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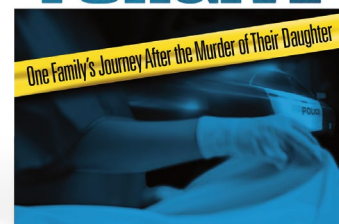


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A TIME TO FORGIVE



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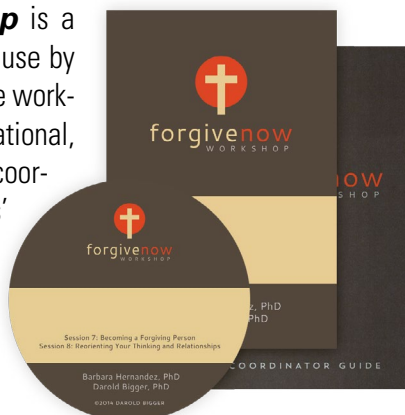


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06 The role of forgiveness in the recovery of physical and mental health

Don Mackintosh

Explore the role forgiveness has in the healing process.

10 Mental health issues in the local congregation

Daniel M. Forbes

Do you have a member exhibiting symptoms of a mental health condition?

14 Worshipping the one Creator God: Challenges and opportunities

Dave Gemmell

Learn some pointers on how to reexamine the health of your worship service.

19 Creating emotional balance in an unbalanced world

Karen Holford

How do emotions factor into the issue of pastoral burnout?

23 Comforting God

David Sedlacek

How does our compassionate God interface with the pain of His creation?

04 Letters

05 Editorial

22 Revival and Reformation

26 Dateline

29 Resources

30 The Pastor and Health

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“Admittedly, a focus on quality may never bring the same numeric results, but it will bring Kingdom results. The command of Jesus is to make disciples, not church members.”

The Creation story

I am a retired Lutheran pastor, who worked as a physicist with DuPont for several years before entering the seminary. I enjoy the complimentary copies of the *Ministry* magazine, although I understandably have a different approach on some of Adventist theology. One such difference is in the acceptance of the creation as being completed in six literal days (“Creation, Salvation, and the Divinity of Christ: A Look at John 1:1–13” by Kim Papaioannou”).

Some incidents in the Scriptures are impossible for us to figure out. We should not be disturbed by accepting the creation as having happened some 14 billion years ago. I have a profound respect and love for a God who worked that long to fashion a planet for us, rather than a Creator that decided to do it all in a few days. (What was he doing the rest of the time?) Let’s forget trying to coordinate the Genesis story

with the scientific facts; two things are abundantly clear from Genesis: that God was the creator and that humans came to the point when they recognized themselves as sinners who needed God’s redemption in Jesus Christ. And incidentally evolution need not be considered a dirty word for us; it is simply a description of how God carries out His creative magic. We see evolution taking place even in our short lifetimes.

From a brother in Christ. Keep continuing with Christ’s mandated work.

—John N. Olson, Kalispell, Montana, United States

Thank you

Just a note with the enclosed to say thank you for the wonderful gift of your magazine to us as non-SDA pastors over so many years. I have received the magazine on and off for many years, and not once have you ever sent out anything seeking a contribution. You have been gracious and blessed us as

pastors with inspiring, challenging, and encouraging articles.

I was born and raised, baptized and confirmed a Presbyterian, wandered in the cults and the occult, and then had a powerful conversion experience in my grandmother’s Wesleyan church. I have now been a Presbyterian pastor for many years, preaching the Bible as the trustworthy Word of God, without error, and the reality of a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ as a necessity for salvation and eternal life.

One of the groups I studied with while doing my wandering was the Seventh-day Adventist Church, through correspondence courses offered by the *Voice of Prophecy*, headquartered in Glendale, near where I lived in Los Angeles. I would also listen to the radio broadcasts with H. M. S. Richards.

Over the years whenever I hear someone say the SDA Church was a cult I speak up and, with firm conviction, indicate that the SDA Church preaches a born again experience, that knowing Jesus is the bottom line, and that the Christology of the SDA Church is orthodox, the ultimate “cult test.” I can testify to having been at an SDA Sabbath worship service where a solid salvation message was preached and then an altar call was given complete with singing “Just As I Am.” Many years later I also attended an evening service of your international gathering in St. Louis and was blessed by the Christ-centered content and passion for missions and bringing people to Christ stressed in that service.

So thank you for your faithfulness to the Gospel and for the gift of the wonderful magazine.

—Rev. Robert Bayley, Wilmington, North Carolina, United States

Continued on page 13

Jerry Page is interim editor of *Ministry* and ministerial secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Thank God before you see

A friend of mine had just given a precious testimony of the Lord's miracle-healing power in her life in answer to so many prayers. This was a great testimony, but one point of it was said in such a way that I knew it would offend some people if repeated in the same way. I determined to gently mention it if I had the opportunity.

A few days later, as we talked on the phone, I shared how beautiful her overall testimony had been and how so many of us were praising the Lord. Then I gently mentioned my "small" concern. She didn't take it very well, to say the least, and proceeded to tell me several things I had done that she didn't appreciate.

At first I was surprised because I was only trying to help. Then, because I felt she was wrong, I became somewhat defensive. We had an "intense" conversation, even though neither of us lost control or became outwardly angry. We weren't really "of one accord" as we hung up.

The Lord convicted me that I had been too defensive and needed to apologize the next time we talked. I did so, but rather than offer any responding apology, she asked me if I'd confessed my sin of "pride" in that situation. That really shocked me, but I decided not to respond negatively. As the call ended, we, again, were not really reconciled.

This continued for a couple of weeks until I learned that my friend had reported her side of how I had supposedly treated her badly to a leader in another conference that I deeply respect. That really seemed unfair and upset me.

I woke up very early the next morning and found myself struggling with the Lord. I had been asked to lead in an anointing service for an ill friend and wanted my heart to be clean before God. I confessed the self and pride that was

troubling me and sought Jesus for peace and forgiveness. But I did not feel peace and continued to struggle.

Finally, I put my hand on several Bible promises about forgiveness, cleansing, and peace, like Philippians 4:6, 7: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (NKJV).

I decided to follow the "ABCs of prayer" by asking, believing, and claiming the answer in advance of seeing or feeling it. So I thanked the Lord in faith that I had been forgiven and that I already had peace because He had promised. As I waited in silence I still didn't "feel" peace but kept thanking Him that I had it.

At that very moment (before 6:30 A.M.), my phone rang. It was the other person calling me. The Lord had awakened her very early, too and convicted her to call me, ask forgiveness, and truly reconcile. I, too, apologized, and what joyful reconciliation. We were really "of one accord."


I love this quote; it is so true: "For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received.

"We need look for no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most."*

As we begin this New Year, we need to enter the "upper room experience"

As leaders we need to share this kind of comprehensive health ministry that includes the spiritual, mental, physical, and social aspects of our being.

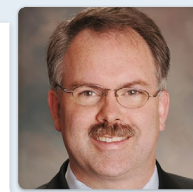
in the book of Acts that led to and followed the Day of Pentecost. We all need the power and wholeness those early believers discovered. Prayer, the Word, forgiveness, assurance, being of one accord, joy, praise, and a focus on His mission by the Spirit took the gospel to the whole world in one generation. As leaders we need to share this kind of comprehensive health ministry that includes the spiritual, mental, physical, and social aspects of our being.

Don MackIntosh leads off this month's *Ministry*, discussing excellent research that has demonstrated the great benefits of forgiving and being forgiven. Other authors focus on different aspects of this comprehensive health ministry. John said, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 2, NKJV). Whatever your challenges or needs, claim His promises and thank Him before you see! 

* Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), 258.

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The role of forgiveness in the recovery of physical and mental health¹

We live in a very painful world, filled with hurt, anger, bitterness, resentment, and perhaps, worst of all, an unforgiving spirit. Unless brought under control, these emotions can wreak havoc in our lives. How can we rein in these destructive feelings? This article argues that perhaps the best way to control and manage such powerfully negative emotions is by understanding and practicing the art of forgiveness.

How can we help people learn the importance of forgiveness?

When trying to identify and understand a person's emotional pain, I sometimes ask the individual to complete the following open-ended statement: "Once upon a time something happened that really upset me, and to this day I have not let it go. This is how that decision has impacted my life . . ."

This simple method of focusing on the issue of unforgiveness is often quite revealing.

The path to forgiveness

Of course, if we were to just leave people with a list of their grievances, we would be of little help. We must, with God's help, lead them on a path to forgiveness, healing, and hope. Here

is where religion plays an important role: its emphasis on forgiveness and its accent on restored relationships are positive factors in the improvement of mental health.²

True Christian ministry must involve forgiveness, and those who embrace true forgiveness experience lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. They will experience a greater likelihood of experiencing significant posttraumatic growth.³ Even in situations where the possibility of forgiveness may seem remote, research indicates there is hope. Researchers monitored Caucasian female incest survivors who "attended weekly individual sessions for an average of 14 months focused on forgiving their abuser. Compared to a control group, they showed gains in forgiveness and hope together with significant decreases in anxiety and depression."⁴

A similar intervention was used with female victims of spousal emotional abuse. "Their increased ability to forgive was associated with considerable improvements in 'depression, trait anxiety, posttraumatic stress symptoms, self esteem, environmental mastery and finding meaning in suffering.' These gains were maintained eight months post-treatment."⁵

Mind and body

The physical benefits of forgiveness have also been clinically documented, and include the following:

Heart health improvement.

"Healthier ratios of both total to HDL cholesterol and LDL to HDL cholesterol. Given both their psychological (lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression) and physiological findings, the authors of this study concluded that 'forgiveness may be associated with reduced risk for future cardiovascular events.'"⁶

Blood flow improvement.

"Patients who showed *anger-induced reductions of blood flow to the heart* (myocardial perfusion) were given 10 weekly individual psychotherapy sessions focused on forgiveness. Their post-intervention and 10-week follow-up measures for myocardial perfusion showed marked improvement compared to a control group."⁷

Blood pressure improvement.

An "8-week psycho-educational training model for forgiveness was provided to 25 patients suffering from stage-1 hypertension. Those who scored high on pre-intervention anger expression measures showed both reductions in the expression of anger and significant decreases in blood pressure after the 8-week course."⁸

It is interesting to note that, while the benefits of forgiveness in general were significant, it was the specific sense of feeling forgiven by God that produced the greatest health-related improvement. Three related dimensions of forgiveness were examined, finding that “feeling forgiven by God had the strongest forgiveness-related

consensus definition may be emerging with the following three elements: Forgiveness is a process that takes time. It involves a ‘letting go of . . . a negative response following an offense.’ Through forgiveness, *a positive response towards the offender emerges.*”¹⁰

Often people who have been traumatized feel that if they forgive

is acknowledged and expressed. Psalm 109 is especially helpful, as it describes not only the anger of the psalmist but also the depressive-like symptoms that accompany such anger.

2. Biblical forgiveness is not absence of consequences. This is a major concern to those who have been injured



It is interesting to note that, while the benefits of forgiveness in general were significant, it was the specific sense of feeling forgiven by God that produced the greatest health-related improvement.

health-mediating effect while self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others also contributed to the positive physical health effects of religiosity.”⁹

What is forgiveness?

While forgiveness can undoubtedly bring physical healing, this leads to another question: What, exactly, is forgiveness? Ann C. Recine, Joan Sthele Werner, and Louis Recine state, “A

those who have injured them, they will somehow release that individual from the consequences of their action. If they are to move forward, it is helpful to share with them the errors of this way of thinking.

The following is what biblical forgiveness is *not*:

1. Biblical forgiveness is not absence of anger. The Bible includes many passages where the emotion of anger

or traumatized. “Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions” (Ps. 99:8, KJV).

If biblical forgiveness is not the absence of anger or consequence, then what is it?

1. Biblical forgiveness is allowing God to be in control of the consequences. “Dearly beloved, avenge

not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19, KJV).

2. Biblical forgiveness is avoiding our natural, negative response and deliberately choosing a positive response. "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men" (1 Thess. 5:15, KJV).
3. Biblical forgiveness calls for blessing and praying for those who have injured us. "Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Luke 6:28, KJV).
4. Biblical forgiveness calls us to not gloat but, rather, to grieve when those against us stumble and fall. "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth" (Prov. 24:17, KJV).
5. Biblical forgiveness leads us to love and pray for those who have traumatized us. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44, KJV).
6. Biblical forgiveness calls upon believers to seek to live at peace with those who have wronged them. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18, KJV).
7. Biblical forgiveness motivates us to come to the assistance of our enemies when they experience practical difficulties. "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again" (Exod. 23:4, KJV).
8. Biblical forgiveness is following God's example of forgiveness. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:35, KJV).

On the path

How can people be assisted, in a practical manner, in moving forward on the path toward forgiveness?

1. Focus on their physical condition. In the Nedley Depression and Anxiety Recovery Program, this goal is accomplished through physician-directed exercise, massage, hydrotherapy, proper nutrition, and a high volume of water intake. These modalities assist in improving circulation in all parts of the body, including (and most importantly) the frontal lobe of the brain.

2. As their frontal lobe is strengthening, educate them in the brain's "executive function." Executive function has been defined as "a group of cognitive control processes working together to regulate and shape behavior, thoughts, and feelings in a goal-directed manner."¹¹ Researchers have discovered that "the stronger the executive function, the greater the likelihood of forgiveness."¹² Their experiments showed that "*executive function promotes forgiveness by controlling rumination.*"¹³

3. Facilitate the healing process by making them aware that writing interventions can enhance their ability to forgive. Researchers gave writing assignments to three groups of people dealing with the consequences of a transgression. They gave one group "the counterintuitive assignment to write about the *benefits* of a transgression they had personally experienced, while other groups wrote about the traumatic aspects of a recent transgression, or about a nontransgression topic."¹⁴ Those journaling about personal benefits showed a greater gain in their ability to forgive than did the other two groups. These results suggest that writing exercises focused on "benefit-finding may be a unique and useful addition to efforts to help people forgive interpersonal transgressions through structured interventions."¹⁵

As individuals reframe the toxic relationships or traumatic events of their lives in this manner, they are often able, over time, to be released from the negative rumination that has crippled them. A number of biblical stories indicate that this kind of reframing occurs, such as Joseph's statement concerning the trauma that his brothers put him

through by selling him into captivity: "Ye thought evil against me," he said, but then as a result of the reframing he had done, he was able to say, "but God meant it unto good . . . to save much people" (Gen. 50:20, KJV). Likewise, the apostle Paul, who went through many harrowing experiences, was able to reframe them, putting them into proper context by saying that "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28, KJV).

4. Assist those engaged in the battle against thoughts of anger, bitterness, and revenge by encouraging them to identify such thoughts and, then, to burn them physically in a group setting. The imagery of the Old Testament sanctuary system, where those who had sinned would symbolically transfer their transgressions to an animal and the sanctuary itself, as well as the New Testament practice of baptism and foot-washing, gave us this idea. Interestingly enough, recent research confirms the value of such approaches. Researchers discovered that "by physically throwing away or protecting your thoughts, you influence how you end up using those thoughts. Merely imagining engaging in these actions has no effect."¹⁶

5. Share stories from Scripture and history that show the power of forgiveness. The testimony of those who have endured unspeakable trauma and abuse demonstrate how healing the Christian message can be when one is grappling with the past. Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom's description of a challenging act of forgiveness is especially apt in demonstrating this, as it pulls together many of the concepts we have mentioned in this article. Facing the German guard responsible for the death of hundreds, including her sister, in that brutal concentration camp, ten Boom recalls, "And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart."

“‘Jesus, help me!’ I prayed silently. ‘I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.’

“And so, woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.


“‘I forgive you, brother!’ I cried. ‘With all my heart!’”¹⁷

It appears that ten Boom’s rumination over the past trauma was disallowing her to express forgiveness until she, through prayer and frontal lobe function, was able to choose to move forward with the decision (an act of executive function) to forgive from her heart the one who had so traumatized her.

It is by the contemplation of such stories that the forgiving spirit of Christ, which has motivated such forgiveness, begins to be more fully appreciated. When people like ten Boom, who experienced significant trauma, recognize that “*Christ was treated as we deserve*”; as they realize that “*He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share*”; that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share”; and as they grasp the reality that “*He suffered the death which was ours*,” that we might receive the life which was His,¹⁸ they see the healing power of God’s forgiveness and begin to be healed through a contemplation of His healing love. As they consider that the wounds He experienced and and the death He died were for them, their hearts are healed,¹⁹ and they are empowered, as ten Boom was, to extend that healing love to others.

6. Finally, in light of Christ’s constraining love,²⁰ pray the following prayer: “Dear Jesus, I thank you for your love for me and for your forgiveness of me. I choose to have the same Spirit, and to forgive _____. Continue

to fill me with your Spirit, so I can be like You.”

Forgiveness plays a pivotal role in the recovery of physical, mental, and spiritual health. As pastors and leaders, in association with church members, we need to lead people through the steps above. When we do so, many will experience God’s love. As this happens, His forgiveness comes in like a tide from the sea with power to raise every stranded ship.²¹ 

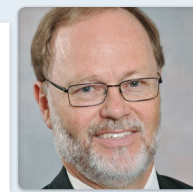
- 1 This article was based on a lecture from HEALTH—a four-month, comprehensive health evangelism program for professionals and those taking the religious studies major at Weimar Institute.
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Mental health issues in the local congregation

One evening, after attending a full day of activities and training at a ministers' meeting, a small group of ministerial colleagues gather in a more informal setting for fellowship. In time, they begin sharing "war" stories from their own church districts.

One pastor begins the conversation: "I've got a member in my church whose behavior leaves me baffled. No matter how hard I try to be upbeat and positive in my interactions with him and to encourage him to broaden his way of thinking, it doesn't seem to have any effect. Much of my time is spent trying to convince him that there are different ways of accomplishing a particular task or of addressing a particular issue at the church. His social skills are severely lacking, and he's always ready to argue with anyone at church who wants to suggest a different way of doing things. I can never seem to please him or satisfy his pastoral needs. I'm losing hours of sleep, thinking about my interactions with him and trying to figure out why he acts the way he does and what I can do better to minister to him. Do you have anyone in your church like that?"

"Yes, I do," says a second pastor, "except my member engages in some of the most selfish, un-Christian behaviors—and not just against me or other church members. I've seen it even with her own family members and their pets. Maybe it's me, but it seems as if she

doesn't even have a conscience. When I try to discuss it with her, she doesn't seem to show any remorse or guilt at all for her actions or even acknowledge that she has conducted herself in any other way than admirably. She always has an excuse and wants to argue about it, blaming someone else. Every time I talk with her, I already know what the end result is going to be."

A third colleague, overhearing the conversation, adds his story.

"That's nothing," he begins. "I have a member whom I never know how he's going to be from one day to the next, or one moment to the next, for that matter. One day he acts like he is my best friend and supporter. The next time I see him, he couldn't care less about me or anyone else. I've noticed that some days he seems so happy with his life and other days he acts so depressed and discouraged that I am concerned for his safety. This same cycle of emotions has been repeated over and over. He has been like this ever since the first Sabbath I arrived as the new pastor three years ago. What do you do with a person like that?"

Recognizing mental health in the local congregation

As most pastors know, such congregational scenarios are all too familiar. With their pastoral empathy and love for souls, clergy learn by God's grace,

along with time and experience, to apply techniques of good listening skills and a Christ-centered understanding of human nature when interacting with the saints under their care.

Some clergy might consider such challenging members to simply be people possessing a few annoying or puzzling personality traits that may, at times, seem directed toward the pastor. Yet with a basic understanding of human behavior and the psychology of mental health, pastors might be less inclined to take such members' behaviors as personal attacks and be better able to recognize possible symptoms of mental illness that would best be served with professional intervention.

Mental illnesses

Take the three hypothetical member scenarios described above. According to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, fifth edition, the first example describes someone who may fall on the high-functioning range of a group of psychological conditions called autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), also known as pervasive developmental disorders. ASDs range in severity. Autism is the most debilitating form.¹

Symptoms of ASD vary but often include the need for sameness, a lack of social skills, difficulty interpreting what others are thinking or feeling, difficulty regulating emotions, a tendency

toward repetitive behaviors, and communication problems. They also often have what are called splinter skills, such as remembering names, dates, and details in history or figuring complex math problems in their heads, among other such skills.²

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ASD has been identified in 1 in 68 children, more in males than in females. And these children grow up to become adults and members of society at some level, according to their abilities and opportunities to progress, with some individuals more limited in their abilities than others.³ Some individuals with ASD even become outstanding members in the church.

In the second earlier scenario, the individual is similar to someone diagnosed as antisocial or otherwise termed as sociopathic personality disorder. In the field of mental health, sociopathy is a condition where the individual is characterized as possessing little or no conscience. Other characteristics include failure to conform to social norms, a deceitful and manipulative nature (though they can display charm), impulsivity and failure to plan ahead, irritability and aggressiveness, reckless disregard for the safety of self or others, consistent irresponsibility, and lack of remorse after having hurt or mistreated or stolen from another person. An individual who possesses any three of the above mentioned characteristics might be diagnosed with a sociopathic disorder. Prevalence of the disorder is present in about 4 percent of the population.

So, statistically speaking, in a church with one hundred members, four might exhibit symptoms at some level consistent with sociopathic behavior. That is important information for a pastor to have in mind when trying to understand human behavior and the best approach to take when dealing with such challenging individuals in their church.

Then, finally, the individual presented in the third scenario exhibits behaviors that are similar to someone

diagnosed as having a bipolar disorder. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), bipolar disorder, sometimes referred to as manic depressive disorder, is a chronic mental illness characterized by extreme high and low shifts in one's moods. It affects the energy level and ability to think clearly. Each phase, both manic and depressive, can last from one day to months or years. In the manic phase, the person may feel irritated or euphoric. They may experience feelings of agitation, sadness, or hopelessness or experience sleeplessness or talkativeness. They may also exhibit a need for extreme pleasure-seeking or risk-taking behaviors. In the depressive phase, the individual may have feelings of sadness or hopelessness and may lose interest or pleasure in most activities.⁴

Although bipolar disorder can develop at any age, the average age for the condition to show up is 25, but it has been seen in children as young as 6.⁵ In the United States alone, there are 5.7 million adults living with some level of bipolar disorder. Each year 2.9 percent

of the population is diagnosed with a bipolar disorder condition. Of that, 83 percent are considered severe cases. It crosses all lines of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic groups. Also bipolar disorder affects males and females equally. If left untreated, the condition often gets worse.

About 1.1 percent of the world population more than 18 years old has this disorder, a figure that translates into 51 million people.⁶ Bipolar disorder is the sixth leading cause of disability worldwide.⁷

Responding to mental health in the local congregation

Of course, such diagnoses as illustrated in the three cases above can never accurately be made with the little information presented here. Proper testing, evaluation, and observation is necessary, requiring time as well as training and clinical expertise. To do otherwise would be both unethical and unprofessional, with a high possibility of being inaccurate as well.

How to choose the right counselor

1. Shop around for the right counselor as you would in selecting a physician.
2. Ask family, friends, or your personal physician for referrals. Make a list.
3. As a consumer, you have a right to ask questions about fees, insurance coverage, specialties, training, and experience. Therefore, make an appointment to go by their office or call to speak with them. They should welcome such inquiries.
4. Is the counselor a Christian? Their spiritual beliefs will be reflected in their counseling approach.
5. Is the counselor experienced in treating the problems you are dealing with?
6. Do you feel comfortable with the counselor's counseling approach and talking with them about your life and personal issues that concern you?
7. Is the counselor properly licensed? Does the counselor have the required education and credentials to do counseling?
8. Do you trust the counselor?
9. If you do not feel positive about a particular counselor on any one of the points above, move on and continue your search for one until you do.

During my years of serving as a pastor, I have ministered to people who exhibited symptoms of autism spectrum disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, narcissism, sociopathic personality disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorder, suicidal ideation, posttraumatic stress disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and dementia, to name a few. And then there were some who possessed personality traits that were simply annoying or puzzling. Each person has presented behaviors and thought processes unique to their condition. Yet each person has also presented an opportunity to minister to another of God's children, a soul to be saved for the kingdom. Sometimes, of course, such individuals are not always willing to admit there is a problem, much less accept a referral to a mental health professional.

In cases like these, I sometimes found it helpful to suggest to these persons that they see their personal physician for a full checkup and a mental health screening. It is a way, I say, to show their loved ones or even themselves that there is no need for concern and that their health status is fine. The latter suggestion often appeals to them. Use of this approach has sometimes been successful in convincing the individual to see someone qualified who can do a proper screening for potential physical and mental issues and offer an appropriate treatment response.

The sad truth remains that for the majority of cases, people do not receive treatment for any of these mental health conditions. They do not pursue professional treatment for various reasons (such as denial of a problem, lack of finances, minimal availability of qualified health care providers, or a desire to avoid any stigma that may come if they were to seek treatment for a mental illness). The number of persons who do not receive treatment for their mental illness is even higher among ethnic minority groups.⁸

Research shows that in developed countries, about 50 percent of the population do not receive treatment for mental illness. In developing countries,

that same lack of treatment being sought rises to 90 percent.⁹

Approximately 450 million persons suffer from such conditions globally, with about one in four people experiencing a mental or neurological condition at some time in their lives. These findings rank mental disorders among the major reported cases of illness and disability worldwide.¹⁰

In addition there is the fact that those who suffer from a mental illness will often have a co-occurring addictive disorder, thereby complicating their mental health status even further.¹¹ For example, depressive disorder cases are often seen combined with substance abuse and anxiety disorders.¹²

Referring those with mental health issues in the congregation

Clergy, as a rule, are not trained or qualified to formally make judgment calls of such a psychological nature or to provide mental health treatment for such conditions. Their expertise lies more in the areas of spiritual and pastoral counseling and support, which, in their own right, can be of great benefit to these individuals.¹³

Yet, cases of mental illness in its various forms are becoming more and more prevalent. To think that the same conditions would be reflected in the church, which is a cross section of the population of the country in which church members live, in my opinion, would only be logical.

With the overall rise in the number of mental illness cases, the possibility that mental health problems, for whatever reason, have affected particular members in the congregation of the church where you minister is something real to consider and be prepared to address. It can prove reassuring to members to know that you, as their pastor, have an understanding and empathy for what they and their family members are going through.

There may be members of your congregation right now who are exhibiting symptoms of one or more mental health conditions. Perhaps it

is an undiagnosed illness. They might have been that way for so long that, to them, their behavior is "normal" and in their minds everyone else has the problem. They may even hold positions of leadership and influence in your church.

You may have thought before that their behaviors seemed odd, but you never considered the possibility of one of the saints having a mental health issue as an explanation for their adamant need for sameness when you want to suggest change in the order of the worship service.

Perhaps you never considered that the difficult member in your congregation, who is sometimes deceitful and manipulative, yet so charming that they easily win the support of others to get their way; also has shown a striking similarity to the behavioral symptoms seen in a sociopathic personality disorder.

It might be that the member you have spent so much time providing pastoral counseling and support for—to help build their self-esteem and outlook on life, only to have them sink back into a severe state of depression the next time you see them; actually has symptoms of a bipolar disorder. And you never thought that they might be better served by encouraging them to first seek out a qualified health-care provider who could give them a full medical checkup that includes a mental health assessment to see whether there might be a chemical imbalance in their brain that must be treated with proper medication.


As a pastor, I have found it helpful to do a search to learn what mental health resources are available in my community so that I can have a list of them on hand for referring members and others to when the need arises. I also make contact with various counselors, mental health facilities, and other referral sources. I have introduced some professionals and agencies to my church in order to provide appropriate presentations and training for the benefit of my congregation and to familiarize the church regarding their services, such as domestic violence

agencies, substance abuse treatment personnel, the local police department community resource division, and individual counselors. Many offer excellent programs for churches.

As cases of mental illness continue to rise, the possibility that it will impact the lives of members in the church will continue to rise as well. Unfortunately, many cases will go undiagnosed and untreated. Yet many people who do seek help usually turn to clergy first. For many, clergy are the only resource that some will ever turn to for help regarding their mental health challenges.¹⁴

If clergy had a better understanding of mental illness, what symptoms to look for, and what resources are available in the community, it would equip them to be more effective in their ministry regarding mental health issues when they arise in the church.

With the proper tools and training, along with the motivation to implement them in their ministry, pastors can be better equipped to offer help to

those members in their congregations exhibiting symptoms of mental illness and to recognize, respond, and refer them, if necessary, to the resources and licensed professionals who are able to meet their psychological needs. 

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LETTERS

Continued from page 4



Quantity over quality

The lead article in the November 2016 issue, "Growing Local Churches God's Way," is disappointing. While the story of the Visalia church and Chad's spirit-filled leadership is inspiring, the article itself revealed a broadly held fallacy, one that even Chad recognized, as the interview revealed. The fallacy: quantity is the highest evidence of success in the church.

This was not Chad's emphasis, but it seemed to me to be the emphasis of the article—from the cover of the magazine to the direction of the interview. It seems that quantity growth is a denominational obsession. As a church, we MUST disavow quantity as our gold standard and choose quality. Our obsession with quantity over quality has been killing

us! Admittedly, a focus on quality may never bring the same numeric results, but it will bring Kingdom results. The command of Jesus is to make disciples, not church members.

I am excited about what God did in the Visalia church—admittedly, it would be exciting if this was a common story! Chad recognized, however, that in spite of the exciting growth, quality was lacking. In our hearts we know this is a problem, yet most of us pass quickly over those observations, riveted by the tantalizing, sparkly splash of numeric growth. We assume that quality will take care of itself. It won't, just observe the church we have today. We are reaping the consequences of quantity driven evangelism. Numeric increase is not evidence of kingdom growth—and

this is not a criticism of Chad or the Visalia church. It is a criticism of our obsession with numeric change as our primary metric, instead of quality. In the end, it is the wise virgins who have adequate oil that end up attending the marriage, not all ten, who were all part of the same crowd.

Quality matters. Quality must become our leadership passion, not quantity. Quantity will take care of itself when quality is our focus. Really.

Many blessings to Chad in his ministry and the Visalia church in theirs, as they wrestle with the big challenge of quality growth, one that I wrestle with myself—and thank you, Chad, for honestly observing the dark lining of your inspiring ministry in Visalia.

—Nathan Stearman, pastor, Alaska Conference 

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Worshiping the one Creator God: Challenges and opportunities

Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev. 14:7b).¹

So proclaims the first of the three angels of Revelation 14:6–12 as he outlines God’s final message to humanity. Heaven’s call is “to every nation, language, tribe, and people.”

The proclamation is lucid and clear. However, it creates a challenge for those leading worship. How can we enjoy this privilege of worshiping God together while we come from such diverse backgrounds?

Paul’s evangelistic methods demonstrate an intuitive skill set in contextualizing the style of his message first to a Jewish audience, then to a God-fearing Greek audience, and finally to a completely pagan audience. Our mission outreach has attempted to follow Paul’s example and endeavored to bring the gospel to every nation, tribe, language, and people.

Contextualizing worship, however, is not a one-time event because we do not live in a static world. Cultures, tribes, languages, people groups, and generations are continually in a flux as a result of unpredictable and volatile factors, such as wars, migration, economic upheavals, and changes in media and social contours.

In view of such unpredictable changes, a congregation that is not ready to change, contextualize, and adapt its worship, evangelism, and fellowship styles heads slowly to its demise.

Yet, anytime we introduce change in the worship experience, conflicts inevitably follow. Worship wars have always been at play in Christianity. When in 1723, Thomas Symes, a New England Puritan pastor, tried to introduce Isaac Watts’s hymns to his congregation in place of songs from the hymnal, the tradition-bound saints threw this argument against the pastor’s efforts: “There are several reasons for opposing it. It’s too new. It’s often worldly, even blasphemous. The new Christian music is not as pleasant as the more established style, because there are so many new songs that you can’t learn them all. It puts too much emphasis on instrumental music rather than on godly lyrics. This new music creates disturbances, making people act indecently and disorderly. The preceding generation got along without it.”²

Do you remember your church’s last conflict? Perhaps it was singing with projected graphics rather than out of a hymnal. Maybe it was playing a guitar rather than an organ or a change in the order of service or using

a new translation for scripture reading. In any case, the conflict may have erupted because something different, something out of the ordinary for your congregation, was taking place.

While conflict over worship change may not be avoidable, the outcome does not have to be divisive; in fact, such a conversation can enable us to reflect on the substance of worship, not just the genre. Such a discussion can lead a congregation to fulfill both portions of the first angel’s message and create a worship service that is both relevant and deeply worshipful. This article will deal with what needs to change and how changes can be made.

What needs to change

Analyze the substance of your worship for truth and relevancy. A few years ago an automotive maker offered a new line of cars that outwardly looked similar to other cars on the market. Yet if you looked past the paint and the seats, everything was different. Traditional steel was replaced with lightweight aluminum. Brakes were replaced with generators. The gas tank was replaced with a battery pack, and the internal combustion engine was replaced with an electric motor. The result? Tesla was able to penetrate a crowded market by

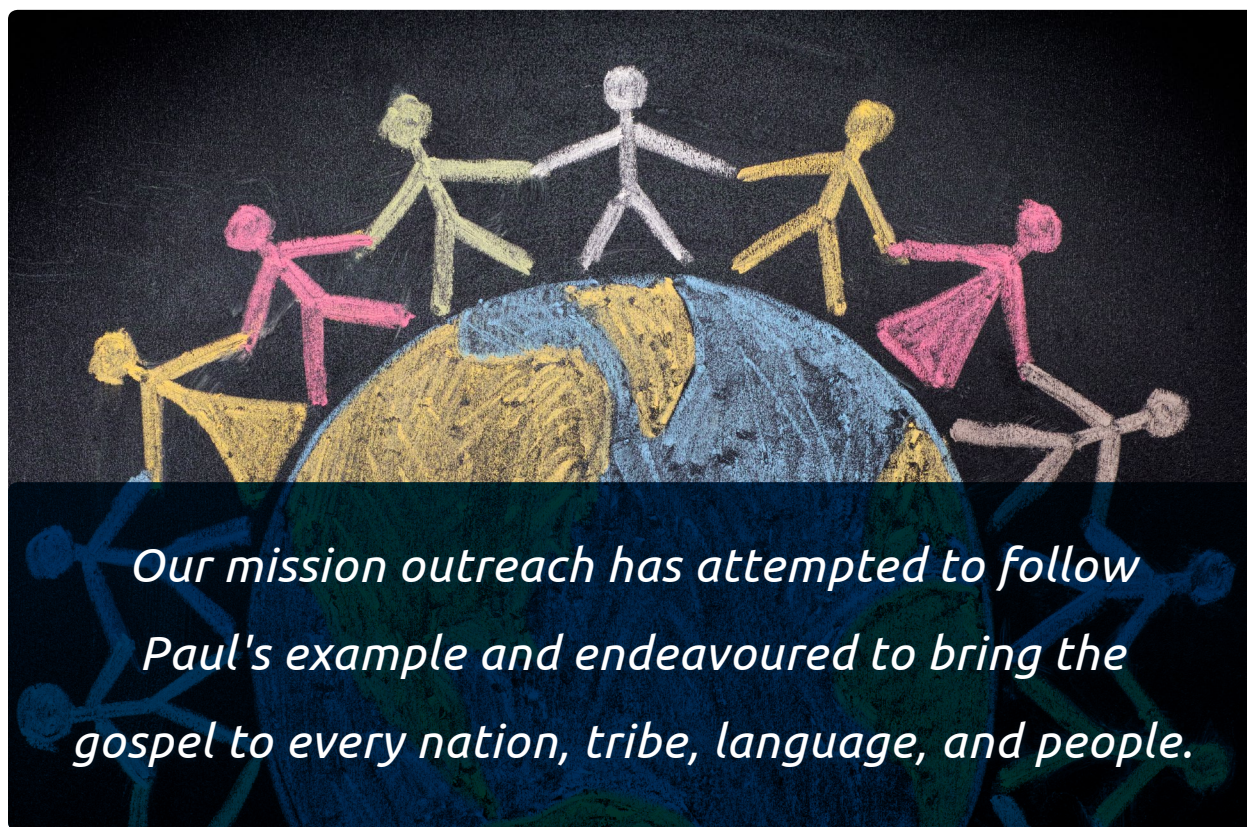
creating a car that was familiar enough for people to relate to, yet revolutionary in its technology.

What if we could reengineer the worship service for new peoples and generations without creating anxiety in the minds of older members who have invested their souls in their faith? I would like to suggest that we reexamine the substance of our worship services looking for truth

In the early days of Adventism, a tent in the prairie with lively music, energetic preaching, and sawdust trails was irresistible. Worship was radical, creative, and relevant for a generation of pioneers. Yet the sawdust trail is found only in history books and cannot be re-created with any relevance for current generations. On the other hand, current technologies such as smartphones and social media,

encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim. 4:2). Every worship service should be examined to make sure that truth is being taught. If no teaching happens, there will be no relevance for attendees, and eventually they will cease to come.

A good way to assess this would be to ask the question: Did you gain a new insight or understanding at the worship service today?



Our mission outreach has attempted to follow Paul's example and endeavoured to bring the gospel to every nation, tribe, language, and people.

and relevancy. A five letter acronym, ADORE, may be used as a template for analysis.

A—Appeal. Every worship service should have an appeal. Worship should change us, and opportunities should be given to make a decision to change. This opportunity was present in the New Testament's first large evangelistic and worship service: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.’” (Acts 2:38).

make excellent platforms for inviting people to respond to an appeal.

A way to assess the appeal element in your worship service would be to ask the question: Were you given an opportunity at the worship service today to make a decision to change something in your life?

D—Doctrine. Adventists have long focused on doctrine. Teaching truth is a vital part of any worship experience. Paul writes to Timothy: “Preach the Word; . . . correct, rebuke and

O—Oneness. Worship services need to promote the fellowship of the believers. In Gethsemane, this weighed heavily on Jesus: “‘I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one’” (John 17:20, 21). While congregants may differ widely on the introversion-extroversion continuum, almost everyone needs the fellowship of others to affirm them in their Christian journey. The look and feel of times of fellowship may be different

in congregations, but every worship service must intentionally provide opportunities for personal interaction with one another.

A way to assess this might be to ask the question: Did you have an opportunity at church today to interact with someone in a meaningful way?

R—Responsibility. How does a worship experience challenge you to make a difference in the world? Jesus challenges us to disciple those in the world: “‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations’ ” (Matt. 28:19). It is not enough to hope for the kingdom to come.

A sign on the egress of a church parking lot says, “You are now entering the mission field.” Worship service is more than a service for praise and worship. It is also a place for formulating, encouraging, and embarking on mission. A way to assess this might

be to ask the question: Did you feel challenged during the worship service today to make a difference in the world this next week?

E—Exaltation. This gets to the heart of worship. Again, from Revelation’s first angel: “‘Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water’ ” (Rev. 14:7b). This is probably the core of worship that is also perhaps the weakest in many Adventist churches.

An easy way to assess whether or not your worship service provided that opportunity would be to ask the question: Did you experience God’s presence during the worship time today?

This five-part acronym—ADORE—summarizes the elements that must be in a worship service in order to satisfy the soul of the worshipers. If one or two are missing or are done poorly, your worship service will fall

short of its potential. Tinkering with worship style or genre while ignoring these substantive elements will simply create conflict, and the goal of worship will still be elusive.

How to change without much conflict

Now that we have assessed what needs to be in place in order to maximize your congregation’s impact on the life and worshipers in your church, let us turn to some time-tested techniques that can create maximum change with minimal conflict.

Children. Some of the best candidates in your church to demonstrate a change in the worship service are children. People will give a lot of latitude to kids. If the change modeled by children seems to be well received, you might consider having an adult model it next time.



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I know of a church that was trying to reach a portion of their unchurched community who could be reached by a genre of music not heard in the congregation. Wisely, they chose a talented eight-year-old to introduce the new type of music. The congregation loved it. Now young people are coming to church in scores.

Guests. If the congregation understands that one of the roles of an Adventist worship service has always been evangelistic, then the needs of the unchurched guests can be highlighted. Churches that reach out to the unchurched and are growing can often be seen affirming, “The change in the worship service has drawn our guests to feel wanted, and they come in with a feeling that they are included.”

A large church discovered that their community had a high percentage of Catholics who are accustomed to coming to the front of the church to receive the Eucharist. As the worship team and pastoral staff discussed this question, they could find no theological reason why people had to be served in the pews. As they began to implement this change, they were not surprised that their Catholic friends were more familiar with the liturgy, but they were surprised that their senior members enjoyed the communion service more.

Public evangelistic meeting. One church introduced change in the way they did evangelism. Instead of the normal practice of holding an evangelistic campaign in the evening, the congregation decided that they would do evangelism in the worship service for the next few weeks. This new style of worship was lively and exciting, and their unchurched friends enjoyed the service. As the campaign began to wind down, many in the congregation began to wonder why some of the worship elements that were introduced for the evangelistic campaign could not be used in the regular service. The pastor took this to a vote, and the congregation voted almost unanimously to

adopt the evangelistic-style worship service as their regular worship format.

Experiment. Change is more palatable if it is not forced upon people. If people know that something is not going to be permanent, they can more easily endure it and maybe even learn to like it.

The leadership team in one church thought that the church service could be more meaningful if the elders of the church sat in the congregation with their families instead of in big chairs on the platform behind the preacher. This was particularly distracting because one of the elders had a tendency to fall asleep during the sermon and was known to snore loudly. The worship team did not ask the board for permission to make this change in the church. Instead they asked the board how they felt if for one week the elders could sit with their families as a kind of experiment. The board approved the experiment. Next time the board met, most of the board members appreciated the change and asked the worship team to make this permanent.

Quality. A change in the style of music or adding video or drama can be one of the greatest sources of conflict in a congregation. To help ease people, change into new elements must be done with finesse and grace. Bad rhythm, pitchy voices, or scratchy vocals are laughed off the stage on reality shows and probably should not be permitted in a church worship service, either. Music that is done poorly will not only offend the seasoned saints but also turn off a new generation.


Genuine. Worship leaders should be chosen from a pool of people who have an authentic relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ. Worship leading on Sabbath morning must be an overflow of personal worship that the leader has experienced throughout the week. If the life of worship leaders outside of church goes in an entirely different direction, they will have great difficulty leading people into the presence of God. Even if the congregation

does not know the reason why, it will intuitively sense that something is wrong.

Add, do not take away. Many church wars take place not when new things are added but when old things are taken away. People many times react in defensive anger when something that they love, cherish, and find meaningful is stolen from them.

One congregation went into conflict when, for the sake of trying to become contemporary, they discontinued using the doxology. What they did not realize is that this 20-second element in the worship service was meaningful to a large portion of the congregation. For them, this was a high point in the worship service where they sensed great joy in worshiping God. Wisely, the worship team reinstated the doxology and retained the older folks without losing the young people.

Conclusion

Change is the only constant in the world. Worship is no exception. As we open the front door of the church for new generations and people groups, we need to continually recreate worship that is meaningful for their context and at the same time ensure that the older worshipers do not walk out through the back door. The elements that provide the greatest meaning are appeal, doctrine, oneness, responsibility, and exaltation. When congregations begin to understand worship and lead change in thoughtful ways, churches can deftly move forward with the message of the first angel. The angel commissions us to proclaim the eternal gospel “to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. . . . ‘Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water’ ” (Rev. 14:6, 7). 

1 All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

2 As quoted by Dan Martella in “The Problem With Today’s Music,” Best Practices for Adventist Ministry, NAD Ministerial, <http://conta.c2gR64Yo>.

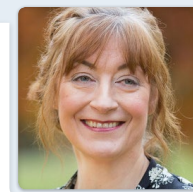


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Creating emotional balance in an unbalanced world

I have paddled my toes in the great sea of burnout—probably even waded in up to my chest. I'm not sure how deep. When life feels completely overwhelming, you can take one small step and suddenly discover that there is no ground under your feet, and you are desperately treading water. For several months I lay awake at night, too stressed from the day to unwind, and then struggled at work because I was too exhausted from my sleepless night.

A few years later I was offered freelance work. The project was to create a workshop on helping children flourish by experiencing healthy and balanced emotions. As I researched the topic, I discovered that, as a ministry leader, I could make wiser and more balanced choices about my own life. I could *choose* to think positive thoughts that would help me experience healthier emotional balance and protect me from the risk of burnout. Eventually, after 40 years, I was learning how to live out my high school motto: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Phil. 4:8).¹

Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson researched the effects of positive thinking on our psychological well-being.² She suggests that in order for us to have healthy emotional balance in our lives, we need to have at least

three positive emotional experiences for every negative emotional experience and more than three to one if we want to flourish. Negative emotions are those that drain us and deplete our resources, and positive emotions are those that refuel and refresh us. Even though we cannot eliminate negative emotions from our lives, because they are a resultant component of living in an imperfect world, we can learn to deal with such draining emotions by identifying them and understanding their potential effect on our emotional, spiritual, physical, and relational well-being. We can *choose* to experience positive emotions, just as Paul did, to help us stay emotionally healthy through the challenges of pastoral ministry.

Negative emotions

Fredrickson³ identifies some negative emotions we are most likely to experience:

- Shame—when you feel a sense of inadequacy and a feeling of personal failure.
- Guilt—when you feel bad about having done something wrong.
- Sadness—when you have lost something precious to you.
- Embarrassment—when your mistakes are made public or when you are being ridiculed.
- Disgust—when you experience something that looks, smells, sounds, tastes, or feels revolting

- Contempt—when you have a sense of your own superiority and look down on someone with bitterness.
- Anger—when you feel hostile about something or toward someone.
- Fear—when you are not sure whether you can cope with the challenge you are facing.
- Stress—when you have more to do than you can easily manage or when you think that other people will be disappointed in you, even when you do your best.
- Frustration—when something prevents you from reaching your goals as quickly as you had hoped, or people are unreasonably critical of you.

Some negative emotions are useful. They can encourage us to make healthy changes in our lives. Stress reminds us to manage our workload differently, ask for help, or share the load with someone else. Fear can protect us from dangerous situations. Guilt reminds us to ask for forgiveness from God and those we have hurt and find ways to repair the broken relationship. Mourning and sadness are natural and healthy responses to losing someone who has been important in our lives or something that was valuable to us. All of these emotions inspire us to pray for the help, wisdom, and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Fredrickson studied love and a variety of other positive emotions like joy, inspiration, and pride through the lens of social science,

rooted in research studies, hypotheses, and data. However, biblical counsel informs us that God presents a plethora of opportunities for us to experience positive emotions that protect us from depression, despair, and thoughts and experiences that deplete our emotional resources.

God's gifts

Some of God's gifts are inspiration, hopefulness, thankfulness, joy, kindness, serenity, job satisfaction, and wonder. Weave a few of these positive thoughts and emotions in your life to counter the negative emotions, and notice the difference they make to your emotional and spiritual well-being.

Inspiration. Observe what Paul says: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Phil. 4:8).

Now consider the following:

- How does God inspire you? How did He inspire you to become a pastor? Which aspects of your ministry do you find most inspiring? What was the most inspiring moment for you today, yesterday, or last week? Are there instances when you felt closest to God? How can you spend more time with God to experience His fullness and sufficiency?
- Make a list of Bible verses and psalms that inspire you the most. Read them when you need inspiration. Focus on the most important message for your life.
- Read Philippians 4 and list Paul's ideas for encouraging Christians to have healthy and positive emotions.
- Collect biographies of famous Christians who did amazing things with God. Read or listen to their stories. Ask yourself: What do I like best about this story? Which part of their story is most like my story? What should be the most important message in their life stories for me today?

Hopefulness. Consider Jeremiah's counsel: "For I know the plans I have

for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jer. 29:11).

What are the thoughts and ideas that undermine your hopefulness? Could it be that you have experienced deep tragedies and disappointments? Or perhaps your life has been so busy that you do not have time to plan events and look forward to them. Or you have not had time to focus on the wonder and miracle of heaven and the promises of Jesus. To help you tap into the resources that will restore your hopefulness, consider the following:

- Keep a notebook of Bible verses and promises that nurture your hopefulness.
- List the ways God has helped you through your challenges in the past. When did you manage a setback well? Who and what helped you manage the crisis? What useful insights have you learned from those experiences?
- Plan something small to look forward to each week. This could be having lunch with your spouse or a friend, studying with an enthusiastic Bible student, visiting an inspiring senior, going for a walk with a friend, planning something fun with your family, or spending time working on your hobby.
- Collect all the messages, emails, and cards you have received that fill you with hope. Read them again when your hopefulness needs a boost.
- Nurture someone else's hope. Send them an encouraging card or message. Let them know that you are praying for them.

Thankfulness. The apostle says: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18). What prevents you from experiencing gratitude? Maybe you are so busy that you find it difficult to pause and notice the thousands of gifts God gives you every day of your life. Each breath, each step, each thought, each movement, each smile is a gift from Him. Or maybe you are facing serious

challenges, and your mind is filled with worries and concerns. Here are some things you can do about such issues:

- Start your day by being grateful to God. Before you even crawl out of bed, pause and thank Him for at least a few of the many gifts He pours into your life.
- Use a notebook to write about whatever fills your heart with thankfulness.
- Memorize psalms of gratitude, such as Psalms 100, 107, or 118 so you can recall or recite them when you are driving in your car or meditate on them when you are in the shower.
- Write thank-you letters to those who have had a significant influence in your life.
- Find creative ways to thank as many people as possible, every day.
- As you drive or walk along the road, notice all the things you want to thank God for. It helps to be thankful for specific things, rather than be generally grateful.
- Use the letters of the alphabet to prompt your gratitude. List the things you are grateful for that begin with each of the letters.
- Write down all the things you are thankful for each day on a chalkboard or whiteboard in your study.
- Make a gratitude jar. Each day write on a slip of paper something you are thankful for and put it into the jar. When you struggle to be thankful, pull a few slips out of the jar and read what you wrote on other days.
- Sit quietly and thank God specifically, and in detail, for at least three gifts He gave you during the day. Write them in your gratitude journal or diary.

Laughter and joyfulness. The wise man says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine" (Prov. 17:22). "There is a time for everything, / and a season for every activity under the heavens / . . . a time to laugh" (Eccl. 3:1, 4).

When did you last have a really good laugh? What stops you from experiencing joy and fun in your life or with your family and friends? The sense of humor

comes as a gift from God to help us de-stress and connect with each other. Here are a few tips to maintain your humor quotient:

- Create a “funny file”—an ordinary file box packed with funny cards, cartoons snipped from newspapers, amusing stories, and your favorite comedies on DVD. Dip into it when you are feeling low to balance your stress hormones with some smiles and laughter.
- Watch the *Matthew* DVD—in this version of the gospel story, Jesus is depicted as someone who is full of smiles and laughter, with the sheer delight of being able to share God’s love with a hurting world.

simple act of kindness can make. Explore kindness ideas on the Web site or sign up for sample ideas.

- Offer 20 minutes to help your spouse, child, or friend with a challenging task.
- Place some coins in someone’s expired parking meter.
- Do something kind for someone who experiences a challenging time.
- Reach out to another pastor or church leader and surprise them with the gift of kindness.

Serenity. “Peace I leave with you,” said Jesus. “My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). What

Wonder. “For you created my inmost being; / you knit me together in my mother’s womb. / I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; / your works are wonderful, / I know that full well” (Ps. 139:13, 14).

What prevents you from experiencing moments of wonder? Maybe the pressure of time and work or forgetting to pause and focus on the wonders of God’s creation. When you open your eyes to look for God’s wonders, you will feel refreshed, inspired, and uplifted. Why not stop for a few moments and look at the myriads of wonders that are all around you?

- When you are walking down a city street, notice the little plants that

We can choose to experience positive emotions, just as Paul did, to help us stay emotionally healthy through the challenges of pastoral ministry.

- Share with someone the funniest thing that happened to you during the day or the funniest idea you had.
- Buy an annual zoo pass—walk among the animals and smile at their antics whenever you need to balance your life with healthy laughter. Watch the meerkats, lemurs, and monkeys. God certainly showed His sense of humor when He created them!

Kindness. “Be kind and compassionate to one another,” counsels the apostle (Eph. 4:32). Being kind to others seems to be one of the best ways to experience happiness yourself, as long as you are still being kind to yourself. Try these pointers:

- Make a list of all the kind acts that Jesus did.
- Watch the *Kindness Boomerang* video at www.lifevestinside.com/film and notice the difference a

soothes you and calms you after a stressful day? Notice when you are feeling calm and identify what soothes you. Also notice what disrupts your peace so that you can manage those disruptions more effectively:

- Make a list of soothing and comforting Bible verses to memorize or read.
- Create a playlist of music that helps you unwind and relax, such as classical music, hymns, and other Christian songs. Keep calming CDs in your car. Or sing soothing hymns to yourself.
- Take a cool shower, a warm bath, or a walk in the woods. Walk around your garden, share a favorite drink, work out in the gym, light a candle, sit by a log fire, or watch the ocean.
- Write your troubles and negative thoughts in a notebook entitled “In God’s hands,” and place them in His care.

manage to survive between the cracks. Watch the clouds in the sky. Listen to birdsong. Take a diversion through a park. Sit on a bench and look at the detail of the bark, the shape, and the leaves of an elegant tree.

- Look closely at a beautiful flower and notice the colors and shading of the hues. Or take a few minutes to explore the detailed construction of your hands and wonder at the amazing creation of your own body.
- Gather some interesting natural objects—like shells, stones, seed-pods, and bark—and place them in a wooden bowl on your desk. Whenever you feel stressed, choose an object. Focus on it for a few moments until you can list three wondrous things about it that you have never seen before.

- Search the Internet for short videos of natural wonders, birds, or webcams in national parks.

Job satisfaction. “Whatever you do,” says Paul, “work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Col. 3:23). What prevents you from experiencing positive job satisfaction? Maybe you have never been able to arrive at the bottom of your “to do” list. Is it focusing on all the different mistakes you have made and the things that weren’t quite perfect? Are there critical voices grumbling around in your thoughts that have been there since your childhood? Here are some things you can do:

- Make a list of ten areas of efficiency covering work, hobbies, and relationships. Review it to see how you can incorporate more of your strengths into your ministry and life.
- At the end of each day ask yourself, *What went well today?* Write at least three items.


- If something did not go so well, call it a learning experience. List three things you can learn from it and plan what you could do differently next time.

- Affirm your colleagues when they have done something well and celebrate their accomplishments.

As a family therapist, I have promoted activities that nurture positive emotions in both church and community workshop settings. When working with pastors and their spouses, we stress the need for balancing our emotions. Individuals and couples explore at least ten different activity tables complete with materials and instructions needed to help nurture positive emotions, such as calmness, joy, gratitude, inspiration, and humor. Even the children have enjoyed participating.

Workshop participants are sent away with gift bags containing resources such as beautiful natural objects and inspiring Bible verses to help them

experience positive emotions at home. Thank-you cards for friends are included because benefits are magnified when positive experiences are shared.

Fredrickson states, “Gratitude opens your heart and carries the urge to give back—to do something good in return, either for the person who helped you or for someone else.”⁴ Scripture declares, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:18); “Give, and it will be given to you” (Luke 6:38a). Adherence to biblical counsel on positivity is consistent with the best counsel from social science research and is a major factor in addressing the issue of pastoral burnout. 

1 All Scripture references are from the New International Version.

2 Barbara Fredrickson, *Positivity: Top-Notch Research Reveals the Upward Spiral That Will Change Your Life* (New York, NY: Harmony, 2009).

3 <http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/barb-fredrickson/>

4 Barbara Fredrickson, *Positivity*, 41.

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An immediately answered prayer

Joyce swore that she would never set foot in the church again. But something drew her back, and on a bright spring morning she popped into our congregation for the worship service. Joyce met me in my office later that week and shared her story. Shortly after that we began meeting on a weekly basis for studies. Joyce became my friend.

As we studied, it became apparent that there were real obstacles in her life. While she had fond memories of the church, there were difficult times that had cast shadows over those memories. She had made poor choices during her youth, and the combination

of guilt and the rough treatment by some church members was enough to create bitterness and distrust.

As we studied, there was a major sticking point that kept Joyce from fully surrendering to Christ. It was then that our church began to increase our prayer efforts for her more earnestly.

Immediately after one of those seasons of prayer I received a text from Joyce. While we were praying, she was having her personal devotional time with God, and she found a verse that stopped her cold. Her text to me read: “I found the evidence I needed—I want to be baptized.”

At the very time we were kneeling in intercession, our God heard our prayer and led Joyce to a deeper understanding of His Word. I am so grateful that as a pastor, I have an incredible Helper in the great work of leading souls to Him!

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Revival
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YOU, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR CHURCH, YOUR COMMUNITY

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Comforting God

In both the Old and New Testaments, there are numerous references to God as a Comforter of His people (Ps. 119:50; Isa. 40:1; 51:3; 61:1; Matt. 5:4; 2 Cor. 1:4). In this world of sin, suffering, and sorrow, there is a great need for each of us, at varying times and in varying circumstances in our lives, to experience the comfort of God personally. When humans do not grieve real losses and experience comfort, they stay emotionally stuck and have difficulty moving into the joy and freedom that is our heritage as Christian believers.¹ Biblically speaking, it is not difficult to build the case for the human need for God's comfort. But could it also be true that God is blessed by our human desire to minister to His pain?

Does God suffer? I would suggest an affirmative response for the following reasons. First, we were created in God's image, which implies that He not only has thoughts (Isa. 55:8; Jer. 29:11) but also has emotions.² Second, when God expresses His emotions in the Scriptures, they are strong (Hos. 11:8, 9). Third, the Scriptures teach that we, as human beings, have the capacity to hurt God (Ps. 78:40, 41). Fourth, God is a God of compassion. John Peckham states, "The biblical language of *compassion* explicitly depicts 'suffering along with,' akin to sympathy/empathy, that is, responsive feeling of emotion along with and for the object of compassion (compare Is 49:15; Jer 31:20)."³

Building on this concept of compassion, God feels our pain in addition

to His own. "In all their suffering he also suffered, and he personally rescued them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them through all the years" (Isa. 63:9).⁴ "Through all our trials we have a never-failing Helper. He does not leave us alone to struggle with temptation, to battle with evil, and be finally crushed with burdens and sorrow. Though now He is hidden from mortal sight, the ear of faith can hear His voice saying, Fear not; I am with you. 'I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore.' Revelation 1:18. I have endured your sorrows, experienced your struggles, encountered your temptations. I know your tears; I also have wept. The griefs that lie too deep to be breathed into any human ear, I know. Think not that you are desolate and forsaken. Though your pain touch no responsive chord in any heart on earth, look unto Me, and live."⁵ To summarize, God suffers deeply, allows Himself to be hurt by human beings, and at the same time compassionately feels pain when we are hurt.

Is God's pain the same as ours? Perhaps yes and no. It is true that Jesus wept (John 11:35), was angry (Mark 3:5), and groaned in His spirit (John 11:33), but did He feel these feelings only as a man or also as God? When we behold the sufferings of Jesus, it is in His suffering that we are healed (Isa. 53:5). It is in the Cross of Jesus, His rejection, abandonment, and physical and emotional abuse, that we are healed. By His taking our sufferings, our guilt,

and our shame into His sufferings, we find comfort and healing. This is a real challenge for some. Paul Coneff writes, "For some reason, some people like to separate Jesus' dying for our suffering from His dying for our sins. But the truth is, unless we are comfortable with ignoring scriptures like Isaiah 53, Hebrews 2:10, Hebrews 2:17–18, and Hebrews 4:14–15, Revelation 13:8—and all the New Testament verses stating that part of Jesus' mission and plan of salvation was to suffer—we can't ignore the fact that, on the cross, Jesus embraced not just our sin but our suffering, too."⁶ By looking at Jesus' victory over the temptation to use His own power on His own behalf and to medicate His own pain, we find strength in His victory over these temptations to overcome our own temptations.

As the unique God-man, we would conclude that Jesus suffered both as God and as man following the line of reasoning above. If this is so, Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane fully felt the pain of sin and the results of sin for all humankind. It is no wonder that He "became anguished and distressed" and said, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death" (Matt. 26:37, 38). He desired human compassion, but did not receive it, and an angel came to strengthen Him. He was in such agony that His sweat was like great drops of blood (Luke 22:43, 44). I would like to suggest that because God suffered for all of humankind (John 3:16; Heb. 2:9), His suffering was greater than ours in volume. "Jesus reassures His disciples

of God's sympathy for them in their needs and weaknesses. Not a sigh is breathed, not a pain felt, not a grief pierces the soul, but the throb vibrates to the Father's heart."⁷

When we are hurt as humans, we do our best to protect ourselves from pain using our defense mechanisms. In doing so, we close ourselves off from those who have hurt us. It is reasonable to conclude that after the fall of humankind, God allowed defense mechanisms and coping strategies so that when pain occurred, humans would survive

Rather, He kept his heart open to those who hurt Him so that, if possible, He might win them for the kingdom. If this is so, then not only the volume of Jesus' suffering was greater than ours but also the depth of His suffering. Therefore, His need for comfort is also greater.

In looking further at God's suffering in the Old Testament, Jeremiah 8:18–9:2 are most often attributed to Jeremiah himself. He is called the "weeping prophet." However, when read in context, these verses appear to be the words of God Himself. After

But some rightly ask, Does God need anything from humans? Is the all-sufficient Creator God in need of anything from His creatures? Perhaps not, but perhaps this is the wrong question. The relationally perfect Persons of the Trinity loved and risked everything on Their love for the human beings made in Their image. It is bold love that risks the possibility of hurt and pain connected to freedom. But relationship, by definition, can never be unidirectional. In godly love, there is both giving and receiving. Yes, there can

In this world of sin, suffering, and sorrow, there becomes a great need for each of us, at varying times and circumstances in our lives to experience the comfort of God personally.

it. Imagine Adam and Eve's profound grief after the loss of both of their sons, Abel and Cain (Gen. 4:8–15). When these coping mechanisms do not work well, mental illness often is the result.⁸ Attempts to self-medicate pain often lead to various addictions that become self-destructive. However, God never used or now uses His own power on His own behalf. In other words, God feels our pain fully in all of its rawness without any anesthetic. Therefore, when we suffer, God feels our pain more than we do. In all of our suffering, He also suffers to the fullest extent possible. It is important to note that God is able to bear suffering in a way that far exceeds our own. He is not crippled by suffering in the way that we are, yet He does not feel it any less!

Likewise, Jesus in His sufferings did not use His divine power to protect Himself from pain. I would also suggest that Jesus did not use the human defense mechanisms that were available to Him.

God speaks in Jeremiah 8:17, the text continues into verse 18: "My grief is beyond healing; my heart is broken. Listen to the weeping of my people; it can be heard all across the land. 'Has the LORD abandoned Jerusalem?' the people ask. 'Is her King no longer there?' 'Oh, why have they provoked my anger with their carved idols and their worthless foreign gods?' says the LORD. . . . I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn and am overcome with grief. Is there no medicine in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why is there no healing for the wounds of my people? If only my head were a pool of water and my eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night for all my people who have been slaughtered." Can you picture this as God's heart toward His people and His suffering for them? When we consider the suffering that we have put and continue to put God through, do not our hearts yearn to bring even a bit of comfort to the One we have injured?

be unrequited love, and God often complains about that toward His people (Isa. 5:1–4). However, God's ideal for Himself and His people is a mutuality of relational love. He describes Himself as the Bridegroom and His people as the bride. God longs for His people. He wants their affections, their praise and thanksgiving. So perhaps it is less about God needing comfort and more about His longings and desires to receive it from His people.

John Peckham, in his canonical exposition of God's love, seems to agree. He states the following: "My investigation of the canonical data concludes that divine love in relation to the world is ideally reciprocal, yet asymmetrical. That is, God desires reciprocal love relationship with every person but enters into and enjoys a particular, intimate relationship with only those who freely reciprocate his love."⁹ Applying this to the suffering of God, it would further help us to understand that God would

be blessed by the comfort offered by His people. A desire to comfort God flows from intimate knowledge of God. Peckham, along with many other biblical scholars, describes God's emotional passibility; that is, that God can be affected by the actions of His creatures. When God laments, " 'Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? / How can I let you go? / . . . My heart is torn within me, / and my compassion overflows' " (Hos. 11:8), God is demonstrating passionate passible emotion.¹⁰

Some well-known Christian songs speak to God's desire to receive the worship of humans. Consider Laurie Klein's 1996 recording of "I Love You Lord." "I love You Lord, / And I lift my voice / To worship You, / Oh, my soul rejoice. / Take joy my King, / In what you hear. / Let it be a sweet, / Sweet sound in Your ear."¹¹ These hymns capture the heart of God so well! The hymn writers understood God and His longing for our praise. These songs connect our heart with God's heart. By singing them from our hearts, we bring Him joy and comfort in the process.

Confession and repentance

Another way that humans comfort God is through confession and repentance. When we sin, we deeply wound God. However, when we admit our sin, allow our hearts to be broken by this realization, and resolutely turn away from sin, God experiences joy and comfort. In Luke 15:4–7, Jesus told the story of the lost sheep. When the shepherd searches for and finds the one lost sheep, Jesus extends the analogy by saying " 'In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away' " (v. 7). Likewise, in the parable of the lost coin, Jesus concludes the story by saying, " 'In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents' " (v. 10). It would appear that God expresses His


unbridled joy in the presence of the angels in the heavenly courts above. The repentance of His children must surely be an immense source of comfort to God.

Comforting others

We also comfort God by comforting others. Second Corinthians 1:4 instructs us to comfort others with the comfort that we've experienced. When we bear one another's burdens, attentively listen to the painful stories of others, offer prayers of comfort and hope, or give tangibly to persons in need, we are comforting God because He said, "When you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!" (Matt. 25:40). Lessening the suffering of others, it would seem, also lessens the suffering of God. In John 15, Jesus spoke about the intimacy between Himself and His followers using the analogy of the vine and the branches. John 17 speaks of this unity even more explicitly: " 'I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be one in us so that the world will believe you sent me' " (v. 21). Building on this idea, Paul states that "we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13), and Ephesians 5:23 identifies Christ as the head of the body, the church. This sampling of New Testament scriptures identifies the intimacy between Christ and His people. Based on this oneness, what affects one of us also has an impact on all of the others including our Head, Brother, Father, and Savior, Jesus. This understanding gives us both the right and the responsibility to bring comfort to God.

"Get God"

Finally, we comfort God by entering into His experience empathically. When we "get God" the way David did, we become men and women after God's own heart. David "developed a heart after God's because he had a heart that

had room for others."¹² David's heart resonated with God's heart. When commenting on David's sin with Bathsheba, Curt Thompson says, "David's heart—his emotion—even in his guilt and shame, appears to be fully engaged with God's heart—God's emotion. . . . In effect, the prophet (Nathan) is saying, 'God gets you. And he gets that you get him.' "¹³ With God's heart resonating within us, we can tell God from the depths of our hearts how sorry we are that He had to suffer. We will express sorrow not only for how our sins have hurt Him but for how He's been hurt by the sin of others as well. In this, we become intercessors on God's behalf. We develop hearts after God, and we believe that our prayers of empathy genuinely touch God's heart. Is God comforted by our ministry to others, by our empathy, by our repentance, and by our heartfelt singing? The Word of God indicates that He is, and I fully agree! 

1. David and Beverly Sedlacek, *Cleansing the Sanctuary of the Heart: Tools for Emotional Healing*, 2nd ed. (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, 2014), 76–80.
2. Chantal J. Klingbeil and Gerald A. Klingbeil, "My Heart Falters, Fear Makes Me Tremble" (Isaiah 21:4, NIV): Emotions and Prophetic Writings in the Bible," *Ministry* (October 2016), 10–13.
3. John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 178.
4. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations have been taken from the New Living Translation.
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► In the Dominican Republic, Adventists share hope during national outreach campaign

Azua, Dominican Republic—Seventh-day Adventists in the Dominican Republic shared messages of hope with hundreds of people in the city of Azua in the southern part of the island during a city-wide impact October 22, 2016. Church leaders and members provided music and drama performances on Bible prophecy and distributed magazines at the Juan Pablo Duarte Park.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in the Dominican Republic also distributed dozens of backpacks filled with school supplies to the children in coordination with the Hispanic Association for Citizenship Development in the Dominican Republic. The initiative is part of a national campaign by the Adventist Church to share hope in cities and communities that are affected by the

escalating violence affecting the island and the world.

“You see the wars affecting us daily and how the condition of this world is deteriorating,” said Pastor **Cesario Acevedo**, president of the Dominican Union Conference. “The national hope campaign began earlier this year,” said Acevedo, and so far three cities in the southern part of the island, Azua, San Juan, and Barahona, have decided to take part. “We are taking this to our national district in Santo Domingo to cover all thirty-two provinces on the island,” he added. Adventist education and local Adventist school leaders also took part in the day’s event as well as the church’s main Adventist radio station, Radio Amanecer.

“We have a responsibility to proclaim the soon coming of Jesus and prepare disciples for the kingdom in



[Photo: ADRA Dominican Republic]

every city and in every community here in the Dominican Republic,” said Pastor Acevedo. “People urgently need this hope of salvation.”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Dominican Republic has more than 286,500 members worshipping in 1,291 churches and congregations. The church operates a hospital, a university, a radio station, and dozens of secondary and primary schools. [Inter-American Division Staff]

► Church leaders mark Religious Freedom Day

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—Seventh-day Adventist religious liberty leaders marked International Religious Freedom Day, October 27, 2016, by asking church members around the world to remember those who suffer discrimination or persecution for their faith.

According to recent statistics from the Pew Research Institute, some two-thirds of the world’s population live in countries where religious freedom is compromised either by laws or by social attitudes. Dr. **Ganoune Diop**, director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the Adventist General Conference, says these religious freedom challenges can take many different forms.

“For some church members, Sabbath keeping in the workplace or

at school is a continuing challenge that makes it difficult to find a job or advance professionally,” he said, citing recent cases reported from South Korea, India, and some African nations. “In other countries, there may be discrimination within the legal system, making religious minorities vulnerable to false accusations or injustice.”

Diop points to the case of **Sajjad Masih Gill**, an Adventist Church member currently serving a life sentence under Pakistan’s controversial blasphemy laws. He was convicted in 2013 in a trial marked by irregularities and tainted evidence.

In the West African country of Togo, Adventist Church member **Bruno Amah** has been in prison since 2012

and is serving a life sentence for a murder conviction that has generated international concern and sparked worldwide prayer vigils and letter-writing campaigns. Adventist pastor **Antonio Monteiro** was arrested along with Amah but was acquitted in 2014.

For other church members, says Diop, religiously motivated violence poses real dangers to individuals and their families. Up to 40 Christians were killed and eight wounded when Muslim Fulani herdsmen attacked the Nigerian town of Godogodo with guns and machetes on October 15, 2016. This is the second time in as many months that the town has been targeted.

Also a news report from Pakistan describes the violent eviction of an Adventist pastor and his family from

their home as part of a property dispute fueled by religious tensions. *Christianity Today* reports that Pastor **Michael Robert** of the Adventist Church in Pakistan sustained serious injuries along with his wife and family when an armed mob entered his house.

“The plight of these church members is known,” says Diop. “Yet there are countless other men, women, and children of many different faiths who suffer the consequences of religious intolerance.”

This complex global reality will be the focus of the 8th World Congress for Religious Freedom, to be held August 22–24, 2017, at the beach-side Diplomat Resort and Spa by Hilton, in Hollywood, Florida. This event, organized by the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), will bring together some of the world’s foremost thinkers in the field of religious freedom.

According to Diop, who also serves as IRLA’s secretary general, the focus of the Congress—religious freedom and

the hope for peaceful coexistence—is especially relevant. “Learning to share the public space with those with whom we disagree, learning to overcome humanity’s abysmal record of religious wars, religious ethnic cleansing, and genocide-fuelled religious bigotry—these have become some of the most urgent challenges of our time.”

For more information, visit the International Religious Liberty Association Web site at www.irla.org. [Bettina Krause| International Religious Liberty Association]



[Photo: United Nations]



► Adventist group seeks to help end child marriage in Bangladesh



[Photo: Monosapara Adventist Seminary/Lukesh Raksham]

Cavite, Philippines—With 65 percent of its girls married before the age of 18, Bangladesh has been identified as having the world's highest rate of child marriages for girls younger than 15, according to the 2016 World Report by Human Rights Watch. An Adventist group is among the key non-governmental organizations in Bangladesh steadily addressing this troubling issue.

The Child Rights and Protection (CRP) initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bangladesh provided awareness and education training for Adventist boarding school principals on November 1, 2016, in Dhaka. With a focus on child abuse and child marriage prevention, the goal was to help principals further spread prevention messages and methods to their staff and community leaders.

Since CRP's inception in 2014, CRP coordinator **Ofelia Raksham** and her staff have diligently worked to create inroads among Adventist boarding schools and churches, especially in rural areas, where high poverty levels and strong cultural traditions have contributed to higher incidences of child

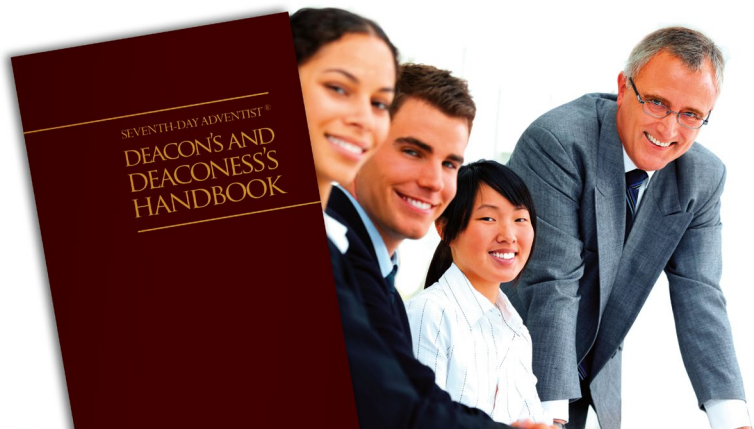
abuse and marriage. Due to the high community regard for Adventist education, the church's boarding schools have a unique opportunity to use their

influence to spread awareness and education regarding children's issues.

CRP staff encourages schools to work with local leaders to provide activities in honor of worldwide advocacy days for children such as the Stop Child Marriage Day, observed September 29, 2016. On Stop Child Marriage Day, Adventist schools hosted community activities such as debates, parades, and discussion groups.

As CRP continues to build on its training and advocacy work, they hope people will associate Adventists with those who speak out against tragedies such as child marriage and abuse with compassion, education, and perseverance.

CRP is a part of the Adventist Church's Bangladesh Children's Sponsorship Services under the umbrella of Bangladesh Union Mission through Asian Aid Australia. [Teresa Costello | Southern Asia-Pacific Division] [V](#)



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Theology Without Borders: An Introduction to Global Conversations

by William A. Dyrness and Oscar García-Johnson, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015.

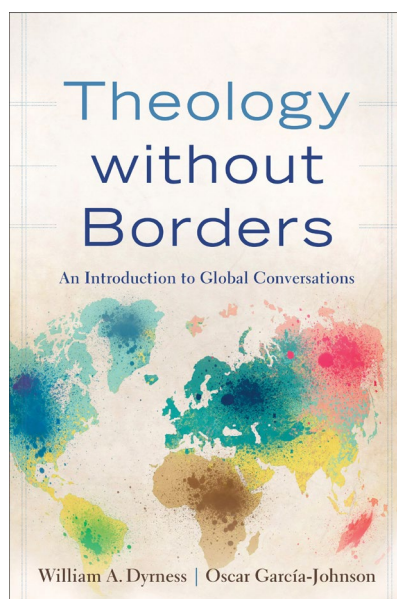
Theology *Without Borders*, by William A. Dyrness (emeritus professor of theology and culture) and Oscar García-Johnson (associate professor of theology and Latino/a studies) of Fuller Theological Seminary, is an introduction in how to embark upon the process of having global theological conversations. It calls for rethinking theology in a global context. Such a call is timely, as world Christianity continues to experience the proliferation of non-Western, indigenous Christianity. *Theology Without Borders* is a call for the theological traditions of the West to learn from and work together with the emerging voices from ancient cultures.

Based on the premise that no one's culture is superior, the authors propose "transoccidentalism" (geography of theology) as a starting point for reflection on global and local theology. Transoccidentalism advocates the reframing of multiculturalism outside of a Western framework. This orientation, enriched by border thinking, is ready to embrace complex cultural existences and seeks intercultural dialogue under a new set of social and theological conditions.

No wonder the book begins with García-Johnson's avowal of a geopolitical and biographical description of theology as a way to embark on a de-colonial process of forging the basis for a theological "common future." Dyrness continues by responding to the assumed superiority of Western theology and strongly calls the West to move from doing theology in a "self-centered" framework to one that is more encompassing through transoccidentalization.

The authors then examine the role of indigenous traditions in Christian

theology. These traditions are explored not only from a Western Christendom perspective but from the cultural traditions of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Such exploration began the conversa-




tion in global theology found in this text, replete with case studies on how conversations among Western theologians and non-Western theologians can initiate a global and local theology. This may be achieved through short, comparative, discursive conversations of the main tenets of such theologians. By so doing, dogmatic facets in theology (God), cosmology (Creation), anthropology, Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology, as well as eschatology, are succinctly explored.

In the case of a Christological conversation, theologians like N. T. Wright, Jose Ignacio Gonzalez Faus, Leonardo Boff, Benigno Beltran (Filipino), and Cyril Okorochoa (Nigerian) were brought

into a mutually constructive dialogue. The outcome shows not only the differences in starting points for theological reflection but also the influence of their different indigenous traditions (histories), resulting in a refreshing variety of perspectives on the nature of theological reflection, while remaining true to the central core of the gospel.

One thing that stands out in this book is the way Dyrness and García-Johnson drive home the point that if we are going to continue using the term *global theology*, it must represent a dialogical and culturally developed discipline and at the same time be global and local as well as intercultural. Moreover, this book is written by two scholars from two different cultural perspectives bringing their experience in multicultural ministry, praxis, and teaching. Hence, such a book becomes a practical and living example of conversation done with transoccidentalism for global theology.

The conversations constructed by Dyrness and García-Johnson touch indigenous traditions on a global and local level. Such conversations show that the flow of global theology should veer toward a more polycentric nature of Christianity. Thus, this book contributes to the ongoing discourse of the future of world and/or global Christianity. For those interested in fostering theological relationships among the multiplicity of theological reflections constantly emerging in world Christianity today, this is a welcome introduction.

—Reviewed by Chigemezi Nnadozie Wogu,
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Counseling the cancer patient

As a pastor you are faced from time to time with parishioners who are facing difficult health situations—maybe for themselves or for a close family member or friend.

For example: Susan, a young mother with two children and a loving husband, was diagnosed with early stage breast cancer in 2010. She was told by her physician that surgical removal of the lump would be the best treatment. The idea of surgery frightened her. Was there not another option? After all, she loved the Lord and had tried to live a healthy lifestyle all her life.

Bewildered and shocked by this news, she and her husband went home and began searching on the Internet for alternatives. It did not take long to find many options. There were clinics and lifestyle centers that treated breast cancer with “natural” methods like massage, hydrotherapy, and special diets. In addition, they found many other products and supplements designed to treat breast cancer. Each one promised a complete cure without the need for surgery.

They grew more confused and did not know what to do. Should she have surgery or opt for the “natural treatments”? They went back to her physician, and he gently affirmed her need of surgery.

Online they found many testimonies from people who said they had been cured from breast cancer by one means or another—without surgery. They talked to many friends and family members. Each one had a different opinion. Their confusion grew. What should she do?

They went to their pastor seeking help. After listening, he encouraged them to try some alternatives first, saying, “They probably won’t hurt, and they might help!”

They decided she would go to a lifestyle center that assured her that if she followed their plan, she could be healed. She adopted an animal-free diet along with other important health habits. The regimen of massage and hydrotherapy was relaxing. After about four weeks she returned home, faithfully following what she had learned, with the hope she had done the right thing.

It came as an awful surprise four years later to realize she had a very rapidly growing lump. At that point they solicited funds from their family, friends, and church so she could go to a treatment center in another country, where she was placed on a raw food diet and a unique hydrotherapy regimen for four months. The lump seemed to shrink, and she returned home and resumed her job.

About six months later she again had a rapidly growing lump. After gathering funds from friends and family, she went to yet another center promising a cure. There she was placed on a very strict program of drinking juice, walking, sunbathing, devotions, deep breathing, and hydrotherapy. The growth seemed to abate a bit, and she went home believing she was healed.


Sadly, in a short time the lump was growing again, complicated by back pain. She visited her physician, and after X-rays and an MRI, she was told she had stage IV bone cancer in her spine. Nothing could be done now. All that could be offered was help with pain control.

Her prognosis is not good. These heart-wrenching circumstances are all too familiar—even in our churches. How can you best provide support and guidance to families like this? Here are five specific ways you, as a pastor, can provide wise and supportive advice to those in these unfortunate situations:

1. Always point them to the Great Physician. Never fail to pray with

and for those afflicted with cancer. Do not just assure your parishioners you are praying for them—pray with them often and personally. Share promises of hope from the Bible with them.

2. Encourage your parishioners to follow the advice of their physicians. Often, as Seventh-day Adventists, we misunderstand the role of lifestyle. Healthy habits practiced over years of time are highly likely to reduce the risk of disease. However, those same preventive habits may have little impact in treating acute disease.
3. Recognize that your ministerial training does not qualify you to provide medical or treatment advice. Remember, just as you have spent years in training for your profession, so have our physicians spent years learning about the human body, diseases, and treatments. Do not be tempted to think that anecdotal stories or a few hours of searching on the Internet can make you qualified.
4. Provide practical assistance when needed and desired. This can include transportation to appointments, childcare during procedures and tests, or help with household chores. Obviously, your role may primarily be coordination of this assistance.
5. Familiarize yourself with community resources for both information and support groups. Most communities have valuable resource groups to support those who are in treatment and recovery.

We thank God for the team of professional chaplains, godly pastors, and committed physicians who are often called to be head, heart, and hands in the provision of love and support to church and community members during these difficult seasons in their lives. 

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Protestant Reformation Tour, Summer 2017

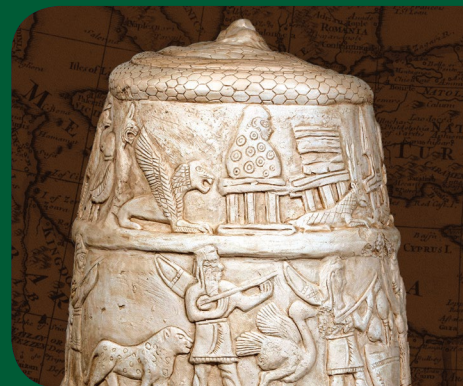
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