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Ministry[®]

INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

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How do I look at others?

My natural inclination is to judge others. Yes, I should know better. The apostle Paul tells us to regard others as better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3). This is important for us to remember when we encounter people—whether in person or in Scripture. Take Zacchaeus, for example: how do we look at (or judge) him?

Judging like the crowd

Most readers of Luke's Gospel consider Zacchaeus to be a traitor working for the enemy who rode to the top unscrupulously on the backs of his countrymen. Jesus transformed him into a generous son of Abraham who righted his wrongs and broke free from his past. But is this only way to understand the narrative? Let's look at the facts.

Luke 19 contains no mention of dishonesty. It introduces us to a man called Zacchaeus who is chief tax collector and rich. Zacchaeus is also short, and the crowd is impeding his goal, which is to see Jesus.

When Jesus comes close to the tree where he is perched, Jesus calls him by his name, "Zacchaeus! Get down quickly! Today in your home I must stay!" (v. 5).¹ Although this is an imperative, Zacchaeus feels no reproach from Jesus. Instead, he complies and welcomes Jesus with joy.

The crowd, on the other hand, criticizes Jesus and judges Zacchaeus: "In a sinner's home He stops!" (v. 7). But Zacchaeus is not discouraged by this indirect slight. He stands, turns to Jesus, and calls Him Lord. Is Zacchaeus just being polite here, or is he confessing Jesus' divinity? It is left for the reader to decide.

Zacchaeus continues, "Half my possessions, Lord, to the poor I give. And if I extorted something from someone, I give back four times!" (v. 8). Here again, the reader can choose what meaning to give to these words. They can mean, "From now on I will . . ." or "I've always . . ." It's my way of living." Greek grammar allows both readings. Why do we almost naturally lean toward the former?



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

The narrative ends with these words from Jesus, “Today salvation entered this house. He also is a son of Abraham” (v. 9). Then Luke adds, “For the son of man came to look for and save the lost” (v. 10). What was Zacchaeus saved from? From the sins assumed by the crowd or the bad reputation that kept him away from Jesus and the others?

To read this text as a conversion narrative is possible, but not compulsory. It can be read as Jesus discovering an honest and generous human pearl, a victim of prejudices. The text does not say that Zacchaeus is not a sinner and does not need God’s grace to be saved. It simply says that the crowd judges him a sinner. In this case, Jesus acknowledges that Zacchaeus’s bad reputation does not prevent him from welcoming salvation and being worthy of the identity of being one of Abraham’s sons.

Standing out from the crowd

Let us not join the crowd. If we adopt its vision, we risk being obstacles to those who want to

discover Jesus but feel too small beside us. We risk being shocked that Jesus could stand by them. We risk being embarrassed when we learn the hard way that God will accept people only if they bow down and not if they remain standing in front of Him. We risk thinking and acting as if we are better than others.

We risk still more by imagining that God cannot see honest and generous people in all social groups. People who are doing good without thinking they merit anything. People who, like the sheep of Matthew 25:37–39, are surprised to be blessed after giving food or water or clothes and visiting Jesus simply because it was natural for them to act as brothers and sisters to those wounded by life.

Yes, let us regard others as better than ourselves!



1 Scripture is the author’s translation from the original Greek.



A funeral homily beyond the usual

The purpose of this article is to challenge pastors to create funeral and memorial services that affirm our Christian faith, provide comfort and assurance to the family and friends of the deceased, and are creative while presenting an accurate account of the person's life. Therefore, it is important for the pastor to spend time with family members to ask questions that invite them to share memories that guide the preacher in preparing a message that incorporates significant details of the individual's life. How do I know?

A catalyst story

A pastoral colleague of mine had lost his father. Several weeks after the memorial service, I asked my friend whether he had found the funeral

service meaningful to him. After a moment of reflection, he replied, "No."

I probed further. "Did what the pastor said give you comfort or help you process your loss?" Again, his answer was no.

"What do you think the pastor might have said or done that would have been helpful?" My friend responded that he was not sure. He told me that he was not sure whether anyone could have said or done anything in a public venue, like the funeral, that would have been either helpful or meaningful. The funeral, he observed, took place so soon after his father died that there was little time to process much of anything. More time, he said, is needed before one can begin to put things together and respond to the traumatic loss associated with the death of a family member.



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Obispo, California,
United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

This conversation, and my friend's evaluation of the funeral homily, set the wheels of my mind turning. How might a pastor transform the funeral homily from redundant to relevant? I began to reflect on funeral services I had attended as an observer and recalled the conversations among the family and friends after the service. There were occasions when the pastor recounted specific details and experiences of the person's life. After the service, I listened as people told one another how what the pastor said revived memories of the person who had died. People opined that the pastor was right on in his depiction of the person's life.

I reflected on other funeral homilies where the officiant provided no evidence of ever having known the person. The generic homily could have applied to anyone. Conversations after the service either did not reference what the pastor said or expressed disappointment that specific details of the person's life were omitted. What can be done to change that? Here are some helpful points.

Talking to the family

The initial family visit gives the pastor an opportunity to listen as family and others express feelings and concerns related to the loss of their loved one. Family members usually like to talk about their recent loss and reflect on the deceased's life, significant events, and accomplishments.

When a parishioner dies, it is reasonable for the pastor to assume that he or she will be officiating at the funeral or memorial, but it is best to confirm this with the family. Whether the family may desire someone other than the pastor is a delicate matter. Such situations provide an opportunity for the pastor to exhibit grace and understanding. I know from experience the feelings that arise when the family selects another person to fill the slot. It is not a failure or sign of weakness if internal disquiet arises when another person is asked to fill the role we believe is ours.

Some congregations have a policy that when a wedding or funeral takes place in the church, the pastor is to officiate. Accept that people have a right to ask anyone they wish to officiate at the service of their loved one. There are other opportunities to minister to the deceased family. When a pastor occupies an observer position, it is an opportunity to think again about what it means to be a servant pastor to our people.

Guidance in decisions

At some point in the conversation, it is appropriate to ask family members if they have had the opportunity to think about funeral or memorial services. It may be helpful for someone outside the immediate family, such as the pastor, to assist the family in considering what lies ahead. This is an opportunity to explain that one has the option to select ground burial or cremation. Family members may ask if the church objects to cremation—it does not.

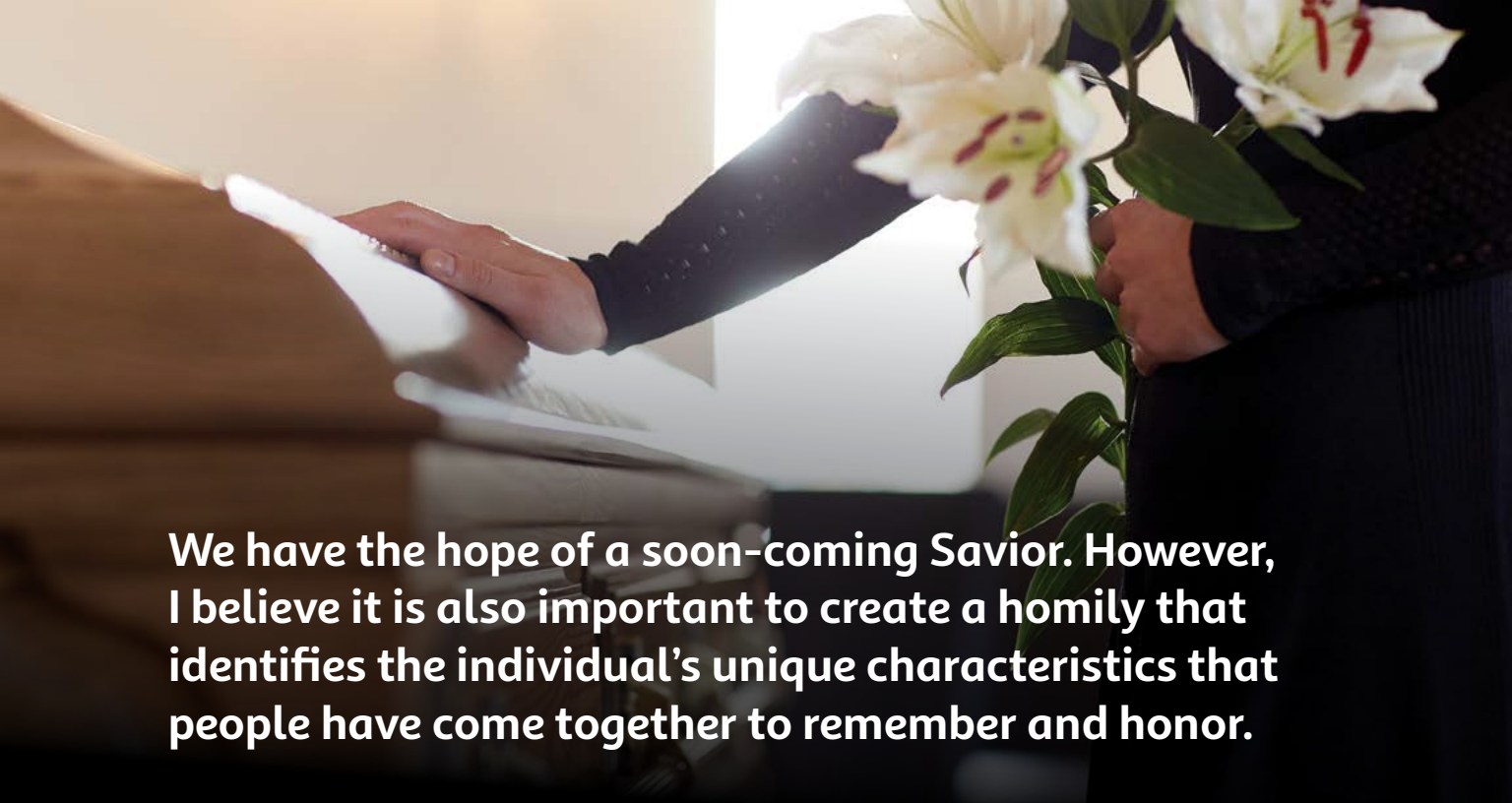
It may also be helpful to review the process of selecting a casket. If cremation is selected, the mortuary may have a cremation casket. It is appropriate for the pastor to explain that the mortuary is a business, and there will be a wide range of price options available. The mortuary sells a product like any other company. There are expensive caskets, and there are less expensive caskets. When the salesperson has shown the available caskets, one can ask whether there are other options. Often the mortuary keeps the less expensive products in another location away from the more expensive items.

A few questions

In the course of the conversation, it was my practice to explain to the family that when I officiated at the service, I saw myself as a spokesperson for the family. I explained that it would help me prepare my remarks if the family answered a few questions. Take careful notes as the family provides information to include in the homily. Sample questions: What did the person count most important in his or her life? What were some significant life influences? What career did their loved one pursue? Were there any unusual events that impacted his or her life? What causes did he or she support? What made him or her angry or distressed? If failing to mention one thing would fail to identify this person, what might that one thing be? Are there other people outside of the family that meant a lot to him or her?

Questions such as these enable the pastor to discover the family's perceptions of the one they have lost and incorporate into the homily what the family considered unique about their loved one. The answers provide a platform upon which to develop the homily.

Including family statements in the funeral homily, without identifying how the information was obtained, grabs people's attention. The family members hear their statements in a new way. They identify with what is said, for the pastor is



We have the hope of a soon-coming Savior. However, I believe it is also important to create a homily that identifies the individual's unique characteristics that people have come together to remember and honor.

restating what they expressed. When preparing the homily, it is essential that we enfold whatever we say within the context of our Christian hope and that we assure the family and friends that our faith enables us to face death with confidence. We have the hope of a soon-coming Savior. However, I believe it is also important to create a homily that identifies the individual's unique characteristics that people have come together to remember and honor. The pastor who is successful in catching the essence of that person's life can expect to see an immediate response from those who hear, as evidenced by smiles of agreement, nods of approval, and other overt mannerisms.

A hopeful homily

Unfortunately, I found out from personal experience what a family needs from the pastor. Early one morning, a phone call from a pastoral colleague informed me that my father, Ed Downing, had died. I decided to officiate at my father's memorial service. In consultation with the pastor, we scheduled the service in my parents' home church.

My sister, other family members, and I designed a service that would fit within a forty-five- to fifty-minute time frame. We agreed that we wanted the service to reflect my father's values and present a brief and accurate statement of what set Ed apart from others. We

recalled his personal likes and dislikes, career choice, recreational activities, the significance his Adventist faith played in his life, and his commitment to family and friends. We identified what distressed him. I searched his Bible to find texts he had underlined, and I attempted to remember the subjects of sermons he, as a local church elder, preached at his home church. With these assembled pieces of information before me, I began to write.

As I spoke, I noticed people nod agreement when I recounted incidents in my dad's life, smile or laugh at appropriate places, and appear somber when a serious statement was made. The service was kept within the target time limit.

A sacred opportunity

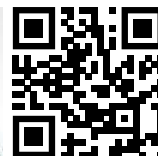
A memorial service is a sacred opportunity. People who experience loss are vulnerable; distressed; often confused; and, on occasion, angry. Questions are asked that have no answer.

A funeral or memorial service is an occasion that calls for a pastor to apply skills and creative thought that transform a boilerplate cliché into a creative homily—one that honors the deceased, speaks to the listeners, uplifts the Lord Jesus, and affirms the blessed hope. 🙏

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.

Living with an eternal purpose

Todd R. Bishop is the lead pastor of Church Unleashed, Commack, New York, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

A young woman named Lea, studying at Long Island University, walked into our church several years ago. I did not realize the impact of that action until two years later when, in December 2017, our church started making plans to host our first-ever Night to Shine—a prom¹ for those with special needs—in partnership with the Tim Tebow Foundation. Lea heard the announcement and thought, *We should open this up to the student athletes at Long Island University*. Excited, she approached us. Within a few weeks, Lea had recruited more than 30 volunteer student athletes. They came and served like champions.

An immediate connection

At the event, I connected with several of the football players, but one young man really stood out to me, Tim. You could see that he was a natural-born leader. He and I also became friends. We stayed connected, and since then, several football players have made our church their home during the off-season. Tim led that effort.

In 2018, Tim told me, “I want to make a difference. I want my senior year to count.” (We had no idea what those words would really mean.) An idea came up about doing a Bible study for any interested football players. I remember Tim calling me and saying, “Hey, Pastor, I think Sunday at three o’clock P.M. will work for the majority of us.” I thought, *OK, I’m gonna preach three sermons on a Sunday and then drive 35 minutes to host a Bible study*. But soon, the Bible study was up and running.

At first, five athletes showed up. For the next 10 weeks, we held Bible studies on Sundays and before every home game. It truly became one of the highlights of my week. I also started sending out a “Verse of the Week” text every Monday to encourage them. Then it became individual messages to players; phone calls; and, ultimately, friendship. Tim’s decision to make a difference his senior year was starting to take shape.

Our Bible study grew to 20 to 25 individuals by the end of the season. When I arrived home after Bible study, my wife, Mary, would ask, “How did it go?” And I would tell her about each player and brag on them. I began to adopt them as part of my family!

One of the earliest lessons I shared with the football team was, “No matter what, God is good.” When the team was 0-5, I reminded them, “No matter what, God is good.” And when the team finished the season 0-10, I still told them, “No matter what, God is good.” It would become an anthem for what we were about to face.

An instant grief

One day, I was in the middle of a production rehearsal when my phone started lighting up with texts from the football players. “PT, call me it’s an emergency.” When I finally saw the messages, I slipped into the lobby and was able to get Joe. “PT, Clay is dead. He was murdered last night.” There, in the lobby of my church, I fell to my knees, overcome by the instant grief that one of the football players I had grown so close to had died. I could not believe it. Walking back into our rehearsal, I stopped everything, and we prayed for the family and football team.

The family set Saturday, December 27, for the memorial service. Several football players asked if I was going to attend. Without a doubt, I had to go. Clay had been more than just someone in the Bible study—he was my friend! So, I rented a 15-passenger van and planned to bring as many team members as I could squeeze into that vehicle.

A couple of days before Clay’s funeral, I received a text from Clay’s dad, Casey. He was going through what every parent who has ever lost a child wrestles with: “Did my child know Jesus?”

I told Casey about the day that Clay raised his hand to confirm his faith in Christ, October 13, 2019. Both Clay’s father and I cried. We spoke for about 30 minutes, and at the end of the

conversation, I said, “I will see you on Saturday at the celebration of life service for Clay.”

An angel in disguise?

A friend, Sebastian, and I loaded up the van and drove a bunch of football players down to Tennessee—a 16-and-a-half-hour trip. At their request, I took a group where their friend had been savagely murdered. When we walked onto the property, you could feel the pain in every athlete. We saw the place where Clay was stabbed and then ultimately where he had died. All of us were emotional! In the middle of the parking lot, on the site of loss, I shared about the pain Jesus felt when He was at the grave of Lazarus. We formed a circle and prayed. And then, when I opened my eyes, there stood an older man with a guitar in front of us! I had no idea where he came from. The man said, “I’ll sing ya a song.” Before we knew it, he was playing “Freebird.” We all gasped. It had been one of Clay’s favorite songs. Then the man asked about another song and said, “C’mon, Trigger, my guitar, and me can play anything.” Trigger was Clay’s dog’s name!

As we walked away, someone said, “Pastor, that was weird. What was that all about?” I shared how Hebrews 13 teaches us to be good to strangers because they could be angels in disguise. After we had gone about 75 yards, we looked back. No one was there! *Could it be*, I thought to myself, *Hebrews 13 playing out in our lives?* I may never really know, but it sure felt as if God sent an angel to give those young men a message—“I am here with you.”

A stand for Christ

Thousands gathered to honor Clay’s memory. During the service, I walked up to the podium, my heart racing. As soon as I opened my mouth, though, I felt at ease and spoke from the heart. When Clay’s siblings and parents spoke, their faith was visible in every word. At the end of the service, Pastor Bergen invited anyone who wanted to give or rededicate their life to Jesus to stand to their feet. Hundreds of people throughout the auditorium and overflow area rose. I was in tears and saw God in a way that I had never seen Him before.

After the service, I jumped back into our rented van, drove back to the university, and dropped off the guys. As soon as Sebastian and I left the campus, I started crying. When you need to be the pastor for others, you hold things in and feel the weight of being strong for everyone else. But finally, at this moment, I just could not hold it anymore. Grief is tough. To be honest, I am still

grieving, but I have seen God do so much in so many lives through this tragedy. The final chapter of this story has not been written yet!

As I have walked countless people through this heartbreak, I can’t help but think, *Everything happens on purpose and for a purpose*. I don’t always like what happens or how, but I do know that God can make beauty out of the ashes. I don’t ask God “Why?” ever! I refuse to ask myself questions that I will never know the answer to on this side of heaven, but I do wonder, *What’s next?* Meaning, *I know, God, You are going to use this, just show me how!* And I can tell you that God has worked through this tragedy in ways I could never describe. God showed up. He always does! Ever fully present, He never wastes a hurt.

A personal mission

I have had a personal mission statement for my 25 years of pastoring: “At the end of the long days and late nights, did anybody hear about Jesus?” It drives me to say yes to a Bible study after preaching three times on a Sunday. It compels me to spend time with student athletes, text them, and even invite them to my home. It pushes me to share God’s love with everyone, everywhere, whether convenient or not. Living with an eternal perspective is not a sermon slogan or cute cliché—it ought to be the thing that motivates every part of our lives.

Going through this has not been easy. People look at pastors as superhuman with a huge S tattooed on their chest, but we are just human. We hurt. We bleed. We feel pain and often hide it. But no matter how great the loss or pain, I still believe “God causes everything to work together for the good” (Romans 8:28, NLT). It never says “everything is good”—but that it “works for good.”

Paul wrote to the church in Colossians: “Fill your thoughts with heavenly realities, and not with the distractions of the natural realm” (Colossians 3:2, TPT). So many things can fill our thoughts: success, failure, fun, relationships, money, and more. Paul teaches us to live with an eternal perspective because you never know whose life will depend on our focus. We should see everything we do through the lens of eternity!

This tragedy has taught me four things. First, *walk through divine doors*. Something can seem totally inconvenient, but inconvenient doors lead to unimaginable opportunities. Second, *live untied to this life*. It is OK to enjoy the things of this life, but we cannot be bound to them. Third, *guard your focus*. Life can be so distracting. Instead of just being

a pastor or holding a Bible study, I am shaping eternity. That must be my focus. Finally, *reflect God's glory*. We do not represent ourselves; we represent God. Our mission is to point people to Him.

The million-dollar question is, Are you living for the eternal or the earthly? I know my answer. It is loud and clear. I will never forget October 13, 2019. God put Lea in our church, Tim in my life, and Clay in that Bible study. I choose to live for an eternal purpose!

Who are your Clays? They stand all around us at work, high schools, malls, supermarkets, universities,

and even churches. Don't pass by the opportunities that God puts in front of you. You just never know how you will influence someone's eternity!



- 1 Prom is a formal event designed to give young people the opportunity to develop their social skills.

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.



LETTERS

Thinking differently

I have just read the editorial of the March 2021 edition of *Ministry*. Jeffrey Brown ("Evangelism is Canceled") has worded so well what I myself have been feeling for a while now. We need to think differently and all-inclusively when it comes to evangelism. And, as George Webber says, "not for the sake of getting new members . . . but love without any ulterior motives." I wonder what evangelism would look like if all our members thought this way—which is actually what Jesus asks of each of us. Thank you so much.

—Clair M. Sanches-Schutte, director, Children's Ministries and Women's Ministries, Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, St Albans, United Kingdom.

Praying continuously

Thank you for the excellent work you are doing with *Ministry*. I am currently enjoying the July 2021 issue. I particularly appreciated the

article by Ekkehardt Mueller ("In Vain?"). Thank you also for the excellent editorial (Sheryl Beck, "Does Your Crop have Roots?"). I was blessed, and greatly appreciated the mention of the Trilogy Scripture Songs website. Congratulations also on the 2020 Associated Church Press awards. Praying continued blessings in the name of Jesus.

—Derek Morris, president, Hope Channel, Inc., Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

Reading faithfully

Dear friends in Christ, I decided to write to you after reading Ekkehardt Mueller's "In Vain" article in your July 2021 edition. I have been, still am, in pastoral ministry since June 1962.

I have gone through a lot of adversity but have experienced far more blessings through ministering in small churches. I believe that reading my autobiography—my story of a ministry that still continues—could be a source of help and

encouragement for pastors to "keep on keeping on, no matter what."

I have gotten your *Ministry* publication for at least five years. While I am not an Adventist, I still love to read *Ministry* and consider you people as brothers and sisters in Christ.

—Rev. Philip N. Peterman, Oxford Circle Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States

Writing compassionately

Just a quick note to say how much I enjoyed the article "Writing for Public Ministry," by Gene G. Bradbury in the July 2021 issue. In my retirement years, I am enjoying more opportunities and time to focus on witnessing and encouraging others through a writing ministry. Pastor Bradbury's article was timely and encouraging for me. Please extend my appreciation to him.

—Loren L. Fenton, pastor (retired), Walla Walla, Washington, United States

Go build a **PILLAR**



Teresa Auten is the adult music director for the Triplett United Methodist Church in Mooresville, North Carolina, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

As a Christian educator for more than 20 years, I have had multiple people ask me how to help children develop their own faith. This story might give you ideas on how to pass faith to the next generation and develop faith in your congregation as well.

Nothing was clicking

Fairly new to the role of Christian educator, I had been praying fervently for a new and better way to reach the young people in my church. It seemed as if nothing was clicking. During my study time, I came to my favorite historical book, Joshua.

In its third and fourth chapters, I read that God miraculously stopped the flow of the flooded Jordan River so that the nation of Israel could cross into the Promised Land. Once all had reached the other shore, God commanded Joshua to have the leader of each of the twelve tribes return to the dry riverbed and get a large stone. They were then to form a pillar in that place that would become their own. Immediately afterward, the river began to flow once again. The children of Israel ended their journey to their own land in much the same way as they started it: crossing a seemingly impassable body of water with the aid of the Almighty God.

But why build a pillar? The story really caught my attention. God had asked them to build other items during the decades of wandering, but those other things were portable and had to do with worship. Unable to get it out of my mind, I

kept thinking about the incident. Building a pillar on the desolate land by the Jordan River seemed to me to be as pointless as digging a hole just to fill it back in again.

As I read again why God wanted them to erect a

pillar, the reasoning was suddenly so simple and profound that I couldn't believe I had missed it before. Of course! Build a pillar out of stones that could only have come from the very middle of the turbulent Jordan. It was the perfect thing to do.

Sparking curiosity

A pillar in the middle of the barren landscape would have elicited questions for decades from children who had not witnessed God's miraculous hand on the day the people crossed the Jordan. "What are those stones doing there?" "Who built this?" "How did it get here?" Such were the questions that God knew children would ask in the years ahead. The pillar would be a focal point; a springboard for ongoing conversations. It would spark curiosity.

God our Creator knows full well that curiosity is the beginning of all learning. Every good teacher knows that the best lessons kindle curiosity in students. Good teachers do not just teach, they encourage questions and stimulate learning. That was what God was doing by having His chosen people build a pillar made of stones gathered from the middle of a river.

Modern-day curiosity

As a Christian educator, I realized that while up to that point I had been teaching, I had not been inciting curiosity. The children learned, but they were not *hungry* to learn. God wants all children to *want* to know Him, not just because a teacher taught a lesson. An effective teacher must invite questions; provide a point of interest; remind them of the great things God has done; and, above all, inspire them.

But how? These were twenty-first century children. How could I spark curiosity in kids who have access to almost limitless information via the internet? It seemed like a huge undertaking. Clearly, God was speaking to me about really engaging young people. As I prayed, God led me

to the next step: Stop teaching and start building a pillar.

The “how to” moment

That first week the lesson was to be about noticing how God acts in our lives and what, as Christians, our response should be to Him. I wanted to make the lesson stick. What could I do to spark their interest, engage their minds, and involve their hearts? Somehow, I needed to give them a focal point. I thought about the pillar and the questions that God knew it would raise.

I remembered from the book of 1 Samuel that after a victory over the Philistines, Samuel created a stone monument, an “ebenezer,” which means “stone of help,” as a remembrance that God had been with them. Like following a path of bread-crumbs, I found the first step. Not only that, I had an entirely new interpretation of my role in the lives of the young people God put in my path.

My first “pillar” was a rock that I spray-painted gold and then wrote on in red nail polish the word “Ebenezer.” Before the students arrived, I set my “ebenezer” in the middle of a table. I didn’t mention it, but the students had plenty to say and ask about it. The unusual object began the conversation, and, as strange as it sounds, the students began to ask more questions and to share more freely. That first, small step actually worked. They were engaged. The key was to create interest and for them to ask questions, comment, share, and interact. I still have that rock. And when children come to visit me, it still serves as a pillar. Children still ask the questions, and we still have the conversations.

Momentum built

That first step led to many others. Often it was a small one. During Christmas, I took the Baby Jesus figure out of the nativity scene. Immediately the students noticed that there was something unusual, the Baby Jesus was missing. The resulting questions and conversations helped the students to consider a world without Jesus in their lives. The discussion was rich and meaningful.

I have also led them on scavenger hunts in the church and on its grounds in which the items they would find were relevant to the topic of the day or helped to understand the history of our congregation in its community. I brought tiny shells from a visit to the Sea of Galilee and borrowed other artifacts from the Holy Land to let them see and guess what they were. I had five stones gathered from the valley where David fought Goliath. Never

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will I forget the looks on the faces of the children as they passed those small stones around.

The pillars I built were seldom made of stones. For example, we made and ate homemade yeast bread and we hunted for treasure. Those pillars were to illustrate two of Jesus’ parables. The kids loved them, and the message stayed with them. I came to understand that the best lessons are those in which the teacher learns as much as the students. And that happened often.

Excited together

Those were such happy years. Never again did I purchase curriculum or prepared worksheets. Every lesson, every activity, every topic included a pillar. I became a better teacher, a more eager learner, and had to work to stay ahead of my students. We were all excited to be together for those two hours a week.

What can you, as a pastor, do to build pillars in the church? God knows the hearts of young people, that they will always ask questions. But the young are not the only curious beings—what about all of your congregation? How are they taking the sermon points home with them?

Tell the amazing story. Repeat the miracles of Jesus. Ask interesting questions. Encourage them to share their thoughts with friends and family. Engage in conversation about things of the spirit. Build in each person a curiosity about the God who continues to bring us through the raging water and into the Promised Land. Build a pillar, then let them ask why. 📖

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Certainty and doubt

As pastors, we must sometimes closely engage with theological issues that arise in our churches. Recently, while I was somewhat convinced that my position, which also represented the official view of the church, was correct, I realized I was not very familiar with the arguments from the other side. When I reviewed the literature of my opponents, I started to form doubts about my position.

Even though there was strong evidence for my view, some Bible texts, along with some highly recommended authors, seemed to accommodate their view better than mine. Furthermore, with a few theological and linguistic gymnastics, they seemed to be able to explain away quite a few of my “proof texts”—though not all, and not very convincingly. Could it be that I was wrong? That would be embarrassing! If so, what would the consequences be?

I realized that both internal and external pressures drove me toward simply defending my original position. I also realized that I could not simply succumb to those pressures. Why? First, it would be somewhat dishonest, and second, as a pastor, I routinely ask people to change their views based on new biblical information I present to them. How could I expect them to do what I was not willing to do?


I was forced to wrestle with my doubts. I was, of course, reminded of the famous passage in James 1:5–8: “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord” (NRSV).

But what kind of doubt is James referring to? Was it the kind that I had? Should I have acted like Paul (Gal. 1:8, 9), dismissing any theory that contradicts my established beliefs? To have doubts cannot just mean to be uncertain of something. Why would I need to pray for further wisdom if I was already comfortably settled on every question?

It was only after several study-filled days that I came across what seemed to be a solution to almost all of the “difficult” passages. With it, my doubts and perplexities washed away. I came to see that in the James 1:5–8 passage, the doubter, being double-minded, must be a person who is dealing with uncertainty not only regarding a particular belief but also regarding whether he or she wants to follow where divine wisdom will lead.

The counterpart of doubt is faith. Faith is not just the assent to certain beliefs but also trust in God and faithfulness toward Him. If certainty was the opposite of doubt here, the argument would become a *reductio ad absurdum*. It would be saying that certainty on all points of faith can block God from giving me further wisdom.

I was able to competently and confidently complete a presentation on the topic. My confidence in our beliefs was reinforced and, more importantly, my relationship with Jesus was strengthened. I felt His presence through the Holy Spirit stronger than before.

It is good to know that He is on our side as a Strong Helper and Master Teacher. Whether we ask for health; financial relief; or, as in my case, wisdom, God desires us to know truth, and truth does not shy away from examination. Only if I remain open-minded and willing to change my behavior due to new information am I, in fact, not a doubter. I will neither be a doubter nor assume certainty in all things; rather, by faith, I will put my trust in the certainty of God’s wisdom and guidance. 



Best practices for trauma-informed preaching

Recognizing the reality that trauma knows no boundaries and that it affects both preachers and their

listeners, it is imperative that the field of homiletics incorporate a trauma-informed approach. The recently published report from the Barna Group and the American Bible Society reveals that only 15 percent of pastors feel well equipped to assist with trauma care, and only 29 percent, predominantly older Protestant pastors, preach about trauma and suffering.¹ Such statistics underscore the importance of trauma care and trauma-informed approaches in preaching.

Joni Sancken, associate professor of homiletics at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, reinforces the importance of trauma-informed homiletics when she writes, “Sermons can offer instruction about the pain of traumatic experience and legitimize the effects of trauma. Sermons can reach out to those who may be suffering quietly and provide an open door for further conversation. Preaching can speak God’s promises in a powerful way to those who need to hear them and provide theological tools to help

people make sense of their experiences in a way that nurtures faith.”²

A definition

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), “Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.” By their own admission, “SAMHSA puts forth a framework for the behavioral health specialty sectors, that can be adapted to other sectors.”³

Applying SAMHSA’s four assumptions and six key principles to the field of homiletics means that trauma-informed preaching “[1] *realizes* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; [2] *recognizes* the signs and symptoms of trauma in [congregants], families, [pastoral] staff, and others involved with the [church]; and [3] *responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into [sermons], policies, procedures, and practices, and [4] *seeks* to actively *resist re-traumatization*.”⁴

The six principles that ground trauma-informed preaching are: (1) ensuring that places of worship, staff, members, and



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visitors will feel both physically and psychologically safe; (2) ensuring that a church's operations and decisions build and maintain trust among its constituents; (3) assisting trauma survivors in utilizing their stories to promote healing and recovery; (4) recognizing that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach; (5) ensuring that the pastoral staff serves as facilitators and not controllers of recovery; and (6) preaching sermons and putting in place policies, protocols, and procedures that are sensitive to a wide array of cultural, historical, gender, and other needs.⁵

Best practices

Preachers can use the following best practices to develop and deliver trauma-sensitive sermons.

Recognize the widespread impact of trauma.

Before addressing trauma in a sermon, clergy members should educate themselves on the issue. Through research and training, they should come to realize trauma's widespread impact; recognize the key concepts associated with trauma, including adverse childhood experiences (ACE); and be able to identify established paths to recovery.

An ACE study conducted from 1995 to 1997 revealed that adults who experienced childhood trauma are 15 times more likely to attempt suicide; 4 times more likely to become an alcoholic; 4 times more likely to develop a sexually transmitted disease; 4 times more likely to inject drugs; 3 times more likely to use antidepressant medication; 3 times more likely to be regularly absent from work; 3 times more likely to experience depression; 3 times more likely to have serious job problems; 2.5 times more likely to smoke; 2 times more likely to develop chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; and 2 times more likely to have a serious financial problem.⁶

Additionally, such childhood encounters have a lasting impact on one's mental capabilities. As Dawn McClelland and Chris Gilyard point out: "The front part of our brain, known as the

prefrontal cortex, is the rational part where consciousness lives, processing and reasoning occurs, and we make meaning of language. When a trauma occurs, people enter into a fight, flight, or freeze state, which can result in the prefrontal cortex shutting down. The brain becomes somewhat disorganized and overwhelmed because of the trauma, while the body goes into a survival mode and shuts down the higher reasoning and language structures of the brain. The result of the metabolic shutdown is a profound imprinted stress response."⁷

The area of the brain primarily activated while listening to a sermon is the prefrontal cortex.⁸ Therefore, it can be safely concluded that since a brain in pain cannot learn, it is almost impossible to present sermons that will arrest the attention of traumatized individuals and promote retention and integration of the message. But trauma-informed sermons will enable preachers to connect emotionally with their hearers.⁹

Avoid platitudes, clichés, and judgmental attitudes. When preaching to those who have experienced trauma, avoid platitudes and clichés because they do more harm than good. While you may be well-intentioned, it often does not sit right with the trauma survivor and can often come across as insincere or ignorant. As Sancken advises: "Preachers will want to avoid simplistic responses such as 'God will take care of it in God's own time' or 'Forgive and forget.' These filler statements function, at best, as jargon and sail right through listeners without making an impact; at worst, they may be seen as not taking survivor's wounds seriously or as letting perpetrators off the hook."¹⁰

Other phrases that research has shown to be hurtful include, "I know how you feel," "It's for the best," "God doesn't give you any more than you can handle," and "It's God's will." Such platitudes injure rather than heal, even when said with the kindest intentions.¹¹

Trauma-informed preachers recognize that their listeners' actions are a direct result of their lived experiences. When congregants act out or disengage, do not ask them, "What is wrong with you?" but rather, "What happened to you?" with the hope of pointing them to "what's right with them." Overall, in any verbal message, the part of language that has the most impact is how it is said. Preachers need to be mindful of their choice of words, vocal tone, and how they phrase statements and questions.

Often, people who experience trauma are already feeling a great deal of shame and guilt either in relation to the trauma itself or how they reacted to it. As a result, assume that the trauma survivors who listen to your sermons and seek your help are doing the best they can and want what is right for themselves and their families.

Practice empathetic listening. Learn the art of good listening. Sancken suggests that "listening is the first step to preaching that facilitates healing, especially when the church has been involved in wounding."¹² In the same way that preachers want others to hear them, they should be willing to listen to their congregants. Preaching does not end when the sermon closes. In fact, a direct correlation exists between better sermons and time spent listening during pastoral visitations.

When people experience trauma, suffering, or loss, it wounds their hearts. To heal such injuries, they need preachers who are willing to listen without causing further harm as they express their pain. It will establish trust between preachers and those who listen.

Avoid retraumatization. Being mindful that an individual might be at risk for retraumatization, clergy should implement strategies that seek to create a safe place for their listeners. Realizing that some sermons may have the potential to retraumatize or vicariously traumatize worshipers, I encourage preachers to have trauma experts or survivors within their congregations preview their sermon manuscripts. It will identify potentially traumatic content.

For difficult material that needs to be retained, preachers should provide "trigger warnings" at the beginning of their presentations. Sancken advises that such warnings should occur one week in advance, perhaps through a brief message placed on the church's website or social media platforms.¹³ Worshipers known to have experienced a specific type of trauma discussed in the sermon should also receive permission to

leave the room without judgment so as to avoid retraumatization.

Avoid abrupt changes in the worship service, such as those involving lighting and sound, that might trigger adverse reactions in some individuals.¹⁴

Demonstrate genuine love. The fact that preachers genuinely love and care about their listeners is one of the most important hallmarks of trauma-informed preaching. As Julius Kim appropriately states: "Preachers are shepherds first, pastorally caring deeply for the flock entrusted to their care. As such, shepherd-preachers must display and declare the kind of heart and speech that demonstrates pastoral empathy and love."¹⁵

Jared Alcántara, associate professor of preaching at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas, further suggests that this kind of love for people will translate into contextualized preaching, wherein pastors will intentionally find "ways to tailor-make and custom-fit sermons to reality, to the concrete situations that people are dealing with in the here and now."¹⁶ In achieving such a goal, ministers will need to be flexible in their preaching schedule. Commenting on that, Jennifer Chrien states: "Though our lectionaries are a tremendous gift, they tend to tell abusers' stories far more frequently than the stories of victims. Sometimes, we will simply need to add a few additional verses; in other instances, we may need to provide entirely different readings or fill in the blanks ourselves, and imagine with our congregations what it might have been like to be Tamar, Bathsheba, or Isaac."¹⁷

Finally, before delivering a sermon on trauma, have a plan to provide additional support for hearers who are trauma survivors. Share specific information with the worshipers at the start of the sermon about care teams, support circles, or other referral services that they can access if needed afterward.¹⁸

Reveal God's love and hope. In addition to revealing the pastors' care for the congregation, trauma-informed preaching should also demonstrate God's care for them through sound biblical preaching. As Sancken notes: "Preaching with awareness of trauma legitimizes the experiences of survivors as well as others who have unhealed wounds from painful experiences and speaks God's love to those who need it. If preachers do not speak to these concerns, it implicitly communicates that the church—and, worse, that God—doesn't care. Nothing could be further from the truth."¹⁹

Trauma-informed biblical preaching emphasizes the gospel's healing power and inspires resilience in the lives of trauma survivors. Preachers should forthrightly speak about the evils of trauma and the need for justice while at the same time offering hope of a new day to come and the promised liberation of God's oppressed people. The minister must ground such prophetic messages in the testimonies of the Hebrew prophets, the laments of the psalms, and the life and teachings of Jesus.²⁰

Practice self-care. It is very easy for caring preachers to become overly involved with church members who have experienced trauma. Especially vulnerable are clergy members who have received little training in recognizing the symptoms of trauma and how to deal with how it can affect them. Clergy members should be trained to identify and address the warning signs of vicarious trauma in themselves, such as hypervigilance, poor boundaries, avoidance, inability to empathize, numbing, addictions, chronic exhaustion, physical ailments, minimizing, anger, cynicism, and feelings of professional inadequacy.²¹ Seeking professional counseling and establishing boundaries are other helpful self-care options to consider.

Another important aspect of self-care is for ministers to examine their own lives, as they, too, wrestle with their own stressful life events and traumas. Since hurt people hurt others, it is important that preachers seek help in dealing with their own trauma in order to effectively minister to their wounded congregants. Spend time in personal reflection. Consider why you avoid preaching parts of the Bible that deal with trauma. Do you shy away from the stories of Tamar or Joseph because you, a family member, or a friend experienced rape, human trafficking, or slavery? Reflecting on such questions will assist preachers in dealing with their own history of trauma.

Intentional ministry

In summary, the adverse and long-lasting effects of trauma permeate every level of society. Because places of worship are microcosms of society, they are not immune to the pervasive issue of trauma. Preachers, therefore, find themselves challenged to view the act of preaching through a trauma-informed lens. The crafting and delivery of appropriate sermons will demand that they acquire the requisite skill set that will assist them in recognizing the signs of trauma in their

parishioners. In addition to educating themselves about trauma's widespread impact, such knowledge should translate into intentional approaches evidenced throughout the entire homiletical process.



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Two New Jerusalems

God's promise in Isaiah 65:17–25 begins with the statement, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind” (KJV). The promise is repeated in Isaiah 66:22–24.

For some conservative evangelicals, this passage has been applied to the eschatological new heavens and new earth, especially because it is echoed by Revelation 21.¹ For some other Christians, Isaiah 66:23 has become a favorite biblical text in defense of the Sabbath, often used in evangelistic sermons to highlight the perpetuity of the Sabbath, as it states, “from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD” (KJV).

There is, however, a problem in applying these texts to the eschatological new heavens and new earth. Paul warned the Colossians, “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come” (Col. 2:16, 17, NKJV).² Paul clearly implies that ceremonial laws are not binding anymore after the death of Jesus. So why observe a “new moon” now and thereafter?

What kind of “new heavens and new earth” does the prophet Isaiah describe, and how should we reconcile them with the “new heaven and new earth” of Revelation 21:1–5?

Principles of prophetic interpretation

Bible students differ between classical prophecy and apocalyptic prophecy as far as their fulfillment (whether reward or punishment) is concerned. Fulfillment of classical prophecy is generally conditional, while apocalyptic prophecy is unconditional.³ Students also need to be aware of the role of ancient Israel in biblical prophecy⁴ and the eventual transfer of the privileges and responsibilities of ancient Israel to the church (spiritual Israel).⁵

Based on the above principle, interpreters recognize the following about the prophetic promises:

(1) The promise in Isaiah 65; 66 was made for physical Israel after the Babylonian exile. The passage should be placed in its context: Isaiah's prophetic ministry in the eighth to seventh century (ca. 745–686 BC) and his prophecies on Babylonian captivity and return.

(2) The conditional fulfillment of the promise (depending on Israel's obedience).

(3) In case of Israel's failure, the prophecy points forward to the new heavens and new earth after the millennium.

(4) Exclusive local setting descriptions for the first New Jerusalem should not be transported/ transferred into the postmillennial, eschatological New Jerusalem.

Threat and promise

Isaiah's ministry took place during the height of Assyrian supremacy. Chapters 1–39 are mainly set against the backdrop of the Assyrians' interference with Israel and Judah. In 722 BC, the Assyrians defeated Israel and carried captive the ten northern tribes (2 Kings 17). Now, the Assyrians were moving toward Judah, defeating Lachish, and from there, sieging Jerusalem (701 BC). But God's intervention prompted the withdrawal of Sennacherib to Nineveh (Isa. 37:36–38).

Likely having heard of Hezekiah's survival of the Assyrian threat and his miraculous healing from his deadly illness, his Babylonian ally Merodach-Baladan sent an envoy from Babylon to congratulate him. Overtaken by pride and vanity, Hezekiah showed them the riches and treasures of Jerusalem, which the Babylonians later would come to take, together with Jewish captives to Babylon (Isaiah 39).

God repeatedly warned that He would destroy His people if they did not repent. But with the impending doom that would befall them, Isaiah 40–66 brings a message of comfort, deliverance, and a promise of new heavens and earth after the Babylonian exile. Therefore, we can assume that the Jews were repeatedly living under spiritual crises and threats from the Assyrians and Babylonians. In such a time, they needed hope, comfort, and deliverance. And God provided them

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supernatural deliverance. He equally promised that they would live in the “new heavens and new earth” after their return from the Babylonian exile.

The first New Jerusalem

Belief and expectation of a “New Jerusalem” were common in New Testament times. The concept is found in several Second Temple Jewish works of literature, such as in the Pseudepigrapha (for instance, 1 Enoch 90:29–38). Among the Dead Sea literature, at least five scrolls from three different caves near Qumran bear the title “New Jerusalem.”⁶

The “new heavens and new earth” passage is introduced by “I [God] will create [*bara*]” (three times in Isaiah 65:17, 18, NIV). All three occurrences of the verb *bara* are participles, indicating what God will continually do in the future. God will bring new things into existence. His “intention is to transform reality in different spheres of life: human personal and family life, human society, and the natural world.”⁷ “New heavens and a new earth” is an idiomatic expression describing a miraculous transformation,⁸ of new conditions of life, for God’s people after the Babylonian exile.

What would the first New Jerusalem look like?

God would create the first New Jerusalem, an echo of the potential fulfillment of the covenant stipulation for blessings, not cursing, found in Deuteronomy 28; 29. Wolf and lamb would feed together (Isa. 65:25). The redeemed would build houses and inhabit them (v. 21). They would rejoice (vv. 17, 18).

There would be no infant mortality nor miscarriages. The youngest age at death would be at one hundred (v. 20). While the faithful would live very long lives (vv. 20–22), premature death would be a curse for sinners (v. 20). Children would be born (v. 23). There would be a temple at the center of the city, where some Gentiles would be appointed and serve as priests (Isa. 66:21). All flesh would come to worship on the new moon and on Sabbath (v. 23).⁹ Alongside God’s people, others who eat swine’s flesh would be consumed (v. 17). The book of Isaiah ends with a statement that the corpses of the wicked would be displayed outside Jerusalem and viewed by worshipers (v. 24).

There is no doubt that Isaiah 65 and 66 describe the potential New Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. Jiří Moskala affirms,

“God’s kingdom will be manifested in Israel, the knowledge about the true God will grow, and the acceptance of the Messiah will secure it even further. In view is the growing establishment of God’s values until [He] will bring the eschatological ‘new heavens and a new earth’ (the establishment of God’s justice on earth by the Messiah is likewise a gradual reality—the kingdom of grace is followed by the kingdom of glory until even nature will be universally transformed to reflect the Edenic sinless conditions).”¹⁰

If the promises of the first New Jerusalem were fulfilled, it would still have remained incomplete and imperfect. As imperfect as it would be, human language and experience would have rated the fulfillment of those promises as “best.” But was it fulfilled at all?

Conditionality of the prophecy

If we accept that “The promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional,”¹¹ then the fate of Jerusalem would be connected to Israel’s acceptance or rejection of the Messiah. The “new heavens and a new earth” of Isaiah 65 and 66 were for the postexilic Jewish nation. But because of their failure and rejection of the Messiah, the nonfulfillment of that prophecy for the Jewish nation is a fact. Nevertheless, the New Testament writers teach, drawing from the Old Testament language, that “new heavens and a new earth” are being prepared for God’s people—a fulfillment of prophecy that will not fail.

From ancient Israel to spiritual Israel

The New Testament teaches about a spiritual Israel. Paul writes, “Those who have faith are children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7, NIV). The church is the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16, NIV). Elsewhere, Peter calls the church a “chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation, His own special people” (1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV), who “according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13, NKJV).

Is it possible that two events are mingled in the same Isaiah 65; 66 passage? An analogy may be found elsewhere in the Scripture. For instance, in the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24), Jesus mingled the description of two events (the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming).¹² The vision of Isaiah may be a mingling of two events as well: (1) New Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile (leading up to Christ’s first coming) and (2) eschatological New Jerusalem, after the Second Coming (John 14:1–3; Rev. 21:1–4).

Typology

Typology as a key for prophetic interpretation is helpful. As Moskala writes, “The typological relationship between these two texts is type—Isa 65 and antitype—Rev 21–22.”¹³ In the same line of thought, it is stated, “Although the Lord’s ‘holy mountain’ would begin with Mount Zion at Jerusalem, it was only a precursor, a symbol, of what God promises to do, ultimately, in a new world with His redeemed people.”¹⁴

What would the eschatological New Jerusalem look like?

Some aspects that were to be potentially fulfilled with ancient Israel will be present in the new heavens and new earth. For it is the same God who will create “a new heaven and a new earth” and says, “‘I make all things new’” (Rev. 21:1, 5, NKJV). The wolf and the lamb shall feed together. The redeemed will build houses and inhabit them, and they will rejoice.

But there will be new things that were not in the first New Jerusalem. The final New Jerusalem, although settling on what was supposed to be the first New Jerusalem, comes down from heaven. Unlike in the first New Jerusalem, there will be no marriage nor birth in the postmillennial new heavens and new earth. There will be no more temple (Rev. 21:21, 22). God assures His people of His visible, physical presence (v. 3). They will live in eternal joy and peace and will be immortal (v. 4).

Are we there yet?

The “best” was promised in the first New Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, but that best had its flaws, was imperfect, and was never historically materialized/fulfilled. Even if, by human ingenuity, something similar to the promise in the first New Jerusalem is happening in our days, that best will have flaws. The best in this sinful world cannot compare with the final New Jerusalem. And for that to be, there is a need for a complete re-creation. Thus, “we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:13, 14, NKJV).

Perfect peace

Pastors are called to make a sound biblical interpretation (2 Tim. 2:15), especially pertaining

to prophecies. The Bible teaches that there were supposed to be two New Jerusalems. The “new heavens and new earth” that Isaiah 65 and 66 describe is the first New Jerusalem, promised to the Jewish nation after the Babylonian exile. But it was not historically fulfilled because of the failure of the people. Revelation 21:1–5 describes the second New Jerusalem, which will be perfect and in which the redeemed will live in perfect peace and eternally in the presence of God. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20, KJV)!



- 1 Jiří Moskala, “Does Isaiah 65:17–25 Describe the Eschatological New Heavens and the New Earth?” *Faculty Publications*, 2016, 187–210, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1204&context=pubs>.
- 2 Because of the eschatological application that the redeemed will worship during new moon in heaven, some contemporary Christians even call for worship during “new moon.”
- 3 Ekkehardt Mueller, “A New Trend in Adventist Eschatology: A Critical Analysis of a Recent Publication,” *Reflections* 44 (2013): 4.
- 4 For a full treatment of this subject, see the important chapter “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976), 4:25–38.
- 5 Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press), 210.
- 6 These are 2QNew Jerusalem (2Q4), 4QNew Jerusalem^a (4Q554), 4QNew Jerusalem^b (4Q555), 5QNew Jerusalem (5Q15), and 11QNew Jerusalem (11Q18). For the translated texts, see Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996). For scholarly study of these “New Jerusalem” texts, see Michael Chyutin, “The New Jerusalem: Ideal City,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 1, no. 1 (1994), 71–97. For study on the “New Jerusalem” in the Qumran writings compared with the New Testament, see F. G. Martinez, “New Jerusalem at Qumran and in the New Testament,” in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 277–289.
- 7 Moskala, “Isaiah 65:17–25,” 192.
- 8 Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, The Old Testament Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1969), 408.
- 9 The importance of the combination of “Sabbath” and “new moon” as days to worship the Lord in the projected new temple of Ezekiel is reflected in Ezekiel 46:1, 3.
- 10 Moskala, “Isaiah 65:17–25,” 199.
- 11 Ellen G. White, Manuscript 4, 1883.
- 12 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898).
- 13 Moskala, “Isaiah 65:17–25,” 204.
- 14 Roy Gane, “New Heavens and a New Earth,” *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, first quarter 2021, Sunday March 21, 2021, <https://absq.adventist.org/html?code=ADLT1Q21WK13LESN>.

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Charles E. Bradford, first president of the North American Division, passes to his rest

Charles E. Bradford, the first president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's North American Division (NAD), passed away on Thursday, September 9, 2021, in Huntsville, Alabama. He was 96.

Bradford was born in Washington, DC, on July 12, 1925, to Robert and Etta Bradford.

Etta Littlejohn, born in Mississippi, became an Adventist by attending Bible studies on the *Morning Star* riverboat and was one of the first 16 students to attend Oakwood Industrial School (now Oakwood University) in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1896. There she met Robert Bradford, from Alabama, who was part of a group of early black Adventist ministers who provided a solid foundation for Adventism among African Americans.

Bradford privately and publicly prodded church members to address racial crises. In 1964, while president of the Lake Region Conference, he wrote a letter to then General Conference president R. R. Figuhr eloquently and passionately urging him



Charles and Ethel Bradford

Photo: Pieter Damsteegt

toward a more progressive view of race relations. In 1966 he wrote a paper to the GC Session on the great need for the Adventist Church to engage in improving the condition of blacks in America. Among other things, he stated: “The Negro Seventh-day Adventist is perforce affected by the tension and the drama of his people’s struggle for justice and equal rights. Half measures and token gestures do not satisfy now.”

Nine years later, Bradford was elected associate secretary of the GC, serving in that role until he was elected NAD president in 1979, a historic election reported in secular newspapers, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

As NAD president, he served as chair of Oakwood University’s board of trustees. In his retirement, the Oakwood University Bradford Cleveland Brooks Leadership Center, the brain-child of Bradford as a leadership development “lab” for church leaders, came to fruition—and today serves as a continuing education center, initiated and supported by the North American Division Regional President’s Council and Oakwood University, that provides servant leadership development for present and future leaders.

G. Alexander Bryant, current NAD president, stated, “Elder Bradford had a rare collection of passion, grace, power, and humility. He made an incalculable impact on our lives, on our church, and on our world. Indeed, a prince of Israel has passed away, but his legacy lives on.”

Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,

“Elder Bradford had a rare collection of passion, grace, power, and humility. He made an incalculable impact on our lives, on our church, and on our world. Indeed, a prince of Israel has passed away, but his legacy lives on.”

said, “Elder Bradford was a giant in so many ways—faithful follower of Christ, wonderful preacher, diligent Bible student, dynamic intellect, experienced administrator, caring pastor, loving husband and father, encouraging brother in Christ, and long-time friend. . . . May the Comforter come especially close to the entire Bradford family at this time of sorrow. Soon, however, Jesus will come, and we will again see Elder Bradford and our loved ones who have died in Christ. What a day that will be! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

Bradford, a graduate of Oakwood University, was awarded a doctor of divinity degree from Andrews University. He is the author of several books, including *The King Is in Residence*, *Find Out About Prayer*, and *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*. [Kimberly Luste Maran, North American Division News]

Thousands of Adventists march against domestic violence in Brazil’s capital

BRASILIA, BRAZIL

More than 300 Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Brasilia, Brazil, and surrounding areas organized various activities to raise public awareness and fight against domestic violence on August 28, 2021. Adventist schools across the

region and beyond also took part in the day-long activities.

A march against violence is promoted annually in eight South American countries. The campaign also encourages forums, educational



fairs, and antiviolence programs throughout the year. Although the campaign has a different focus each year, it always seeks to make people aware of the need to respect and value women, children, and the elderly.

Anny Gill, who leads Adventist Women's Ministries across the Central Plateau of Brazil, emphasized that the project's primary goal is to help victims talk about violence and



Photos: South American Division News

overcome it. "We understand that when the victim speaks up and protests, she inhibits the aggressor," she said. "When victims stop being silent, it is easier for the abuse to stop."

In the Novo Gama district, the Adventist congregation organizes an annual motorcade 10 kilometers (6 miles) long to promote the event. Program coordinator **Alvany Fonseca** said that cars are decorated with balloons and banners reading "Say 'No' to Violence."


Leaders encourage victims to report abuse. "When we get to know about a case [of abuse], we guide and refer the victim to the relevant agencies," Fonseca said. [Rafael Brondani, South American Division and *Adventist Review*]

From bar to baptism

MBEYA REGION, TANZANIA

Anna Charles, from the Mbeya region in Southern Tanzania, heard about the everlasting gospel through television. A purveyor of beer, she became famous through her bar and made many friends through her business. Anna felt the Holy Spirit directing her to set up a pavilion in the territory of her bar, so that the Seventh-day Adventist Church could use it as an evangelistic center during an evangelistic campaign aired

through the media, "Shangwe Katika Njia Yake," a Kiswahili phrase meaning "Joy in His Way."

The three-week campaign, in July 2021, attracted thousands of people to Jesus. Those who came to drink from Anna's bar were watching a big screen. During the second week of the meetings, Anna made a decision that surprised many people—she decided to accept Jesus. She got rid of the beer and other alcoholic beverages that she sold in her bar. She was baptized along with 11 other people—all of whom heard the gospel in her bar. [Herbert Nziku, Southern Tanzania Union Mission] 



King Jesus and the Beauty of Obedience-Based Discipleship

By David Young, Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan, 2020.

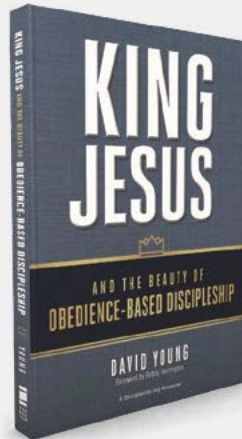
Who is a disciple? Is it one who studies the Bible, prays every day, and grows, grows, grows? The book *King Jesus and the Beauty of Obedience-Based Discipleship*, written by David Young, provides a bold, biblical answer.

The stated purpose of this book is to reacquaint the church with the Kingship of Jesus. Because the monarchy is not a universally relatable analogy, the nuances of Christ as King are lost on many in the modern church. Therefore, Young posits, “Calling Jesus ‘King’ is not a mere theological claim; it has implications for how we live. It is not just a title. Kingship denotes a position, and a very real position with very real and eternal consequences. If Jesus is king, we have only two choices in response. We can rebel against him, raise puppet kings, construct our own kingdoms, and generally thumb our noses at him, or we can submit to him in obedience-based discipleship.

“This book is a call for us to recognize the Jesus who is king and submit to him in obedience-based discipleship” (4, 5).

In addition to this, the book provides practical suggestions and examples of the surrendered life. After offering five mandatory principles for those who desire to follow Jesus as King, Young guarantees the reader will find a life worth having, filled with peace, power, and purpose.

The anecdotal writing style keeps readers engaged. Through various relevant stories, readers are stimulated both emotionally and spiritually. Generally, this creates a deeper connection with the presented information. Additionally, the inclusion of stories and illustrations widens the reach of the book. It makes the content available to the “common man.” Furthermore, the anecdotal “feel” allows the book to be read as a devotional. This is a strength because it makes the information accessible to a younger demographic.



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Despite this, the book’s credibility was diminished by an imbalance of scholarly citations compared to testimonials and blogs. Of the 24 listed references, only 11 can be properly considered authoritative. The abundance

of heart-warming quotations

leaves the reader emotionally attuned but intellectually bereft. Although exemplars are necessary to illustrate the point being made, a stronger voice of academia is missing.

The theology of the book reflects general Christian principles. Since most Christians should be able to easily relate to the content, Christian leaders seeking to grow disciples will find the book a useful resource since a clear model for discipleship is presented in a step-by-step manner.

First, Jesus, though assumed familiar to the reader, is reintroduced in kingship terms, including as God of the universe, crowned Conqueror of sin, and returning King of victory. Second, the authority of Jesus over every area of life—such as relationships, money, health, emotions—is presented. Third, embracing the mission of Jesus is offered as a best practice, and seven specific steps to accomplish this are set forth. Last, the ultimate commitment of baptism, the power of living in obedience, and the expectancy that Jesus can and will do great things are recommended as the best alternative for those seeking the fulfilled life of a disciple.

I strongly recommend this book. Young exposes the secret God of our hearts—self—and proposes the truth in a statement that is repeated in various ways throughout the book, namely, “King Jesus is a better king than you or I will ever be” (4). Reading this book can potentially produce the same effects in the reader that a “prophetic” sermon has on a hearer. As Bobby Harrington succinctly stated in the book’s foreword, this book “is easy to read. . . . It explains obedience-based discipleship. . . . It focuses on helping you to grasp the wonder, grandeur, and majesty of Jesus as king [and] . . . can change your life and the lives of the people in your church” (xiv). It has certainly changed mine.



“What do I do after the potato salad is gone?”

I have never forgotten the words a dear woman shared with me after the loss of her mother. “What do I do after the potato salad is gone?” She was very appreciative of all her church family who came and ministered to her at the funeral, but now that all the rush was over, she wondered how she would cope.

These tearful words caused me to stop and consider how we do grief ministry as a local congregation. Most pastors and churches are very good about ministering to grieving members during the funeral and initial time of mourning. However, we often return to business as usual once

Most pastors and churches are very good about ministering to grieving members during the funeral and initial time of mourning. However, we often return to business as usual once the funeral is over, surmising that life goes on.

the funeral is over, surmising that life goes on.

While life does, indeed, go on for the pastor and congregation, it often remains at a standstill for the one(s) mourning. For the one(s) experiencing loss, just facing another day can be a herculean task. If the church is truly to be the body of Christ and bear the image of Christ to one another, then we must do a better job of ministering to those who are broken over the losses and disappointments in life.

To accomplish this task, the church can take several steps to minister more effectively to those grieving:

Be proactive in your ministry efforts. Do not tell the grieving member to call you if they need anything. They are facing so much pain and loss that they will never call you, nor should they have to call you to receive ministry. The church must reach out to the grieving by visiting and calling them.

Be an encourager in your ministry efforts. When you go to visit with them, be very attentive to their words. Do not be quick to speak; instead, be quick to listen. Often what the grieving person really needs is to know that someone cares and will laugh and cry with them. They need to know that God still cares, and we represent God to them.

Be intentional in your ministry efforts. When someone in the church has experienced a loss, it must become the most important matter on your schedule. They need to see Jesus in us. Church staff must schedule regular visits to the one who is grieving.

Be focused in your ministry efforts. When you make your visit, send your cards, or make your phone calls, have a purpose in your efforts. We are trying to bear the image of Christ to those grieving, so encourage them from God's Word (no platitudes), pray with them about their greatest challenges and fears (gained from active listening), and schedule a time to follow up with them to serve them in some manner.

Be ongoing in your ministry efforts. There is no timetable as to how long you need to continue this ministry. We minister to them, build relationships with them, listen to them, and cry with them until they begin to experience wholeness. During our times of ministering to them, we seek to gradually involve them in ministry efforts. We may begin slowly by inviting them to a small group, a recovery group, or a luncheon. As they begin to experience healing, we may encourage them to go with us as we go to sit with another grieving member as we encourage them together.

The church is full of grieving members. All too often, the church is the loneliest place in the world for those who are hurting. We are the body of Christ. We are called upon to bear the image of Christ to our family, church, and the world. One of the best ways to start is by being Christ to those hurting within our church. When the potato salad is gone, I hope Jesus continues to show up . . . in you and me. 🍷

John Duncan, PhD, is the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jasper, Jasper, Indiana, United States.



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10 DAYS OF
PRAYER

Materials by
Evangelist Mark Finley

THE THREE ANGELS CALL TO PRAYER

January 5–15, 2022

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REVELATION 14:6, ESV

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