All of us still trying to extricate ourselves from the bondage of tradition and practices that do not align with the Bible and to help others do so are spiritual heirs of Martin Luther.

Our world today is not much different from that of 1517. As in Luther’s day, clergy corruption still exists today. As in Luther’s day, beliefs contrary to God’s Word spiritually enslave the masses, and the vast majority are slow to make any move to extricate themselves from false systems and teachings. As in Luther’s day, today some who know better and should be leading the deceived into the light of truth do not take so bold a stand as to arrest people’s attention and cause them to act.

But just as Luther began the Reformation, so we are to finish it. The scope of our task is daunting, but if each of us nails our lists to the

bulletin boards of our communities, a reformation even greater than Luther’s will sweep the earth, culminating in the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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Mission statement: Giving a clear focus to ministry

Jim Swanson graduated from seminary and began his pastoral ministry in a medium-size church. He was excited and motivated to lead his congregation effectively. Swanson became well acquainted with his congregation, learning the names of the members and sensing some of their needs.

For a year and a half, Jim preached, prayed, and ministered in a variety of ways. But he had a growing awareness that he lacked a clear focus for his ministry. He struggled to understand his fundamental role in the various facets of his overall ministry.

Finding a mentor

I need help, thought Jim, *a mentor to guide my development*. As he thought about this over a period of days, he asked the Lord to lead him.

At a pastors' meeting, he met John Whitaker, a well-seasoned pastor in his fifties. "How are you doing?" asked Whitaker. "I see you're in your second year as pastor. How are things shaping up for you?"

"To tell you the truth, I'm struggling a bit," said Jim. "I was eager to begin my ministry, but as I reflect on it now, I need a better grasp of the various parts of my overall role as pastor. I think I need a mentor, someone like you who has plenty of experience."

"Believe me, Jim. I went through the same experience you are having.

Maybe I can help you. I'd be glad to spend an hour a week with you for a while to help you get through this transitional period."

"That would be great. My day off is Friday. Could you work that in?"

"Certainly, Jim."

Beginning at the beginning

At their first meeting, Jim and Pastor Whitaker discussed the experiences of Jim's first year and a half and various aspects of his pastoral ministry. Pastor Whitaker grew silent, then said to Jim with a grin, "I have an assignment for you. I want you this next week to read the Gospels of Matthew and John. Write down every statement Jesus made as to why He came to our world. We can call them mission statements. Jesus expressed these on numerous occasions. When I discovered them, I was surprised at how many there were."

During the following week, Jim read the two Gospels and wrote down every mission statement Jesus made.

Why Jesus made mission statements

"Have you completed your assignment?" Pastor Whitaker asked with a smile.

"Sure have," replied Jim. "It was an eye-opener."

"Jesus made His assertions without any hesitation as to why He came to Earth. He wanted both friend and foe to understand what He was about and why He had come," said Pastor Whitaker.

"For example, Jesus said in John 10:10, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'¹ Then in Matthew 5:17, He said, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.'²

After pausing a moment, Pastor Whitaker continued. "Jesus spoke of His mission repeatedly not only to keep His focus on His mission but also to use the mission statement as a blueprint for His ministry, much like a blueprint for a house. Jesus lived out the principles and purposes He articulated in His statements.

"For example, Jesus summarized the totality of His mission in His statement to Pilate: 'For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth'³ (John 18:37).

"I'm impressed," said Jim. "As I wrote down the various mission statements of Jesus, I realized that they were all guideposts to His daily life and ministry."

"That's right," responded Pastor Whitaker. "Another statement of Jesus speaks volumes to me in my daily living: 'I have come down from heaven not to

do my will but to do the will of him who sent me” ’ ” (John 6:38).

“Yes,” said Jim. “Isn’t that the purpose of every Christian, every moment of life?”

Building a list

After discussing various other statements Jesus made regarding His mission, the two men charted out their future discussion. “For our next session,” the senior pastor said, “I’d like you to make a list of the various aspects of your ministry. Once we’ve nailed those down, we can begin work on your mission statements. I suggest you list number one as the overarching mission statement covering your entire ministry. Then list individual areas of your ministry to the congregation.”

During the week, Jim worked on his list. As he thought through the various aspects of his leadership, he realized that his pastoral role was more complex and wide ranging than he had earlier realized.

With the list in his hand, Jim sat down in Pastor Whitaker’s office. “First,” he began somewhat timidly, “let me say that I had not been as aware of the breadth of my ministry as I now am. Making this list has enlightened my thinking about the range of roles I am trying to fulfill. In a way, it’s a bit scary, but I know the Lord will help me succeed in all of them.

“Of course, first on my list is my *overall mission statement*. I have some thoughts on that.

“Like most pastors, I need to develop a mission statement for my *pulpit ministry*. That’s where I relate to my congregation as a whole, and it is important that I fully understand what my purposes are in the pulpit. That way, I can better evaluate how well I’ve succeeded or missed the mark on a given weekend. When I have a clearer understanding of my mission in the pulpit, I will have a clear focus in my sermon preparation.”

“Good,” responded Whitaker. “By setting out realistic goals for ourselves, we can measure our progress, or lack thereof, as we go along.”

“Then I’ve tried to think through what I want to accomplish with different age

groups. I’ve listed six categories in this regard: ministry to *children, youth, young adults, families who are raising children, middle adults, and senior citizens*. All of these segments of my congregation have their own unique needs.

“I know I cannot be all things to all people, so I realize that part of my mission as pastor is to enlist qualified people to relate to and help meet the needs of these groups. I need a mission statement for each group to guide both my efforts and those of others in effective ministry.”

“I’m very pleased, Jim. Are there any more items on your list?”

“Yes, one of them is *counseling* those who come to me regarding various situations. Although I’m not a clinical psychologist, I’ve had training in both college and seminary in psychology and counseling. I know my limits, so I have gathered a list of consultants I can refer people to when the problems they are dealing with go beyond my expertise. However, I have been able to counsel successfully some who are grateful for my assistance.”

“Any others?”

“Yes, my *visitation ministry*. When people are hospitalized or there is sickness in their homes, I try to be there for them.”

“Very good. Any more areas on your list?”

“No, this is as far as I’ve gotten, though I’m sure I have overlooked one or more things. Do you have any suggestions?”

“Yes, Jim, an important one. What about your family? Too many pastors

become so busy with their pastoral duties that they neglect their families.”

“I’m ashamed I missed that one. I haven’t told you, but Joyce is expecting our second child. Nate just turned two, and our next one is going to be a girl. I certainly must draw up a mission statement regarding my family.”

Getting started

“Jim, the most effective mission statements are one sentence long, but it’s better not to try that at the beginning. I suggest that for every statement, you begin with a paragraph and then summarize it down to a single sentence. I suggest you work on only two mission statements this week. Begin with your overarching statement for your total ministry as well as the one relating to your family. Let’s put first things first.

“Approach this project prayerfully. Remember the words of Paul in Romans 8:16: ‘The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.’ The Holy Spirit witnesses to us not only concerning our relationship with God but also concerning other things as well. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts through His indwelling presence. Write from your heart as well as from your mind. Convey important goals with an economy of words. If you need help completing them, I’ll be glad to work with you. But remember, these statements are to be uniquely your own.”

Off to the library

To prepare for this unique task, Jim decided to go to the library, where

“When I have a clearer understanding of my mission in the pulpit, I will have a clear focus in my sermon preparation.”

he would not be interrupted. When he arrived, he found an empty table in an isolated area among stacks of books. Prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide him, was his first task. Then he picked up the list of Jesus' mission statements and reviewed them. He had read the other two Gospels and compiled a rather complete list of Jesus' statements.

One that stood out to him was Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jim silently prayed: *Oh, God, may that be the purpose of my life, to serve You and others.*

At first, Jim's thoughts were scattered. He thought of various elements for his overarching statement. Then his mind cleared, and he began writing and soon had a rather long paragraph. To arrive at a single sentence, he would need to be very concise. As he went over his paragraph again and again, certain parts of it began to stand out. He crossed out words, even sentences. Then he realized he need not edit the paragraph but write its essence in a single sentence.

Jim began to write. *My mission as pastor of Eagledale Church is to be led by the Holy Spirit, be sensitive to the needs of individuals and the body of believers, and be a servant of Christ and my congregation, leading God's people by following the example and teachings of Christ.*

"*Whew!*" whispered Jim. "I wonder what Pastor Whitaker will think of this statement."

Two days later, he was back at the library table, ready for another challenge. Again, he opened his heart and mind to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Jim had already put a lot of thought into his family statement. Soon he began writing, and before long he had completed another rather lengthy paragraph. At that point, he realized the hardest part of his work lay ahead.

Repeatedly, Jim read the paragraph to drink in the essence of it to be able to write a condensed version. He liked the paragraph so well that he decided he

would keep it for future reference after writing a single sentence.

Gradually, his mind began to form a sentence. *My mission to my family is to be a loving and supportive husband and father and spiritual leader for my children, giving my family top priority in my life.*

The refining process

Jim felt optimistic as he met with Pastor Whitaker again. He wondered how his mentor would respond to his first two mission statements. He handed Pastor Whitaker a sheet with the two statements, double-spaced so that they could be edited.

"You're off to an excellent beginning," Whitaker said. "I can see that you have put hours of thought and prayer into these statements. I'm sure you'll want to tweak them a little here and there before you consider them final, but you have included the essentials. Regarding your family

mission statement, do you consider your children the only members of your family who need your spiritual nurture? You left out your wife in that regard."

Silently, Jim began writing a revision of his family mission statement. *My mission to my family is to be a loving and supportive husband and father, provide spiritual nurture for all, and give my family top priority in my life.*

Pastor Whitaker looked it over and said, "That's better. Probably before you are finished it will be better still. For our next meeting, write two more mission statements from your list."

Tears came to Jim's eyes. "Thank you for serving as my mentor. I can already sense that I'm beginning to better realize the vital importance of every aspect of my ministry. Before we're through, I'm sure I'll have a much clearer comprehension of what my ministry is all about." ✎

* All Scripture is taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

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Avoiding common pitfalls during pastoral transition

After pastoring for 26 years, I have come to the conclusion that ministry success, to a large degree, depends upon the relationship the pastor builds and nurtures with his or her congregation. Unequivocally, to achieve this success, the pastor needs to show some intentional flexibility and adaptability while working with his or her church members.

There are various common pitfalls to be avoided when embarking upon a new pastoral assignment. We will look at four:

1. Failure to meet the people where they are.
2. Failure to seek first to understand rather than to be understood.
3. Failure to adapt to the local church's custom.
4. Failure to lead necessary change from an established common-ground platform.

Rightly understood, these comprise a simple road map or navigational device to help the pastor avert pitfalls that create tension with the congregation.

Failure to meet the people where they are

A successful pastorate requires surrendering any personal prejudice and agendas. The pastor needs opportunity

and time to observe, investigate, and analyze what works and what does not in his or her new setting. Because something worked well in a previous assignment does not guarantee it will in the new. Frequently things that have been working effectively in a church for years are changed to mark the arrival of a new pastor. The new pastor, driven by enthusiasm, imposes the change to incorporate something(s) that may have worked well in a previous assignment(s). Some may even introduce initiatives that did not work well previously, that merely signal a personal preference or style. Sadly, this is often done with little or no consideration, conversation, and collaboration with the local congregation.

Because the pastor is new, the local congregation tends to readily accept some changes the new pastor desires. The results can be disequilibrium, chaos, and tension. Stereotypically, the congregation gets branded as being resistant to change or set in its ways. Conversely, the same may be said of some pastors who are very inflexible to change to which they are not accustomed.

I have served 19 congregations. Each was unique in particular ways of operations and responses to my ministry. In retrospect, I encountered no significant relationship challenges with any simply because I met them in their varied contexts. In my last

two assignments, prior to the arrival, rumor had it that I was sent to change the church into a type of the one I was leaving. Upon arrival, I could feel the tension. Some had the courage to approach me about what they had heard. In a few weeks, the atmosphere was relaxed as the people experienced me participating in their ways of doing things without attempting any change. Eventually, both congregations experienced significant change. However, the change did not occur as they initially believed; otherwise, it would have been met with great resistance.

Failure to seek first to understand rather than to be understood

There is no telling what positive experiences might be gained should the new pastor set out to understand the congregation's ways as opposed to immediately changing those ways. It's a travesty when pastors desire their congregations to understand them, while they show no willingness to understand their congregations. That will not work. Instead, the new pastor needs to win the confidence of the church. When confidence is won, the congregation will empower the pastor to lead change.

The Greek word for authority, *exousia*, denotes "freedom of action" or "right to act." As pastors, we received the "freedom to act" or "right to act"

from the “call” and empowering of God. However, the disposal of the pastoral authority is delegated through organizational credentials and assignments. Apart from organizational delegation, the real delegated authority to lead comes from the congregation. The unity that takes place between a congregation and pastor puts into proper perspective divine, organizational or positional, and moral authority to lead. Jesus demonstrated a genuine desire for the good of people and won their confidence.

the adaptation must be sincere and demonstrate a high level of comfort as opposed to a mere uncomfortable tolerance. Avoid the Peter syndrome that was a suspect and questionable adaptation (see Gal. 2:11, 12). While becoming self-vulnerable to the new congregation’s customs, the pastor must not merely appear to be genuine. The pastor *must* be genuine! Our congregations know whether we are authentic or not.

Adaptability builds relationship and earns credibility—two essentials

dishes. After two years of this, a small delegation from the dominant cultural group approached me at an annual international program of the church. They wanted an honest answer as to my abstinence from eating the particular dish. I decided to be vulnerable and give the true reason. They were hilarious in laughter. Afterwards, they encouraged me to take a taste, and I did. Being truthful, coupled with effort to try the dish, further strengthened the bonds with that group. It has been many years since leaving that congregation. However, we still have a good laugh each time we come into contact regarding our particular cultural difference (that dish) that had the same name. Had I not eaten of the dish, a great opportunity for bonding and relationship building would have been gone.

Adaptability builds relationship and earns credibility—two essentials needed to lead change.

Failure to lead necessary change from an established common-ground platform

Once the new pastor establishes credibility and receives the congregation’s stamp of authority to lead, he or she can now lead the members from the known to the unknown; from where they are to where they did not even faintly imagine they could be or have been. There are two examples in the New Testament that undergird the principles here: The first, Jesus and the woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:4–30). The second, the apostle Paul and the Athenians (Acts 17:16–34).

A major contributory factor to the success I have experienced resulted from my quest to understand each congregation. This was done through participation, observation, questionnaires, and town hall meetings. Through these means, the members were able to express personal opinions about their church. They indicated things they wanted to keep as well as those they desired to change. As I acquired understanding of the people being led, I would demonstrate understanding through adaptation.

needed to lead change. The apostle Peter’s pseudo and pretentious adaptation was exposed when his ministry colleague and other Jewish Christians suddenly showed up (v. 14). Peter immediately switched sides from fellowshiping with the Gentile converts and changed his behavior into conformity with Jewish Christianity. What hypocrisy! As pastors, it would be well to remember that One greater than any human authority figure is always present with us. Therefore, we would do well to act in character at all times because we cannot deceive God.

In the narratives cited, both Jesus and the apostle Paul met their targeted congregations in their sociocultural and spiritual contexts. Similar to a new ministry assignment, they were coming to join the people in their experience. Notice how both launched their ministries with attitudes of openness to understand their congregations as opposed to merely being understood by them. The irony, however, is that both Jesus and Paul knew and understood their congregations. And yet, they engaged them with a learning attitude that connected their experience with the people they served.

Failure to adapt to the local church’s custom

After having acquired understanding of the congregation’s customs, the new pastor should endeavor to adapt to the same. This will be the litmus test of how the people will gauge and relate to their new pastor. Therefore,

While serving in a congregation, I declined to eat a particular dish from the dominant cultural group of the church because that dish had a derogatory name from my culture. However, people from the dominant group were observing my constant avoidance to eat one of their cultural

Jesus and Paul demonstrated flexibility and adaptability to the local custom of the people. Jesus was quite comfortable resting by Jacob's well. Moreover, by requesting the woman to give Him water to drink (John 4:7), Jesus showed His great level of adaptation and comfort. Jesus was willing to first enter into the woman's experience of Jacob's well before inviting her into His.

The apostle Paul likewise was flexible and adaptable to worshiping in the Jewish-Gentile Christians' synagogue as well as their marketplaces. In the Areopagus, the famous meeting place of the Athenian council, Paul adaptably ministered to the people. Every place was surrounded by idols, which Paul desired to change by changing the people's belief. However, he had to first connect with the

people. What if Paul had approached ministry in Athens by commands to break down and remove the idols? What if Jesus had approached the woman at Jacob's well by offering her the better "living water" He had, as opposed to requesting of her water from her experience?

Yet, these are similar and often-repeated mistakes in pastoral transition. Jesus and Paul made themselves vulnerable in efforts to build their common-ground platforms. We would do well to learn from Jesus, the Master Teacher, and the classic example of the apostle Paul.

By meeting the people in their context, seeking first to understand them rather than being immediately understood by them, and adapting to their experience, both Jesus and Paul were able to engage in conversations

related to the people's experience. Thus, they created within them an insatiable thirst for something better, which they were prepared to offer. They led them from the known to the unknown!

Conclusion

In the end, all new church pastorates come with many challenges. This article sums up what has worked for me based on my understanding of these biblical stories and how they can help us avoid many common pitfalls. You may want to reevaluate and apply these principles in a current assignment that is not going too well. In such a case, be vulnerable to the congregation. This will require genuinely admitting mistakes and expressing willingness to regroup and begin again. 

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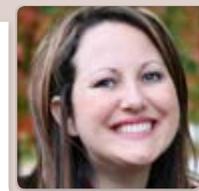
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What is unity?

When we were in the seventh grade, my friend and I usually walked to school. One morning, we were late and so we decided to ride the school bus. All the seats were taken except one. Naturally, we went to sit in that seat. Suddenly, everyone started yelling at us to move before the next stop because that was “Devin’s seat.” Not understanding the gravity of the situation, I said, “So what? We all have to ride this bus, and it’s first come, first served.”

Devin was an eighth-grade girl who stood about a foot taller than most of the eighth-grade boys. She was a bully and always got her way. At the next stop, Devin entered the bus. She was a little bigger than I remembered; but now I was committed. She walked over and said, “Get out of my seat.”

“No,” I replied.

“Get out of my seat,” came the stern command.

“No,” I replied, only slightly firm.

The bus driver intervened and told Devin to sit down so we could go. So, she sat behind me and pulled my hair and swatted me most of the way while I stubbornly ignored her.

The next day, the story repeated itself. By day three, everyone was telling me how I was stupid. My friend was not even sitting near me.

Devin shouted, “That’s it. I’ve had enough of you. Today, you’re getting beat up unless you get out of my seat!”

All the kids swarmed around us. I was terrified, but I refused to move. I just looked straight ahead and ignored

her as the bus driver came to the back and made her sit in the front.

When we reached the school, the bus driver explained that if he heard of Devin touching me, he would make sure she got suspended. However, for a few weeks at school, she would still pull my hair or push me down. But, by the end of the year, Devin told me that she respected me, and we became strange friends.

I found it interesting that even though everyone on the bus knew that what she was doing was wrong and no one liked it, they allowed it in order to avoid conflict. They were unified, in a sense. They were all just trying to get through the school year by maintaining the status quo. They could keep the peace, feeling that everyone would be better off in the end. But was this true unity? Or was it a false sense of unity that is actually authoritative control mobilized by fear and/or ignorance that there could be something better?

Imitation unity

Unity is not silent submission in the face of oppression. Jesus stood up and spoke out for what was right and/or what needed to be reinterpreted, even though this caused problems in the community of which He was a part. At the same time, Jesus prayed for unity, for oneness. So, there must be a different kind of oneness—different from a mere acquiescing to the majority, submission to persons of higher rank, agreement to avoid conflict, kids on a bus ignoring the issues for fear of consequences.

Genuine unity

So, what is true unity? Listen to the words of Jesus: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word . . . that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:20–23).¹

Oneness in this passage has a clear purpose: “that they may be one”; a defined nature: “just as We [the Father and the Son] are one”; and a specific result: “that the world may know that You [the Father] have sent Me [the Son], and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

The meaning of *one*

What is *one*? Though it seems to be the simplest of numbers to understand, actually we find *one* quite difficult to explain mathematically. The unit of *one* is the foundation for all math. In a lesson titled “One Is One . . . or Is It?” Christopher Danielson, a mathematician, described how the number one is determined by what is defined as a whole unit.²

For example, an apple slice, an apple, and a bag of apples can all be described as one. While these three “ones” are obviously not all equal, individual units can either be composed (combined into a larger grouping like a bag of apples) or partitioned (divided into smaller fractions, like an apple slice). Danielson argues that once a

unit has been either partitioned or composed, the unit is now considered a new whole unit that can be further composed or partitioned. So, by this definition, “oneness” can always be added to or taken from.

Though slices may be of different shapes and sizes, all share the same core. What is our church core? What holds us together and remains our center once we are apart? What makes us one body? “The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ.”³ If Jesus is the core, how do we apply this in practice?

Oneness in the teaching of Jesus

Listen again to the words of Jesus: “ ‘I in them, and You in Me’ ” (v. 23). The word *in* here gets across a notion of deep mutual concern. How would that type of oneness exist between us? Earlier in the John 17 prayer, Jesus prayed that He would glorify God in what He was about to endure so that all who believe might have eternal life. In verse 3, Jesus gave a definition of eternal life—to “know” God and Jesus whom God sent. The word *know* indicates more than conceptual and informational knowledge; this word demands a oneness and unity in terms of relational intimacy and behavioral experience. The unity that characterizes the relationship of God and the Son is oneness in thought, action, and purpose, and Jesus prays for that kind of unity to exist between all believers and their Savior and among themselves. The intimacy underscored by the word *know* may be better understood when we recognize that this word is similar to the Hebrew word used in Genesis 4:1 to describe the oneness of relationship designed between Adam and Eve.

Thus, the call of Jesus for unity among His followers was totally different from what was extant in religious circles of His time. Those religious leaders were concerned about a unity defined by birth, race, knowledge, and

Only by lifting up Christ and making Him the center of all we say and do can we fulfill the divine call to oneness.

other such factors that drew a circle forming one group to the exclusion of others. Such limitations led to a superficial understanding of the scriptural call for unity and created a misinterpretation and wrong application of spiritual truths. As a result, the teachings of Jesus were often misunderstood, and He Himself was accused as having come to destroy the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17, 18).

Jesus wanted and prayed for unity. It is not, however, the superficial kind that stressed an intellectual assent to the letter of the law as in His time; rather, it is the spiritual dimension that makes possible the creation of a community of faith based on love to God and fellow humans and on an intimate and cohesive relationship within that community.

The unity Jesus prayed for, therefore, cannot mean just assent, even active assent, to theological correctness, doctrinal faithfulness, or observation of outward standards in worship and stewardship. In terms meaningful to our time, one might say that unity does not mean simply a mental assent to 28 fundamental beliefs that the Adventist Church has committed as the core of its theology. Yes, we need those beliefs, but the unity Jesus prayed for is much more personal than that. Jesus likened oneness to how He related to His Father, “as I and the Father are One.” Participating in this oneness means we are entering into a relationship as a composed family unit, a family unit of very different individuals.

The midsection of John 17 goes further into this dynamic. In verse 11, Jesus prayed, “ ‘Holy Father, protect them [the disciples] by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one’ ” (NIV). Notice, He did not pray for them to be the same but to be one in thought, action, and purpose, even as the Father and the Son are One. The Christian call to unity does not insist on giving up one’s individuality but rather on recognizing the oneness of love in Christ that brings all of us together to affirm our common identity in God’s grace that has made us citizens of His heavenly kingdom where Christ remains our core. Apart from Him we are not unified.

Earlier that evening before this prayer of John 17, there was tension among the disciples. They argued, for example, as to who is the greatest (Luke 9:46). Even as disunity confronted the disciples, it was Jesus who unified them. His impending death scattered them, but in His resurrection, He united them. And at Pentecost, Jesus’ prayer for His disciples to be one came to a beautiful fulfillment. They were all in one accord, and the Spirit came upon them. Suddenly, their differences became their strengths as God used some to reach Jews and others to reach Gentiles, as they spoke in different tongues to reach different people. It was a movement of the Spirit working through diversity to glorify God and bring the world to Him. It was this kind of unity that embraces diversity for which Jesus prayed.

Principled dissent versus malcontent dissent

An article on business ethics presented two different types of dissent: principled dissent versus malcontent dissent.⁴ The malcontent dissenters are those who seek to divide and tear down an organization through negativity and an invitation to chaos. They are pessimistic about the potential for change and do not value opinions opposed to their own. The principled dissenters, in contrast, are highly ethically motivated because of a love for the organization. Moral conscience will not keep them silent when speech is necessary. Principled dissenters seek to make the organization better by standing for needed change in order for the organization to become even more solid on its foundational principles and provide necessary accountability to avoid natural institutional dangers. These dangers include a “bureaucratic ethic” that prizes conformity with organizational ideals, acquiescence to administration, and the avoidance of blame. If this “bureaucratic ethic” continues, the organization ends up full of like-minded people, a general policy where dishonesty governs everything and “niceness” replaces genuine relationships with the belief that social harmony and a lack of conflict are positive ways of adjusting to people. The organization then becomes smiling faces devoid of individual substance and integrity.

The alternative to this kind of superficially unified structure is to value principled dissent in contrast to other forms of opposition and to encourage principled dissenters to be an important organizational voice. Principled dissent has the opportunity to bring humanity back into an organization. Our goal for those with different ideas and opinions should not be mutual toleration but mutual comprehension. Then, we may truly know each other and become mature as the body of Christ. In Ephesians 4, Paul tells us that we are baptized into one body with diverse gifts for the purpose of building up the church. Why do we try

to separate ourselves from those who are different from us when, together, we can achieve brilliance?

The result of genuine unity

What is the result of oneness? “They may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:23). This kind of unity is hard and difficult to see. The presence of Jesus in the body of Christ is invisible. How are people to know and believe in Jesus? The text gives us the answer. The unity in the church becomes visible when we love one another. Unity is not so much about whether we agree but how we disagree. Unity is a gift from God through His Spirit. But this unity does not call for passivity. Nor is it a call to uniformity. We need to be active in bridging the gap between likes and dislikes, liberals and conservatives. We do not need to agree or function in the same way, but we need to take hold of each other’s hands prayerfully and seek to know each other on deeper levels than church politics, socioeconomic status, and lifestyle choices. Let perfect love do its work.

In a world starving for meaningful relationships, a unified community of diverse people will draw others to believe that Jesus is alive and within us. Love draws—true love, not superficial bureaucratic church “niceness.” Love is not a mere sentiment—not something used to disguise dislike. Genuine love demands mutual contribution, giving, and receiving—a recognized need of each other, of everyone as a part of the whole family unit.

Jesus prayed that the disciples be “‘be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me’ ” (v. 23, NIV). True church unity takes place when we all feel the need for one Savior, humbly submit to one God, experience that salvation, and be so intimately concerned with each other’s journey that we are willing to

sacrifice our own lives for those with whom we disagree.

Genuine unity in action

Earlier in life, I worked as a nurse in a pediatric intensive care unit. I will never forget the very first time there was a life-and-death emergency. He was my patient—a toddler that had swallowed a tack. His lungs were filling with blood—he was dying. That night, I had some issues with people with whom I worked. The respiratory therapist was making inappropriate comments to me. The doctor did not respect me. A nurse did not like me because I was a Christian. But when that child’s heart stopped beating and his lungs stopped breathing, none of that mattered. The doctor was very patient with me as she gave the orders of what to do. The respiratory therapist appropriately aided me in my compressions and life-giving breaths. The nurse acted as my supporter throughout the process. Other nurses rallied to hold the mother as she screamed for her child to come back to life. Suddenly, the other issues became insignificant as we worked side by side, unified by a mission to save this child’s life. Afterward, love between us overshadowed any issues we had before.

We need to be united in what or who we are for and not in what we are against. Our true enemy is defeated and will soon cease to exist, but we will remain united in Christ, our core, for eternity. As we stand together at the end of the greatest conflict in the history of the universe, we need oneness more than ever before, a unified team focused on the salvation of people, not from swallowed tacks but from eternal death. Only by lifting up Christ and making Him the center of all we say and do can we fulfill the divine call to oneness. 

1 Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

2 To see the lesson from Christopher Danielson, visit ed.ted.com/lessons/one-is-one-or-is-it.

3 Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), 179.

4 Nasrin Shahinpoor and Bernard F. Matt, “The Power of One: Dissent and Organizational Life,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 74 (2007): 37–48.

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Nine secrets to avoid a pastoral burnout

Omar, I am quitting the ministry!” My pastor friend’s threat over the phone seemed authentic and emphatic. He proceeded to speak about the stresses and frustrations of ministering to his church, congregation, family, and the world.

What could have caused my friend to feel so hopeless and helpless? He had more than a decade of varied pastoral experiences. He was a remarkable pastor—the kind that reflects the love of Jesus, loves people, and is easy to connect with; an effective preacher; and a wonderful counselor, problem solver, and administrator.

After he stopped talking, I asked him whether there was any acute change in his work or personal life? His response came so quickly that it surprised me: “No, it’s just an everyday, nonstop type of job. I always feel like I am about to enter a crisis, I am in a crisis, or I am just coming out of a crisis. It’s never just calm! And it just wears me down!”

After hearing him out I gently responded, “It sounds like you’re burned out, or on the verge of being so.”

My friend was taken aback. He admitted that he had never considered that as his problem. For the next several minutes, we talked about making some crucial changes in his spiritual, emotional, social, and family life and in his ministry that would ultimately ensure his continuance in fruitful, joyful, and

effective ministry for God for many years to come.

Scary starts, simple strategies

Every month approximately 1,700 to 1,800 pastors leave the ministry.¹ The main reason is burnout.² “According to an article in the *New York Times* . . . 40% of pastors and 47% of pastoral spouses are suffering from burnout, frantic schedules, and/or unrealistic expectations. And 45% of pastors say that they’ve experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry.”³

The statistics are sobering and startling—but you do not have to be one of them! Here are nine ways to be proactive and to protect yourself against burnout.

1. Think rightly about God. Many times pastors forget that they can only serve within the power and boundaries that God has set for them. They tend to want to do things in their own power instead of leveraging the power that God has already promised and given them. They forget that God calls to, continues, enables, and completes the work of ministry.

This, however, is not a new issue. Take a look at what happened in a problem congregation that Paul had to strongly rebuke: “For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I

follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow” (1 Cor. 3:4–7).⁴

2. Think rightly about yourself. Thinking rightly about God allows pastors to place themselves in a proper perspective. They can then take an honest view about their specific skills, spiritual gifts, and talents. Paul, a very self-reliant and strong-willed individual, wrote, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has given you” (Rom. 12:3).

When pastors have unrealistic expectations of themselves, they may land in difficult situations. Such expectations may originate from comparing themselves to other pastors or from their own desire to better their performance. Bottom line: expectations must be adjusted to be realistic.

3. Have regular periods of solitude. Pastoral ministry can often be a time-demanding experience. Some pastors feel pressured in their work all week long, many hours each day. They just do not find time for themselves or their families. A pastor is not expected to

work 24/7. To be a successful and fulfilling pastor, it is necessary to set aside intentional time to care for personal and family needs—for study, prayer, exercise, rest, relaxation, and family togetherness. The truth is, there will seldom be time if you do not schedule it. God, your family, and your parish expect the very best from your ministry.

I know of pastors who take time at least once a week to be by themselves in solitude, study, and prayer—maybe at a local park, the library, or in an office

dumbfounded. He could not understand what was going on and why. However, during the mandatory separation period, after taking some time to assess honestly his part in the situation, he admitted that shortly after they got married, he began full-time ministry and slowly over the years had allowed his relationship with his spouse to weaken. The extremely difficult year of ministry that he had just emerged from served to unravel the last vestiges of his already crumbling marriage. He and his wife got

are hurt actually turn around and hurt other people. Either way, a pastor's lack of understanding of this issue can damage his or her spiritual sensitivity. Jesus has given us this powerful counsel regarding forgiveness: " 'For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins' " (Matt. 6:14, 15).

6. Make friends. Nobody makes it through life alone. Everyone needs someone with whom to connect, relate, and speak. In Paul's words, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Unfortunately, in reality, a lot of pastors are lone wolves. They do not have friends to relate to on a personal basis. But a pastor's life and ministry will be much easier and richer if a connection exists with other like-minded persons who can love and accept you unconditionally, without judgment, and you can do likewise.

7. Talk about it. Find someone with whom you can talk openly and honestly about your struggles, problems, and ups and downs. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17). That person does not have to be a licensed counselor or therapist. Find a consistent and regular time to talk with that person about the deepest yearnings of your heart: those spiritual and/or emotional wounds, unmet needs, and expectations.

8. Set boundaries. Learn to say No when you find it necessary to do so.

When pastors have unrealistic expectations of themselves, they may land in difficult situations.

uninterrupted. That kind of being alone can be used for Bible study, journaling, reading, or just jotting down thoughts for a future sermon. Pastors should not be stretched so thin in terms of their schedule that they could not allot time on a regular basis for rejuvenation, restoration, and refocus.

4. Have a solid marriage. Next to your personal relationship with God, your relationship with your spouse is the greatest determinant of your success in ministry. Your spouse can either help or hinder your long-term effectiveness and fruitfulness for God. Therefore, you must recognize the importance of taking time to address all facets of your relationship with your spouse properly. When things are busy and stressful, you will find it easy to get lazy in the relationship with your spouse.

Several years ago, I received a distress call from a pastor who had gone through a difficult year in ministry. At the end of that year, his wife served him divorce papers. At first, he was

some counseling, and now he makes it a priority to spend daily time with his wife and takes her out on dates weekly.

5. Learn to forgive. A pastor may have a blind spot about a certain issue and is not forgiving others and/or self. We all live in a sinful, fractured world and live in families that sometimes can hurt instead of help. One thing I have learned about human relations—even among Christians—is that people who

Resources

- Insightful and Informative Interview Regarding Burnout: "The Purpose of Burnout: An Interview With Dr. Archibald Hart," Canada Focus on the Family, www.focusonthefamily.ca/pastors/the-purpose-of-burnout-an-interview-with-dr-archibald-hart
- Focus on the Family: Thriving Pastor: thrivingpastor.org/pastoral-care
- Standing Stone Pastoral Care Ministry: www.standingstoneministry.org
- H. B. London Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk: Real Help for Pastors From Pastors Who've Been There* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003).
- Gordon MacDonald, *A Resilient Life: You Can Move Ahead No Matter What* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004).

Your parishioners and friends may come up with so many requests, but you have your own limitations, and you cannot do it all. Do not neglect to have quality time with your spouse and children. Learn to delegate less important administrative tasks to your elders, deacons, and department heads.

Some years ago, a pastor whom I respect very deeply had this to say about his perceptions of God, his ministry, and his family: “Omar, if I’m going to burn out, I want to burn out for God!” I wanted to make sure that I heard him correctly, so I asked him to clarify his statement. He confirmed that I had heard him correctly. After thinking about his statement for several minutes, I expressed my disagreement and let him know that God did not want anyone to burn out on *anything*—and especially not for Him.

9. *Cultivate varied interests.* Take time to find, develop, and establish a hobby or interest. Do something that fills you up emotionally, spiritually, or physically and restores you. This may be something as simple as reading a good, non-work-related book, listening to some beautiful music for several minutes a day, or working in your garden. Take some time off regularly to cultivate these non-work-related interests, and you will reap exponentially positive results. Take Solomon’s counsel seriously: “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God” (Eccles. 2:24–26).

Conclusion

The demands of ministry in the twenty-first century can truly be challenging and exhausting even to the most dedicated and effective servant of God. However, discerning and wise use of strategies such as those mentioned here can enable you to sidestep burnout and give God your best in ministry for and to Him for a lifetime. Our lives are open letters for others to read about who God truly is. Let us make sure that what people are reading magnifies, not minimizes, Him. 

- 1 “About Us Information,” Standing Stone Ministry, accessed Dec. 29, 2013, www.standingstoneministry.org.
- 2 “Top 2 Causes for Pastors Leaving Ministry and More Statistics,” Standing Stone Ministry, accessed Dec. 29, 2013, www.standingstoneministry.org/top-2-causes-for-pastors-leaving-ministry-and-more-statistics/.
- 3 George Stahnke, “Dealing With Burnout (Part 1 of 2),” Thriving Pastor, accessed Dec. 29, 2013, thrivingpastor.org/dealing-with-burnout-part-1/.
- 4 Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references are from the New International Version.

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Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power

by Andy Crouch, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013.

Playing God addresses the important, yet poorly understood, topic of power—personal, institutional, cultural, and racial—and offers a Christian perspective of power shaped by the gospel about Jesus Christ. Andy Crouch, executive editor at *Christianity Today* and a senior fellow of the International Justice Mission, examines power and the ways we should harness it for human flourishing and the glory of God.

“Power is a gift.” That, according to the author, encompasses the book’s central, controversial idea. Although diminished and distorted by sin, power is a gift nonetheless. Power is for human flourishing. When used rightly, power results in creative image bearing that expands our own and others’ joyful “meaning making.” Crouch claims that power is not always a zero-sum game in which one’s increase in power means a decrease in someone else’s. The best kind of power occurs when powerful people create new power in other people without the total power being reduced, as when a teacher teaches a student.

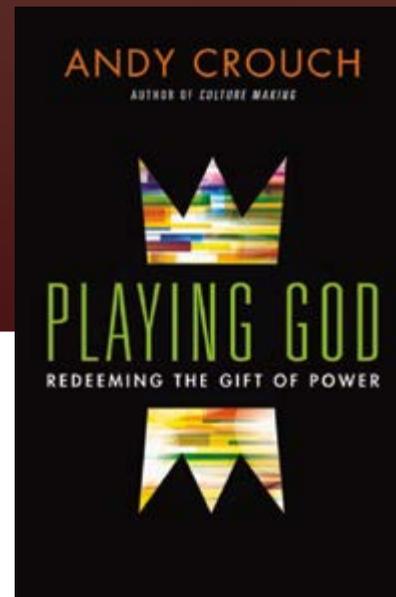
After the introductory chapters, *Playing God* unfolds in four parts. In part 1, the author lays his case for power being a gift. He uses two biblical accounts—Creation (Gen. 1; 2) and the wedding feast of Cana (John 2)—to frame this section of the book. Crouch also argues here against Friedrich Nietzsche’s “will to power” and “might-makes-right” vision of power.

In the next section, Crouch questions the assumption that power is ultimately about violence and coercion. Two biblical passages that bookend the next section of the book are the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20

When used rightly, power results in creative image bearing that expands our own and others’ joyful “meaning making.”

and Jesus washing the disciples’ feet in John 13. The Ten Commandments orient us with the proper disposition to power and questions our underlying idolatry and proclivity toward injustice. John 13 shows how Jesus, aware of His power and privilege, modeled a different order of power for His disciples.

Part 3 addresses the role of institutions. While institutions are broken and often responsible for profound injustices, they are also necessary for human flourishing. Crouch notes that “in any failing institution, as common as the abuse of power is the neglect of power” (214). He urges trustees to work within broken institutions to provide places and ways for people to flourish. His biblical exploration of Philemon illustrates how the apostle Paul did not attack slavery directly but used his power, influence, and hospitality to advocate on behalf of Onesimus.



In the last major section of the book, Crouch describes the “end of power” in terms of its *telos*, its proper limits and the eventual cessation of human power as this power is swallowed up in praise of God.

Playing God is a clear and compelling call for Christians to steward the kind of power that enables human flourishing. 

—Reviewed by Raj Attiken, DMin, principal moderator, the Innovation Commons, and retired president of the Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



Fulfilling God's End-Time Mission: A Comprehensive Evangelism Training Manual

by Mark and Ernestine Finley, Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2013.

Mark and Ernestine Finley have distilled more than four decades of evangelism experience into one power-packed manual on conducting a public evangelistic series, *Fulfilling God's End-Time Mission*. The purpose of this book is to train how to effectively prepare and implement a public evangelism series.

The first few chapters lay down the underlying philosophy, while the remaining chapters give step-by-step details that cover each aspect of effective public evangelism. The writing style targets both ministers and laypersons, while clearly speaking to leaders of local congregations.

What makes this manual especially helpful is its thorough coverage of almost every aspect of a public evangelistic seminar. From chapters on how to draw a crowd and keep one, to chapters discussing evangelistic visitation and the science of appeals, Mark and Ernestine lay a clear outline of productive ministry.

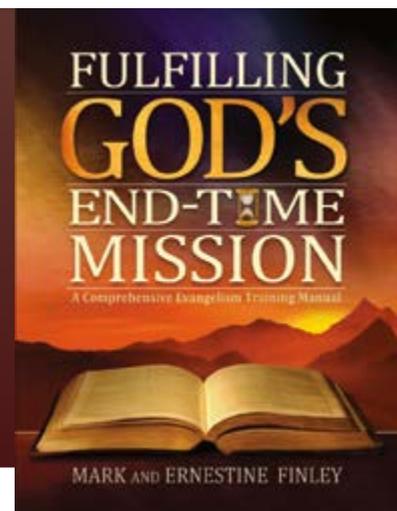
Three concepts stand out in my mind that help both novice and experienced evangelists. First, in the desire to preach good sermons, it is helpful to see the underlying framework for the array of truth that Seventh-day Adventists have. The authors explain how the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 lay the foundation and outline for the preaching of an evangelistic series. They give the order of events used by Pastor Finley in a series and explain the topic, goal, and appeal that attend each sermon. This organization leads to quality evangelistic preaching.

Second, as a new evangelist, I struggled to find my way in the area

If I had access to this manual, it would have saved much trial and error.

of evangelistic visitation. I would try one thing and then another until I found what worked best for me. If I had access to this manual, it would have saved much trial and error and I would have had better results sooner in my evangelistic efforts. The authors go through visitation techniques to be used when visiting guests during a public seminar. For example, when visiting someone after the sermon on baptism, the manual explains how to engage that guest in conversation concerning baptism as well as what literature to share. These details are very useful in the realm of public evangelism.

Finally, asking someone to make a decision for Christ is easily the most important part of evangelism and probably, for many, the most intimidating. The authors start their chapter on making effective appeals by quoting Richard Boothby: "You must preach like you expect people to respond"



(159). This section of the manual covers nine different calls or appeals that can be made in an evangelistic series. Sample calls are given for several of them with clear instructions for all nine. This practical and intellectual study of appeals is just one more reason to make sure that this manual is not only part of your library but used in accomplishing successful soul-winning.

Fulfilling God's End-Time Mission will appeal to ministers and laypeople that long to be more effective in public evangelism. Evangelism knowledge as found in this manual will take ordinary committed pastors and laypersons and make them powerful tools for evangelism in their local churches and districts. ❧

— Charles Holtry II, assistant director of the Amazing Facts Center of Evangelism, resides in Madison, Virginia, United States.



► Reaching out beyond church walls: *Jesus7* in Ireland

Dublin, Ireland—Belfast pastor **Adam Keough** reported that up to 150 people visited *Jesus7*, a neatly laid out exhibition regarding significant places in Jesus' life and ministry. They also enjoyed sampling foods similar to those eaten at the time of Jesus. Artistic images provided opportunities for contemplation as visitors entered into the world in which Jesus lived.

There was also a *Jesus7* seminar that took place nightly in the Belfast church, which was streamed live to other venues across Ireland.

Similar exhibitions were held in two Dublin venues and Londonderry.

Pastor **Stephen Wilson** and **Lindita Vani** said, "We were praying and thinking about how we could give people an

camera how they felt. This generated a few smiles and giggles and reflection on how we receive Jesus, the Greatest Gift.

Another group of Dublin young people invited people to copy the Gospel of Mark by hand. **Deborah Koizumi**, a student, reflected, "In the beginning there weren't many people coming toward the table to copy the Gospels, so the vicar suggested that we put the board right next to the entrance. This time the response was better. People now participated in the activity at the beginning of their visit, not at the end."

In addition, across all the venues, 25,000 *Jesus7* leaflets were distributed, and the various venues were promoted on Facebook and other media outlets, including an appearance on local radio.

Nightly *Jesus7* presentations

The daily exhibitions and activities led toward a series of evening seminars, presented by **Janos Kovacs-Biro**, ministerial secretary for the Trans-European Division. Presented live from the Belfast church, they were streamed on the www.Jesus7.ie Web site.

The focus was once again on reaching beyond church walls. The Belfast church was transformed into a café studio for the event, with drinks and refreshments available on the tables during the presentations.

With up to 45 in attendance each night, Pastor Keough was particularly encouraged by the 13 visitors who attended as a result of visiting the exhibition and the 17 visitors who came as a result of a personal invitation.

Other small groups also got involved. A Dublin Ranelagh church

member watched the program in a friend's home with seven other Christians. "She thought that it was important that the program was not trying to be sectarian, which would have put people off otherwise. They were disappointed the series finished so soon," reports Pastor **Gavin Anthony**.

Betty O'Rourke reports from the west of Ireland that pizza was a motivation to Galway church youth and their friends at the home of **Telia Daiwoo**. She says, "The youth particularly liked the interactive style and the visual aids used to convey the story of Jesus' walk on this earth." In Limerick City, church members and friends gathered at the home of **Bruno and Nuala Basil**. They reported that both college and secondary students took time away from their usual studies to study Scripture.

During a Friday evening appeal, four people in Belfast requested baptism, including one individual who had come into the meetings from the street.

In Drumcondra, an English tourist attended the Wednesday evening meeting. She came back every night and stated she wanted to be part of our "community" when she returned to England.

Londonderry church members celebrated the end of *Jesus7* with an Easter Sunday church breakfast. They spoke with enthusiasm about the friendships that they made, including a visitor who attended four of the evenings and asked to join the church. There was a sense of accomplishment and pride in a project that was very well done. [Adapted from *Weiers Coetser*, *BUC News*] 

"We wanted to help people engage at a deeper level."

opportunity to see, read, and hear, or perhaps even make something as part of a real-life experience here in Dublin. We wanted to help people engage at a deeper level." The first day's focus was on Jesus, the Greatest Gift, so they gave each attendee a beautifully wrapped gift box full of Bible promises from Jesus. As visitors opened the gift, they were invited to share in front of a video

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

What reputation does your church have?

Hundreds of thousands of Americans fall prey to some of the silliest, most preposterous stories on health every day. There are those who proclaim that eating whole lemons prevents all cancers. Others teach that bathing every day in expensive Himalayan salt will eliminate harmful body toxins.

The Internet has become a prime source of this kind of nonsense. Even Facebook has the ability to take unsophisticated readers from harmless dietary nonsense to medical quackery. Every week people email me queries about this remedy or that fanciful claim. Sadly, most are hoping for a shortcut to better health.

Even your local health food store is often a rich repository of pseudoscientific information, offering products with plenty of Latin words mixed with phrases such as “builds better blood” or “made in the kitchen—not in the lab” and teas claiming to cure whatever ails you. The magazines and books are generally not much better, with titles like *The Coconut Miracle*, *What Doctors Don’t Tell You*, or *Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps*. Pseudoscience can cause us to loosen our grip on the anchor of evidence-based science, resulting in a dangerous drift toward antiscience and all manner of conspiracy theories.

But what does this all have to do with your church? Unfortunately, a lot in some cases. Recently, someone wrote me asking if vitamin C would cure pneumonia. Another wanted to know whether they could boost their brain function by eating spirulina. Both had heard these questionable claims at their local church!

As the pastor, you no doubt recognize your role as a guardian of the faith. Frequently, you answer questions or preach sermons in defense of your beliefs

and understanding of Bible truth. You do this more frequently than you wish because there are plenty of people who espouse pseudotheological tenets and spiritual conspiracy theories. No doubt you often find yourself explaining why a particular interpretation of Scripture misrepresents the Word of God.

Could it be that, in your desire to help and heal the sick and suffering in your community, your church has become a temple of pseudoscience, a dispensary of snake oil remedies and concepts? Some may say it makes little difference and believe that if people appear to be helped, then snake oil remedies are OK and this improves your standing in the community.

As a nutritionist, I have discovered over the years that often in my audience there is someone who knows more about a narrow slice of nutritional science than I do. Thus, I find it vitally important for me to make sure I am speaking from evidence-based science. Otherwise, I put the reputation of my church and my very mission in grave jeopardy.

Ellen White wrote, “If they see that we are intelligent with regard to health, they will be more ready to believe that we are sound in Bible doctrines.”¹

When we allow our churches to be platforms for extremism, fads, and pseudoscience, we make our work and mission much more difficult. Once the doors have been opened to scientific nonsense, even the wisest and most intelligent presenters of comprehensive health ministry may find it impossible to place this important subject on a right basis in the community. White also wrote, “The door is also closed in a great measure, so that unbelievers cannot be reached by the present truth upon the Sabbath and the soon coming of our Saviour. The most precious truths are

cast aside by the people as unworthy of a hearing.”²

You may be wondering, as a non-scientist, how you can sort the chaff from the wheat so that you do not fall prey to the smooth-talking charlatans. Many of you are blessed to have highly trained, professional scientists in your congregations. Seek their advice, and listen carefully to their counsel. I have found the following seven practical warning signs of bogus science to be extremely useful.³

1. The discoverer pitches the claim directly to the media—short-circuiting the scientific process of peer review.
2. The discoverer says that a powerful segment of the establishment is trying to suppress their work to protect wealth and power.
3. The scientific effect involved is always at the very limit of detection.
4. Evidence for a discovery is anecdotal and based on personal testimonies.
5. The discoverer says a belief is credible because it has endured for centuries.
6. The discoverer has worked in isolation to make a revolutionary breakthrough.
7. The discoverer must propose new laws of nature to explain an observation.

In a world filled with scientific nonsense, is it too much for you as a pastor to develop the skill of spotting bogus science? Your ministry and mission depend on it. 

¹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1957), 452.

² White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976), 209.

³ Robert L. Park, “Seven Warning Signs of Bogus Science,” *Chronicle Review*, Jan. 31, 2003.

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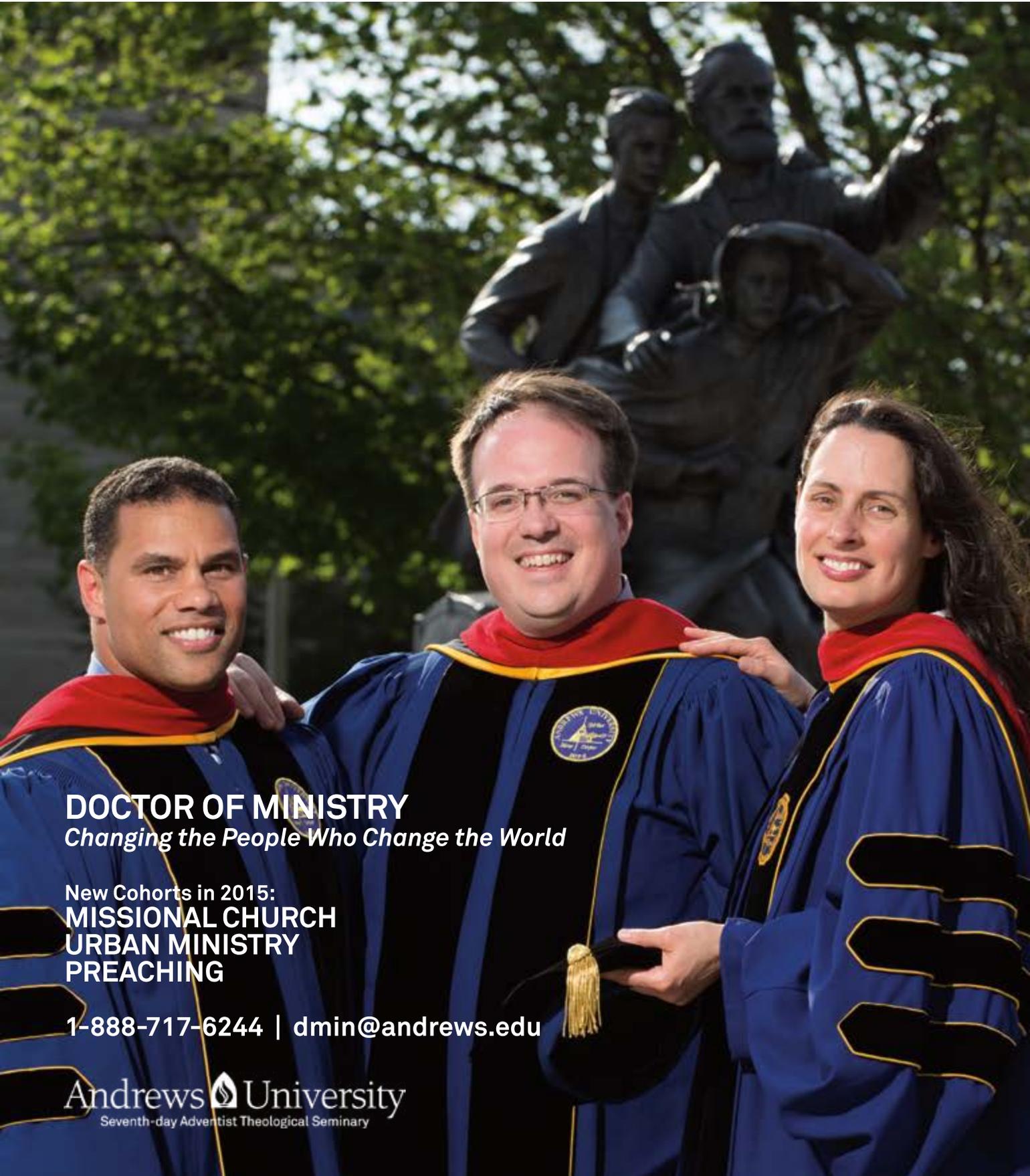
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