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God of the open door
MARK A. FINLEY
A beloved leader calls us to view a dispiriting streak of closed doors to the church as a providential stream of open doors to the community.

Get some roots!
CARLTON P. BYRD
A veteran evangelist appeals to us not only to delight in the parables of Scripture but also to discover the prophecies.

The power of “we”—pastoral ministry in a corporate world
INGRID HERNÁNDEZ
A caring chaplain reveals how the strength of team ministry can reach even the corporate world.

Amazing Jesus in turbulent times
KAYLE B. DE WAAL
A renowned theologian points us to the One who has been our help in ages past, and will be our hope for years to come.

A new normal? Technology and the church in the age of social distancing
JIMMY ARTHUR ATKINS
A prominent pastor warns that, when it comes to technology, preparation is profitable and procrastination is perilous.


Ministry in Motion Host: Anthony Kent Cohost: Ivan Williams
Ministry in Motion TV
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On the one hand . . .

That was an interesting article by Lori Stotko (“Emotional Intelligence for Effective Ministry,” March 2020)! It was very helpful for me to understand EQ (Emotional Intelligence). I got a chuckle from the first sentence under “Self-regulation” that stated, “We have an average of 400 emotional experiences a day.” What a lot! More than 20 an hour or about one every three minutes! Does that hold true across the gender spectrum? Thank you for the magazine! I appreciate it.

—Ertis Johnson, by email

I wish I could have read your superb article “12 Principles of Evangelistic Preaching” (David Klinedinst, January 2020) when I began my pastoral ministry in 1979 in the Oregon Conference. I appreciate what you expressed so well about enthusiasm and suggested volume changes in delivery. I would like to add just a little.

—I’m 88 and, via TV, there are only two or three pastors I regularly listen to. Many others, however sincere and inspiring, often preach too loudly, speak too rapidly, and talk too frequently and are very intense in their presentations. The pastors I appreciate most and who are such a blessing to this great-grandpa are the ones who use a more conversational style in their sermons (like most pastors do in their benediction). I’m particularly impressed and encouraged by Pastor Randy Roberts of Loma Linda University and Dr. Charles Stanley of First Baptist in Atlanta—they inspire me!

—Eric Kreye, Walla Walla, WA

On the other

Rodney Palmer’s article, “The Inseparable Duo: The Holy Spirit and Preaching” (January 2020), was a very good synopsis of the Spirit’s power and presence in both the origin of the Word of God and its declaration. Many of his observations are worthy of review by any preacher of the gospel. However, there is one point in his article which should probably be restated. Palmer writes, “Since the Bible is the product of God’s mind revealed through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12, 13), we can comprehend both the original meaning and its present application only through the assistance of the Spirit of God (vv. 13, 14; 2 Cor. 3:14–18; cf. John 6:45; 16:13).”

He continues, “Preachers are to rely on the Holy Spirit as they employ the principles of hermeneutics and homiletics. They must seek the Holy Spirit’s leading in selecting and studying the passage, discovering the exegetical concept, formulating the homiletical idea, determining the sermon’s purpose, choosing an illustration, and outlining and writing the sermon itself.” Yet Palmer quickly notes, “On the other hand, the preacher should never use the Holy Spirit as an excuse for not spending quality time in crafting a sermon.”

These positions seem to be contradictory. If we can comprehend the original meaning and application of Scripture through the Spirit of God, as well as discover the exegetical concept, then what, in essence, is the need for the use of any study aids whatsoever? If Palmer’s view here is pressed to its logical conclusion, it presents quite a dilemma for hearers of
Breaking news or normal news

I looked at my online tithe and offering envelope—and was tempted. A voice inside my head said, *You need your money for your household.* Our son Jamel and his wife, Sarai, have my wife, Pattiejean, and I locked up in the house. It’s not elder abuse—and it’s not all bad. They do the shopping. We get three meals a day. They let us out for walks. For our health. Not too far, now. Just around the neighborhood. We go. Like good pets.

But I can’t go to the shops as before. I can’t go to church. I can’t go to work. I can’t go to restaurants. I find myself asking, *Can I get back to normal?* Yet another part of me dismisses the normal. As I feverishly surf the channels, craving something hot off the press, I find myself asking, *Can I get some breaking news?*

What’s normal?

Maybe normal news should be breaking news. Years ago, I read a book by Watchman Nee called *The Normal Christian Life.*1 The title caught my attention because we are enamored by the unusual. Perhaps breaking news should be hearing that, even in a crisis, Christians are just doing what they normally do.

I looked at my online tithe and offering envelope—and was tempted. A voice inside my head said, *The church is not open. Why give?* Then I thought of all the work my church was doing to stay in contact with its vulnerable members. I thought of all the time-consuming, thought-provoking online programming my church was doing to provide inspiration to its members, young and old.2

I thought of the various ministries of other churches. I heard about one jurisdiction announcing that all places of business and leisure should be closed except for essential agencies such as fire departments, police stations, hospitals, grocery stores . . . and the New Haven Seventh-day Adventist Church. People asked, “What’s so special about this church?” They discovered that this church regularly takes in drug addicts and prays them through withdrawal. This church ordinarily provides temporary housing for the homeless. This church normally feeds scores of people every week.3 The county needed this church to stay open. It became breaking news.

What’s breaking?

Breaking news could be that, in this financial crisis, Christians are modeling sacrificial principles of giving (Mal. 3:8–12), as they had before. Breaking news could be that, in this health crisis, Christians are living out sensible principles of health (Rom. 12:1, 2), as they had before. Breaking news could be that, in this isolation crisis, Christians are carrying out selfless principles of caring (James 1:27), as they had before. *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary* says, “This is the normal Christian life—after the Spirit. Man may be so accustomed to imperfection and failure that this may seem extravagant and ridiculous. But not so. It is God’s plan and provision.”4 Pursuing the normal—in abnormal times—may just make the news cycle.

Panic, no; pestilences, yes. Pandemonium, no; pandemic, yes. Seasonal Christians, no; reasonable Christians, yes. Extraordinary believers, no; ordinary believers, yes. Great generals, no; good soldiers, yes. End of time, no; time of the end, yes. Business as usual, no; business as normal, yes. Breaking news, no; normal news, yes.

A voice inside my head said, *Keep doing what you normally do.* I looked at my online tithe and offering envelope—and clicked Continue.

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2 Emmanuel-Brinklow Seventh-day Adventist Church, emmanuelbrinklow.org/.
God of the OPEN DOOR

A beloved leader calls us to view a dispiriting streak of closed doors to the church as a providential stream of open doors to the community.
The year is 2020. The world is experiencing a pandemic of epic proportions. The loss of life; the economic toll; and the impact on society, families, and local congregations are incalculable. What can church administrators, pastors, and church leaders do to make a difference in this critical time? The Bible is clear—let’s allow it to be our guide.

Sing your song
The year is A.D. 51. Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia. Luke declares, “They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6). Then Paul received a vision: “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (v. 9). Paul was convicted that “the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them” (v. 10). God shut the door to a province in Asia because He wanted to open the door to a continent in Europe.

The year is A.D. 52. Paul finds himself in Philippi, “the foremost city of that part of Macedonia” (v. 12), and a crisis places Paul in isolation in prison. What does he do? Scripture says that Paul, along with Silas, began “praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (v. 25). Imagine singing during seclusion! Out of that experience, the Bible says, not only did all the prisoners hear the gospel but also the jailer and his whole family got baptized. In times of crisis, look for opportunities.

The year is A.D. 62. It’s ten years later. Paul is in prison again, this time in Rome. What is he doing? Is he lamenting the fact that he is in confinement? He’s praising God and looking for opportunities to witness. Paul never complains that the door is shut. In his isolation, he uses the time to write. That’s a lesson for somebody right now. Paul takes the opportunity to encourage the church in Philippi. He says, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (Phil. 1:3).

How can Paul say that? He’s in jail, but he says, “I’m thinking of you. I’m in prison, but you’re in my heart and mind.” You can chain a person’s body, but you cannot chain their prayers. In social isolation, Paul found time to pray. He found time to witness to other prisoners. He even found time to witness to Caesar’s household. Then comes the climax: “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel” (v. 12).

Open your door
How can Paul write that? He’s not preaching to large crowds. He’s not preaching in Philippi or Thessalonica. He’s not in the marketplace of the Stoa in Athens, reasoning with the philosophers. He’s not challenging the Corinthians. But he says that the things that happened to him, being in prison, have turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.

Paul can say what he said and write what he wrote because he believed that God was the God of the open door. Even with social distancing, God opened a door for Paul. God never shuts a door without opening one. At the end of Philippians, Paul says, “All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household” (Phil. 4:22). There were converts at the very epicenter of Caesar’s residence.

In Matthew 24 and Luke 21, Jesus speaks about last-day signs. One thing is for sure—God has not been caught off guard by dramatic events. We need not wait for opportunities to share the gospel when the pandemic is over. We need to be praying and asking, “What can we do now? Lord, give me an opportunity today!” Doors are open that may have been closed before. New possibilities lie before us. This is a call to use innovative methods to maintain contact with church members and to share Christ’s love in the community.

Some of you may remember the old drive-in movies, where cars parked in a large parking lot as their occupants watched a giant screen and listened through a speaker system from their car. What about a drive-in church today? A pastor in...
Minnesota encouraged his members to drive to the church parking lot for a unique service. From a stand in front of the church, he preached to parishioners sitting in their cars with their radios tuned in to the sermon. A similar occurrence happened in Florida, where worshipers would honk horns for “Amen” as they resonated with the message. For offering, congregants engaged their hazard lights to signal to waiting deacons. Carrying baskets on the ends of long poles, the deacons approached the signaling cars and joyfully received their tithes and offerings. The members had a sense of fellowship and togetherness and were inspired by their pastors’ ingenuity and sermon.²

I am convinced that our sovereign God is guiding the affairs of this world and allowing circumstances to unfold for a further proclamation of the gospel. Rather than be filled with fear or consumed with panic, why not look for new, creative ways to minister and share the gospel?²

**Touch your circle**

Here are ten practical suggestions gleaned from pastors who are pushing open the door of opportunity, nurturing their members, and touching their communities.

1. **Stream a worship service.** At Living Hope, we are streaming our worship services live, utilizing a minimal production crew. We have a little music, tell a children’s story, then one of our pastoral staff members preaches in an empty church while persons watch from their homes. Although streaming is not new to our church, our audience during this crisis has swelled tremendously, with over 30,000 households (numbering tens of thousands of people) watching, ten times larger than average.³

People in isolation are eager to experience a worship service. Rebecca wrote to us, “You preached with as much energy, conviction, and warmth as if in a stadium with tens of thousands of people. I am so glad I isolated myself in the house and watched.” This is an opportunity to minister in unique ways through the preached word. Although your church may be empty, imagine yourself preaching to hundreds or even thousands as you open the Word of God and proclaim a biblical, Christ-centered message.

2. **Record a Bible study.** We are doing a four-week series on Philippians that we tape with a single camera during the week and release on Sabbath at six o’clock in the evening, Eastern Daylight Time. This requires two other people besides the presenter. We usually begin with a simple children’s story, then a 30-minute message.

3. **Email a devotional.** Each Monday morning, send out an email devotional encouraging, your members in their spiritual journey. This one-page devotional can be your personal message to them.

4. **Intensify your prayers.** Encourage your members to participate in 100 days of prayer—and join in yourself.⁴

5. **Include the children.** A children’s church teacher in southeastern California sent out information for an online Zoom Sabbath School. Zoom is an extremely effective online tool because it enables you to see all participants. Both parents and teachers were excited. Many children were separated from their friends due to shelter-in-place regulations. The teleconference became a time of sharing, fellowship, rekindling friendships, and Bible study. The kids loved it. The cost and effort of ministering to God’s children in this time of crisis are small in comparison to the advantages.⁵

6. **Reach the seniors.** One church in North Carolina is keeping its members active delivering food baskets to needy senior citizens. They invite church members and community residents to leave nonperishable food items at a drop-off spot in their church parking lot at designated hours during the day. Church members volunteer in groups of two to sort the food and distribute food baskets to senior citizens through a contact hotline number or email. What an impact they are having on their community.

7. **Care for your community.** Distribute COVID-19: Facing the Crisis With Confidence. This new 16-page magazine describes the virus, offers suggestions on reducing the risk of contracting it, and gives spiritual support and hope. A husband and wife physician team in the Boston area distributed the magazine to their neighbors, along with some healthful recipes. The response was overwhelmingly positive.⁶

8. **Inspire your family.** Encourage your family, friends, and church members to check out reliable, inspirational websites for up-to-date information and dynamic messages.⁷

9. **Invite your neighbors.** Invite them to watch specific programs on Hope Channel and 3ABN (Three Angels Broadcasting Network). You will be far more effective if you choose a favorite program or one that is on a specific topic of interest and invite them to view it.⁸

10. **Generate hope.** The challenge of our times is opening minds to the prophetic events unfolding for the future. What an opportunity
to distribute our Christ-centered, hope-filled literature, such as *Hope Beyond Tomorrow*. Why not ask God to impress you with whom to share gospel literature? Maybe God is opening the door to reach someone you have wanted to share your faith with for a while. This is your opportunity.⁹

**Tell your story**

I believe that as God opened the door for the Apostle Paul, He’s opening the door for the church today. This is not a time to lament. This is a time filled with the urgent possibilities of what Christ can do. God will interrupt your plans to accomplish His plan. God will shut down something good to give you something better. One day, we will hear testimonies of how God closing one door was just God getting ready to open another. What will your testimony be? May Jesus help us to be creative. May Jesus help us to think new thoughts. May Jesus help us to contemplate new opportunities to expand the mission. Because the mission does not cease at a time of pandemic. The circumstances do not shape the mission, the mission shapes the circumstances.

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1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
3 See the Living Hope Seventh-day Adventist Community Church Facebook page at https://facebook.com/livinghopesda/.
4 See the Revival and Reformation page at https://revivalandreformation.org/.
5 See the disciplemama.com page for creative resources on leading kids to Jesus by Brianna, wife of a pastor, former teacher or school administrator, now stay-at-home mom to a toddler and an infant.
6 To read the magazine *COVID-19: Facing The Crisis With Confidence*, to acquire copies for personal distribution, or to order quantities for zip code mailing, visit Pacific Press’s Facing the Crisis With Confidence web page at https://www.pacificpress.com/covid.
8 See the HopeChannel website at hopetv.org, the 3ABN (Three Angels Broadcasting Network) website at 3abn.org, and the Dare to Dream Network website at https://d2dnetwork.tv/.
9 To order copies, visit the *Hope Beyond Tomorrow* page at https://adventistbookcenter.com/hope-beyond-tomorrow.html.

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I am convinced that our sovereign God is guiding the affairs of this world and allowing circumstances to unfold for a further proclamation of the gospel.
A veteran evangelist appeals to us not only to delight in the parables of Scripture but also to discover the prophecies.

The captain of a US Navy aircraft carrier, facing a growing outbreak of the coronavirus COVID-19 disease, asked for permission to isolate the bulk of his roughly five thousand crew members on shore. He was asking to take the warship out of service in an effort to save lives.

In a memo to Navy leaders, the captain of the USS Theodore Roosevelt said the spread of the disease was accelerating and that removing all but 10 percent of the crew was a “necessary risk” to stop the transmission of the virus. The ship docked in Guam while the US Navy scrambled to determine how best to respond to the extraordinary request as dozens of crew members tested positive.

Captain Brett Crozier stated, “We are not at war. Sailors do not need to die. If we do not act now, we are failing to properly take care of our most trusted asset—our Sailors.”

I agree. We must take care of our sailors and soldiers, even though they recognize that grief and death accompany their job description. A songwriter said, “We are soldiers in the army. We have to fight, although we have to cry. We have to hold up the bloodstained banner. We’ve got to hold it up until we die!”

I agree. Sailors should not die needlessly, even though the apostle says, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

But I disagree with the statement that says we are not at war. Coronavirus or no coronavirus, we are in a war. We were in a war before the disease, and we will be in a war after the disease. The question is, are we prepared for war? Are we prepared for trial? Are we prepared for tribulation?

Spring up

In each of the synoptic gospels—Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8—we find the parable of the sower. A parable is a simple story whose primary purpose is to teach a truth. Anytime the same
story appears three times in Scripture, it must be of great significance.

When Jesus teaches by a parable, His main purpose is to hold up a mirror by which we can see the truth. In the parable of the sower, Jesus teaches truth by examining how four types of listeners received God’s Word.

Jesus says that a sower goes out to sow, or plant, seed. The sower wants the seed to spring up and give him a great harvest. As he plants the seed, he throws it on the ground, and the seed falls on four different types of soil.

In soil type number 1, the farmer tosses seed on the ground, but the birds just come by and snatch the seed up.

In soil type number 2, the farmer casts seeds across rocky soil. While the seeds sprout, the hot sun soon causes the plants to shrivel away.

In soil type number 3, the farmer scatters seed on soil among thorns, but the thorns spring up and choke out the young plants.

In soil type number 4, the farmer throws seed on good soil, and when the seed falls, it grows, develops, and produces a great harvest.

I want to deal with soil type two—rocky soil—because it applies to our situation as we deal with the tragedy of a pandemic.

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I want to deal with soil type two—rocky soil—because it applies to our situation as we deal with the tragedy of a pandemic.

**Face up**

In the rocky soil, the seeds do germinate, but the sun destroys the tender plants. This soil type represents persons with no deep roots. Hearing the Word of God fills them with joy and excitement. But as soon as trials come, they begin looking for a way out. They accept what seems to be good at the moment, but they fail to count the cost of discipleship. We must face up to the reality that when we decide to follow Jesus, there is a price associated with it.

Tragedies ask some difficult questions of us. Is God really a God of love? Why do the innocent suffer? Why do doctors and nurses, who try desperately to save our lives, end up losing their own?

Why did my loved one have to die? At the end of the day, survival demands that we get some roots.

When 9/11, the coronavirus pandemic, or a yet-to-come, unknown global crisis strikes, many of us are fearful. We do not know what is next. It’s not enough to detect fear; we must direct it. The psalmist can confidently proclaim, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee” (Ps. 56:3). John can positively declare, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18). And Paul can powerfully assert, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

**Toughen up**

As Christians, we know what we were dealing with. The disciples asked Jesus what the signs of His second coming would be. Jesus told them straight, “Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21:26). Jesus told them directly, “Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars. . . . For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matt. 24:6–8).

We are in a war. We’re approaching the heat of the battle. Jesus is soon to come. Why is coronavirus here? It’s a pestilence! Now is not the time for us to get weak. This is what we’ve been preaching about. This is what we’ve been teaching about. This is what we’ve been witnessing about. This is why we’ve been having revivals and evangelistic campaigns. Jesus is soon to come! The days of pleasant preaching are over. Toughen up! We need a Word with some roots.

I love the stories of David and Goliath, Daniel in the lions’ den, and the three Hebrew boys delivered in the fiery furnace. I love the New Testament stories of Jesus. But I also need Daniel 7 and 8. I need to know how to apply the time prophecies.
Wake up
Do you realize the times in which we live? Do you recognize what’s happening right before our eyes? That the coronavirus has literally shut down the world? Our economy has crashed. We have closed schools, closed churches, closed sporting events, closed amusement parks, closed cities, and closed states—all within a few weeks.

Ellen White said it best: “We are living in the time of the end. The fast-fulfilling signs of the times declare that the coming of Christ is near at hand. The days in which we live are solemn and important. The Spirit of God is gradually but surely being withdrawn from the earth. Plagues and judgments are already falling upon the despisers of the grace of God. The calamities by land and sea, the unsettled state of society, the alarms of war, are portentous. They forecast approaching events of the greatest magnitude.

“The agencies of evil are combining their forces and consolidating. They are strengthening for the last great crisis. Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones.”

Wake up, my friends. We need some deep roots! Roots that can’t be destroyed. Roots that will nourish our spiritual growth. When I read the Word of God, it must not only inspire my emotions, but it must also challenge my mind. I don’t want a dead church, but I don’t want a dumb one either. I want a living church that is also a learned church—I must feed both my head and my heart. Get some roots!

Straighten up
We are faced with a coronavirus pandemic that has left us in a state of unprecedented desperation. Many are ready to come to Jesus and live right, simply because they are scared. If it’s this pandemic that leads you to greater spiritual thinking, spiritual awareness, and spiritual behavior, praise the Lord. God can use something like this to straighten us up. But do not let it be that as soon as the coronavirus hype wears off, your spirituality fades, and you slip back to whatever you were doing and being before.

God is not for emergency use only. Get some roots, because if you think coronavirus is something, you haven’t seen anything yet. Don’t praise God just when the sun is shining. Do it even when the rain is falling.

Our obedience and praise to God are not about our feelings, because some days you are not going to feel like studying the Word. Or praying. Or singing. Some days you are not going to feel like coming to church. But I rebuke the devil in Jesus’ name when those feelings threaten to overwhelm. “I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall be on my lips, and in my mouth” (Ps. 34:1–3).

Jesus did not go to Calvary because He felt like it. He went to Calvary because He loved you and me. To save you and me. Get some roots in the Word! Coronavirus is here, but God said, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isa. 41:10). One songwriter said, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” He said, “When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay. On Christ the solid Rock, I stand—All other ground is sinking sand.” Get some roots!

2 “We Are Soldiers,” in African American Heritage Hymnal (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc., 2001), #488, https://hymnary.org/text/we_are_soldiers_in_the_army_we_have_to#authority_media_flexscores.
3 Scripture is from the King James Version.
6 Article adapted from a sermon by Carlton P. Byrd, March 14, 2020, Oakwood University Church, Huntsville, Alabama, United States. Editors.
By few or by many

It was the beginning of a new year, and my church was about to join in the 10 Days of Prayer program. During the months leading up to this special time of prayer, I shared testimonies of how other churches had experienced a revival in their spiritual growth as a result of this program to encourage my members.

On the first day, 5 people came. At the end of the 10 days, our group had increased to 8 participants—out of 120 members. The prayer meetings were a blessing to the small group, but I was disappointed and discouraged. I wanted the whole church to experience this blessing.

Soon I realized that experiencing the power of prayer is not so much bound to an event but instead comes with an attitude of surrender to God. I remembered how Jonathan did not lose faith when facing the enemy camp. He stated, “For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few” (1 Sam. 14:6, NKJV). It is not about how many people pray but about individuals surrendering to the power of the Spirit.

As the year came to an end, we decided to rejoin the 10 Days of Prayer. This time, we prayed for the Holy Spirit to move more church members to attend the prayer meetings. God answered our prayers, and the first night, 20 people came. In the end, we had more than 40 participants. As the 10 days came to an end, church members expressed that we should not stop praying but instead continue asking God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

A weekly prayer meeting was established. Young and old came together to pray. We decided to especially pray for members who had left the church.

One night we prayed for Michaela. Michaela had left the church 10 years ago, along with her husband. Michaela received a sudden and strong impression to go to church the following week. At first, she found this thought strange. Why should she go to church now, after such a long time? But as the days passed by, the impression grew stronger until Michaela was convinced that God was calling her to come back to church.

That next Sabbath, she found herself in church. The members of the prayer group couldn’t believe their eyes. A member of the prayer group immediately went up to Michaela and asked her if she could bring a dessert to the fellowship meal. Michaela was expecting all kinds of questions but not a request for a dessert. It made her feel very welcome and still part of the church family.

From that day on, Michaela decided to recommit her life to Jesus and be part of His church again. She asked the prayer group to also pray for her husband. Before long, that prayer, too, was answered. Today, both Michaela and her husband are leaders in the church and very much involved. They are so thankful for the people who cared enough to pray persistently for them to find their way back to Jesus and the body of Christ.

It all started with a small group participating in the 10 Days of Prayer and being willing to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). No matter how big or small, as the old gospel song says, “Little is much when God is in it.”

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1 10 Days of Prayer is a global prayer initiative held each January, available to churches of all denominations. See https://tendaysofprayer.org/.
A caring chaplain reveals how the strength of team ministry can reach even the corporate world.

The power of “we”—pastoral ministry in a corporate world
My two sisters are nurses at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, New York, the epicenter of this coronavirus. It’s sobering. When it hits this close to home, it’s sobering. What a blessing it was to pray for them at the Virtual Prayer gathering. Thank you.”

So wrote Yisel, from human resources. She was not alone. Amanda, from our clinical mission integration department, wrote, “The outpouring of prayers brought me to tears. I couldn’t hold them back. With tears flowing down my face, I watched and listened to the cries of broken and limited people calling out to their all-knowing and all-powerful God. I have no words. Thank you.”

Nanette, from physician enterprise, stated, “I was so deeply moved as we prayed together and heard each other cry out to God. Thank you for taking the time for us to come together and support one another.” Caroline, another colleague, added, “Such a powerful time together! I felt the overwhelming presence of the Lord with us as we were praying. God bless you all!”

These stories came from our Virtual Prayer gathering, a 15-minute service established by Sergio Torres to meet a specific need—to provide a space where a family of healers can find hope and healing during the coronavirus pandemic. It symbolizes the unique way Sergio has carved out to minister in the corporate world.

The power of one

Regularly, AdventHealth’s “congregation” has been within a hospital campus or medical facility. Sergio saw a congregation within the organization’s corporate office. Traditionally, pastoral care has meant a pastor’s care for his or her congregation, represented by a church, a school, or even a branch of the military or government. Sergio was determined to see pastoral care at work in the corporate world.

With a ministerial career spanning 40 years, Sergio found AdventHealth’s roughly 3,500-employee corporate team to be larger than the churches he had pastored. Sergio understood that it doesn’t take thousands to have church. Where even two or three are gathered, Jesus promised to show up. Sergio’s strategy was to reduce his audience to one person.

“I realized you don’t have much time for programs in the work environment,” he said. “There was little time for it in the hospital setting, and there’s not much time for it at the corporate office. So, I’ve learned that two minutes of simply connecting with a team member makes a greater impact. I’m never in a rush to leave when I’m talking to someone. My priority is to be present in that moment.” Such a moment came with Susan.

Sergio sat down with Susan, as he had with many others before her. He was not there to offer her the perfect formula for overcoming grief but simply to listen—a critical element in pastoral care. He learned that her pain stemmed from her mother’s recent death and a disagreement she’d had with her brother over their mother’s final wishes.

“She told me she was not ready to talk to him about it,” said Sergio. “That’s when I suggested journaling her feelings. It changed her completely. She had been carrying such a heavy burden, but through the process of writing things down, she found a way to release it. You could see it in her face and sense it in her body language. She was starting to feel whole again.” Although Sergio had been the one to suggest journaling, he was not the one who had initially sensed her need for spiritual support.

The power of “we”

Clayton Alves, a member of his ministry team, noticed that something was bothering Susan.

“We were walking toward each other one day, and the Lord revealed to me that something was
different about her,” Clayton related. “I stopped and asked her about it, and she shared the news of her mother’s death. I did nothing more than listen to her, affirm her feelings, and share insights from my past experiences with loss. But given her questions, I knew Sergio would be of great help.”

A campus pastor is an important piece of the puzzle—but still only one piece. Sergio recognized that when you have a team working together, you can better care for the whole person and, at the macro level, the entire campus. “Those of us who serve on the ministry team are in positions where we work in close proximity to our peers and know what is happening in their lives,” Clayton stated. Efficient pastors know that effective ministry can never be a solo effort. Sergio knew that all too well.

He decided to pour himself into his leadership team and became enamored with the biblical concept of the body. “Together we make a ‘corps’ because, one, the word is used as an abbreviation for corporate and, two, it’s the Latin word for ‘body,’ the body of Christ,” he continued. “The church is the body. And here, we spiritually take care of each member of that body.” For Sergio, one key scripture—Ephesians 4:15, 16—guides this concept: “Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (NIV).

For Sergio, it’s about the ministry, never the minister. He likes to call his work “We Ministry.” His colleague, Jay, emphasized this point. “We are the ‘corps,’ the spiritual body,” he said. “Sergio brings certain skills, but we are a family that serves together.”

**Ministry to your congregation**

Having a heart for mission is precisely what keeps Sergio going when he receives a call about a team member or team member’s relative who’s been hospitalized or has passed away. He visits them in the hospital and is present during their funerals. Sergio even visits team members at home who are experiencing hardships within their family life.

Because these difficult moments touch more than one person and affect other members of the “corps” (the body), he can also be found meeting with entire departments following a team member’s hospitalization or death to help the group collectively process and express their emotions.

Sergio likes to ask three questions when meeting with people:

1. What kind of support system do you have in your life?
2. What resources can you access to help you?
3. What is your relationship with God like, and how can it be a source of strength for you?

During his meeting with Susan, Sergio asked those same three questions. When they reached the last question, she opened up about her faith in God’s strength but her lack of faith in her own. It was not until her experience of journaling that she was able to muster the strength to let go and forgive her brother.

“The most amazing part of my job is that people like Susan trust me with their stories,” Sergio observes. “The fact that people would have the courage to open up to me tells me that I am invited to be a part of their journey. That they don’t have to go through it alone. That not only can I enrich them, but that they [also] can enrich me.”

**Ministry for your congregation**

Opportunities for mission are present in a church congregation—Sergio was committed to offering them to his corporate congregation. While in a church setting, ministry leaders may be in contact with their congregation for a couple hours each weekend, in the workplace, campus ministries gets to interact with and support theirs five days a week, eight hours a day. So, Sergio and his team pushed forward with domestic mission trips, Bible studies, special worship experiences, speaker-centered devotions, Christmas and Easter events, and programs that support the annual Week of Spiritual Renewal.

Sergio’s ministry is about addressing those who have crises, but it also extends to proactively identifying points of possible conflict. This places the ministry not at the periphery of the corporation but at its heart. Moving beyond programs and activities, the ministry works closely with human resources to ensure that mission education is embedded in the very job-candidate and new-hire experience. Sergio’s ministry to employees, particularly the COVID-19 Virtual Prayer gathering, inspired Judy, a clinical application analyst and leader of a five-minute daily prayer on her floor.

“I just wanted you to know that the CareNet team restarted our five-minute prayer this morning,” Judy stated. “It was our first virtual meeting. Those who wanted to connect and see
each other just clicked on video. It was very nice. I wanted to let you know that the spark is relit and ready for the other Spiritual Ambassadors to follow suit if they’re willing and able. This is a great way to interact with people, especially now that we’re home.”

**The power of “He”**

When the Virtual Prayer gathering was set up to offer our healing community a place of relief and release, Sergio and his team wondered what the response would be. One? Ten? One hundred and twenty signed on for the gathering! Alejandra, from integrated health services, was one.

“I wasn’t really sure what to expect when I decided to ‘show up’ to the Virtual Prayer gathering. I wasn’t that familiar with MS Teams or the people at Corporate. But, I thought, why not? If not now, when? So, I did. And what a blessing it was! Gary, the leader of this prayer ministry, started things off and allowed us all to cry out to God. I’ve been in churches during prayer time. I’ve heard people crying out to God before—but from a church pew. This was so different.

“As people began to pray out loud, it was the most beautiful sound I’d heard in a long time. People lifting up our coworkers and families and leaders to the throne of God. I know we work for a faith-based organization. And our mission is to extend the healing ministry of Christ. But I also know we’re a corporation. We’re not a congregation. Yet, in that moment, we were the body of Christ! And hearing our brothers and sisters cry out to God for protection for their families was beyond words.”

For Sergio, ministry is about working together as a team, serving wherever we are placed. It’s about being available to God and people. “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). It’s about Him, because while God can use you, God can also bypass you.

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1 Sergio Torres is manager for spiritual ambassadors and pastor for corporate campus ministries at AdventHealth, a national health system operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

2 The name has been changed for the employee’s privacy.

3 Orlando “Jay” Perez is vice president of mission and ministry for AdventHealth.
Amazing Jesus in turbulent times

The COVID-19 crisis is a demonstration of how words can lose their force. This global pandemic is called “a life-and-death matter.” Yet so many have continued business as usual while tens of thousands are dying all over the world. Life and death—words that would typically evoke a strong response now no longer do.

Words appear to have lost their power to change and impact us. They have lost much of their descriptive and rhetorical power. Words like great, awesome, and amazing no longer refer to something grand and spectacular. Instead, they are often assigned to people, things, or events that are, indeed, far removed from the richness that these words convey.

The deeper the reality of a fearsome crisis, the greater the need for a deliverance of awesome proportions—the Gospel of Mark addresses this need. While the situation of Mark’s audience was different from ours, what was true is that they, like us, were in a time of crisis.

Alarming persecution

The Gospel of Mark was written in the early 60s of the first century during, or just after, the Neronian persecution (A.D. 63–64).1 This would have been a severe time of crisis for the early Christians. Many would have died for their faith in the persecution in Rome. The Roman historian Tacitus provided a gripping account of what took place. He says that Christians, “covered with the skins of beasts, . . . were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination,

A renowned theologian points us to the One who has been our help in ages past, and will be our hope for years to come.
when daylight had expired.” During this time of suffering and trial, Mark uses four different Greek words, translated as “marveled,” “astonished,” “amazement,” and “amazed.”

The theme of “amazing” being so dominant in Mark, but not in the other Gospels, suggests that Mark received this idea firsthand from Peter, widely acknowledged to be the apostolic influence on the first Gospel. Knowing that readers and hearers grow accustomed to words, Mark employs variety. To drive home his point, Mark will use this diversity of words on 20 occasions to describe who Jesus is and the unique responses of the people to His ministry. Mark was trying to emphasize that in a time of crisis, Jesus was to be the focus of His followers. There is no one better to contemplate in a crisis than Jesus. We will look at four occurrences of the words amazed and astonished in Mark’s Gospel (Mark 1:22, 27; 2:12; 5:20) and discover the depth and beauty of just how amazing, just how astonishing, Jesus truly is.

**Amazed at His Word**

Mark recounts the exorcism of a demon-possessed man as Jesus’ first miracle in Mark 1:21–27. Mark uses the literary technique of inclusio in that he opens and closes the miracle narrative with the word “astonished” in verse 22 (exeplēssontō) and verse 27 (ethambéthēsan). Verse 22 reads: “And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (NKJV, emphasis added). Verse 27 reads: “Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? What new doctrine is this?’ For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him” (NKJV, emphasis added).

The encounter begins with “a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, ‘Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’ “ (verses 23, 24, NKJV). Robert Gundry contends that this is a defense stratagem of the evil spirit, namely, identifying Jesus and thereby attempting to gain the upper hand in the conflict. This helps us understand Jesus’ strong response of “Be quiet!” (verse 25, NKJV), or literally, “be muzzled.”

Furthermore, sandwiched between the inclusio is Jesus, filled with authority and acting to deliver. In this opening miracle, Jesus acts with paradigmatic force—paradigmatic meaning this miracle sets the tone, or provides the example, for how one must act in the face of evil and suffering. Act decisively, no second-guessing, no debate, and no discussion. A human life is at stake!

Mark’s use of “all” in verse 27 emphasizes the universal recognition of Jesus’ power and authority. The phrase “new teaching” (didachē kainē) is the language of inaugurated eschatology. The prophetic tradition has reached its zenith. In fact, teaching was one facet of the new age looked for by the prophets. Jeremiah says, “No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD” (Jer. 31:34, ESV). That was Jesus’ unique, astonishing authority, an authority far surpassing that of the scribes.

The scribes presented what the Scriptures and their tradition taught. In contrast, Jesus presented Himself as what the Scriptures taught. As N. T. Wright suggests, “He is somebody with authority over everything the physical world . . . and the non-physical world . . . can throw at us. This is a Jesus we can trust with every aspect of our lives.” A global pandemic presents us with opportunities to minister confidently.
Amazed at His power

The healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1–12) has so much percolating beneath the surface. This miracle opens up a raft of questions that the reader can raise. For the religious leaders, the genuine question, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (v. 7). For the paralytic, “What on earth is happening to me?” For the homeowner, “I wonder who’s going to pay for my damaged roof?”

This beneath-the-surface reading sheds greater light on just how amazing Jesus is. He sees the faith of the man’s four friends (v. 5), reads the thoughts of the leaders (v. 8), and knows the needs of the sufferer (v. 5). Jesus knew that what this paralyzed man needed was not just physical healing but, most of all, spiritual healing.

Jesus is amazing because He knows our greatest need. That need is for a spiritual breakthrough, to encounter Him, and to be forgiven and restored in our relationship with God. His presence brought healing, peace, and wholeness to the paralytic. The paralyzed man was told by Jesus to get up, take his mat, and go home. “He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’ ” (v. 12, NIV; emphasis added). Those legs, once so weak and incapacitated, were now full of vitality. That mat, so often the symbol of his humiliation and defeat in life, was now carried in his arms.

In light of their friend’s personal crisis, four men believed that Jesus could make a difference in their friend’s situation. “When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’ ” (Mark 2:5). Faith and action united in a teamwork that brought both healing and forgiveness. A global pandemic presents us with opportunities to minister collaboratively.

Amazed at His love

Once more, we see the sovereign power of Jesus to save. “Seeing Jesus from a distance, [the demoniac] ran up and bowed down before Him” (Mark 5:6, NASB). Even though he was in the grip of Satan’s power, it was no match for the greater power—the power of Jesus. Notice “he bowed [proskuneo] before Him”—meaning he worshiped Jesus. Then we see two uses of the same word in verses 10 and 12, namely “beg” (parakaleo). Verse 10 says, “He begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area” (NIV), and verse 12 reads: “the demons begged Jesus” (NIV). It is also used of the leper of Mark 1:40, who begged Jesus to help him. It speaks of desperation. Jesus is amazing because He confronts evil and, in the process, sets humans free. The same divine power that can drive out demons can also change hearts.

Mark 5:20 reads: “So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed” (NIV; emphasis added). What led to this response of amazement from the people? The wider literary context reveals to us that the story of the changed demoniac answered a question lingering from the end of chapter 4: Who is the good soil?

The seed clearly took root in the demoniac, the least significant and least likely place imaginable. His transformed life was not of his own doing but rather solely and wholly through the power of Jesus. The demoniac is the good soil, now declaring “what great things the Lord has done” and how the Lord “had compassion” on him (Mark 5:19). A global pandemic presents us with opportunities to minister compassionately.

Amazed at His sacrifice

Scholars have generally acknowledged Mark 8:27–10:52 as “the theological nerve center” of this Gospel.10 Once more, Mark will use an inclusio, namely, the word meaning “way or road” (hodōs) in 8:27 and 10:52, to delineate this discreet section of the story of Jesus.11 In these chapters, which are charged with “outbursts of predictive energy,” Jesus announces three passion predictions (8:31; 9:30–32; 10:32–34) and attempts to clarify for His
disciples the nature and substance of His mission. 12

In this final passion prediction, we see Mark's intentional use of the word amazed. "Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed [ethambōunto]. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourg[e] Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again' " (Mark 10:32–34, NKJV).

The phrase “going up to Jerusalem” echoes the Old Testament language of pilgrimage (Ps. 122:4; 24:3; Isa. 2:2, 3). The disciples were amazed because Jesus was going ahead of them to Jerusalem, even after all He said in the earlier passion predictions (Mark 8:31; 9:30–32). The misunderstanding of the disciples is a major theme in this Gospel (Mark 8:32, 33; 9:11, 32; 10:35–39). 13

However, verse 32 might be a subtle hint of the disciples beginning to understand just a little of the mission of Jesus. 14

The verse informs us that, “as they followed they were afraid.” The declaration of their fear is preceded by the solution to their fear. To the extent that they continued to follow Him, the same Jesus who, in the midst of the storm, said, “Peace, be still” (Mark 4:39), would accompany His disciples during a crisis of uncertainty and anxiety that would impact the whole world. A global pandemic presents us with opportunities to minister calmly.

**Astonishing victory**

God's kingdom in Mark's Gospel comes with the power to do things that human beings cannot do on their own: the power to support, transform, help, and encourage the human soul in every given situation. It transforms and challenges us to perceive the truth that God's kingdom best takes root in the marginalized, the outcasts, those seemingly most insignificant.

God's kingdom is real here and now, regardless of the challenge.

In story after story, Jesus emerges victorious over the forces of evil (Mark 1:21–28); over the fractious conniving of the religious leaders (Mark 3:2; 6); over the fear of human beings (Mark 5:1–20); and, yes, even over death (Mark 16:1–8). We learn that Jesus is amazing because of what He says and how He says it, how He cares, and because of what He does.

While uncertainty and fear grip our communities across the globe and we try to find the right words to depict what is happening, let us remember that God invaded human time and space in the person of His Son (Gal. 1:4). Jesus walks across the narrative stage of Mark's Gospel and demonstrates that His victory over all that the kingdom of darkness can throw at Him and His children is, truly, amazing.

3 All verses are from the New King James Version. See “astonished” (ekēkōma) in Mark 1:22; 6:2; 7:37; 10:26; 11:18; “amazed” (ethambēthōn) in Mark 1:27; 10:24, 32; 9:15; 15:4; 16:16; “amazed” (ektōmōmen) in Mark 5:42; 16:8; and “marveled” (ektōnawō) in Mark 5:20; 15:5, 44; 12:17. Due to the constraints of this article I will not be discussing the notion of “feared” or examining each occurrence of the term “amazed.” For a historical analysis of the development and use of the concepts of “amazed” and “fear,” see Timothy Dwyer, “The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark,” Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 128 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). While I am indebted to Dwyer for developing fresh thinking on this topic.
5 Robert H. Gundry, Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 76.
12 Gundry, Commentary on His Apology, 425.
14 France, Gospel of Mark, 412.
A new normal?
Technology and the church in the age of social distancing

Little did I know what was coming. A few years ago, I introduced my congregation to cloud-based web conferencing using Zoom. This platform allows participants to interact simultaneously online. Church members can use this tool to conduct Bible study remotely, and they can connect without leaving their homes. Small groups can meet online. Meeting online allows people to spend less time driving and more time with their families, especially in those churches where members live farther away. It also reduces operational expenses because when the building is not in use, utilities such as gas or electricity do not have to be used.

When schools and universities closed their campuses and moved classes online, students in our church were already familiar with online learning because we had been using Zoom for Bible study well before COVID-19 started. In fact, I have been teaching online for the past 10 years, and I have seen the value...
that the online experience provides. Simply put, by using online tools, we have been able to reach and share the gospel with more people than we would have otherwise been able to.

**Slow off the mark**

In the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, many churches have been forced to transition to presenting their worship services online using Facebook Live and other streaming platforms. For local pastors, it represents a new normal as crowds have dissipated and the worship experience has begun to cater more to the online viewer. Moreover, it reflects a generational shift, particularly for older parishioners used to driving to church.

Unfortunately, some churches and pastoral leaders have been slow to adapt to such changes and embrace new technology to build and sustain their congregations online.

However, the influence of technology on the church is not a recent phenomenon. Since Martin Luther wrote his Ninety-Five Theses in the early 1500s, technology has shaped the methods the church has used to advance the gospel. Martin Luther’s criticism of papal authority could have faded away as just irrelevant rhetoric if it were not for Gutenberg’s printing press. It allowed Martin Luther’s work to be copied and disseminated to a wider audience that served to further the Protestant Reformation. Furthermore, the telephone (1876), the automobile (1893), and commercial aviation (1920s) also facilitated the spread of the gospel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The advent of motion pictures opened biblical narratives such as the giving of the Ten Commandments and the passion of the Christ to vast audiences.

**Adapting to change**

Nonetheless, the church still has some ambivalence toward the overuse of technology in the church, and justifiably so. When the apostle Paul encouraged his followers to greet one another with a holy kiss, scarcely would anyone have imagined a kissing emoji instead. The church is more than the building—it enables meaningful social interactions and provides spiritual and emotional connections difficult to replicate online. However, as a pastor, I believe the church, more than any other institution, must adapt to the changing times in order to reach those already online.

According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 81 percent of Americans say they go online daily, and roughly 3 in 10 Americans acknowledge that they do so constantly. Among them, 48 percent of Americans ages 18–29 say they spend extensive time online. Moreover, nearly 40 percent of parents report that their child owns a smartphone. Undoubtedly, people employ such devices to access the internet; stream media; and, in some cases, create and upload content. The online and digital space is reshaping how people interact and engage with one another outside of the church walls.

If such trends continue, some worry that the church could see further declines in membership and participation. However, that does not mean that values such as community and fellowship will necessarily suffer as more virtual churches and online communities of faith emerge. Through social-media platforms such as Facebook, Google Hangouts, and Twitter, the church can organize, meet, and create shared spaces where online interaction is possible.
worshipers can gather and interact. In addition, social-media platforms such as YouTube provide opportunities for churches to operate on demand and share content 24–7 as opposed to once a week during the 11:00 A.M. worship hour.

**Coming together**

One of the pleasant surprises during our transition to online church is that it has brought our seniors and millennials closer together. We have created a space where members across generations can interact and build community, which is consistent with our mission. Moreover, our youth, who are native to the technology, have helped our seniors learn how to join the Facebook Livestream, upload our church app on their phones, and give online using Cash App and our online giving platform.

Andrew Careaga, author of *E-vangelism: Sharing the Gospel in Cyberspace*, explains that online, the church is not hindered by time or space. Through the internet, Careaga says, two or more people can gather and have church whenever they desire. Sandra Herndon notes that “networked organizations have the potential for fostering communication across social categories—leveling status difference, and enhancing openness, and free expression of ideas.”

Dave Mullin further explains that “internet information sharing mediums . . . have certain advantages over face-to-face communication in the process of spiritual dialogue. Spiritual topics that have been ‘taboo’ are talked about in lively and open ways by users of differing views and mindsets that are hard if not impossible to recreate in a group setting at a particular time and place.”

Messaging apps such as WhatsApp allow members to communicate with the pastor directly as opposed to leaving a message with the church secretary. The future may necessitate that churches pioneer their own private social media platforms or apps as a means of staying connected and sustaining relationships across geographic boundaries. Group texts can also be used to disseminate church announcements, provide updates, and share Bible-study notes and other information to increase connections among members.

During this economic downturn, many churches are concerned about how to keep their tithes and offerings from falling if people are not coming to church. The ability to give online has allowed us to sustain our giving and connect with new followers who want to sow financially into our ministry. We have also seen an increase in the number of likes on our Facebook page. Members are hosting their own watch parties, which has introduced our church to an entirely new ministry demographic.

**Transforming technology**

The internet and virtual technology offer new and unlimited opportunities to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. As younger generations mature, they will undoubtedly be more technologically savvy, which will place new demands on churches to increase their online footprint. In many ways, the coronavirus has flattened the growth curve by closing the gap between large and small churches. Large churches could once tout the size of their sanctuaries, educational wings, family-life centers, and onsite childcare facilities. But online technologies can provide some of the same advantages to smaller churches.

In the age of social distancing, a large church building no longer gives its congregation a competitive advantage over smaller neighboring congregations. Small and micro-sized churches may be the new normal now and well into the foreseeable future as congregants become more concerned about their health and well-being. I believe that the church must embrace change and work to transform the technology rather than fear being changed by it. Given the internet and new digital applications available, the church online may become one of the most common means by which future generations will come to know and experience Christ.

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Church members in China assist in the Philippines

Despite being gravely affected by the coronavirus themselves, members of the Mainland China Seventh-day Adventist Church wanted to help another country in great need—the Philippines. The first batch of rice distribution, held in the municipality of Silang, Cavite, assisted more than 1,260 families severely affected by the government lockdown due to the pandemic.

The bags were picked up by tricycle drivers, care group members, and utility personnel. The rice distribution was implemented under close supervision, to ensure the goods were distributed correctly while following health safety measures.

The second distribution of rice, organized four days later, benefited more than 890 families.

“The people in China also suffered, so they understand the challenges that people are facing here,” said Samuel Wang, Chinese evangelist to the Southern Asia-Pacific region. “They wanted to send a message that through unity, by love, and by working together, we can overcome this virus, so many helped out and responded to this call.”

[Southern Asia-Pacific Division Communications]

Adventist pastor reaches hundreds of couples during the quarantine

Police officers have reported that long weekends and national holidays see a rise in domestic violence. As an indication of this, when the quarantine in China loosened, people went in unusually high numbers to apply for divorce.

Gabor Mihalec, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor and licensed couple therapist in Hungary, started “Couple-Minutes,” a ministry to support couples during social isolation.

Every evening at 9:00 P.M., Mihalec opens his personal Facebook page to conduct a live event. During this time, he gives counsel regarding conflict resolution, effective communication, and other relevant topics and answers viewers’ questions that have come up in their relationships during the day.

“I chose this time because the children are in bed, and the parents finally have some time for their relationship,” he said. “I want to give them insights to spend this time in a creative and constructive way.”

Mihalec has received much more feedback than he expected. About 400 people follow the live event every evening. The number of those who watch the videos during the next day reaches as high as 12,000, with many people sharing his advice across their social-media accounts.

This unique ministry has sparked interest across Hungarian media. Mihalec has been interviewed by a national radio station, Kossuth Rádió, and many websites are sharing his videos. Hungary’s leading financial magazine, HVG, published an article about the initiative, sharing it as a good example of how to ride out the crisis.
“This new door that God opened for us has given me more work than I had earlier,” Mihalec stated. It has also “brought our family members even closer to each other.” Mihalec is not able to travel as before, so this new initiative “has become our regular, common program every single evening. I don’t know anything about viruses; I am not able to heal people; but I am very happy that God showed me a way that my family and I can be of benefit to the world, in this time of need.” [Tamás Ócsai, Trans-European Division News]


Church in Guatemala distributes food to thousands of families

GUATEMALA CITY, GUATEMALA

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Guatemala is distributing food baskets with rice, beans, cornmeal, oil, salt, and sugar to thousands of church members most affected by national COVID-19 quarantine regulations that limit them from going to work to provide for their families.

“Because of the government’s decree on quarantine measures and curfews in place, the country seems to be paralyzed. Fear has taken over communities,” said Guenther Garcia, president of the Guatemala Union Mission. “The crisis will intensify as another 30 days of isolation is scheduled this month, preventing so many from going out to earn money to feed their loved ones.”

Church pastors, members, and administrators assembled hundreds of food baskets for needy families. Juan Segura, an older member of the Chal Adventist Church in Peten, north Guatemala, was among several who benefited from food baskets last week. “Thank you for this gift from our brethren, because we know that the love of God is manifested this way,” Segura said. [Inter-American Division News Staff]

Remembering William Shea: Renowned Seventh-day Adventist scholar

MANASSAS, VIRGINIA, UNITED STATES

Renowned Seventh-day Adventist scholar William H. Shea died on February 15, 2020, in Manassas, Virginia, United States, at age 87. A medical doctor and surgeon, Shea graduated from Harvard University and the University of Michigan to become an esteemed Bible scholar and beloved seminary professor.

While working at Andrews University, Shea filled many capacities, including professor, chair of the Old Testament Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, and acting director of the Institute of Archeology. He was sought after at Bible
conferences and extension schools around the world. In 1986, Shea joined the Biblical Research Institute of the Seventh-day Adventist Church General Conference in Silver Spring, Maryland. During this time, he traveled internationally, preaching and lecturing on the Bible, archeology, and many other issues of interest to the church. Shea was happy to go wherever he was needed. He occasionally joked, however, that he wished there were more Bible conferences in Bora Bora or Tahiti.

Shea published several books dealing with topics ranging from ancient inscriptions to the meaning of Bible prophecy, and hundreds of articles, including many for Ministry. He brought to the world of biblical studies the acute intelligence of a diagnostician in the emergency room; the profound insight of a historian; and, with his proficiency in several Semitic languages, the intense precision of a linguist.

Reflecting on her father, his daughter Rebecca Erdelyi said, “What I find especially difficult to put into words is what a humble and unassuming person he was. He was the epitome of ‘walk humbly with thy God.’” [Adventist Review Staff, Ministry]
If You Can Eat . . . You Can Make Disciples: Sharing Faith in a Multi-Faith World


Peter Roennfeldt, an experienced pastor and evangelist and a veteran church planter, has written *If You Can Eat . . . You Can Make Disciples* to show how to share the gospel with friends, neighbors, and colleagues in ways that are sensitive to culture and relevant to people who follow either another religion or no religion at all. The author focuses on rediscovering how Jesus related to His multifaith context, in particular His instruction to the 72 disciples as outlined in Luke 10:1–24. The specific aim of this book is to put evangelism within reach of every believer instead of delegating it to only well-trained professionals.

Roennfeldt argues that we need an approach that is respectful of other religious persuasions without losing one’s strong identity as a follower of Jesus and affirming the uniqueness of Jesus and His distinctive message and mission.

The disciples were to follow the example of Jesus, who mingled with the people, accepted their hospitality, ate their food, ministered to their needs, and shared the gospel. The aim is to have an approach that is biblical, simple, and reproducible so that every follower of Jesus can do and teach others to do it as well.

Roennfeldt points out the following steps that can be easily followed and duplicated:

1. Open your eyes and understand the spiritual longings of others.
2. Mingle with people and build a relationship by enjoying their hospitality.
3. Focus on people of peace that God has prepared. They are hospitable and have influence in their relational network.
4. Eat their food and listen to their story.
5. Minister to their needs with care, concern, encouragement, and support.
6. Share your story about how God has worked and is working in your life.
7. Assure them that God is near and cares about and loves them.
8. Invite people to discover the Bible through an inductive process called “Discovery Bible Readings.” This is a simple way of exploring the Bible together through simple questions and explanations.

Finally, the author helpfully describes the church as a simple, biblical, caring community of faith that seeks to be a blessing, bring church life to homes, and to continuously equip believers to share the good news of Jesus in their relational streams.

The author appears to overshoot the mark by leaving the reader with the impression that public evangelism that overtly proclaims biblical truth is outdated—“so last century.” The good purpose of this book might have been strengthened by pointing out how Christ-centered and Bible-based public evangelism can serve an important role when embedded in strong personal evangelism and discipleship.

Nevertheless, this is a very timely book that indeed places evangelism within reach of every
believer. It makes clear that making disciples is not just about adding members and retaining them. Rather, it is about equipping them for personal evangelism and empowering them to replicate this process, leading to a disciple-making movement.

This book is very much needed for a church in which the majority of members does not personally share their faith in a winsome, natural way in their everyday life. The author did a great job showing practical ways of sharing the faith that are so easy that the reader can start right away. Everyone who longs to be an effective witness for Jesus and to train others to experience the same will find a great resource in this book.

Peter Roennfeldt is offering his new book, *If Your Church Is Closed*, free of charge. Download it from the Following Jesus website at following-jesus.com/books/if-your-church-is-closed/.

Links within the e-book will take readers directly to relevant resources. We would like to thank Dr. Roennfeldt for this generous and timely resource made available for pastors and church leaders around the world.

—The Editors

the “Spirit-illumined” message. Every preacher in the pulpit on Saturday or Sunday morning should be in agreement on a given passage of Scripture. If not, then it falls upon the hearer to determine who was the more “spiritually illumined” in the study and preaching of the text.

Indeed, it is a curious fact that professing Christians meet on different days of the week and attend varying denominational churches who disagree on particulars, which make them distinct from one another. What’s even more curious is that the early leaders of these various denominations often laid claim to have discerned these distinctives through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit is expressly declared to not be the Author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), I wonder if this particular doctrine of the Holy Spirit is really taught in the Scriptures.

—J. E. Long, by email

Ministry magazine has no structure of collective themes. It stumbles from issue to issue, but are these relevant to pastoral ministry? It needs a structure based around subjects relevant to the pastor’s daily life and ministry.

It is encouraging to see articles on preaching in the journal. Overkill can neuter valuable material. Would it not be wiser to have little and often rather than a Belshazzar’s feast? A quality article by itself is more likely to be received than a lot at one time.

Please do not be offended by my comments. They are intended to be constructive and, to some degree, provocative. I have been reading the journal since the 1950s, and I always stand under correction, so do not fear to correct or chastise the beast.

—Patrick Boyle, pastor, South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Watford, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom.
Retired leaders: A proven asset

It’s a scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The action is fast and furious. Indiana Jones is determined to reclaim the ark of the covenant. He chases a truckload of Nazis, barks orders to his friend Sallah, then declares, “I’m going after that truck!”

Sallah asks, “How?”

Jones replies, “I don’t know. I’m making this up as I go.”

While the story may be fictional, Jones’s character depicts perseverance, determination, and ingenuity, traits nearly all of us admire.

**Perseverance with resilience**

Perseverance must be coupled with resilience for consummate victory. Jerry Scher writes, “Resilience is defined as ‘an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change’ and perseverance is defined as ‘the continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.’ . . .”

“. . . And that includes the resilience and perseverance essential to managing and executing change.”

We admire people with resilience; it is especially needed in church leadership. It’s not always easy or entertaining, but it is fulfilling. And some of the most resilient people are retired church leaders who have been around a block or two. One of the greatest blessings in ministry is working with people who voluntarily connect themselves with your ministry. If you want the blessing and are up for a challenge, find a retired church leader and ask them to help.

Along with most older ministers, I want to encourage those who are faithfully engaged in God’s work as Azariah encouraged Asa: “But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded” (2 Chron. 15:7, NIV). Overcoming adversity makes us stronger for subsequent challenges.

**Giving up too soon**

A 2014 poll from Lifeway Research suggests the “average pastor’s tenure in a local church is 3.6 years.” The article goes on to point out that “studies of effective leaders suggest an average tenure of 11.2 to 21.6 years.” Many ministers give up too soon. While church planters may not minister in one place for an extended period, both statistics and observation reveal that the most effective ministers remain at a church for a longer time. Trust, confidence, and partnership in your ministry take time to build. Some estimates are that it requires at least seven years.

Athletes undergo demanding drills, developing “muscle memory” and strengthening response times as they train. Lawyers anticipate challenging objections, preparing answers to questions before they are raised. Paul wrote, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2–4, NIV). Challenges are opportunities for sharpening skills, strengthening resolve, and sustaining perseverance. A retired leader can help guide you in these challenges; they most likely have been there themselves.

Indiana Jones was up for the challenges his adventure would throw at him. Any given church contains people at different levels of spiritual maturity. But through God’s grace, we can minister to each one. So, embrace this adventure called ministry. With more resources available today than ever before, one of your most valuable still resides with older and more experienced church leaders. Availing yourself of the perseverance and resilience of older ministers can lead to direction, wisdom, and encouragement which, in turn, can help reduce setbacks and avoid disappointments. Use us!

Randall R. Childress

Randall R. Childress served in four churches over forty-five years of full-time ministry, retiring after thirty years as senior minister of the Kempsville Christian Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, United States.


THE MISSION-DRIVEN WAY
TAKING YOUR CHURCH FROM FEAR TO FOCUS IN TURBULENT TIMES

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CHURCH B: Members here are mission-driven! COVID-19 has spurred them into unified action. They’re experiencing primitive godliness like the Early Church in Acts!

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- **7x** more likely to form a deep relationship with Jesus.
- **8x** more likely to study under faculty who help them grow spiritually.

For more reasons and the research source, visit southern.edu/100reasons.

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