



DYNAMIC Steward

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April-June, 2008

Time

Inside DS

Resources

Concept

Small Group

▪ Who's Got the Time?

Tool

▪ Clearly: How to
Preach So Everyone
Understands

One-on-One

▪ With Miguel Luna

Spiritual Formation

▪ A Cup Running Over

Preachers and
Writers Contest

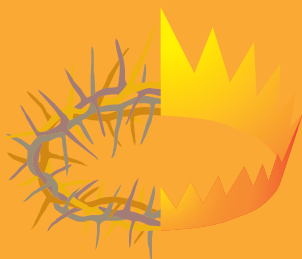
Volume 12 ▪ Number 2



an invisible gift...
a chance to choose

DYNAMIC Steward

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Exploring partnership with God

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inside ds

A Prayer About Time

“God our Father you are the Maker of everything that exists, the Author of the world of nature and of all living things, the Creator of both space and time. Without you there would be no past, present or future; no summer or winter, spring or autumn, seedtime or harvest; no morning or evening, months or years.

Because you give us the gift of time we have the opportunity to think and to act, to plan and to pray, to give and to receive, to create and to relate, to work and to rest, to strive and to play, to love and to worship.

Too often we forget this and fail to appreciate your generosity: we take time for granted and fail to thank you for it, we view it as a commodity and ruthlessly exploit it, we cram it too full or waste it, learn too little from the past or mortgage it off in advance, we refuse to give priority to those people and things which should have chief claim upon our time.

Help us to view time more as you view it, and to use it more as you intend: to distinguish between what is central and what is peripheral between what is merely pressing and what is really important, between what is our responsibility and what can be left to others, between what is appropriate now and what will be more relevant later.

Guard us against attempting too much because of a false sense of our indispensability, a false sense of ambition, a false sense of rivalry, a false sense of guilt, or a false sense of inferiority: yet do not let us mistake our responsibilities, underestimate ourselves, fail to be stimulated by others, overlook our weaknesses, or know our proper limits. Enable us also to realize that important though this life is, it is not all, that we should view what we do in the light of eternity, not just our limited horizons, that we ourselves have eternal life now.

God our Father, you are not so much timeless as timeful, you do not live above time so much as hold ‘all time . . . in your hand’, you have prepared for us a time when we will have leisure to enjoy each other and you to the full, and we thank you, appreciate you and applaud you for it. Amen” (*The Tyranny of Time*, by Robert Banks).

This issue of *Dynamic Steward* will consider the stewardship of time. With this in view, I have shared the above reflective prayer on time.

In acknowledgment of the importance of outstanding stewardship sermons for our congregations and ministries we are launching a *Preachers and Writers Contest*, titled “Sacred Eloquence.” We are calling upon our global leaders, pastors, and writers to contribute from your cultural context sermons on stewardship. We will publish our three winners in our 2008 Oct-Dec issue of *Dynamic Steward*.

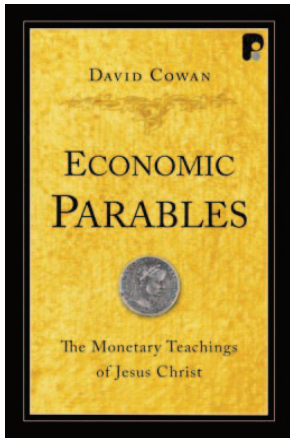
You will find our final journal entry by Dr. Haddon W. Robinson, “Clearly: How to Preach so Everyone Understands” a useful tool and guideline that will assist you in preparing your sermon.

We thank you ahead of time for your contributions and sharing the generous gift of your ‘time.’

Alongside you in His service,

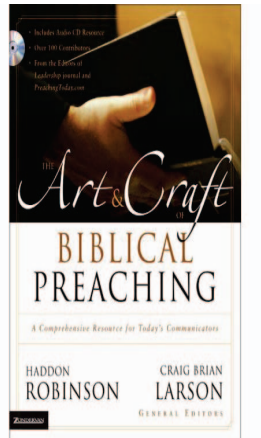


resources



Economic Parables
by David Cowan
Paternoster Publishing
Colorado Springs, Colorado
2006 US \$14.99

Using his vast experience in the financial world as well as church ministry, the author invites you to listen directly to the words of Jesus and reflect on a number of “economic parables” to understand life in an increasingly globalized economy. Each chapter contains a parable and reflection, followed by questions making this book ideal for group or personal Bible study. To order go to www.amazon.com.



The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching
by H. Robinson & C. B. Larson
Zondervan
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2005 US \$39.99

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Inter-American Division
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The author, Roberto Herrera, has compiled fourteen interesting and inspiring stewardship sermons. These messages will nourish and strengthen your faith. They will also help you to love God, to know Him better and to have a deeper relationship with Him.

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Time Alone With God

*Erika F. Puni, Director
General Conference Stewardship*



Human life is lived out in segments of time. Whether one is engaged in church ministry or in personal activities, in corporate events or individual pursuits of life, all of our human endeavours take place in time. This reality means that none of us can afford to squander this precious gift and resource of God in the way we conduct ourselves in the world. Even the “preacher” in the *Wisdom Literature* recognized the importance of every moment in life by stating that “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV).

The importance of time in relationship with God is clearly expressed in Scripture from the very beginning when God instituted the seventh-day Sabbath as a special time when Adam and Eve could experience rest in Him (Genesis 2:1-3). Making time for God in our busy lives is not only “right” in terms of Christian behavior but it is good stewardship—giving God His rightful place in our lives.

God also recognized that humans would need time to revive and survive daily. He created the “night” so His creatures could sleep in order to restore energy and give the body time to do its work of repair and replenish. But more importantly, God wanted His people to make time to be in communion with Him so they would come to know Him better as Creator and Savior. Time alone with God is not an option; it is a required discipline of the Christian life.

Jesus made time

I find it significant that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recorded the experience of Jesus in the desert where He was tested by Satan soon after His baptism. The notation that Jesus was led by the “Spirit,” and that He fasted (a spiritual exercise of faith) for forty days during this time would suggest that He was spending time alone with His Father though tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-2).

In essence, Christ practiced the value of being connected and being in the presence of God as a necessary preparation for service. Not only did He seek time in the beginning of His public ministry for communion with His Father, but He continued to make time for God in His prayer life (Luke 9:18; 11:1). This special time was the secret to His power as manifested in His ministry in Palestine.

The disciples made time

When questioned by the high priest and rulers of the law about the authority by which they healed the crippled man at the temple, Peter testified boldly that it was by the power of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 4:8-10). The leaders of the temple were amazed with Peter and John’s courage, particularly because they saw them only as ordinary men with no formal education but noted that they “had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Power and courage are the consequences of a life connected to Jesus Christ. The disciples made time for God.

Will you make time?

If Jesus felt the necessity of making time for His Father in His life and ministry, if the twelve disciples saw it fit to be in the presence of their Master, thus enabling them to do the impossible, would it not be wise for us as stewards and God’s leaders in the church to set aside time for Him today?



stewardship window

News From the Director's Desk. . .

Report from Meetings in Albuquerque, New Mexico

More than half of the Division Stewardship Directors and also General Conference Stewardship personnel from Silver Spring, Maryland, were present for two distinct but related events in Albuquerque, New Mexico, from January 29 to February 02, 2008. The Division Directors Consultation which took place first provided a forum for a focused discussion and presentations. The Combined Offering Plan—one of the three offering systems used by the Adventist church today was presented by Mario Niño from IAD who also reported that “the meeting in Albuquerque was very useful.” “It gave me the opportunity to learn how the stewardship program of the church is progressing in other parts of the world thus giving inspiration and creating a sense oneness.”

The directors also attended the Annual Conference of the Christian Stewardship Association (CSA) where all members of the team participated in a learning experience from other Christian professionals. This was a time to listen, engage, and interact with stewardship specialists from within North America. According to Salomon Assienin from West Africa (WAD), “The different workshops I participated in gave me a lot of tools and resources that will help me for my training programs. The CSA Conference has been to me an importance source of inspiration and creativity.”



Directors from left to right: Jean-Luc Lézeau (GC associate director); Roberto Herrera (IAD associate director), Kigundu Ndwiga (ECD), Edward Reid (NAD), Raafat Kamal (TED), Mario Niño (IAD), Miguel Pinheiro (SAD), Marapaka Joseph (SUD), Salomon Assienin (WAD), Erika Puni (GC director), Maria Ovando-Gibson (GC assistant director).

Lake Union Conference Stewardship Report

Nearly 150 Union and Conference officers, directors, pastors, and lay leaders participated in what many reported to be the best stewardship conference they had attended. The Partnership With God Bible Stewardship Conference was held December 2-4, 2007, at the Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University. Organized and sponsored by the Lake Union Conference Stewardship Department, the three-day conference included nine presentations by Ed Reid, NAD stewardship director; Erika Puni, GC stewardship director; Maria Ovando-Gibson, GC stewardship assistant director; Kathy Reid, author of *Dollars and Cents from Grand Mommy*; and Walter L. Wright, president of the Lake Union Conference.

The conference was designed to teach leaders how to model and present biblical principles that lead to an abundant and fulfilling partnership with God. All PowerPoint materials presented in the conference were made available to the attendees and a number are now presenting their own stewardship conferences.



NAD Stewardship Director Ed Reid presents at the Partnership With God Bible Stewardship Conference.

small group

Who's Got the Time?

*JR Rozko
Missional Pastor*



After encountering Christ as a sophomore in high school through the ministry of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, he began a surprising and exciting journey with God. JR attended Malone College in Canton, Ohio, where he majored in youth ministry. After serving as a student pastor for three years at RiverTree Christian Church, JR relocated to Pasadena to attend Fuller Theological Seminary where he completed an MA in theology with an emphasis on a missiology of Western culture. Vitaly concerned about the state of the church in Western culture, JR plans on devoting his life to encouraging and equipping others through the cultivation of missional church communities.

Recently, I was invited to an event where a local non-profit, service-minded group was celebrating the accomplishments of a few of its members. The speaker for the evening talked powerfully and eloquently about the value of volunteerism. She said one thing in particular that got me thinking. Her comment was, “Time, it’s the one thing that none of us ever have enough of.” My silent, gut reaction was a hearty, “Amen!” And then I thought about it again. “Do I really believe this is true? Who would I fault for not having enough of something so intrinsic to the human experience as time? God? Is it really the case that God just doesn’t give me enough time, or might it be the case that I, more often than not, fail to deal wisely with the time God does give me?”

Time is a precious commodity. No... Strike that. See, there’s the problem! In a culture so thoroughly capitalistic, I am inclined to commodify everything—even the gift of time. Time is indeed precious, but it is not a commodity. It is God’s gift to us and like any other gift God gives us, we need to think carefully about how to steward it. My point then is simple, if I really believe that time is a God-given gift, but experience it as something that it seems I never have enough of, perhaps I need to revisit how I steward this gift.

What follows are three characteristics I have identified in my life that I think negatively effect how I (and I presume others) steward the gift of time. Following each characteristic are three questions that I would encourage you to use in a small group study to stimulate discussion centered around and the stewardship of time.

From fear to freedom

One of the biggest hindrances to stewarding time well is fear. But gifts, including the gift of time, cannot be enjoyed in fear—only in freedom. Whether we fear events from the past, present circumstances, or future possibilities, when how we spend our time is motivated in anyway by fear rather than freedom, we run the risk of failing to be good stewards of the gift of time. We may entertain thoughts like, “What if that happens again? What if people don’t agree with me? What if things don’t turn out how I’d like?” When questions like these drive how we spend our time, we are robbed of the freedom to enjoy God and his gifts to us. We can recall the words of Jesus, who said,

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” John 6:25-27 (NIV).

Fear is something Satan uses to trap us. As long as we live in fear, we cannot experience the fullness of freedom in Christ and how we spend our time will be directly affected. But, once we move from structuring our time in order to avoid or circumvent that of which we are afraid, to freely enjoying God and his many gifts to us, how we use and spend our time becomes altogether different.

1. Reflect on the life and ministry of Jesus. Name some ways in which he could have let fear control his time. How would his life and ministry have changed?
2. In your life, name some ways in which how you spend your time is dictated by a fear of something or someone.

3. Read Luke 10:38-42. Where do you see fear and freedom in this passage? What does it have to do with the stewardship of time?

From greed to generosity

Another major hindrance to stewarding our time well is greed. We live in a culture bound and determined to convince us that our worth is bound up in what we are able to accomplish and accumulate. But this is not God's desire for us. Jesus lived a life of simplicity and called his followers to the same. To the extent that we allow greed in any area of our lives to grip us, we forfeit the opportunity to live lives of generosity. We use our time for our gain rather than for the good of others.

In Scripture we are admonished, "Freely you have received, freely give" Matthew 10:8 (NIV). "It is more blessed to give than to receive" Acts 20:35 (NIV). "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share" 1 Timothy 6:18 (NIV). Greed gives rise to the selfish understanding and use of time. Generosity, on the other hand, compels us to use the gift of time for the good of others.

1. Looking at our culture broadly or your life specifically, how does greed dominate how our/your time is spent?

2. Thinking of Jesus as a model, what sort of vision of reality do you think enabled him to not let how he spent his time be dominated by greed?

3. Read Luke 12:16-21. Discuss the connection between greed, generosity, and time in this parable.

From impatience to influence

A final characteristic I notice in my life that affects how I steward my time is impatience. I don't like to wait. I want things now and the culture in which we live has done its job of convincing us that this is indeed my "right." But here's what I notice; when I determine how I spend my time by virtue of what I am most impatient about (anybody else out there lose track of how many times they check their email per day?), I lose the ability to truly have an influence on people and situations. Influence takes time and perseverance—impatience kills influence.

Jesus, bound and determined to have the necessary influence in the life of the apostles given their future task, was never impatient. "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons" Mark 3:13-15 (NIV).

Did you catch it in there? The first and most vital part of Jesus' relationship to the disciples, "that they might be with him..." I think there are two lessons to be gleaned here. First, whatever else we do with our time it loses power and potency when it is not born out of our taking the time to simply be with Jesus. Everything else flows from this. Second, we are reminded that this life is a battle between influence and impatience. To steward our time well is to discipline ourselves towards the true influence of others.

1. What are the things you find yourself to be impatient for or about? How does that effect how you spend your time?

2. Jesus was and is the linchpin of all history. How and why do you suppose he was able to steward time the way he did, without even so much as a hint of impatience?

3. Read John 11:1-6 (through 45 if anyone is unfamiliar with the story). Given how we often view time, we should be scandalized by this passage. Reflect on how Jesus' vision of time plays into the unfolding of this story.

All the time in the world

I'm not sure I can really wrap my head around the idea that God is outside of time. Or for that matter, that time is a created thing, which need not exist. Nevertheless, my faith and hope are in a God who is the creator, sustainer, and Lord over time. All the time in the world is God's and inasmuch as I endeavor to follow Jesus into a life of freedom, generosity, and influence, fear, greed, and impatience are things which need not control how I spend and steward my time.

My hope and prayer for those of you who read this article and use this guide for group study and reflection is that you will discover and enjoy a new found freedom in God, the giver of time whose perfect love casts out fear, whose generosity nullifies our greed, and whose divine timing renders our impatience foolishness.

SCRIPTURE :
John 11:1-45

one-on-one

With Miguel Luna

*Miguel Luna, PhD
Stewardship Director
Northern Asia-Pacific Division
South Korea*



Dr. Miguel Luna currently serves as secretary of the Ministerial Association and the stewardship director for the Northern Asia-Pacific Division in South Korea. During his ministry he has worked in many capacities such as church pastor, youth and education director, Bible teacher, professor of theology, dean of theology, and director of graduate studies. Elder Luna's desire is to develop and implement a strong discipleship and leadership program in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division territories. Elder Luna and his wife Idalida have two grown children: Miguel Jr. and Liz.

Exploring Biblical Dimensions of Discipleship

Question: "So what does it mean to follow Jesus?"

My answer: The phrase "follow me" speaks of discipleship and denotes the student/master relationship. Here Jesus invests the term with the significance of following Him by obeying God's will, that is, by self-denial and taking up the cross. To "follow" Jesus is to pattern our lives after His life, and to serve God and our fellow men, as He did (1 John 2:6). Following Jesus, consequently, meant a true commitment and no turning back (Matthew 10:39).

Question: "How do the Gospels describe the nature of discipleship?"

My answer: Jesus Himself established the conditions for discipleship. In the dialogue with His disciples at Caesarea Philippi, He declared, "If any one would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). These conditions should be interpreted in light of the preceding prediction of Jesus' suffering and death. As it cost Jesus to follow the Father's will, so it would cost His disciples to do the same. Jesus is addressing each one of the disciples and others in the crowd, as testified by the gospel of Mark (Mark 8:34), to "renounce himself," to submit his will to Christ; therefore, to live for Christ rather than for himself. Clearly Jesus is about to submit Himself and His own desires to the desire of the Father's will, which signifies that He will pass through suffering and death. To deny oneself refers contextually to being mindful of the things of God, not the "things of man" (Matthew 16:23). Therefore, the disciple must first renounce himself. His own plans, his own desires; then he must be willing to bear any cross that duty calls him to take up; finally, he must "follow" in the footsteps of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21).

Question: "Does being a disciple include surrender and sacrifice?"

My answer: Being disciples involves surrender and sacrifice. Addressing the crowd Jesus mentioned "in the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). What is the cost? Disciples may face loss of social status or wealth. They may have to give up control over their money, their time, or their career. They may be hated, separated from their family. Following Christ does not mean a trouble-free life. As usual, Jesus clearly states the lesson His parables are designed to teach. Discipleship involves the complete placing on the altar of all that a man has in his life—plans, ambitions, friends, relatives, possessions, riches—anything and everything that might interfere with service for the kingdom of heaven (cf. Phil 3:8-10). As true disciples of Jesus we need to acknowledge first the will of God and His mission in our planning and decisions and renounce our own personal agenda.

Question: "Does discipleship imply obedience?"

My answer: The call to discipleship also includes obedience. For example, the gospel of Matthew records that Levi immediately followed Jesus. "Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me" Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him" (Mark 2:13). Called upon to make the greatest decision of his life on a moment's notice, Matthew was ready; such a decision would presuppose having previous contact with Jesus. In his heart there must have already been a longing to follow him. Luke

SCRIPTURE:
1 Peter 2:21

added that Matthew “left everything” in order to follow Jesus; he left a profitable business to serve without pay. “No man can succeed in the service for God unless his whole heart is in the work and he counts all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ” (*Desire of Ages*, p 273).

Question: “Does discipleship mean also to follow His teachings?”

My answer: Being a disciple is not only to believe in Him but also to believe in His teachings. For instance, in His address to the Jews who believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). By nature being a disciple means to follow His precepts and instructions. The idea of the Greek word *meno* is to keep or remain in the truth of Jesus teachings, which is to continue resting in His doctrine based on the Scriptures. Continuance in the doctrine of Jesus is evidence of the sincerity of the original profession of faith in Jesus. He Himself is the truth that set us free (John 8:36). He is the source of truth, the perfect standard of what is right. This is the reason why in the context of the great commission “to make disciples” implies to teach and instruct regarding Jesus teachings (Matthew 28:20).

Question: “How is discipleship related to a fruitful life?”

My answer: The disciple of Jesus is the one who carries fruit. “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8). And again Jesus emphasizes the same idea when He declared, “You did not choose me, but I choose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 15:16). The reflection of the Christian graces is evidence of discipleship. Without vital connection with Christ it is impossible to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. As believers we need to promote spirituality among ourselves through a significant devotional life, Bible study and a deep attitude of prayer in order to have a fruitful life.

Question: “How can we witness if indeed we are disciples of Jesus?”

My answer: In the last week of Jesus’ ministry, during the celebration of the Last Supper, Jesus made a remarkable statement about the way other people will recognize His disciples. “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). To love others was not a new commandment (Leviticus 19:18), but to love others as much as Christ loved others was radical. Now we are to love others based on Jesus’ sacrificial love for us. Such love not only brings unbelievers to Christ, it will also keep believers strong and united in a world hostile to God. Jesus was a living example of God’s love, as we are to be living examples of Jesus’ love. So, we need to “follow him” by exercising this type of love which indicates forgiveness, tolerance and compassion among each other (cf. 1 John 3:23).

Ellen White clearly emphasized “when men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart” (*Desire of Ages*, p 678).

Question: “So what is the cost of discipleship?”

My answer: Our examination of the conditions of discipleship given in the Gospels show that they are directed toward challenging believers and church leaders to live a life of obedience, submission, sacrifice, personal commitment, humility, love and self-denial. There is not the slightest evidence that they are intended for unbelievers.

Discipleship is indeed costly, but the cost can only be paid in response to the grace received at salvation. When we as believers understand the sacrifice of God for our redemption, we will want to respond to the grace given with a reciprocal commitment. As we learn to also sacrifice, obey, and deny ourselves, we will become more like the Savior who exemplifies these things. In synthesis, a true disciple of Jesus Christ is indeed a true steward in the kingdom of God.



spiritual formation

A Cup Running Over

*Dallas Willard, PhD, is a professor in the School of Philosophy at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. He has taught at USC since 1965, where he was director of the School of Philosophy from 1982-1985. He has also taught at the University of Wisconsin (Madison, 1960-1965), and has held visiting appointments at UCLA (1969) and the University of Colorado (1984). He also lectures and publishes in religion. *Renovation of the Heart* was published in May 2002, and received Christianity Today's 2003 Book Award in the category of Spirituality. *The Divine Conspiracy* was released in 1998 and selected Christianity Today's "Book of the Year" for 1999. *The Spirit of the Disciplines* appeared in 1988, and *Hearing God* (1999) first appeared as *In Search of Guidance* in 1984 (2nd edition in 1993). Dr. Willard and his wife, Jane, have two children, John and Rebecca, and a granddaughter, Larissa.*

In my early days of ministry I spent huge amounts of time absorbed in Scripture and great spiritual writers. The Lord made it possible for me to spend whole days—without any issue of preparing for something or taking an examination—soaking up the Scripture. I literally wore out the books of great spiritual writers. This focus was foundational to my spiritual journey, to finding satisfaction in Christ.

Experiencing God in that way leads me to satisfaction in Christ and to speaking to others out of that satisfaction. There is no substitute for simple satisfaction in the Word of God, in the presence of God. That affects all your actions.

Characteristics of dissatisfaction

Men and women in ministry who are not finding satisfaction in Christ are likely to demonstrate that with overexertion and over preparation for speaking, and with no peace about what they do after they do it. If we have not come to the place of resting in God, we will go back and think, *Oh, if I'd done this, or Oh, I didn't do that.* When you come to the place where you are drinking deeply from God and trusting him to act with you, there is peace about what you have communicated.

One of my great joys came when I got up from a chair to walk to the podium and the Lord said to me, "Now remember, it's what I do with the Word between your lips and their hearts that matters." That is a tremendous lesson. If you do not trust God to do that, then he will let you do what you're going to do, and it's not going to come to much. But once you turn it loose and recognize we are always inadequate but our inadequacy is not the issue, you are able to lay that burden down. Then the satisfaction you have in Christ spills over into everything you do.

The preacher who does not minister in that satisfaction is on dangerous ground. Those who experience moral failure are those who have failed to live a deeply satisfied life in Christ, almost without exception. I know my temptations come out of situations where I am dissatisfied, not content. I am worried about something or not feeling the sufficiency I know is there. If I have a strong temptation, it will be out of my dissatisfaction.

The moral failures of ministers usually are over one of three things: sex, money, or power. That always comes out of dissatisfaction. Ministers are reaching for something, and they begin to feel, *I deserve something better. I sacrifice so much and get so little. And so I'll do this.* The surest guarantee against failure is to be so at peace and satisfied with God that when wrongdoing presents itself it isn't even interesting. That is how we stay out of temptation.

Characteristics of a satisfied soul

We are long on devices and programs. We have too many of them, and they get in the way. What we really need are preachers who can stand in simplicity and manifest and declare the richness of Christ in life. There isn't anything on earth that begins to compete with that for human benefit and human interest.

When people hear preachers who are satisfied in this way, they sense that much more is coming from them than what they are saying. When I hear preachers like this, I sense something flowing from them. Preachers like that are at peace. They are not struggling to make something happen.

That is one of the biggest issues for ministers today because of the model of success that comes to us. We get the idea we are supposed to make something

spiritual formation

happen, and so we need our services to go just right. The concluding benediction has hardly ceased before those in charge are saying to one another, “How did it go?” or “It went really well.” The truth is we don’t know how it went. From God’s point of view it will be eternity before we know how it went. These folks are not at peace if they are trying to manage outcomes in that way.

One mark of preachers who have attained deep satisfaction is they are at peace and they love what they are doing. Peace comes from them. From such preachers I sense something coming to me that is deeper than the words. Hearers sense the message opening up possibilities for them to live. In the presence of this kind of preacher, people find ways of doing the good that is before their hearts.

That is the living water. Jesus brought people that opening up of possibilities. In John 8, when he said to the woman caught in adultery, “Go now and leave your life of sin,” I don’t think she felt, *I’ve got to do that*. She experienced Jesus’ words as: *That’s really possible. I can do that*. That is one characteristic of preaching that comes from a satisfied life.

Another mark of satisfied preachers is they can listen. They can be silent in the presence of others because they are not always trying to make something happen. Such a person has the capacity to listen to people and come to an awareness of the needs that underlie the felt needs. We should be attentive to the felt needs of people, but we should know that the game is at a much deeper level of the soul.

A large part of what the pastor does in preaching and life is to listen and help people feel their real needs, not just superficial needs. The satisfied preacher speaks from a listening heart. Since people often do not know what they really need, such preaching can help them find out. This requires a spaciousness that only comes if your cup is running over because you are well-cared for by God.

Steps toward finding satisfaction in Christ

We can take steps to find this deep satisfaction and to preach from the well within us.

I encourage pastors to have substantial times every week when they do nothing but enjoy God. That may mean walking by a stream, looking at a flower, listening to music, or watching your children or grandchildren play without your constantly trying to control them. Experience the fullness of God, think about the good things God has done for you, and realize he has done well by you. If there is a problem doing that, then work through the problem, because we cannot really serve him if we do not genuinely love him.

Henri Nouwen said the main obstacle to love for God is service for God. Service must come out of his strength and life flowing through us into receptive lives. Take an hour, sit in a comfortable place in silence, and do nothing but rest. If you go to sleep, that’s okay. We have to stop trying too hard. There may be a few pastors for whom that is not the problem, but for most it is. We need to do that not only for ourselves but to set an example for those to whom we speak.

There is a place for effort, but it never earns anything and must never take the place of God with us. Our efforts are to make room for him in our lives.

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Clearly: How to Preach So Everyone Understands

Haddon W. Robinson, PhD, is the colorful discussion leader for the RBC Ministries' Discover the Word radio program in addition to writing for Our Daily Bread. Dr. Robinson teaches at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary where he is the Harold J. Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching. Dr. Robinson is a prolific writer. His work has been published in magazines that include Christianity Today, Moody Monthly, and Decision Magazine. He is also editor of PreachingToday.com. He has authored several books: Grief, Biblical Preaching, Biblical Sermons (currently used as text for preaching in 120 seminaries and Bible colleges throughout the world), What Jesus Said About Successful Living, Decision-Making By The Book, Preaching That Makes A Difference, and Trusting The Shepherd, Insights From Psalm 23.

When Napoleon sent out his messengers, he gave them three instructions: be clear, be clear, and be clear. There are several challenges facing preachers who desire to do just that.

First, there's a tendency to roam through the whole Bible, bringing in all kinds of things to enhance what we're saying. We end up saying too much and, as a result, communicating too little. We start out stalking bear, but are soon distracted by some rabbits we'd like to chase. Before long, we're chasing this and adding that and missing the bear we started after at the outset. So less is more.

We also deal with the challenge of oral communication. Preachers have to work at clarity because the spoken word lacks some of the built-in aids inherent to writing. When you're writing, you can utilize paragraph divisions, punctuation marks, section headings, and things in quotes. You can't do that when you're preaching. Also, if I don't get what the preacher is saying the first time, I can't go back and mentally review; if I try to, I won't hear what he is saying now. The preacher has the responsibility of helping his congregation think clearly.

Someone who writes out his sermons in an effort to be clear can often cause the opposite effect because of the written style. If that's the case, then how can we bridge the gap between clarity in our notes and clarity in our presentation?

Begin by being clear about your subject. When you've worked through your notes, you ought to be able to answer two questions. First, "What am I talking about?" You ought to be able to state in precise, definite terms what this sermon is about. For example, "Why should I be committed?" or, "Where do I serve Christ most effectively?" We call this the subject, but it's really the answer to the question: "What am I talking about?"

Then, you should be able to answer the next question: "What am I saying about what I'm talking about? What are the major assertions I'm making about that question?" Clarity often fails because we haven't nailed those two things down prior to arrival in the pulpit.

Expository preachers have to ask themselves an additional question: "What's my purpose?" Topical preachers have the advantage of having a purpose, often embedded right in their title. An expository preacher, however, tends to start and end with the text, never answering "Why are you preaching this sermon this Sunday?" The fact that you're supposed to fill the pulpit from 11:25 to 12:00 isn't good enough.

A good outline always helps with clarity. You can use the outline to design the sermon as you would a conversation, so that each point is related to what goes before. For example, if you are preaching a sermon on forgiveness, the introduction might deal with why you're bringing this up. Your first movement could say, "Forgiveness is necessary." The second could be, "But even though forgiveness is necessary, we often find it difficult." Likewise the third could follow, "But I have good news. As difficult as forgiveness might be, Christians can excel at it because we are followers of Jesus Christ."

These major movements in the sermon can be read like a conversation rather than three bare statements. This enables you to have an outline, but it doesn't stick out like a skeleton. It also acknowledges the fact that the "one-two-three things I have to say" type of outline seems to be less popular today. Sometimes that's what

SCRIPTURE:
Proverbs 25:11

you want if your purpose is to be clear. But if every sermon takes this form, it can lead to boredom.

Another way to add clarity to a sermon is, first, to clearly orient the audience to the body of the sermon right in the introduction. A preacher might say at the end of the introduction, “God sometimes keeps his promises by performing miracles or performing miracles in us.” But if that’s all he’s going to say, folks already have the sermon. If he asks, “Now what exactly does that mean, to say that God performs miracles or performs miracles in us?” he secures the chance to develop clarity, because the congregation has the whole idea, and the preacher has the opportunity to clarify that idea through the body of the sermon.

You can also add clarity by restating key ideas. Suppose you begin by saying, “We want to talk today about how to know the will of God.” Continue by restating this idea several times: “When we are confused about what God wants us to do, how can we determine his direction in our lives? Where would we turn to determine God’s will? How do we go about knowing the will of God?” It seems laborious when you’re preaching, but restating the subject several times in different ways makes it stand out in people’s minds.

In addition, avoid pronouns requiring the listener to remember the reference. For example, rather than saying, “A second thing we must do is consult the Bible,” include the subject it is referencing: “A second thing we have to do in trying to determine God’s will is to consult the Bible.” It may be clear to you what “second thing” refers to, but such vagueness requires a listener to recall a previous reference, possibly diminishing clarity.

You can also give the audience a map of where you’re going. Suppose you are preaching on Christians and government in Romans 13:1-7. You might say, “Christians are to be subject to the government. Christians are to obey what the government demands. I want to talk about the basis for this command. I want to talk about how we show submission to the government; what the implications are in daily life. Third, what exceptions, if any, are there to this command.” In beginning this way, you have given the people a road map of your sermon so they can track with you.

If the subject is interesting, people almost automatically begin developing questions. If you anticipate where you’re going in the map and promise that before you are through you will deal with that question, it puts that question to rest for awhile so your people can hear the rest of what you’re saying.

Visual preaching aids clarity. We use illustrations because they take an abstract concept and ground it in life. A good illustration paints a picture in people’s minds; it creates clarity and understanding. Weak preachers constantly say, “Well, in other words,” to clarify something that is unclear. Better preachers will substitute “For example,” “For instance,” or “Let me illustrate.” Following an abstract statement with a “for instance” or an example increases its clarity.

It is also critical to use a story that really illustrates the point. Every preacher knows the temptation to follow a story because it is powerful. But if the story doesn’t shed light on the point, then it will reduce clarity, because it causes the audience to focus in the illustration’s connection to the sermon rather than on the point of the sermon.

Another practice that reduces clarity is the tendency to begin with text and follow with background. Imagine the following scenario. “Do you have secrets?”

Also, if I don't get what the preacher is saying the first time, I can't go back and mentally review; if I try to, I won't hear what he is saying now. The preacher has the responsibility of helping his congregation think clearly.



Clearly: How to Preach So Everyone. . . (continued)

*A good transition
secures the point
you're going to make
in people's minds.*

Every single one of us comes to this auditorium with secrets. Some are difficult to carry. Some make you afraid. In Psalm 51, David has a secret. He goes to talk to God about it. He had sinned against a woman by the name of Bathsheba; he committed adultery with her. And he had tried to cover that sin by having her husband, Uriah, killed. As he tried to cover things up, he came to feel very guilty. His secret overwhelmed him. Now in this text he tells us how to handle our guilt.” That’s a long way of going about it, and it’s the wrong way of going about it.

A better approach is to give the background or setting before you announce the chapter and verse. “You have secrets. All of us have secrets. David had secrets. The sin he committed with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah were David’s secrets. He was overwhelmed by guilt because of it. But he had to deal with that guilt. Now, in Psalm 51, we see how David handled the guilt he had before God.”

When you refer to a passage, people start turning to it, and they expect you to deal with it right then. But if you’re going on and on, giving background about his guilt and how he’s going to handle it, and only then getting to the passage, it’s a confusing sequence for the listener. You are better off discussing contemporary matters, biblical background, and the subject first. Then announce the Scripture passage and deal with it immediately.

Transitions can be a challenging part of maintaining clarity in sermons. Transitions are difficult because if the message is clear to you, you will tend to not clarify it for the audience. The idea is so evident to you that you don’t think it’s important to build the bridge. A good transition, however, reviews what has already been said. It takes you back to the subject of the sermon and then anticipates what is coming. A good transition secures the point you’re going to make in people’s minds.

One way you can transition from one thought to another is by asking a question. Suppose in your first point you’ve been talking about picking up the cross and following Jesus. In transition, you might say, “Well, that’s pretty clear, isn’t it? It says we’re to pick up a cross and follow Jesus. What does this look like in life if you pick up the cross and follow Jesus? What does it look like in your business or your home to carry a cross?” Transitional questions can help you move into your next point with clarity.

What part can conclusions play in clarity? A strong conclusion brings your sermon to a burning focus. It can help you return to the question you raised in the introduction, giving the audience some satisfaction and closure.

It’s difficult, however, for a conclusion to salvage an unclear sermon. Conclusions can salvage sermons in the sense that they make the last five minutes clear, but they usually cannot create clarity in retrospect. It may drive home the point and illustrate it, but your hearers still may not understand what you talked about for the first twenty-five minutes.

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FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME A . . .



Preachers and Writers Contest

“Sacred Eloquence”

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Contest Rules and Guidelines:

1. Sermons must be the original work of the creator and must not violate the copyright or any other right of any other author.
2. Sermons and illustrations should be something that readers in your cultural context can identify with.
3. Reference your resources (biblical text, other source books, etc), if applicable.
4. The sermon article should not be longer than 1000-1200 words.
5. Sermons should be typed in 12 point Times New Roman font.
6. Submit your name, home address, telephone number, email address, and sermon article either by email to: gcstewardship@gc.adventist.org; or fax to: 301-680-6155, or mail to: GC Stewardship, ATTN: Preachers and Writers Contest, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600.
7. The deadline for submission of your sermon article is July 31, 2008. All submitted sermons will be retained and become the property of the GC Stewardship Department; therefore, make a copy of your work before sending it.
8. If you are chosen as one of the winners, we will request: (1) your social security number; (2) a good quality photograph, and (3) a mailing address to send your gift.
9. Winners will be notified within 60 days after the final entry deadline.
10. This writing contest is open to all of our *Dynamic Steward* readers and supporters.

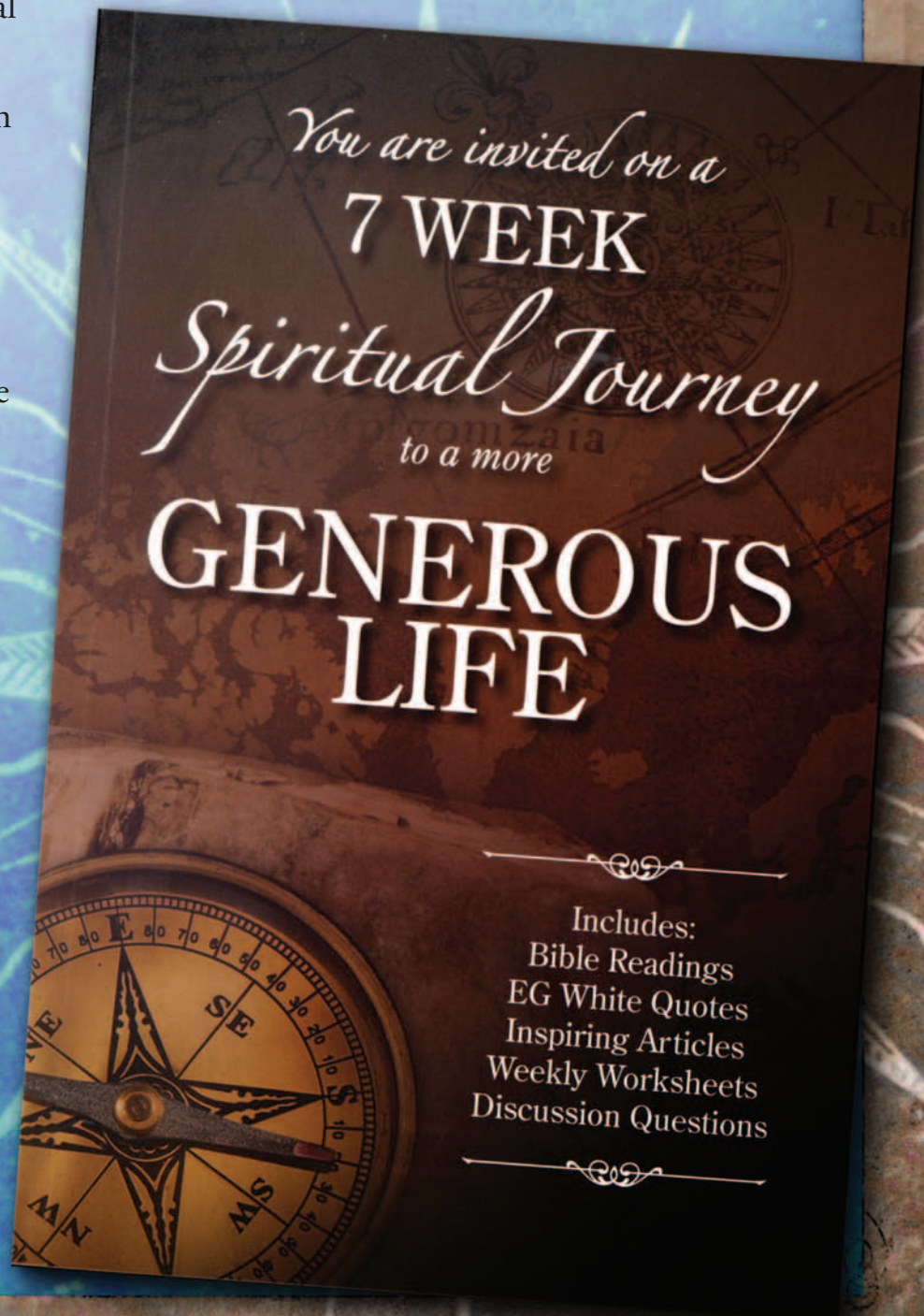
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