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ABSTRACT

USING TRANSFORMATIONAL PREACHING AND LIFE-SKILL
SEMINARS TO PROMOTE CONVERSATION AND DIALOGUE
ON ABUSE AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AT MOUNT OLIVE
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN TORONTO

by

Jacqueline D. Peart

Adviser: Kenley Hall

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Professional Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: USING TRANSFORMATIONAL PREACHING AND LIFE-SKILLS SEMINARS TO PROMOTE CONVERSATION AND DIALOGUE ON ABUSE AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AT MOUNT OLIVE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN TORONTO

Name of researcher: Jacqueline D. Peart

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Kenley Hall, DMin

Date completed: October 2022

Problem

Domestic violence is a hidden crime globally and it is a problem at the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church. Very often, the abusers and the abused are from the same family. Children who grow up in homes where physical and mental abuse is prevalent tend to become abusers or marry abusers. Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not immune and need emotional healing from abuse and family violence. However, Christian communities typically appear silent on the issues of abuse and family violence.

Method

An exploratory process was devised to research the benefits of transformational preaching and life-skill seminars to foster ongoing dialogue on abuse and family violence. The Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church administrators presented the request for their church to be the site of the study, and it was approved. Subsequently, for twelve months, Sabbath sermons focusing on transformation were preached to approximately 300 attendees, followed by six monthly Sabbath sermons and six Sunday seminars attended by 30 attendees. Information was gathered by noting testimonies and shared responses following each monthly weekend (Sabbath sermon and Sunday seminar). The results were based on the overall effectiveness of the seminars and compared across the demographics of age, education, gender, and marital status.

Results

The strategy developed for the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church utilizing transformational preaching and life-skill seminars to promote conversation and dialogue on abuse and family violence was successful. While emotional healing was not measured or the primary focus, there were positive anecdotal updates and changes to the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church programs to indicate that emotional healing was taking place. A multi-pronged approach was needed to promote conversation and dialogue on trauma issues. The research approach included salient components such as culture, symbols, and faith for Seventh-day Adventist, Afro-Caribbean populations in Toronto. Finally, the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to provide a consistent, safe environment to enable each person to respond at their own pace. The body of Christ ought to show evidence of His restorative powers.

Outcomes

Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church now provides programs and workshops on mental health, addiction, anger management, and family violence to the church and the community. Grants fund a free (to recipients) weekly in-person counseling and referral service by a licensed mental health professional member at the church. The programs also serve those ordered by the court to attend anger management and conflict resolution programs. Counseling sessions are scheduled and strategically held on Wednesdays when the church's food bank operates and the church holds its weekly Prayer Meeting service. The church continues to create a safe space for supportive and positive relationships. These strategies have increased the interactions between the church and the community. Through word-of-mouth, the church now welcomes more visitors and worshipers. The membership has grown spiritually and emotionally due to this authentic and intentional wraparound support system.

Conclusion

The Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to intentionally create safe spaces, stimulate conversations and dialogues on the impact of trauma and family violence, and promote healthy interactions for the surrounding community and members. Their consistent efforts of providing counseling support and prayer have garnered positive results as part of the city-wide services directed at crime, family dysfunction, and gun violence.

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Adviser,
Kenley Hall

David Sedlacek

S. Joseph Kidder

Director of DMin Program
Hyveth Williams

Dean, SDA Theological Seminary
Jiří Moskala

Date approved

DEDICATION

Olga Peart (September 4, 1943 – August 30, 2021), you dreamed and prayed for this moment. Gone, but not forgotten. Rest easy until we see each other again.

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vision. Lastly, I thank my Savior, Jesus Christ, for Your sustaining and unrelenting love. You saw this day before there was one, and You waited patiently until I caught the vision.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Her screams pierced our eardrums. The other women sat as if pinned to their seats in stunned silence. They stared blankly as one of their own writhed in pain on the floor. The group facilitator, a counselor, rushed to her and enveloped her in her arms. Together they rocked until her sobs were quieted. This interaction was not a therapy session but an early Sunday morning Women's Ministries Prayer Breakfast at a Seventh-day Adventist church.

Before this scene, the women were asked to recount an event in their lives that had a profound effect on them. The question was posed to facilitate free-flowing conversation. I cannot remember any of the stories except for hers. Her story changed the atmosphere. Her story was one of rejection and abandonment. She recounted an incident where she was physically assaulted while heavily pregnant. It was that memory that sent her clutching her stomach at our feet.

At that moment, it dawned on me that we did not know each other. Even though we had shared many collective experiences for many years, we all carried unspoken hurts and pains that were still unresolved. Grcevich (2018) agrees that there is a disconnection between the emotional health and spiritual health of many Christians. He states that most Christians seem to exist in two worlds: the persona projected at church and who they are otherwise. He implies that the church cannot understand, support, or accept the integrated

person. Holcomb and Holcomb (2014) state that because many victims struggle with guilt (referring to what they may have done) and shame (referring to what was done to them), it is hard to believe or accept the concept of God's unconditional love. They further posit that many victims believe they are being punished by God for some previous wrongdoings and look for ways to blame themselves for their hurt.

Domestic violence affects the whole person. Without God's grace, healing is not complete. Poythress (2016) postulates that Jesus' miracles were both restorative and redemptive. Scriptures posit God's divine response: Jesus came to forgive sin (Mark 2:10), to deliver the bound from bondage (John 8:36), to avenge injustice (Rom 12:19), and to reconcile humanity to Himself (Col 1:21). White (1905) says,

Not only does Christ know every soul, and the peculiar needs and trials of that soul, but He knows all the circumstances that chafe and perplex the spirit. His hand is outstretched in pitying tenderness to every suffering child. Those who suffer most have most of His sympathy and pity. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and He desires us to lay our perplexities and troubles at His feet and leave them there. (p. 249)

Before His ascension, Jesus charged His disciples to carry on His work and assured them that they would receive the power to do even greater things than He did to glorify God (John 14:12,14). We are the disciples of Christ in the 21st century, and our churches are in dire need of healing of all types. Why are we not using the resources given to us to deliver the oppressed and those in bondage?

Personal History

With more and more women entering pastoral ministry, congregants are hearing personal stories of abuse and family dysfunction. Women and some men are taking ownership of their own stories. It opens the door for more dialogue and removes the

feelings of shame, isolation, and abandonment. Transformational preaching is needed to challenge the traditional views of Scripture that have been used to foster or maintain oppression. We must create a new narrative of what God desires for His people. I continue to receive support and see proof that God approves and can use my brokenness for His glory. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that pastoral ministry was what God had in mind for my life—a survivor of childhood trauma and family violence. I am a *wounded healer* (Isa 61:1-3). I have not regretted that pivotal decision to obey the Call to ministry. My healing is not complete, but it has motivated me to research, present, and promote a ministry that addresses these real challenges in real-time. I hope that others will connect with a God who sees the abused, loves them, and wants them to voice their stories to enable them to receive the healing He so willingly wants to bestow.

Description of the Ministry Context

Statistics Canada (2021) states that 4 out of 10 women experience intimate partner violence. This finding indicates that domestic violence is a crime that affects families. When women leave domestically violent relationships and divorce the abuser, they tend to remarry abusers (Flowers & Flowers, 1993). Where children are involved, 3 out of 10 are most likely to be victimized by a family member (Toronto, 2011). Social barriers such as level of education, employment, culture, and isolation further complicate the victim's experience with abuse (Ahmadzai, Stewart & Sethi, 2016).

Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church is located in Ward 1, an urban region of the city of Toronto. Toronto has long been identified as one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world (Toronto, 2016). Despite the ever-shifting populations in this region, Ward 1 still attracts significantly higher numbers of socially and economically

vulnerable populations. Approximately 65.7% of the population are either elderly or youth (dependents from age 16 to 24), (Toronto, 2018). These groups have greater incidents of family conflict (Ross, 2018).

A Call for Social Change and Education

While touted as one of the safest cities in North America, Toronto has also experienced increased gun violence and gang-related activities. This has caused harm to the mental health of those residing in those communities (Toronto, 2018). The city and social service agencies suggest that systemic racism and poverty have added to the complexity of this gang-related violence and are calling on the help of community leaders. They have also suggested that culturally relevant social programs and educational supports could benefit this population.

The Membership of Mount Olive Adventist Church

The membership of the Mt Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church hovers around 300 and is an inter-generational, predominantly English-Speaking, Afro-Caribbean population. Approximately 80% self-identified as first-generation Canadians (born outside of Canada) and the remaining 20% self-identified as second-generation Canadians comprised youth and children (born in Canada). Many live in Ward 1, with a few who travel from surrounding areas. Seniors and adults are the most prominent groups. Thirty percent are two-parent-headed households, and 40% are single-family-headed households. Thirty percent are white-collar professionals, with many working in the healthcare field, business, or education. Approximately 60% are blue-collar workers, and the remaining 10% self-identified as unemployed.

Mount Olive Community-based Programs

The church operates community-based programs at the church's address and from different venues within the community. These programs are well received and speak to the needs of the surrounding population. Historically, there have been weekly blood pressure clinics at the local shopping mall, an after-school tutoring program for elementary and high school students, a senior program at the nearby nursing home, and a weekly food bank at the church's address. Over the years, many of the programs have been abandoned. However, the senior program and the food bank are still in operation. The food bank serves both church and community members.

Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have not been immune to the impact of domestic violence. Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church strives to be a faith-based resource center where healing from abuse and domestic violence is one focus of its ministry. The church desires to provide support and counseling services as part of the city-wide services directed at crime, family dysfunction, and gun violence.

Statement of the Problem

The Mt Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church is located in a part of the city of Toronto where gun violence and domestic violence have escalated in recent years (Toronto, 2018). Historically, the church's programs have consistently focused on needs across all age groups. These programs have been well received and have been a successful method of evangelism, leading to regular attendance for some and baptism for others. Currently, the church community is not addressing issues of abuse and family violence even though it is a growing problem in society. Over the years, the church has consistently forged diverse partnerships with community service providers and has

established itself as a well-respected leader in the community. However, the church has historically been very conservative on issues of family violence and has never addressed it from the pulpit. Programs addressing domestic violence and abuse are often hosted by the women's ministries departments but held at locations far from their local community. This practice further gives the impression that it is solely a women's issue and not something that warrants serious consideration. It is not fully known to what extent members struggle with issues of abuse and family violence. The true character of God, a loving Creator, is further obscured through trauma and human suffering. The church's mandate is to provide an alternative, biblical response to dealing with abuse and family violence.

Statement of the Task

Develop a strategy for the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church utilizing transformational preaching and life-skill seminars to promote conversation and dialogue on abuse and family violence.

Justification for the Project

The Mt Olive Seventh-day Adventist church is located in an urban area of the city of Toronto, with high demographic indicators resulting in abuse and family violence (Toronto, 2011). Many of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist church members live in this community. Some members of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church have shared stories privately and publicly during church programs of their experiences of trauma and family violence. Some recounted the events with freshness even when the events happened decades before. Many are trapped with the debilitating effects of post-

traumatic stress disorder as they lack financial resources or meager employment benefits. Promoting safe conversation and dialogue on the issues of abuse and family violence will enable the church to fulfil its expressed desire to become a faith-based resource center to the congregation and surrounding community.

Delimitation of the Project

This project was delimited to the congregation and community who support the programs of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Limitations of the Project

The research was limited by the lack of empirical research in the community in which the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church is located and the limited resource materials available in Seventh-day Adventist libraries. Thus, the project focuses on articles, written work, and videos produced in the public sector over the last ten years. However, one source of information produced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church through the End-it-Now program now speaks to this subject. Another current source has been the Possibilities Ministries department of the General Conference. Another limitation has been that, historically, much of the information on this subject was from the areas of social science and the medical community, rather than pastoral ministry.

Description of the Project's Process

The project took place at the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church. The theological reflections based on God's response to our pains and distresses derived from the Scriptures, the writings of Ellen G. White, and other inspired writers. The literature review includes books, articles, videos, journals, and other related materials to provide

statistics and insight on how preaching can meet the needs of those affected by abuse and family violence. Participants attended the seminars voluntarily. All participants were 18 years of age and older. Transformational sermons were presented monthly on a Sabbath (see Appendix D). The seminars were based on biblical narratives and were conducted monthly on Sundays. The seminars were set up to take 90 minutes to 2 hours. I preached the sermons and facilitated the seminars. Professional support was engaged and available after the sermon and during the seminars for those in need of emotional support. I was available for pastoral support after each worship service and seminar. The sermons focused on God's response to injustice, abuse of power, violation, and His desire to offer healing and restoration.

Weekly announcements and bulletin messages promoted the Sabbath services and the monthly seminars (see Appendix C). The seminars featured biblical narratives to explore the effects of trauma on the spiritual, emotional, and physical issues common to abuse and violence. The seminars provided opportunities for the participants to explore and share their feelings, apply the tools they were learning, and experience a guided quiet time for reflection and personal prayer during each session. The project was evaluated from anecdotal and recorded responses of the participants. The programs were promoted from the pulpit, in the bulletins and on the bulletin boards at Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church and nearby Toronto West Seventh-day Adventist Church. Flyers were distributed to families accessing the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist church food bank.

Expectations of This Project

I expected that this project of sermons and seminars would increase awareness of the effects of abuse and family violence, increase conversation and dialogue among members and the community, create new needs-felt programs, and identify Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist church as a safe space for survivors and abusers. I hope that the participants gained knowledge, resources and a supportive network to facilitate continued conversation and dialogue. Finally, I also hope that other leaders will become emboldened to address social issues like these in the pulpit.

Definition of Terms

Abuse – to hurt or injure something or someone by acting badly or neglectfully (yourdictionary.com).

Abuser – one who treats in a harmful or offensive way (dictionary.com).

Emotional healing – is a process where past psychological hurts from painful thoughts, feelings and emotions no longer impact daily life (thepleasantmind.com).

Family violence – is any form of abuse or neglect that a child or adult experiences from a family member or someone with whom they have an intimate relationship (www.canada.ca).

Participant – A person or group that participates; a partaker (dictionary.com). In the project, it refers to anyone who attends the sermons and the seminars.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – A condition characterized by recurring and, often, disabling symptoms of anxiety, depression, etc., that affects some persons well after they experience a traumatic event or situation, as combat (www.psychologytoday.com). This project refers to the feelings of anxiety, shame, and

depression that many survivors experience.

Transformational preaching – an expository sermon that leads the listener to a deeper understanding of clear and concise Biblical truths, which results in a change of thinking and behavior (www.logos.com).

Trauma-informed Approach – a flexible, strength-based framework, not based on a prescribed set of procedures or practices. It applies an understanding of how variables such as culture, history, and gender intersect and their impact on trauma. This approach also works to prevent re-traumatization by promoting safety, transparency, and the empowerment of choice throughout the process (www.mentalhealth.org).

Summary

This brief introduction gives an overview of the need to recognize the reality that many people in our congregation and the communities have experienced trauma from abuse and family violence. The results of this study will hopefully offer insights into how traumas if left unexplored by the church, could undermine the tenets of its faith and obscure the true character of God. Shame and fear keep many silent. As a noted leader in society, I hope the church will lend its voice to decry abuse and violence within families and intimate relationships. A response from the church will help dispel the myth that the church is unaffected by this pandemic. The expected outcome will also break down the stigma which keeps many silent. Finally, this body of work will be used by others to further this course of study.

Chapter two presents a theological approach to understanding the nature of God and presents various biblical characters who loved God but reflected Lucifer. Chapter three reviews contemporary literature on domestic abuse and family violence,

intervention methodology, and preaching for transformation. Chapter four presents the methodology and how the transformational sermons and skill-building seminars were facilitated. Chapter five provides an overview of the research project, the methodology, analysis of outcomes, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Introduction

My theological approach to understanding the nature of God and the propensity for humanity to take on a reflection of Lucifer rather than God is best revealed in the lives of biblical characters, beginning with the first created beings.

Adam and Eve were created with the power of choice, and when they fell, their transgression had far-reaching consequences (Rom 6:23). Sin forever changed the relationship between humanity and the Triune God community (Sedlacek & Sedlacek, 2018). Humanity was left with a propensity and a desire to sin (Ps 51:5, Lam 5:7). That early sin led to violence between two brothers, leaving one dead. Family violence and abuse continue to attack, and the supportive premise that the home and community are to provide the foundation for healthy individuals is still wanting. The resulting emotional scars distort the central theme of Christian beliefs to this day and present a damaging misrepresentation of the image of the Divine Creator and His true feelings towards humanity (Baldwin, 2018). Where love, social community, and respect are indicators of His character, there is a vacuum and worse.

This chapter focuses on several issues. The first is familial and non-familial interactions where oppression and violation are evident. Then, God's response to oppression in the lives of His people and Christ's focus on preaching and healing to

alleviate pain and suffering are explored. Finally, the focus turns to identifying ways to understand better God's plan to bring insight into emotional healing, restoration, and reconciliation between Him and us.

First Family

The book of Genesis chronicled the origin of life on earth. The phrase, "And God saw that it was good," was repeated numerous times, and the only time when something was 'not good' was when God stated, "it is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" Gen 2:18. God was intentional in creating this dyad, and He proposed that their relationship was to be unlike any other act of creation. God fashioned Eve out of Adam's rib (Gen 2: 21,22) for an equalitarian and cooperative union. She was from his side, symbolizing that she would be his equal, and she was not to control or be controlled by him. They were both to demonstrate love and sympathy (White 1890/2018, p. 46; 1 Pet 3:7). White (1890/2018) continued, "she was his second self; showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relationship" (p. 46).

Lucifer's Self-ascendency Leads to Violence

Satan has systematically attacked and distorted God's ideal for family relationships. To fully understand the impact of sin on the family and relationships, one must go back to the first rebellion that occurred in Heaven when Lucifer instigated a coup d'état to wrest God's authority, worship, and glory for himself (Isa 14:13-14). He used deceit to create anarchy in a sinless place (White, 1882/2017, p. 152). The war was the first indication of the results that discord could bring. When Satan was cast out of Heaven (Ezek 28:16), the earth became his domain (Job 1:7), where he prowled looking for

unsuspecting victims to destroy (1 Pet 5:8). Satan, as the beguiling serpent (Gen 3:13), leads Adam and Eve into disobedience. “As men turned away from God, the divine attributes—justice, purity, and love—were supplanted by oppression, violence, and brutality” (White, 1890/2018, p. 120).

The Legacy of Sin

The choice of Adam and Eve to disobey forever changed humanity’s relationship with each other and God. Adam blamed God for giving Eve and Eve for his actions (Gen 3:12). Eve followed suit and blamed the serpent and God for creating the serpent. The interaction between God and man was now based on blame and suspicion. God’s ideal for family and social interaction became marred as the heart became selfish, self-seeking, and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9, Mark 7:21).

Eve would now desire to control her husband, but Adam would rule over her (vs 16). The effects of their sin were not theirs alone. One curse of sin resulted in a fractured relationship between humanity and the earth. The earth would no longer willingly produce food, and the man had to struggle with it to receive food. Human beings would also return to the earth (vs 19). Innocent animals were also affected; they would die, beginning with being slain to cover Adam and Eve’s nakedness (vs 21). The legacy of sin is always pain and death.

Family, the Source of Violence

Family violence was recorded in the first family of humanity, where Cain killed his younger brother Abel (Gen 4:8). Cain violated the tender care and respect of each person that embodied God’s ethical paradigm. God’s response was swift and decisive.

Cain was expelled from his family as a vagabond and a fugitive, but God still offered grace. God placed a mark on Cain to prevent others from taking his life unknowingly and to curse those who did (vs 15). Cain's unrepentant heart and propensity toward violence are seen again in his sixth generation. Lamech, the first recorded polygamist, is recorded as an unrestrained violent man (vs 23). Since sin's inception, man's interpersonal relationships have been charged with animosity, jealousy, and hatred, as seen in the lives of the following biblical characters.

Hagar

Hagar was a maidservant whom Abram and Sarai had most likely acquired while they were in Egypt (Gen 12:6; 20:14). As an enslaved person or a servant, she would have had no voice or autonomy or power over her actions or her body. In the patriarchal culture of the Ancient Near East, women were limited in ownership of property and were the property of their husbands (Num 27:4). Fertility and fecundity gave women status as children were seen as a sign of God's blessings and wealth (Ps 127:5).

Sarai was barren and past childbearing age (Gen 11:30). Desperate for children, she devised a plan to fulfill God's promise of a child by gifting Hagar to Abram as a wife to impregnate (Gen 15:4). "Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. . . so he went into Hagar, and she conceived" (Gen 16:3, 4).

White (1890/2018) indicates that Hagar became a secondary wife, which was not in keeping with God's plan (p. 145). Polygamy displeased God as it violated His law and the sacredness and peace of the family (White, 1890/2018, p. 145). When Hagar became pregnant, she used her change in status to express contempt for her mistress, who then

complained to Abram. “Abraham is in perplexity. If he seeks to redress the wrongs of Hagar, he increases the jealousy and unhappiness of Sarah, his first and much-loved wife” (White, 1870/2017, p. 95). Without any protection from the physical abuse she experienced at the hands of Sarah, Hagar runs away (Gen 16:6).

Notwithstanding the intense heat, her pregnant state, and the threat of predators or marauders, Hagar fled to return to Egypt, but God intervened (Exod 20:10-11). An angel called and addressed her personally, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?” Gen 16:8. The direct way he addressed her provided her comfort, rebuke, and hope (vv 9-11). Despite her polytheistic Egyptian background Hagar knew that she had been seen by the True God (White, 1890/2018, p. 145). Her feelings of abandonment and rejection were assuaged when God assured her that He heard her cries and knew her circumstances. Hagar responded by referring to God in a new way, “You are the God who sees me” (v 13). She discovered that God “executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed” (Ps 103:6). God intended that even enslaved people be treated fairly by their masters (Col 4:1). Hagar returned to Sarah and Abraham.

The animosity between the two women escalated after the birth of Isaac, Sarah’s son (Gen 21:8,9). His birth destroyed Hagar’s hope that her son, Ishmael, would be Abraham’s heir. Hagar and Ishmael were both jealous and resentful toward Isaac as he was the object of his parents’ affection (White, 1890/2018, p. 145). Sarah noticed the malice and begged Abraham for their final banishment (Gen 21:14). God agreed for the sake of peace in the family (White, 1890/2018, p. 146). God assured Abraham that all would be well and that Ishmael would be the father of a great nation (Gen 21:13).

God again spoke to Hagar as she and Ishmael wilted in the oppressive desert heat. Her tears and Ishmael's cries brought an immediate response from God. He alerted her of His presence and assured her of their survival and prosperous future. God also provided for their physical needs by giving them water (Gen 21:17-19). Hagar again experienced the personal response from an attentive and sympathetic God.

Joseph

Joseph was born into a household where his mother, Rachel, was the beloved wife of his father, Jacob (Gen 30:22-24). He was called Joseph, which meant 'may I have another' as his birth removed his mother's shame of infertility (v 23), commonly thought of as a sign of God's displeasure (vs 31, 30:1; White, 1890/2018, p. 569). The competition between his father's other wife was his mother's older sister, Leah (v 16). The resentment began when his father was tricked into marrying his aunt by his maternal grandfather, Laban (Gen 29:18, 21, 22). Unable to discard her, his father agreed to work another seven years, per the dowry, to marry his mother (v 20). The fact that Leah was involved in the cruel trickery made Jacob feel he could not love and possibly trust her (White, 1890/2018, p. 189).

This bitter rivalry between the two sister-wives included the sisters' handmaids who became concubines (Gen 30:8). The children born to the concubines were considered the respective wives' children (vv 3-5, 9). This volatile competition became the premise on which Jacob's family was borne and built (vv 30,31). White (1890/2018) said, "the jealousy of the several mothers had embittered the family relations; the children had grown up contentious, impatient of control. The father's life was darkened with anxiety and grief" (p. 208).

Joseph appears to be unaware that his special relationship with his father fostered resentment in the hearts of his brothers. The loss of his mother made him cling to his father more than all his brothers. Joseph also had an obedient spirit and a love for God, which endeared him to Jacob (White, 1890/2018, p. 209). Other factors fed the resentment and jealousy his brothers felt against him. First, he was his father's favorite, and everyone knew it (Gen 37:3,4). He was pampered and often set to report on the whereabouts and activities of his older brothers. Secondly, his father gave him a coat of many colors which fed his brother's jealousies and anxieties for their future (v 4). "The father's gift to Joseph of a costly coat, usually worn by persons of distinction, excited a suspicion that he intended to pass by his elder children to bestow the birthright upon the son of Rachel" (White, 1890/2018, p. 209). Finally, Joseph's callus boasting of his dreams from God further widened the chasm between him and his brothers. (Vv 5-8,10).

The plot to kill him crystalized in their hearts, seemingly unpremeditated (vv 17-18). Without restraint or warning, they violently attacked him (Jer 17:9). Falling short of killing him, they sold him into slavery (Gen 37:28), an act punishable by death (Exod 21:16). The brothers compounded their savage act of betrayal by lying to their father leading him to believe that Joseph had been attacked and killed by wild animals (vv 31, 32). Jacob's devastation was beyond their expectation (vv. 34,35).

Joseph Turned to God: Repentance

The unprovoked and violent attack, confinement, and subsequent enslavement left Joseph traumatized. Alone and facing an uncertain future, Joseph reflected on his life and acknowledged some truths about himself (White, 1890/2018, p. 213). He recognized how his own thoughtless and insensitive behavior had fed the anger and resentment of his

brothers. In the few hours of contemplation, he matured more than he had in years. He was able to understand and empathize with his brothers' pain. In his distress and angst, his mind turned to God (Ps 62:8). "Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord and prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in his exile" (White, 1890/2018, p. 213). God accepted and responded to Joseph's repentant heart (Ps 34:18; 51:17; Isa 57:15). God gave Joseph emotional healing, which prevented him from becoming bitter (Ezek 36:26,27). Joseph's assurance of God's presence changed his outlook on his circumstance and how he perceived his future (Prov 3:5-6, Phil 4:6-8).

Joseph's Assault

God gave him honor, favor, and wisdom even as an enslaved person (Matt 6:33; White, 1890/2018, p. 214). His faithfulness and integrity were recognized, and Joseph was treated more like a son than an enslaved person (Gen 39:4, White, 1890/2018, p.214). Joseph's commitment to God was tested when he resisted Potiphar's wife's persistent sexual advances (Gen 39:7). She physically accosted Joseph and tried to overpower him sexually. Her anger at his rejection prompted her to accuse him of rape falsely, and he was incarcerated (v 9). White (1890/2018) says that had Potiphar believed his wife, Joseph would have lost his life; but he had him imprisoned to save the family's reputation (p. 218). Joseph endured cruel treatment while imprisoned (Ps 105:17,18). Abandoned by his adopted family, rejected, disgraced, and unjustly confined, Joseph had ample time to become angry and bitter; but he chose to turn his hurts over to God instead. He chose to turn his focus toward those suffering around him (White, 1890/2018, p. 218).

God used his incarceration to prove him and to fulfill his promise over his life (Gen 39:19).

Unbeknownst to Joseph, God was moving him closer to fulfilling his earlier visions. The experiences allowed him to stay focused under adverse conditions. Through Joseph's story, the plots and schemes of Satan to thwart his resolve are easily seen.

Joseph could have easily forgotten that an enemy was seeking to frustrate his desire to seek after God. He learned obedience does not remove suffering and trials (Ps 34:19,22). Through Joseph's reliance on God, God used Joseph's circumstances to fulfill the dreams he had seen years before (Isa 14:24, Jer 29:11-13).

Joseph's Vindication

Joseph was elevated to prominence when he least expected it (James 4:10). After spending nearly 13 years in Egypt, God provided him with a new identity and position. All the things that he had been stripped of were restored (Gen 41:42 – 44, Joel 2:25). Despite his change in social status, Joseph did not forget God. He allowed God to guide him in his new duties so he would not abuse his authority (White, 1890/2018, p. 222). Joseph ultimately chose forgiveness and reconciliation with his brothers. Joseph's reliance and trust in God prevented him from being bitter or angry over his adverse circumstances (Ezek 11:19).

Misunderstanding God

Joseph's brothers expected condemnation and retribution. Joseph was unaware that his brothers lived with the constant fear of retaliation. They thought that the trauma they caused him left him irreparably changed (Rambo, 2018). Despite Joseph's many

attempts to dissuade his brothers from this thought, the guilt of their betrayal weighed heavily on them throughout the remaining years of their lives (Gen 50:15,18). Joseph had been able to recognize that despite his hardship, God had been able to transform his heart for His glory (Gen 50:20). Indeed, Joseph lived to see the fulfillment of God's promise (Prov 25:21,22). Joseph's life ended with the benefits of emotional healing: reconciliation and fruitfulness (Gen 50:22).

Tamar

David's polygamous households and his mighty acts of valor meant that he was often away from his family—the quintessential absentee father. His relationships with his children appeared permissive, with deep love, but lacking in discipline. White (1899) said of undisciplined children:

All the learning they may acquire will never undo the evil resulting from lax discipline in childhood. One neglect, often repeated, forms a habit. One wrong act prepares the way for another. Bad habits are more easily formed than good ones and are given up with more difficulty. (p. 1)

When his spoilt, unrestrained eldest son, Amnon, developed sexual feelings for his young half-sister, Tamar, he lacked the moral fortitude or social conscience to restrain himself (2 Sam 13:2). Instead, Amnon plotted to assault her sexually. Unknowingly, it was David who sent Tamar to him. She refused, she reasoned, resisted his sexual advances, but Amnon overpowered and violently raped her. His professed love changed to anger and loathing such that he forcibly ejected her from his house (2 Sam 13:12-16).

Her emotional and physical injuries sent her dazed and crying in the street. She rents her clothing and virginal veils as a public sign of her defilement. She was not silenced by shame as she sought justice. Absalom, her beloved older brother, found her

and knew what had happened (2 Sam 13:20). Amnon's crime was punishable by death (Lev 18:8-18) which was expected to be swift and decisive. However, when David heard the news, he became angry but did nothing (2 Sam 13:21). Absalom hated Amnon for what he did to Tamar but resented David even more for his weak response to Amnon's crime of rape. Tamar's lack of paternal vindication made Absalom determined to avenge her. He plotted and waited patiently to retaliate (v 29). When David heard of Amnon's death, his response was public and dramatic (v 31).

Absalom's anger and expectation for revenge echoed an earlier Old Testament Narrative. When the news of the rape of Dinah, Jacob's daughter, reached her brothers, they planned and executed a bloody onslaught that resulted in the death of all the men in a whole community (Gen 34:7, 11, 12). In response to this tactical assault, Jacob cried out to God in fear of retaliation from other nearby groups (v 30). God did not rebuke the slaughter but told Jacob to move his family to Bethel (Gen 35:1). God did not punish Absalom for Amnon's death. David's non-response to his daughter's assault brought recrimination upon his head. As king he was known for his bravery (1 Sam 17:34,35); he was known to defend Godly principles (vs 40) and he was known as a man of war (1 Chr 28:3). The expected response was based on his role as an indignant father and his responsibility as king. Solomon wrote, "it is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks what is right" Prov 16:12,13. As king, David's silence conveyed consent to wickedness (1 Kgs 22:43).

David's silence was egregious as he was noted for his prayers for vindication (Ps 35:24; 43:1; 54:1), protection (Ps 61:1-4), comfort (Ps 18:6; 22:2; 102:1), and justice (Ps

17:1; 40:1). God remained silent and allowed time to take its natural course. “When parents or rulers neglect the duty of punishing iniquity, a train of circumstances will arise which will punish sin with sin” (White, 1890/2018, p. 728). David’s lack of response opened the door for more pain and hurt to come upon him and his family. The last mention of Tamar in the Scriptures was Absalom saying to her, “do not take this thing to heart.” However, the Scriptures also say, “Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom’s house” (1 Sam 13:20).

Children of Israel: God’s Response to Trauma

God is mindful of His children (Ps 8:4) and the lives of all His creatures (Matt 10:29). When God heard the cries of His oppressed people, He remembered His covenant with Abraham (Exod 2:23-25). He called Moses from his self-imposed exile in the Midian desert into service (Exod 3:1). Guilt and fear for his life had kept him away from Egypt for forty years, and he had no desire to revisit the past. Unbeknownst to him, God had been preparing Moses for this role his whole life (Ps 139:1-3, Heb 4:13).

God used the time to undo the deep impressions of Egypt on Moses’s mind and character (White, 1890/2018, p. 248). Moses had to unlearn to become patient, reverent, and humble. His forty years of tending sheep in the wilderness developed patience and control over his passions which led him to be called a meek (Num 12:3) and notable prophet (Deut 34:10). God wanted Moses to possess fatherly care and understanding from the hardship and perils of the wilderness to lead the nation of Israel (White, 1890/2018, p. 247; White, 1900, p. 2). Moses prefigured Christ, who would break the effects of sin on humanity (White, 1890/2018, p. 264).

After over four hundred years of living in Egypt, the descendants of Israel thrived

and grew to the point where they became a threat to the mighty nation (Exod 1:8-10). The Egyptians resorted to using seduction to lure the Israelites away from the worship of God; failing this, they used threats and cruelty (White, 1890/2018, p. 259). White (1983) said the polytheistic beliefs of Egypt and the lack of corporate worship had begun to dull their view and understanding of God. Some had grown blind, ignorant, and unbelieving in God's promises to their forefathers as they queried His apparent lack of response to their cries for help (p. 260). God heard their collective cry, and he responded to Pharaoh like an indignant parent. He said, "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So, I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn" (Gen 4:22,23). God knew the oppression was severe and pitied Israel (Ps 103:13).

White (1890/2018) said that elders of Israel who were strong in faith reminded the people repeatedly of God's covenant and promises of deliverances (p. 178, Rom 4:1-3, 20). However, there were many whose faith had waned listening to the taunting of their Egyptian masters, and even Pharaoh boasted of his might over Israel. Some Israelites questioned why God ignored their oppression, refusing to acknowledge their disobedience and idolatrous practices (White, 1890/2018, p. 259).

Slow to Anger: God's Deliverance

The deliverance of the Israelites was delayed because of their lack of faith. God knew that many expected to be rescued without testing their faith, real suffering, or hardship. He also knew that some would have stayed in Egypt, having habituated to the oppression and pagan practices (White, 1890/2018, p. 260). Many had acclimatized to the oppression and had no hope of being rescued (Barrett, 2020). The ten plagues were sent

as a message to both the Egyptians and the Israelites. The plagues represented judgment against the various gods of Egypt (Exod 12:12; Num 33:4). God wanted to punish Egypt for its tyranny and idolatry. He wanted them to know that He was above all other gods and how much He despised idolatry. God wanted to bless Israel for their obedience and repentance (1 Cor 2:9), but they had to be willing to leave it behind (Isa 30:15). White (1890/2018) says,

His people were permitted to experience the grinding cruelty of the Egyptians so that they might not be deceived concerning the debasing influence of idolatry. In His dealing with Pharaoh, the Lord manifested His hatred of idolatry and His determination to punish cruelty and oppression. (p. 267)

God wanted to reveal His character to Israel through His justice, power, and love (Ps 103:6-10). He wanted them to Him to take care of their healing and restoration (Ps 145:14-20). God wanted them to willingly leave Egypt and give themselves in pure worship and to His service (White, 1890/2018, p. 263). He wanted to use Israel to glorify His name throughout the earth and to draw them back to Himself. His prophets Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah consistently repeated this message to Israel. Malachi said,

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (Mal 1:11)

God also desired for Pharaoh to repent of his rebellious ways (Exod 6:1; 7:6; 8:1). However, Pharaoh's heart hardened as he resisted the prompting of the Holy Spirit until it was too late (Exod 4:21). God wanted Israel to be in awe and pride at His Might and power (Nah 1:3).

God's deliverance of Israel was noted by all the then world (Exod 18:1; 2 Chr 20:29). Egypt lost its established workforce, its military might, and its national leader. Their idolatrous and pagan practices were debunked (Exod 14:5, 30). God's deliverance

and forming them as a people was for more than just temporary relief from physical oppression. He wanted to dwell among Israel, to be near them as His chosen people (Exod 29:45, Lev 26:11, Ezek 37:27, Zech 2:10, Rev 21:3). Their history of captivity and oppression was not to be a thing of shame but pride that God had delivered them and chosen them to be His peculiar people (White, 1870/2017, p. 193). He wanted to heal their wounded hearts (Isa 1:18; 43:18,19) and to offer them a new identity as a nation to be His ambassadors to represent His kingdom on earth. White (1900a/2017) said,

Upon this people God had bestowed great privileges, blessing them richly from His abundant goodness. He looked for them to honor Him by yielding fruit. They were to reveal the principles of His kingdom. In the midst of a fallen, wicked world they were to represent the character of God. (p. 285)

The work of healing and restoration was His to do (Isa 43:18,19). God outlined in Leviticus and Numbers His plan for their atonement and to turn them into a holy people. Instead of trusting and following God, they rebelled and rejected God. He pleaded with them through His prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos, until people resorted to killing His prophets to silence the messages (Acts 7:51-53, 2 Chr 36:15, Jer 2:30, Matt 5:12). When they resisted the prompting of the Holy Spirit, they were unable to put away wrath, anger, bitterness, and malice which prevented tenderness and forgiveness to thrive (Eph 4:20). Eventually, they resisted until God no longer responded when they called out to Him (Jer 32:17, Zech 7:13, Prov 1:24-26). God said this of Israel, “All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people” (Isa 10:21).

Steadfast in Love: Comfort Ye My People

Despite Israel’s disobedience, God never rejected them. He continued sending prophets to speak to them and woo them back to the path of righteousness. When Israel

turned away from God, He sent the message through His prophet Isaiah:

Comfort, yes, comfort My people! Says your God. Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. (Isa 40:1-3).

God repeatedly sent hope and comfort to Israel while their disobedience oppressed them. Their choice of apostasy tore his heart, yet they were never forsaken. His anger was only for a moment (Ps 30:5, Isa 54:7). Fellowship and reconciliation are what God desires to have with the repentant sinner. When Christ stated, "come let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, I can make them white as snow. Though they may be red as crimson, I can make them as wool" (Isa 1:18). This is a promise of acceptance, reconciliation, and restoration. White (1895) said,

The foundation of our hope in Christ is the fact that we recognize ourselves as sinners in need of restoration and redemption. It is because we are sinners that we have courage to claim Him as our Saviour. Then let us take heed lest we deal with the erring in a way that would say to others that we have no need of redemption. Let us not denounce, condemn, and destroy as though we were faultless. It is the work of Christ to mend, to heal, to restore. God is love. . . . He . . . gives Satan no occasion for triumphing by making the worst appear or by exposing our weaknesses to our enemies. (p. 1)

Isaiah and Christ both personified the role of God towards Israel as a shepherd caring for sheep. The tenderness and thoughtfulness demonstrated a desire for their well-being and safety. Jesus clearly stated His desire to restore the sinner. For the hesitant, He stated, "I stand at the door and knock" the recipient is given the option of opening the door or not (Rev 3:20).

The Word Became Flesh

The birth of Christ fulfilled the words of the prophets (Mic 5:2, Isa 7:14, Hos 11:1). He was the promised seed (Gen 3:15). Whom John referred to as "An Advocate

with the Father, The Righteous, The Propitiation for the sins of humanity,” (1 John 2:1). He was Immanuel, God with us (Matt 1:23) in the midst of our troubled and chaotic world (Stott & Bonhoeffer, 2012), and to show us the way back to the Father (John 14:6,7). And He was Jesus, the One who would save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21). Jesus’ ministry was specific. “He came to earth to reveal the character of God to both man and angels” (White, 1898/2017, p. 19) and to reflect God’s heart in response to the pain of humanity (Langberg, 2015).

Societal biases or prejudices did not bind Jesus. He purposely went out of His way to meet and interact with the oppressed (Matt 20:28, Mark 10:45). He touched lepers (John 8:3). He allowed Himself to be touched and pressed upon by crowds seeking to be near Him (Mark 3:7-10; 5:24, Luke 5:1). Jesus often took the initiative for the interactions. When He encountered the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:5,6), He began the conversation and took advantage of their time alone (John 4:7-41). Christ knew historically and culturally that the Samaritans were looked down upon by the Jews because of their mixed Jewish heritage (2 Kgs 17:24-28, John 4:9) and that they regarded them as not having a claim to God (Ezra 4:3).

However, God hates castes and sees the souls of all men of equal value (White, 1898, p. 403). Christ knew that she was a social outcast within her community as she gathered water alone during the hottest time of the day (John 4:5-7). Through their conversation, she truthfully confirmed that she had endured a life of broken, intimate relationships. Jesus noted her honesty without condemnation, and He offered her living water to quench her emotional and spiritual thirst (v. 14-15). After healing, she immediately ran to share her experience with her community, the same community she

had previously avoided. Her testimony of transformation brought curious seekers into contact with Jesus (v. 28-30), and they were also transformed (v. 39-42). Transformation through Christ always draws people to Him (John 12:32). Paul said, “for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:11-13).

Moved with Compassion

Jesus dared to touch a leper who was considered unclean (Lev 13:35) and condemned as a sinner (John 9:2). All reports (Matt 8:2-4, Mark 1:40-41, Luke 5:12-14) indicated that the leper approached Jesus, begging him for healing. Jesus responded by touching Him, not to push him away, but to heal him. “Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed’” (Mark 1:41). Leprosy condemned him as a pariah, yet Jesus touched him as a physical demonstration of his reconnection to family and society (John 9:3-5). The leper received physical and emotional healing (Jer 30:17). Jesus ordered him to show himself to the priest to complete and confirm his restoration to society and his family (Mark 1:44, Lev 14:4-8).

Jesus’ compassion was consistently extended (Matt 8:16; 14:4; 15:30; 19:2, Mark 1:34, Acts 10:38) even on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6, Luke 13:10-11). He showed that healing and restoration honored God and were in keeping with corporate worship. He was indignant when a person’s healing and deliverance were challenged as breaking the Sabbath (Luke 13:14-17). He healed more than He preached as He wanted to respond to their greatest needs first. Jesus desired to remove barriers to reveal His redemptive love for humanity (Sancken, 2019). White (1905/2017) says

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.' (p. 143)

Jesus responded to the injustice of the woman who was baited, trapped, and condemned when caught in the act of adultery (John 8:3). Although both she and her partner were guilty and should have been condemned to death (Lev 20:10), it was she alone who was targeted (John 8:5). Jesus objected to the partial application of the law at the expense of the woman. He reminded her accusers that all have sinned and fallen short (Rom 3:23) and that no sin was greater or lesser. By revealing their sins, they too were to be condemned. Stymied and convicted, the accusers passed quietly away, leaving the woman alone at the feet of Jesus (v. 9,10). White (1898/2017) said,

Her heart was melted, and, bowing at the feet of Jesus, she sobbed out her grateful love, and with bitter tears confessed her sins. This was to her the beginning of a new life, a life of purity and peace, devoted to God. In the uplifting of this fallen soul, Jesus performed a greater miracle than in healing the most grievous physical disease; He cured the spiritual malady that leads to eternal death. This penitent woman became one of His most steadfast followers. (p. 462)

Without an accuser, she would be free to go (Deut 19:15). Jesus allayed her fears by verbally confirming that He did not condemn her but admonished her to go and sin no more (John 8:10-11). The grace applied to the guilty gave her a second chance and a new life (2 Cor 5:17). In this act of grace, Christ reclaimed, restored, and reconciled her to Himself. Grace and forgiveness are readily available to all who have sinned (Jones, 2019). Reconciliation is God's ultimate plan for His erring children (2 Cor 5:18-19).

Jesus Receives Sinners

The Pharisees and Scribes criticized Jesus because He associated with and ate with sinners (Luke 15:1-2). Zacchaeus was a tax collector who had gained incredible

wealth at the expense of extorting his people on behalf of the Romans. He was a social outcast and had no fellowship amongst his people (Luke 19:1-10). Internally, he longed to turn from his unrighteous practices but found it challenging. His heart was stirred by all he had heard about Jesus and longed to meet Him (White, 1898/2017, p. 553). Jesus knew this and told Zacchaeus He was coming to stay at his house (Luke 19:5). Jesus expressed His desire to fellowship with Zacchaeus was all he needed to surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wrought repentance, healing, and his desire to offer restitution to those whom he had wronged. White (1898/2017) wrote,

Zacchaeus had been overwhelmed, amazed, and silenced at the love and condescension of Christ in stooping to him, so unworthy. Now love and loyalty to his newfound Master unseal his lips. He will make public his confession and his repentance. (p. 554)

Jesus knew His unconventional behavior drew attention and seized the opportunities as teachable moments. He responded to their hearts' questions through the lost sheep's parable (Matt 18:12-14 and Luke 15:4-7). Jesus knew that the Pharisees looked disdainfully at His behavior because He received the Publicans and common sinners who clamored to hear His Words (White, 1915/2017, p. 187). The parable spoke to the value of livestock in that agrarian culture and the attachment between animals and owners (Matt 12:10-13, Luke 14:2-5). The lone sheep was the least amount missing in a flock of one hundred. Nevertheless, its value outweighed the risk, effort, and possible inconveniences of finding it. The audience was able to commiserate with the shepherd's range of emotions, from deep distress to immediate joy and excitement when the sheep is found unharmed.

Sin separates us from God (Isa 59:2), which is why Jesus often exhorted those who received healing and subsequent reconciliation with the community and God to sin

no more. Jesus wanted them to know that connection with God was a choice. He used the illustration of the vine and how the fruits had to be intimately connected to grow and thrive. Christ reminded them by saying,

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. (John 15:3-4)

Both Matthew and Luke noted that there was great rejoicing when the sheep was found. There was no mention that the sheep was ever punished or rebuked for being lost. The shepherd carried the sheep on his shoulders and invited his neighbors and friends to a celebration. Likewise, heaven rejoices with great joy when a soul turns from sin and returns to Christ (Luke 15:7). The shepherd's love message for the sheep is clear.

If one strays from the fold, he is not followed with harsh words and with a whip, but with winning invitations to return. The ninety and nine that had not strayed do not call for the sympathy and tender, pitying love of the shepherd. But the shepherd follows the sheep and lambs that have caused him the greatest anxiety and have engrossed his sympathies. (White, 1894/2018, p. 158)

In Luke 15, Christ chastised the spiritual shepherds of His day. He castigated them for not feeding those who looked to them for spiritual food. Ezekiel 34 also spoke about the shepherds' wrongdoings who exploited the sheep's needs and ignored their well-being. Christ was adamant when He admonished Peter to feed His lambs and sheep (John 21:15-17). Being diligent in the role was His only requirement to demonstrate love for God.

Jesus Preaches Reconciliation

Jesus effectively used parables to reveal new truths and dispel old ones. It allowed Him to address social injustice and prejudice as He presented the governing principles of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus told the parable of the "Good Samaritan" of Luke 10:25-

37. He told the story of a man (Jew) who fell victim to assault and robbery and was left nearly dead on the side of the road. Although a Rabbi and a Levite saw him, both passed by on the other side of the road to avoid contact (vv 31,32). He received no assistance until a Samaritan passed by. The Samaritan moved with compassion and came to his aid. The Samaritan willingly assumed the financial responsibilities for the stranger's healing and recovery. The implications of the parable would have been shocking to some and angry to others. White (1875/2017) stated,

The Levite and the priest represent a class in the church who manifest an indifference to the very ones who need their sympathy and help. This class, notwithstanding their position in the church, are commandment breakers. The Samaritan represents a class who are true helpers with Christ, and who are imitating His example in doing good. (p. 511)

The messages were clear to His audience. The wounded and the hurting were the 'least of these.' The role of the church was to help the hurting. When they abdicated their responsibility, God sent another instead.

Pretense and oppression were commonly experienced in the religious community. The leaders were oppressive to those seeking forgiveness and regarded them with disdain. Jesus took exception to the exploitation of the poor and the greed of those who benefited. Jesus used the parables to press the point that social justice and the pain of others required a response. "These men had been chosen to minister in God's temple, and they ought to have been like Him, full of mercy and kindness. But their hearts were cold and unfeeling" (White, 1900b/2017, p. 65). In this parable, Christ wanted to illustrate the nature of true religion. It was not merely based on tradition, systems, or rites but on bringing the greatest good to others showing genuine goodness (White, 1898/2017, p 497). Jesus illustrated that religious beliefs were to involve self-sacrifice in the

community and family and wherever there was a need or profession of faith would be in vain (White, 1898/2017, p. 504).

Jesus, in the form of a man, had physical limitations that prevented Him from being omnipresent. As a result, He chose Capernaum as a suitable location as it afforded Him access to large groups and diverse groups of people (Mark 1:21, 2:1; Luke 7:1; John 6:17, 6:24). White (1909/2017) said,

Jesus could meet all nations and all ranks, the rich and great, as well as the poor and lowly; and His lessons would be carried to other countries and into many households. Investigation of the prophecies would thus be excited; attention would be directed to the Saviour, and His mission would be brought before the world. (p. 121)

Jesus spoke truth to power. He addressed social and spiritual issues that were an affront to Him. Jesus said, “they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matt 23:4). He knew His words would have negative consequences, but He wanted to offer hope to the oppressed. When questioned about his association with sinners, Jesus’ response was recorded in three of the four gospels. He said,

those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. (Matt 9:12-13, Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31)

Jesus chided the people on their diligence in fasting while their hearts remained unchanged. Christ wanted them to notice the afflicted among them. He wanted them to help those who were marginalized and oppressed. Christ quoted Isaiah, who stated,

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isa 58:6-7)

The kingdom of God to which Christ referred was where social outcasts were welcomed, and the least would be the greatest. The poor and marginalized are God's special people (Ezigbo, 2021). Lepers were required to show themselves to the priest to resume life in the community. Christ said, "The son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10). He traveled around Judea, Galilee, and across the Jordan River and was never in one place very long. Jesus went to the synagogues to teach as it was the center of the community and Palestinian life (John 8:2). Jesus worked meticulously to dispel common myths and social disgrace against the marginalized.

Those who were demon-possessed and those with leprosy were particularly maligned. Lepers were removed from their families and communities and often opted to live alone or in colonies (Matt 8:22). The demon-possessed were feared, and the demons often dealt violently with them. The possessed had little hope of reprieve. People feared them, yet Jesus was not afraid (Matt 8:28-34, Luke 8:26-37). When others ran away, Jesus stood His ground or advanced. The demons recognized and acknowledged who Jesus was (Luke 4:41) and acquiesced to His commands (Matt 12:22). After healing the people, Jesus took the time to teach them and blessed them. In Matt 5 and Luke 6, Jesus took a moment to address their miseducation. He wanted them to experience a paradigm shift as to their worth in the kingdom of God. Christ identified their everyday issues and pronounced blessings upon them (Matt 5:3-11).

Many never knew that the kingdom was accessible or that God noted their pains and hurts. "Through their reverence for tradition and their blind faith in a corrupt priesthood, the people were enslaved" (White, 1898/2017, p. 611). Christ longed to heal their broken hearts and bind up their wounds (Ps 147:3). The people heard the truth for

the first time and were amazed (Matt 22:33, Mark 1:22, Luke 4:32). Jesus knew that the truth would set them free (John 8:31-22). He knew that at the heart of their issues was a longing to be liberated, but they could never achieve freedom on their own (Stevens, 2022). He invited them, “come to me if you are weary of the life you are living, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11: 28-30).

Bringing Glory to God

Even when admonished to keep silent, they were unable to restrain themselves. The praise of those who received healing quickened the minds and gladdened the heart of the oppressed. Their testimonies were irrefutable, and their worship glorified God (Luke 18:42-43; 19:37, John 11:4, Acts 3:8).

Mary Magdalene, who had received healing from evil spirits and infirmities (Luke 8:2-3), came uninvited to Simon’s house (John 12:1-8). Her presence was an offense to the host and created a stir at the event (Matt 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-11, Luke 7:36-50, John 12:1-8). Despite knowing that she was being criticized and scrutinized (Matt 6:8,9), she was unashamed and deliberate in her open adoration of Jesus. She was so grateful for what He had done for her that she lavished love on Him unabashedly. Jesus rebuked her accusers and praised her openly for her worship. It was testimonies like hers that Christ referred to when He said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13). White (1917, 2017) said,

Salt must be mingled with the substance to which it is added; it must penetrate, infuse it, that it may be preserved. So, it is through personal contact and association that men are reached by the saving power of the gospel. They are not saved as masses but as individuals. Personal influence is a power. (p. 232)

Jesus addressed the stigmas of what was denoted as ‘sinfulness’ and God’s willingness to offer forgiveness many times during his ministry. When Peter asked him how many times forgiveness was to be given, “til seven times?” Peter believed forgiving a person three times conveyed a true spirit of forgiveness. Therefore, he thought he was very generous when he suggested seven, the perfect number. However, Jesus said, “seventy times seven” (Matt 18:21, 22). It was not to say only four hundred and ninety times as a specific number but rather a principle (Ps 34:15-18, 51:17).

When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, He said, “Forgive us debt as we forgive our debtors” (Matt 6:12, Luke 11: 4). Time and time again, Jesus offered forgiveness to those whom He healed because He wanted them to know that judgment came from Him (John 5:26-27).

Summary

God’s plan, in the beginning, was for Adam and Eve to be obedient. Lucifer did not have to be followed, but he became the “prince” of this world until Jesus came in human form and set an example of how following God might look. The disciples were not only taught by Jesus’ words but by His example. The commission that Christ gave to the original eleven still stands today. Take His yoke and carry the gospel to the utmost regions of the earth so that others will experience the loosening of the bonds and the liberation of the captives. Christ said,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28:18-20)

Jesus' ministry was inclusive. He saw humanity, not socio-economic status, culture, language, or gender. Christ is the only way back to God (John 14:6). He purposely became the bridge for the suffering to be reunited with God the Father. He sought to elevate the quality of humanity by specifically blessing the marginalized and the downtrodden and redefining citizenship for the kingdom of God. No longer were the social and religious elites guaranteed a place, but it was for whoever believed and accepted Him. He brought hope to those who sought vindication for their injustices. Christ fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3. Jesus sought those who were lost and delivered those who were bound. As followers of Christ and preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we too have the mandate to bring hope to the hopeless and healing to the sin-sick hearts of individuals.

In summary, the theological reflection indicates that God is undeniably affected by the hurts and pains of humanity. God offers us a framework for understanding and responding to trauma. One must be willing to bring their hurts to Him. He is actively involved in mitigating the effects and desires to bring healing, restoration, and vindication to those affected. There is grace and mercy for all who seek it. Accepting God's forgiveness and love plays a significant role in healing, vindication, and restoration.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews contemporary literature on domestic abuse and family violence, intervention methodology, and preaching for transformation. In the area of domestic abuse, this literature review seeks to establish who is at risk for domestic abuse and family violence, identify the emotional struggles, and how trauma's effects can affect spiritual awareness and well-being. Regarding intervention methodology, the chapter identifies how the church's response can promote or hamper open conversation and dialogue in those enduring or who have survived domestic abuse and family violence. On transformational preaching, literature is reviewed to establish how preaching ought to reflect God's core values of responding to the hurting and exploring the fundamental need of the preacher to develop transformational sermons to educate, offer hope, and facilitate healing and reconciliation with God.

Definition

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation (2012), domestic abuse is considered an umbrella term that includes all forms of abuse, for example, physical, psychological, sexual, financial, spiritual, criminal harassment, and stalking. These behaviors must all occur within the domestic domain. Statistics Canada (2012)

differentiates between domestic violence and domestic abuse. Domestic violence focuses on violent behavior alone; domestic abuse captures a broader range of behaviors that may not include violence but are abusive. This comprehensive definition criminalizes all domestic abuse. For this discourse, domestic violence and domestic abuse will be used interchangeably.

Abuse and Family Violence and Those at Risk

In 2012 the Canadian Women's Foundation contended that domestic violence is rooted in the belief that a group's needs, beliefs, or feelings are more significant or correct than those of another group or person. This flawed view held by the abuser becomes the premise for oppression, humiliation, intimidation, control, and even murder. Abuse and family violence impacts the very fabric of society, and domestic violence transcends socio-demographic boundaries. Holcomb and Holcomb (2014) agree that domestic violence is complex, pervasive, costly, and preventable and damages the individual's emotions, body, psychology, and spirituality.

According to the World Health Organization (2017), 1 in 3 or (35%) of women experience physical or sexual assault in their lifetime by a partner or non-partner. Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2010) found that 1 in 4 women who were sexually assaulted in Canada identified their assailant as either someone they knew or an intimate partner, which led to the phrase Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). IPV is violence between legally married, separated, divorced, common-law partner, or current or previous dating partner (McInturff, 2013, p. 5).

Given the clarification of the terms of domestic violence and domestic abuse, it is easy to understand why the signs of domestic abuse can be hard to spot in general and

even more so in the church. I recall a woman recounting abuse at the hands of her now ex-husband, a man I grew up with in church. As she spoke, I found herself invariably looking at her nose when she mentioned that he had broken it in the past. I had to remind myself that abuse leaves many scars, visible and invisible.

Men as Victims of IPV

Historically, the female victim was often the reported victim of IPV. Hines and Malley-Morrison (2001) and Cook (2009) found that men were rarely perceived as victims of domestic violence. According to Hines, Brown, and Dunning (2007), since the 1970s, when systematic research into IPV began, one of the most controversial topics has been IPV by women. There is a dearth of qualitative research on men as victims of IPV (Douglas & Hines, 2011). Research gained through collaborative professions in the criminal justice such as social work, counseling, nursing, and psychology, has begun to identify the impact of IPV on male survivors (Shuler, 2010). Drijber, Reijnders, and Ceelen (2013) found that male survivors of IPV were often victims of physical and psychological abuse. Many survivors reported that their claims were often dismissed or denied (Bielski, 2016). Despite indications that men are victims in at least one in four cases of IPV, there are no publicly funded shelters for men and their children in Canada. However, more government funding is being directed towards housing for women and children, leaving situations related to violence (Todd, 2019). Anderson (2018) suggests that there needs to be a more consistent response to male victims of IPV, especially within faith communities. McMullin, Nason-Clark, Fisher-Townsend, and Holtmann (2015) agree that male victims and all perpetrators require spiritual guidance from their faith communities as they learn new ways of thinking and behaving.

Before my leaving to attend the seminary in 2008, I witnessed a male IPV victim share how he was physically and verbally abused by his former wife. It was after church at a potluck at a member's house. We had finished eating and lingered at the table while we waited for dessert. We began sharing jokes and stories about our Caribbean families and childhood. This disclosure was his first attempt at publicly sharing. He began with haunting stories of being restrained and public beatings. As he transitioned, he started sharing stories about his marriage and subsequent divorce. He spoke of the violent temper of his wife and his physical injuries. Given his more significant than average physical height and weight, his comments drew shock, then snickers from a few men at the table. Many commented that they found it hard to understand how he allowed a woman to 'beat' on him. He laughed it off as inconsequential to avoid any further threats of emasculation, even though he now bore a scar on the side of his head. Had it not been for the support of a few older women, he would have been shamed into perpetual silence. Later, during a private conversation with me, he explained how abhorrent he thought it to hit a woman, even in self-defense, as he feared his anger would be unrestrained.

Children and Family Violence

Finley (2013) estimated that in 30-60% of families where domestic violence occurs, child abuse, neglect, and mistreatment are also present. Children live what they learn. Statistics Canada (2014) found that more than one in five (21%) spousal violence victims reported that they witnessed domestic violence as a child. Groves (2002) also found that the lessons children learn about violence were from their parents or primary caregivers and not the media or community. Hunt (2010), Davediuk (2013), Finley (2013), and Rakovec-Felser (2014) reported that children exposed to domestic violence,

even when it was not directed to them, showed signs of emotional, physical, social, and spiritual trauma. Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2010) stated that exposure to domestic violence often left children with feelings of anger towards God. God, the Protector in their minds, failed to protect them. My disconnection from God resulted from a pious father who was physically, emotionally, and verbally abusive toward me. It was hard to see myself positively and envision a Heavenly Father who was unlike my earthly father. My feelings of hopelessness were pervasive. I never realized that I was not unique in my trauma.

Domestic Violence and the Church

Physically and socially, we present our best selves at church. Nason-Clark, Kroeger, and Fisher-Townsend (2011) found that few want to acknowledge domestic violence as a reality within the church. It is messy and refers to a darker nature that many would rather avoid, especially in the context of worship. The assumption is that faith in God becomes a moral regulator and that people will refrain from abusive behavior in familial relationships. Drumm, McBride, Allen, Baltazar, and McCoy (2001) found that with IPV, religious adherence appeared to provide some benefits concerning the types of violence observed and committed. However, it did not ultimately protect against violence. In actuality, the effects of domestic violence appeared more significant for the Christian woman, and she was more likely to feel alone and isolated, potentially leading to a spiritual crisis. Nason-Clark and Kroeger (2004) found that when survivors share their stories of domestic violence, they are often ridiculed, ignored, or accused of lying.

Nason-Clark (1997) contended that the prevalence of domestic violence throughout society (within the Christian community) is also unclear as many victims do

not self-report. Police reports from emergency rooms and shelters are the basis of what is known. Drumm, McBride, Allen, Baltazar, and McCoy (2001) found that within religious communities, there was no significant difference in the rates of domestic violence reported between women with conservative affiliations and liberal/moderate affiliations. However, women in (conservative) congregations who did not advocate for divorce in cases of IPV were more likely to be victims. Furthermore, Nason-Clark, Fisher-Townsend, Holtmann, and McMullin (2018) contend that victims of domestic abuse with deep religious convictions are more at risk. Kock and Ramirez (2010) also found that when Christian fundamentalists support corporal punishment and when their theological beliefs support corporal punishment, they are also more likely to approve violence in general, thus making family violence more tolerable. Davis, Strachan, Holcomb, and Holcomb (2015) agree that victims are less likely to seek help, more likely to stay or delay leaving an abusive relationship, and are optimistic that their abuser can and will change. Westenberg (2017) found that many remain in abusive relationships with the intent of fixing their husband and their marriage.

The Church's Response to Domestic Abuse

Both Keeney (1994) and Williams (1996) reported that Christian women were likelier to disclose abuse to their clergy or religious leaders than anyone else. VanderWaal, Opei, and Hernandez (2015) found that besides spiritual support, pastors were spending more time providing pastoral counseling on more complex mental health issues than marriage and family therapists in private practice. Kroeger, Nason-Clark, and Fisher-Townsend (2008) added that when women of faith sought spiritual assistance and support from their pastor or clergy in the aftermath of domestic violence, they often

sought help with practical, emotional, and spiritual needs and guidance in understanding and resolving problems. She continues that the survivor “often struggles with questions of whether she leaves, should she stay, what about forgiveness?” (p. 381). Salvation for the Christian victim is often questioned or misunderstood. Drumm et al., (2009) and Nason-Clark (2009) agree that women of faith in abusive relationships face pressure to stay and conform to specific religious norms/beliefs, which makes them turn to their clergy, pastors, or religious leaders for help (Popescu & Drumm, 2009, p. 376). Many expressed feelings of being pulled between their church’s religious beliefs, including their leaders’ behavior or advice, and their safety and emotional health (p. 381). Nason-Clark and Kroeger (2004) comment on the story of a Christian survivor “though many years had passed since her days in the battered women’s shelter, she was still in pain because church leaders had ignored her plight” (p. 46).

Male Dominant Culture and the Church

This notion of male religious leaders being unaware or unresponsive to the vulnerability of women or children in the congregation is supported by researchers. Keeney (1994) states that when the church keeps silent, it nurtures abuse; when the church speaks out, it can significantly impact the problem of physical and sexual abuse. Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2001) and Nason-Clark and Kroeger (2012) agree that the church can no longer ignore the effects of domestic violence among its members, if not for social reasons or moral ones. God’s honor is at stake on at least two bases: abusive homes and marriages do not reflect the love of Christ among His children, and the peace that He promised is not reflected as well. There is also an expectation of correction and guidance from Christian leadership (p. 8). When there is apathy, it fosters shame and

silence. Wheeler (2017) feels the infraction is far more grievous and denounces the practice of avoidance by religious leaders as a disservice to the people and religion and an evasion of the calling to serve the congregation. Hunt (2010) agrees that sermons denouncing domestic violence against God's will must be preached. The survivors need spiritual encouragement to overcome guilt and shame, and they need to know that they are not alone in this battle.

The Church and Social Service Agencies

McMullin, Nason-Clark, Fisher-Townsend, and Holtmann (2015), Nason-Clark and Kroeger (2012), and Kroeger, Nason-Clark, and Fisher-Townsend (2008) confirm that the negative view of the church as seen by social service agencies creates barriers for women of faith seeking help outside the church. Those who do reach out for help feel conflicted between their commitment to God, the church, and the advice they receive from these secular agencies. Many women of faith who accept the support of secular services feel pressured, downplay their religious affiliation to protect their church from negative criticism, or terminate support to avoid embarrassment due to their religious beliefs.

Wang, Horne, Levitt, and Klesges (2009) agree and state that it is for this reason that many social service agencies perceive the church communities as prolonging the abuse of the victim, as many times it is church leaders who exert a strong influence for the victim to forgive, reconcile with their abuser, submit to her husband or to pray rather than to leave. Fortune (1995), Kroeger, Nason-Clark and Fisher-Townend (2004), Miles (2011), and Davediuk (2013) strongly agree that churches should partner with the

community and licensed mental-health professionals to deal with the specific needs of the vulnerable victim-survivor.

The Role of the Church in Supporting Survivors and Abusers of Domestic Violence

Fortune (1995), Nason-Clark and Kroeger (2012) agree, and Holcomb and Holcomb (2014) say, “faith victims of domestic violence seek out support from their church, religious leaders as they grapple with feelings of abandonment by God, beliefs about the Christian family and marriage in general may be severely shaken” (p. 49). Survivors with a faith-based belief system will look for leadership and spiritual support as they come to terms with their trauma. The impact of these feelings is deeply profound. “When the church is unresponsive to the evidence of abuse and family violence, it often leaves the believer with a deep spiritually aching need, a sense of abandonment and loss as they grapple with biblical questions about suffering, faithfulness and patience” (p. 46). Without the church’s support, many survivors are left feeling spiritually untethered.

The Impact of Church Response on Spiritual Health

I remember for years attending church and going through the motion so as not to draw attention to my spiritual apathy. I felt abandoned by God and felt isolated in the feelings. Only as I sought Christian counseling outside my faith community did I realize that I was not alone. Powell (2016) states, “I felt broken inside; it was terrifying going through all those horrific memories. I just wanted to forget it all and go back to the way I was coping before – wearing those masks and pretending” (p. 72). Coleman (2010) and Zuniga and Davis (2010) agree that a supportive church environment facilitates disclosure and promotes healing. Women who dared to leave abusive relationships

credited their faith in helping them make the choice (Wang et al., 2009) and the influence of their religious doctrines and the perceived attitudes of their religious community (Zust, Housley & Klatke, 2017). Winkelmann (2004) found that for those who stayed, it was not uncommon for them to feel as if the violence was their cross to bear. Women in the Seventh-day Adventist faith community who opted to stay identified pervasive beliefs about marriage and divorce, stereotypes about Christians, and beliefs about Christian gender roles. The beliefs were tough to overcome when they were supported externally by clergy, friends, an abusive partner, family, and the church community, making it even more difficult for the survivor to leave the abusive situation (Popescu et al., 2009). Women who currently have or previously had abusive relationships reported that their religious communities were less accepting of divorce due to domestic violence (Wang et al., 2009).

The need for healing and social justice must be examined for the whole body (Palmer, 2014). Historically, church leaders have had a moral response against abuse and violence (Kienzle & Nienhuis, 2006, p. 81). Ramsay (2006), Zuniga and Davis (2010) agree that the faith community's response to domestic violence has not always favored the victim. Leehan (1989), Owens (2011), and Miles (2011) state that to adequately address the issues of domestic violence in the church population, one must address the crisis of pastoral leadership and misappropriation of theology concerning female submission and male dominance. Many religious leaders admit that their training to deal with the complex issues of domestic violence is inadequate. McMullin et al. (2015) found that while instruction addressing domestic violence has become increasingly common in university curricula, it is still not adequately provided to seminary students across North

America. They also found a need to provide ongoing training to seminary graduates (p. 113).

In recent years, the Graduate Studies program at Andrews University created a dual Master of Social Work and Master of Divinity degree program. This additional degree emphasis enables clergy and church leaders to integrate both disciplines to meet the growing demands of non-traditional ministry opportunities such as social and economic justice, human rights, and global perspectives from a Christian worldview (Andrews University, 2018). So, while this training opportunity will benefit new pastors, what about the established ones in the pulpit?

Perfectionism and Reporting Domestic Violence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist church self-identifies as the ‘remnant church.’ Their theology is a fulfillment of last-day prophesy as per Revelation 13 to call people into true worship. Catherine Taylor, a Seventh-day Adventist clinical social worker, helped design the sexual abuse reporting policies for the Southern New England Conference. She found that she struggled with internal conflict as a church member and as a professional in responding to the lack of reporting of sexual abuse by the Seventh-day Adventist church (Taylor & Fontes, 1995). She explained feelings of denial, grief, and compassion for those who either avoided therapy or traveled an extensive distance to receive it outside their religious and physical communities (p. 178).

Taylor found that secrecy was in part supported by culture as well as theological understandings of forgiveness taught from early on. Pastors reinforced this message of forgiveness in counseling sessions. She cited that when she questioned the appointment

of a convicted sexual predator to the role of Pathfinder leader (Pathfinders is a Seventh-day Adventist church scouting organization), the pastor replied, “the man had been baptized and he had asked God’s forgiveness for his sins. Why shouldn’t he be allowed to work for God in this position?” (p. 179).

Seventh-day Adventist church theology and their understanding of last-days prophecies often make them see themselves as the example for a troubled world. Concerns about their public image and their feelings that exposure of failings is considered a betrayal of trust further compound the survivors’ psychological and spiritual distress (p. 179).

Seventh-day Adventists teach that the community is family and, as such, may view non-members as outsiders who are unable to understand their peculiar beliefs and lifestyle practices. As a result, many members address personal and corporate needs only within the Adventist community. While this behavior may strengthen self-sufficiency, it heightens the danger of insularity. Given the Seventh-day Adventist practice of promoting homeschooling and sending their children to Adventist boarding academies and universities, the need for secrecy is maintained due to fear of betraying the family and community network (p. 180).

This perfect or “perfected” Adventist image creates internal and external sensors for members to remain in abusive relationships and prevent the truth from being known. Leaving the abusive relationship for emotional and spiritual healing means there has to be a shift in religious ideology. Patterson (2010) writes, “coming to terms with the lordship of Jesus requires that the Steward Leader (church leader) recognize God as owner, and self as steward of all that God puts in his charge” (p. 80). This awareness means that the

church leader or pastor must always recognize that God is the owner of the flock, and they are merely its guardians. Conscientious custodians are required to foster optimal emotion and spiritual well-being among the members, denouncing abusive and unhealthy relationships.

When the Church Fails to Report Domestic Violence

Nason-Clark (2004) and Wang et al., (2009) agree that women in families with solid faith remain in abusive relationships for many reasons, including fear, vulnerability, isolation, the sacredness of marital vows, and the optimistic belief in the abuser's promise to change. The reluctance to leave is further complicated by external factors from their families, church community, and clergy. Survivors will commonly assume the blame for failing "their families and God and [for] not being able to make the marriage work" (Wang et al., 2009, p. 225). For this reason, many perceive the church communities as prolonging the victim's abuse as they often strongly influence the victim to forgive, reconcile with or submit to their husbands or to pray rather than leave. Therefore, these women in faith communities were more reluctant to end their marriages due to deep-rooted religious ideologies that portray worthy women as wives and homemakers. Furthermore, explicit religious notions such as forgiveness and sacrifice make it especially difficult for IPV victims in faith communities to acknowledge the abuse and seek outside help (Nason-Clark, 2004, p. 304).

The church's supportive and positive response to helping survivors is paramount in helping victims escape domestic violence (Zuniga & Davis, 2010, p. 37). Historically, when the issue of domestic violence was revealed to the clergy, many clerics were, and some still, to a lesser degree, reluctantly refer the matter to other health care professionals

(Nason-Clark, 2010, p. 51). This hesitation created an uneasy tension between clergy and health care professionals. Damron and Johnson (2015) agree and state that the bias between mental health professionals, especially those working in the area of IPV and clergy, is partly due to training and experience. The clergy who confessed to inadequate training to support mental health issues associated with domestic violence tended to minimize the seriousness of the abuse and were not consistent in making referrals. Some clergy reported the abuse to police authorities and recommended that victims leave abusive relationships, while others counseled the victim to remain (Nason-Clark, 2010, p. 55). There is sufficient evidence to agree with the indictment of inconsistencies among cleric responses to domestic violence (Midgett, 1993, p. 44).

For this reason, many researchers argue that theological themes are distorted when a victim remains in an abusive environment (Ramsay, 2006). Family violence perverts God's intention of loving relationships and creates a skewed view of God, making it difficult to see Him positively and relationally (p. 34). This result is profoundly more so for victims who experienced sexual and physical abuse as children (p. 30). For this reason, Damron and Johnson (2015) recommend that mental health professionals work with clergy to provide training and support to the religious community.

Deciding to Stay or Separate from an Abusive Relationship

The decision to leave or stay in an abusive relationship is never easy. There are many factors to consider. I recall "Joy," who indicated that it took twelve separate attempts before she finally and successfully left her abusive husband. It was not due to him breaking her nose multiple times or knocking out several teeth; it was when he started abusing their son that she finally found the courage to leave. In faith communities,

more than 70% of women who left abusive relationships indicated that faith gave them the strength to do so (Wang, et al., 2009, p. 225). Those who reported attending church more frequently and practicing the tenets of their faith noted less emotional disturbance and spiritual disengagement. Drumm, Popescu, and Kersting (2009) found that people dealing with recent abuse were at risk for neglectful or abusive behaviors toward their children regardless of whether or not they attended church regularly or closely practiced the doctrines of their church. This finding led to the recommendation that churches increase outreach to parents to protect the children in their congregations (p. 144).

Neergaard, Lee, Anderson, and Gengler (2007) and Finley (2013) found that external barriers such as clergy, family, and church community could exert a negative influence or pressure that made it emotionally harder for women seeking a way out. They also found that theology was also a determining factor. Miles (2011) stated that when ministers tended to believe marriage must be saved at all costs, they preferred quick-fix solutions such as “forgiving and forgetting the abuse.” However, some argued that clergy who appeared indifferent to the issues of family violence were merely ill-prepared to deal with it (Nason-Clark, Fisher-Townsend & Fahlberg, 2013). Although women in faith communities perceived advantages to disclosing to clergy, studies showed that there were numerous personal, interpersonal, and societal obstacles to confiding.

In general, many women who experienced IPV felt a ‘price’ for speaking up that could lead to social isolation, exposure, and recrimination (Neergaard et al., 2007, p. 780). Nason-Clark and Clark-Kroeger (2005) found that many women experienced being ignored, ridiculed, and accused of lying when they disclosed their experience as the church community and leaders struggled with the positive public image of the abuser and

this private alternative. The evidence was overwhelming that the church and its leaders played an essential role in mitigating the effects of abuse on faith-based women, including Seventh-day Adventist women. Protection against suicide ideation and action was only evident when the confidant reacted compassionately.

Often it is the same conservative ideology on the role of women and marriage that gives rise to the abuse that prevents women from leaving or seeking support and assistance in the aftermath (Nason-Clark, 2004, pp. 303-4). Popescu et al., (2009) found that having relationships with other faith believers made it harder for women in the Seventh-day Adventist church to believe that they were in abusive relationships. It was incomprehensible that they would knowingly stay in an abusive relationship or, given the abusers' roles and responsibilities in the church, that they would be abusive. Religious beliefs in Scripture also play a role in keeping women with the strong Christian faith in abusive relationships. In studies, more than half of the women adhered to strict gender roles and submission to their husbands. When sermons support gender roles and submission, many survivors perceive God's will to remain committed to their marriages (p. 405).

Since 2002, the Women's Ministries department at the General Conference, the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has designated the fourth Sabbath of August as the Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day, now renamed *EndItNow* Sabbath, to focus on physical, emotional, and mental abuse. For the special Sabbath, informational packages, which include a sermon and seminar with handouts, are translated and sent to the Divisions (regional headquarters) around the world or posted on the EndItNow website for the churches to use at their discretion. The impetus to follow through is not

placed on the pastor's office but the Women's Ministries department within the church. The Seventh-day Adventist church has used its many written publications, such as *Ministry Magazine*, a publication geared towards pastors around the world; *Adventist Review*, a publication that focuses on the roots of Adventism, mission, and issues around the globe. Furthermore, *Adventist World*, the official publication for the Seventh-day Adventist world headquarters, speaks on the issue of domestic violence in the church and the church's policies and official response.

The annual EnditNow Summit on Abuse is sponsored by the North American Division (NAD, the Adventist headquarters in North America) with invitations to the General Conference (GC, the Adventist world headquarter), NAD administrators, pastors, educators, church leaders, and laity. At the EnditNow annual summit in September 2018, expert presenters, survivors, lawyers, and administrators provided resources and information to inform and equip pastors, church staff, teachers, and members to identify, report and end abuse within their sphere of influence. The summit was live in English and Spanish on Facebook and YouTube, enabling viewers to interact and submit questions to the presenters. The summit underscored accountability and victim support. Alex Bryant, President of the NAD, "The Church does not tolerate abuse of any form, whether physical, sexual, emotional, or mental . . . all human beings are made in the image of God and therefore, if we mistreat another person, we're in turn mistreating God" (Medley, 2018). The church's highest authority in North America stresses that victims must be supported and that abuse must not be ignored, akin to abusing God. I am very hopeful that the Ontario Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Seventh-day Adventist church headquarters in Ontario) will follow suit with the emphasis on addressing the issues from

the pulpit. The momentum has been very slow and inconsistent across the city of Toronto.

The Need for Pastoral Preaching

The great commission of Christ to the church is to go, baptize, and teach. The church seems to have focused on the “go” and “baptize” elements, but the teach and nurture elements are the most significant challenge. Sahlin (2004) says this tripartite set of activities is necessary for any missionary enterprise to be faithful to the biblical definition of the Great Commission. However, according to the Annual Council report, over the past 40 years, 31.8 million people joined the Seventh-day Adventist church through baptism, while 11.4 million have dropped their membership or are missing in action. It seems counter-productive to not examine some of the reasons.

Growing up in Toronto, I often heard that people did not leave the Seventh-day Adventist church because of spurious doctrine but because the church was cold. I posit that they also left because they felt unloved through the sermons. Growing up in Toronto in the Seventh-day Adventist church, I have heard easily over 3,500 sermons in my lifetime. The sermons were typically apologetic and missional. Alonso (1997) contends that bipolar preaching is needed to provide balance to worship. He defines bipolar preaching as anchored in biblical truths and addresses human needs and issues in meaningful ways. Fernandez (2018) states that historically, the Seventh-day Adventist church espouses an escape theology based on its mission to prepare the world for the imminent second coming of Christ with little focus on social justice issues or other contemporary social issues problems. As such, evangelism and mission-focused sermons are still the thrust when metamodern members expect engagement theology where

sermons focus on political and social justice issues with the intent to effect change.

Willard (1998) refers to the gospel gap when disconnection or bridge is missing between the person's faith and real life. So, while I intellectually embraced the message and doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist church, I felt emotionally disconnected because of a perception of an uncaring, indifferent God.

One of the first 'pastoral' sermons that spoke to my emotional pain was by T. D. Jakes at a "Woman, Thou Art Loosed" conference. I witnessed a stadium with over 25,000 women crying and shouting because the Word of God was speaking to their desperate conditions. One of the critical reasons for the success of this annual conference is that speakers are not ashamed of recounting their painful past. In addition, the message that they are being set free without any judgment against them because they are "daughters of God" was vital.

The conference also provided practical and biblical tools to help women overcome obstacles, transform their lives, and maximize their potential. Is that not what Christ offers to everyone? Differences in theology aside, it would be egregious of me to assume that none in our pews could benefit from a conference like that. My desire for spiritual healing led me to sift through many preachers in search of sound theology. I have to say that there is resistance to "felt needs" type sermons in Seventh-day Adventist churches. Many have told me that the church is getting soft and not preaching *Present Truth*, the Third Angel's Message, and alerting people of Christ's imminent return.

Purpose of Preaching

Almost all theologians and scholars would agree that preaching is more than discourse; it is God's inspired message to the church through the preacher. Therefore, a

heavy burden rests on the shoulders of the presenter to provide a message that speaks to the worshipers' needs and feeds them spiritually (Proctor, 1994). How the sermon is prepared is vital to communicate that message effectively.

Adams (2002) says this of the process of sermon preparation,

Prayer is the beginning of my sermon as I speak to God and ask God to speak to me, that I may preach good news to the poor . . . It is my deepest desire that the Holy Spirit will mandate, motivate, generate, and articulate the good news to all people through my poor, lisping and stammering tongue. (p. 13)

Adams asserts that prayer begins the sermon preparation process, while Stott (2012) disagrees and states that the process begins with God. Stott contends that God initiates, motivates the prayer, and gives us the things to pray for. Bounds (2006) believes that the practice and knowledge of prayer would produce more effective preaching than all theological schools. Bryant (2009), a prominent female preacher, states that sermon preparation should follow a progression of prayer, meditation, exegesis, research, imagination, and vulnerability.

Double Listening

Sermon preparation for me did not seem normal compared to what I heard from colleagues, and my assumptions about what I thought would happen did not. It was refreshing to discover the “sergeant and surfer” metaphor which seems intrinsically related to temperament. Bryant (2009) explains that sergeants are methodical and even regimented in their daily devotion concerning the time they start, the amount covered, and types of reading. All are predictable. Surfers, on the other hand, ride the waves of spiritual inspiration where they are productive and indefatigable, doing more in a day than the sergeant would in a couple of weeks. After the surf is gone, the surfer subsists on

the pools and puddles of inspiration and learning that have been gained. During those seasons of drought, I find myself craving solitude as I ruminate and digest all that the Holy Spirit has shown me concerning the world and people around me.

Buttrick (1987) admonishes against referring to consulting commentaries first as it may lead to using works of others, bypassing the need to be immersed in the text. One of the things that I do is use my senses and travel through the passage as a participant and not just a reader. I immerse myself in the text and view it from a different perspective. Bryan (2009) agrees and says, “this helps me begin to grasp some of the ways in which the text connects with universal human experience via particular circumstances” (p. 12). Stott refers to the process of double listening as a means of the relevant communication. He explains that the preacher must double listen first and foremost to God and the Word of God against the backdrop of the voices of the modern world and society. However, the preacher must not listen to the world with the same deference as to God. This process provides understanding to the cries of pain and the sighs of the oppressed (Stott, 2012).

Shift in Preaching

Many theologians agree that there is a shift in contemporary preaching. According to Long (2009), the stakes are risky and high for preaching the Gospel in the twenty-first century. He further likens the Christian preacher as either a witness or martyr in the New Testament. McMickle (2006) and Long (2009) agree that preaching in the twenty-first century is to rebuild and refresh the memory of the church in relationship to the prevailing culture. Long continues that inside the church, there is a loss of theological and biblical knowledge on the part of the average layperson, leading to a loss of eschatology in preaching. With the exchange of information via media and technology, it is common

to hear the prevailing voices, but what of the ones suppressed?

Brosend (2010) and McMickle (2006) continue that the shift is due to preachers losing their purpose. Fear of offending is plaguing our churches and their leadership. Freidman (2007) states that leaders will always experience a failure of nerve whenever an anxious group drives them. Failure to address the issues leads to the problems being recycled for many generations (p. 5). McMickle (2006) refers to them as patriotic preachers who preach without substance or urgency to avoid offending the listener. Brosend (2010) reasons that many have forgotten the “why” of preaching.

Additionally, Brosend disapproves of the prophetic preachers and feels that they foster guilt in the name of Jesus that may or may not foster change (p. 69). He promotes proclamatory preaching, which he argues is the closest to Jesus’ preaching. He states, “Jesus was interested in changed lives, not guilty consciences.” Furthermore, he adds that proclamatory preaching stakes a claim, takes a stand, and offers forgiveness (p. 70).

How can people come to a God they fear? Or think He is cold and unyielding? Paul Coneff, *the creator of “2 Straight 2 the Heart Discipleship Ministries”*, helps individuals move beyond information to the application. He focuses on the unique qualities of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Messiah, as both man and Divine. The life of Christ reveals His experience with human suffering and His desire to provide healing and restoration (2014, p. 28). Coneff maintains that through Christ, transformation takes place, finally breaking the cycle of sin and forgiveness, leading to freedom and victory in the life of the Christian. This process still begs the question, “Why do didactic messages have to be formatted for the classroom rather than the pulpit where few will hear them?” LaRue (2011) refers to the issue of “pulpits without purpose,” where preachers neglect to

preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ.

Prophetic Preaching

The Seventh-day Adventist church is renowned for preaching biblical sermons, but as mentioned before, there is a thrust toward evangelism and discipleship. Hyveth Williams, Homiletics Professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, has been instrumental in refocusing on prophetic preaching in Seventh-day Adventist pulpits. Williams contends that preaching in the twenty-first century must be both prophetic and pastoral. Prophetic moves the church forward, and pastoral promotes charity and goodwill (2018). She has unapologetically voiced her pain and claimed her healing, a blazing trail for many to follow.

Prophetic preaching concerns the current evils of today, the political climate, and the social injustice against the marginalized. Some would argue it is a call back to preaching's original purpose. According to Smith (1994) and Williams (1999), prophetic preaching resumes the role of the ancient prophets. The Hebrew prophets' primary role was to use God's words to transform their audience's thinking and social behavior. Brueggemann (2001) agrees and refers to prophetic preaching as prophetic imagination, which is the insight that the prophet gains as a messenger of God. The prophet's role is then to awaken an alternative reality in the people's minds so that they can be inspired to look beyond the reality of what is.

Tisdale (2010) shares that prophetic preaching is counter-cultural and challenges the status quo. She adds that although many preachers may accept that prophetic preaching is a part of their ministry, they do not relish it and, like biblical prophets, only do so as an act of obedience to God. Williams agrees and adds that preachers willing to

preach prophetic sermons are not liked by many. She continues that they must be “willing to confront injustice in the nation as well as in their local communities with divine authority” (Morris, 2011). The widespread trend of political correctness leads McMickle to query, “where have all the prophets gone?”

Hull (2006) and McMickle (2008) defend the effectiveness of prophetic preaching as biblical. However, they agree that the preacher must approach the sermonic passage from the standpoint of an investigative reporter to address some of the anticipated questions in the listeners’ minds. McMickle identifies the critical questions as “so what?” and “now what?” On the other hand, Hull prefers to ask a series of progressive questions, “what are we thinking, what are we feeling, what are we doing, and where are we going?” McMickle (2008) and Hull (2006) both feel that these questions can engage the listener and their interests in better understanding how the messages of the ancient stories can be used as a model and mirror for them in their current lives. McMickle refers to Robert McCracken’s book, *The Making of the Sermon*, as influencing his belief that a sermon should elicit four possible behavioral responses: (1) kindle the mind, (2) energize the will, (3) disturb the conscience and (4) stir the heart towards obedience and faithful living. McMickle continues that the sermon’s effectiveness in generating change will be directly related to the preparation work of study and prayer by the preacher (p. 65).

Preaching Beyond Information to Transformation

Inspiration for my sermons comes from various sources. Often it is from my devotion and Bible study. Other times, it is from life: people’s stories, local and international news, art and entertainment, and colleagues. Fasting is a discipline I practice as a means of helping me to get “fresh water from an old well.” McMickle (2001) refers

to the process as going from unknown to known. Stiller (2005) agrees that the preacher must exhaustively research to uncover the accuracy of the truth of the passage or words for two main reasons: 1) a greater understanding of how it will speak from the heart of God and 2) sharing His desires and expectations for His people. Carter, Duvall, and Hays (2005) agree that it is as essential to exegete (interpret the Scripture) for the intended audience to provide an effective transfer of ancient text to modern experience or existence.

The Holy Spirit often sends a sermon to me before it goes through me. On many occasions, when I preach, I often receive feedback confirming that the sermon resonated with issues the hearer is experiencing. Preaching with variety is espoused by all theologians as the listener is used to variety, and if grasping and maintaining their attention is the desired outcome, then the sermon must reflect that. McDill (2006), Long (2009), and Craddock (2010) agree that preaching must follow revelation where the revelation determines the purpose and method. Arthurs (2007) also endorses and advocates for variety in preaching. He maintains that the Scriptures are replete with literary forms – poetry, law, parable, and narratives, to name a few. Moreover, since the prophets and witnesses used variety to convey their messages, this approach still needs to be reflected in preaching today (p. 23).

Proctor (1994) and Long (2009) contend that the sermon is to provide comfort, and education, speak truth to power, be biblically based, and provide an understanding of doctrines, interpretation, application, and celebration to the hearer. According to Buttrick (1987), preaching is to unify the listeners and bring them into one shared consciousness (187, p. 334). Troeger (1999) argues that the role of the preacher is to uncover the

muffled voices in the Scriptures and the world. Preaching is to address current issues, such as domestic abuse, from a biblical perspective; denouncing its practice and comforting the abused falls into this category.

Preaching to build faith and inspire hope is a reminder of Christ. Mohler (2008) states that preaching is not only to inspire but also to bring the hearer back into a right relationship with God. Proctor (1994) and Aden and Hughes (2002) agree that sermons cultivate faith so that the hearer can see God as actively present amid their suffering and assure them that they are not abandoned and forsaken. Aden and Hughes (2002) add that preachers must encourage believers struggling with injustice and anger to express their anger and hurt to God and find a resolution to their suffering. Troeger (1999) adds that the preacher's task is to highlight the cross. Most people think of their burdens as the "cross" they must bear when Jesus invites us to take His yoke upon us (Matt 11:29). His cross included suffering, but the purpose was to win souls for the Kingdom (Matt 16:24). The cross Jesus invites His followers to take up is neither passive nor imposed upon us but carried by choice. Viewing the cross of Christ, the listener is reminded of His desperate prayers in the face of cruel and unjust suffering. The cross of Christ liberates those who suffer by acknowledging their abandonment and desperation (p. 66) and helps to dispel their fears that it is a punishment from God (Aden and Hughes, 2002).

Aden and Hughes (2002) continue that there are so many deep-rooted beliefs that God uses pain to punish in response to our rebellion and wickedness. They say, "suffering seen as punishment tends to complicate rather than strengthen the sufferer's relationship with God" (Aden & Hughes, 2002, p. 4). There is also the assumption that suffering is a test that drives us to God or away from Him. In either case of punishment

or test, it portrays God as punitive or maniacal who plays games or uses power to test the powerless. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that sound hermeneutical practices and spiritual guidance cultivate theological interpretation.

The sermon becomes the common platform where theological interpretation and spiritual guidance come together to remind the listener that help and healing are available. Buttrick (1987) is adamant that preaching is more than rhetoric to the believer as it is integrally intertwined with faith. He continues that preaching is to inspire hope as a reminder of Christ and His role in reconciling the world back to Himself (p. 450). His death, burial, and resurrection inspire hope for change, regardless of what is needed. Faith becomes ignited in response to the word of God, as opposed to the message that the survivor struggles to believe (p. 453). Preaching is to witness the resurrection and subsequently acts as a reminder that we are by faith with Christ through his death, burial, and resurrection.

Strategic Preaching

In his blog post, Andrews (2018) noted that while the field of homiletics has integrated with other disciplines, the field of psychology has been left out. This omission has limited the pastoral understanding in meeting the psychological needs of the faith community – resulting in the preacher missing the opportunity to reach the heart of the listeners' concerns. Hull (2006) refers to the process as strategic preaching. He contends that the preacher must intentionally use Christian proclamation to move the people from where they are to where the imperatives of the Gospel call them to be—from Point A to Point B.

Buttrick (1987) and Coneff (2014) agree that the result of preaching is to inspire

hope for change, regardless of what is needed. Buttrick (1987) continues that another result of preaching is to evoke a response, a response to God in faith and repentance. Wimberly (1999) contends that the result of preaching must reveal a God who covers our shame and accepts our confession of repentance. Sedlacek and Sedlacek (2018) state, “God’s healing is all-encompassing. There is no part of the human being that cannot be touched by His divine hand” (p. 41). God can heal and restore, regardless of the issue or situation.

Summary

Pastors are given the indomitable task of being God’s messenger to His people. Like the ancient priests, they must bring the people’s petitions before God. They are privy to the emotional and spiritual angst of those they serve. Given their role’s respect and deference, pastors must seize the sermonic moment to address social issues and the stigmas associated with them. As such, pastors ought to dedicate time for meditation, prayer, and study. Staying connected to God will allow the Holy Spirit to enable the pastor to produce sermons that will speak truth to power regardless of the reprisal and their discomfort with the issues. Sound biblical teaching must be employed to expose and dismantle the shame and fear that frequently prevent survivors and abusers from fully experiencing God’s restorative grace and love.

The pulpit is often regarded as “the” most sacred place in the sanctuary and the Divine Worship as *the* most sacred hour of the Sabbath. Prophetic sermons addressing social issues during this prime time will give credence to the issues and value to those affected. This priority will heighten the urgency of the issues and God’s disdain for the suffering of His children. God’s desire for healing, reconciliation and restoration must

always be promoted as it is the crux of the Gospel.

Finally, biblical preaching and pastoral support must create an understanding that it is acceptable for members to seek support within and outside the church community. Preaching is an effective tool used by God to facilitate healing and wholeness in the body of Christ.

The issues of abuse and family violence are invasive and pervasive. For the follower of Christ, the church community significantly impacts how they navigate abuse and family violence traumas. The literature review indicates that effective preaching facilitates theological and biblical knowledge. Sermon preparation employs sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles steeped in prayer and meditation. The preacher must present the sermonic message with godly fear and authority. Preaching truth to power and confronting day-to-day social ills requires courage. The sermon is the response from God, bridging the gap between the ancient text and the lived experience of the contemporary hearer. In so doing, the preacher reveals the victorious, sympathetic and empathetic God who longs to join them in their struggles.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT PROCESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

This chapter will present the methodology, the incorporation of transformational sermons, and skill-building seminars to facilitate healing for survivors of abuse and family violence at the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist church. The project was an exploratory study that began from my experience and a divine call to this work. The methodology was selected based on the needs of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church population and followed a process based on valid and reliable approaches. The methodology was explicitly implemented to create a safe and interactive process to facilitate healing and maintain program support.

The Call to This Work

I met Dr. Mable Dunbar, Founder and Executive Director of Polly's Place, on the day of my MDiv graduation. She mentioned that she was looking for a female Chaplain to meet the spiritual needs of the women in her shelters. She also mentioned that she was in dire need of financial support as the shelters were privately funded. I consented to help with grant writing as I had no work permit to work in the United States but could do the grant writing from Canada, where I was a citizen. She invited me to come and see the

shelters to understand better the programs that were offered. Shortly after I arrived, the Holy Spirit revealed that I was there “for me to heal.” For the first time, I interacted with a population of women from the Seventh-day Adventist faith community who openly identified as survivors of domestic violence. They were a mix of Black, Latin, and White women. Some came alone, and others had their young children with them. We lived, counseled, and grew as a family for two months. When I returned home, I knew that serving survivors of abuse was the work God was also calling me to address.

The Beginning of the Process

After my stay in the shelter, I returned to Canada as a new MDiv graduate without employment. I contacted the pastors in my conference, looking for a church where I could intern and implement a project for the abused, a marginalized population, in and out of the Adventist church. The Senior Pastor of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church was the first to respond, and he invited me to join the pastoral team as an unpaid intern.

Except for a couple of individuals who had attended conference-sponsored Women’s Ministries programs, few members and attendees of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist church knew me when I started my ministry. While I lived most of my life in Toronto, I grew up in the city’s eastern part. I attended a large predominantly Afro-Caribbean Seventh-day Adventist church, Toronto East Seventh-day Adventist church, comprised mainly of immigrants who were part of the Windrush Generation. The Windrush Generation refers to the ship MV Empire Windrush which transported skilled workers from all over the Caribbean to the UK between 1948 to 1971 to fill post-war labor shortages (Matthew, 2019). Seeking a life free of racism, discrimination, and

growing opportunities, many fled to Canada in the late 1960s and 70s with their British-born children in tow.

Growing up in Toronto East, education and excellence were emphasized as ways of successful integration into Canadian society. This influence was most pronounced in the way I spoke. At that time, every visible minority aimed to blend into mainstream society. I had effectively become ‘multilingual’ where my Caribbean creole or patois could become muted depending on my environment. So, it made many of the Mount Olive population think I was ‘too Canadian and not Caribbean enough’ to relate to them culturally. Given my experience in community development as a civil servant, I knew I had to establish trust and respect to integrate successfully. The Senior Pastor gave me more and more opportunities to preach where I demonstrated my cultural connection and fluency in the Caribbean creole or patois and theological fitness. I knew that I had a unique opportunity. I was the only female speaker on the preaching schedule, and many were unaccustomed to a woman in pastoral ministry. I used the opportunity to share my testimony of trauma, healing, and restoration during these times. It took about one year to establish an open relationship conducive to the needed approach mentioned earlier, creating a safe and interactive process to foster connection and promote program support. Slowly, more and more church members and visitors to the church began requesting pastoral counseling sessions with me, and some began sharing their stories of hurt and abuse.

Development of the Process

It became clear that many either did not have the means (funds or employment benefits) or the courage to seek professional help. It was culturally too taboo to share

dark secrets with strangers. Many expressed that I was the first person with whom they had ever shared what had happened and, in some cases, what was happening in their lives. Shame and fear had kept many silent, and I had to honor that trust. My response was to prepare life-skills-building seminars from the pulpit to enhance the capacity for emotional, physical, and spiritual wellness. I wanted to normalize the acknowledgment of trauma to the population. I wanted to dispense the truth of how God takes offense to one's willful harm upon another and how His heart is torn by it. Additionally, I wanted to address steps to healing mental damage and building and rebuilding spirituality.

Therapy Without Spiritual Insight

Ramsay (2015) states that one cannot look at healing without confronting the spiritual damage. I found this to be true for myself. While therapy offered tremendous benefits, it never spoke of my spiritual struggles. If anything, the lack of acknowledgment exacerbated it. Sutherland (2017) found that faith and culture can be counterbalanced against adversities, but these variables were often underappreciated or underrepresented in multicultural counseling. My most effective counseling to date has been with culturally sensitive Christian counselors. My spiritual healing from trauma began while at Andrews University. It was during my seminary classes led by Drs. Beverly and David Sedlacek, where I heard for the first time that my pain and estrangement also tore God's heart. I wanted the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church members and community to know that same truth.

Research Design and Procedure: Trauma-Informed Process

I knew that a pre-test and post-test quantitative study would be a more effective

way of evaluating the effectiveness of the sermons and seminars related to my study. However, I also knew many participants were skittish about the process, and I did not want them to feel manipulated or coerced to participate. A trauma-informed exploratory process became necessary as I proceeded. A Trauma-informed approach operates from a strength-based perspective, mindful of the impact of traumas and how survivors can be easily triggered. So instead of focusing on “what is wrong with you?” it instead focuses on “what happened to you?” (Sweeney, Filson, Kennedy, Collinson, & Gillard, 2018).

Multi-pronged Approach

Culture

Cultural influences and their impact on trauma have not always been acknowledged when considering various approaches to overcoming and moving on for the lives of those involved. According to Dixon (2018), there is an intersectionality between culture and how trauma is experienced and understood. Trauma cannot be isolated from within its context, nor can healing. Understanding the cultural backgrounds of the survivors and how trauma is experienced and remembered must be integrated into the multiple pathways that lead to healing which will also minimize the potential of re-traumatization (Tebes, Champine, Matlin, & Strambler, 2019).

Faith

Dixon (2018) posits that African-Caribbeans’ collective experience of slavery, colonialism, and difficult post-migration transition to new countries create unique challenges that impact their mental health. She adds that for this population, their faith, spiritual and religious practices mitigate the effects of trauma. Shaw, Joseph, and Linley

(2005) found that traumatic experiences can deepen religious and spiritual adherence. They further add that religious participation is associated with positive coping and posttraumatic growth. They continued that faith could play an integral part in reconstructing cultural and personal identity.

Exploratory Study

In response to the input from the Adventist Family Services (AFS), the community, Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders, and Dr. David Sedlacek, my second reader, it was deemed best to conduct an exploratory study. Exploratory research studies use flexible designs to clarify the nature of the investigated problem and garner the most data from the process (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). This approach was cognizant that many traumas could have occurred in childhood and had a lifelong impact (Menschner & Maul, 2016).

We wanted the participants' potentially triggered responses to guide the process. I wanted to encourage reflection and personal assessment of painful experiences that may have never been explored before without causing further harm. The design facilitated participant engagement, support, and adherence to the project.

Building Trust

I preached twelve pastoral and transformational sermons to approximately 300 persons on Sabbaths for 18 months; twelve went beyond the project's scope to demonstrate that the Scriptures were not silent on abuse or trauma issues. Familiar biblical narratives, such as the stories of Joseph, Hagar, Tamar, Dinah, the woman at the well, and the woman with the issue of blood, were used to focus on themes that included

anger, fear, shame, guilt, rejection, violation, vulnerability, injustice, abandonment, nepotism, and bitterness. I intended to help them interpret Scripture and its application to everyday life (Hasel & Hasel, 2019). Mbewe (2017) believes that pastoral preaching should bring a freshness to biblical truths that transform the hearer. I hoped this process would enhance biblical literacy, inform personal reflection, increase private praying and lead to the opening of the heart for healing to take place.

The sermons also focused on God's response to injustice and redemption. I wanted the church to emphatically know that it was not a cultural issue but a sin problem. I wanted to remind them that God desired reconciliation and restoration for both the abused and the abuser. Each sermon was recorded by the Communications Department of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church. The recordings were made available for people to purchase at a nominal cost to cover the cost of the compact disc. After the sermons on Sabbath, the Senior Pastor would give me private use of his office to provide pastoral support, clarification of sermonic themes/ideas, or additional resource material.

Congregational Input

The whole congregation was invited into the process. The congregation chose the day, the second Sunday of each month, and the time (from 11 am to 1 pm) for the life-skill building seminars. The schedule allowed members who worked on Sundays (many did instead of Sabbaths) the opportunity to attend. The thrust of the programs was to build life skills for optimal emotional, physical, and spiritual wellness. The programs were added to the church's monthly calendar so that no other programs would be simultaneously scheduled. The members were encouraged to promote the programs,

which meant they could also attend them with friends and families without feeling conspicuous.

Partnership and Community Support

I had the support and commitment of the leadership of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church, including the pastoral team and members of the Church Board, as well as Advent Family Services (AFS). AFS is a faith-based counseling service staffed by licensed mental health practitioners who support the community throughout the Greater Toronto Area. The pastoral team and board members were committed to the health and well-being of the community and were also remarkably familiar with the membership issues. Their input and my counseling sessions with members created the framework to cover many spiritual and psycho-social topics.

Implementation of Procedure

New Beginnings: A Time to Heal

The life skill-building seminars were identified as “New Beginnings: A Time to Heal.” The title was framed to promote optimal health rather than focus on mental health. The seminars offered how-to practical skills and resources for personal growth. I wanted to attract participants who wanted a chance to change, to start over again. The seminars ran monthly from January through June 2014.

Promotion of Projects and Seminars

Recruiting was done orally during the announcement time on Sabbaths. Promotions took place after Sabbath School (Bible study), as the congregation gathered together before the Divine Worship started. This period was a time when there was

maximum attendance. Large colored posters were also posted on bulletin boards throughout the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church and the food bank area. Flyers and posters were also posted at AFS and sent to other local Seventh-day Adventist churches. Flyers were distributed at the annual Ontario Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Camp Meeting, where a conservative estimate of 5,000 adults from around the city was in attendance.

Each week the announcement was printed in the bulletin and promoted from the pulpit. The Sabbath before the seminars, I made the announcement and invited the congregation to support the seminar the next day. I also encouraged those who found the sermons and seminars beneficial to share the information with others. Each month the theme would change. After each seminar, participants were encouraged to invite and transport a friend where transportation was an issue. They were reminded that the seminars were open to anyone. I also promoted the project whenever I preached to other Adventist congregations.

Procedure of Activities

The Importance of Symbolism

Stepakoff (2007) agrees with other researchers on symbolism that creative methods of symbolism can also lessen isolation and provide a sense of solace and relief for survivors. Survivors of trauma benefit from symbolism, whether verbal expressions such as through songs or nonverbal ones, such as through letter-writing and other rituals that allow them to acknowledge their own experiences and have them acknowledged by others.

Seamands (2016) states that the cross is most significant for Christians as it

represents the suffering of Christ, which profoundly impacts how trauma and pain are processed. The cross reminds the believer that Christ suffered abuse, rejection, and shame and that He understands the pain and can empathize. His pain provides comfort and healing to the hurting, and his response to suffering and pain provides hope for release and relief.

A large red cross constructed of Bristol board was erected at the altar in the sanctuary. Writing paper, extensive brightly post-it notes, and pens were given to each of the approximate 30 or so participants upon entry into the room. They were told that the post-it notes would be used during the seminar to journal their thoughts and feelings. Instructions were provided that the thoughts could be issues they were struggling with, dark feelings, and secrets bottled up from their past. A demonstration was made to show them that they were to journal on the side with the adhesive only. Additional post-it notes and facial tissue (i.e., Kleenex) were placed at both ends of each row for easy access. They were repeatedly reassured throughout the seminar that their journals were for their eyes only and would not be seen by anyone.

Beginning of the Seminars

The welcome was given, and the topic was introduced. The AFS representatives and their special guests were acknowledged and introduced. AFS staff shared information about their experience and training and confirmed their commitment to providing ongoing support to the church community. They informed the group that private and confidential support was available during the seminar and to anyone who needed it afterward.

Opening the Heart Through Worship

Each seminar began with worship. According to Wlodarczyk and Basabe (2015), religious participation promotes positive posttraumatic outcomes. They posit that coming together is essential in increasing coping potential and creating social cohesion, well-being, and functioning. The worship service commenced with an invitation for the participants to share a favorite or meaningful hymns/choruses for the group to sing. After about three to four songs/hymns, the opening song was sung, The Scriptures were read, and the seminar began.

Scriptural Focus

A biblical narrative was used as the focus. The first session, “From Fear to Faith,” on January 12, 2014, focused on the life of Joseph (see Appendix D). His story included family dysfunction, anger/resentment, betrayal, guilt, fear, and forgiveness. The message of God’s providence and the promise of Joseph’s success was emphasized. They were invited to focus on any similarities between his family dynamic with his parents, siblings, and experiences later. The seminars were interactive with open-ended questions to facilitate feedback (see Appendix E). Participants were encouraged to ask questions and to share as they felt comfortable. No one was forced or coerced to participate.

Throughout the presentation, they were reminded that although Joseph’s life had detours and delays that resulted in hurt and much frustration, God’s plan and purpose were not thwarted. Emphasis was made that despite Joseph’s trauma, he purposed in his heart to trust the God of his father. AFS representatives or their guests shared testimonies of abuse and triumph. Throughout the discussion and presentation, participants were encouraged to journal their feelings. Many needed more paper and more time which were

provided as needed. The biblical reflection and discussion lasted from 45 minutes to an hour.

The Significance of Seeing the Cross

The participants were reminded that the paper cross was symbolic of the suffering, death, and triumph of Christ for their healing and restoration. The red color represented the blood of Jesus and His atoning sacrifice at Calvary. Hunsingers (2015) says that the cross becomes the gospel to the traumatized, but only if one can accept that incredible, divine love was willing to bear the unbearable pain that mortal, fallen beings feel. She adds that God can bear the total weight of sin and death. Healing can only happen when the implications that Jesus, God, descended into the worst hell imaginable to deliver humanity from the hells they have experienced is fully grasped (Sedlacek & Sedlacek, 2018, and Seamands, 2016).

They continue that as the resurrection and ascension of Christ are affirmed, it releases confidence in His power to bring every kind of evil to an end. The cross of Jesus is God's response to all the terror of human trauma as well as all the anguish of human guilt, bringing healing to the one and judgment and forgiveness and the *godly grief* of repentance to the other (2 Cor 7:10). It is through the recognition of the pain and the love of the cross that we find hope (Hunsinger, 2015).

Personal Time: Reflection and Prayer

After the discussion portion was completed, the participants were invited to leave their seats. They were instructed to move to any point in the sanctuary, as far apart as needed to reflect, journal, and pray privately. According to Seamands (2015), the prayer

for emotional healing is unique and must go far beyond the common. Participants were assured that they did not have to worry about what to say but to pour out their hearts' content to God (Rom 8:26-27).

According to Stepakoff (2007), many find the journaling process therapeutic as it enables them to express an emotion or experience that may not have been previously formulated. In so doing, emotions that had been previously internalized and therefore potentially overwhelming were given physical expression. Stepakoff continues that this process of formulation helps reduce anxiety and distress. Furthermore, this inherent sense of relief and peace in expressing one's internal experience can lead to emotional healing. They were repeatedly assured that no one would read the post-it notes and that the matter was solely between them and God. A period of about 15 to 20 minutes was provided. During this time, music was sung or played that reiterated the message of God's love and forgiveness.

Coming to the Cross

After the prayer session ended, participants were informed of the red-paper cross at the altar and its symbolic significance. They were invited to affix the journal notes they had written on the post-it notes to the red paper cross. Songs of repentance and surrender were sung or played at this time. They were reminded that bringing their petitions and affixing them to the cross was an act of faith and surrender. The participants went to the cross, and many paused in contemplation.

The brightly colored post-it notes created a patchwork of various colors obliterating the red background. I intentionally used an assortment of colors to create a visual focal point. I wanted it to reflect their uniqueness and, at the same time, remind

them that they were not alone in their struggles. The physical act of leaving their seats to go to the cross was symbolic of letting the hurt go and giving it to Jesus (1 Pet 5:7). It made healing an intentional choice. For many, this was the first step.

Prayers of Thanksgiving to God

After affixing their prayers to the cross, the participants were invited to offer prayers of thanksgiving to God specifically for the gift He had given them through Christ. Their prayers also acknowledged the ongoing emotional healing and the new beginning they were given. Songs of celebration and praise were either sung or played. As they prayed, a much larger white paper cross covered the red paper cross. Rising from their knees, they were met with the white cross, and their petitions were no longer visible. The participants were again reminded through Scriptures that the blood of Jesus washed their sins, and they rose in newness of life (Rom 6:2).

This final private prayer session lasted about 5 – 10 minutes. The program resumed after the last person who finished praying had returned to their seat. The participants were invited to form a large circle at the altar, which began the regrouping process and signaled the session's ending.

Release and Celebration

The participants were invited to form a circle at the altar, symbolizing unity and support with the cross behind them. The “victory” song was played, and many sang along. After the song ended, two or three attendees were invited to pray publicly on behalf of the group. Many testified of feelings of joy and relief before they prayed, and I prayed the final prayer of thanksgiving and blessing.

The approximately 30 participants watched as the crosses and petitions were dismantled and placed in an appropriate receptacle for disposal. Participants were invited to share in a light meal. Initially, some needed private counseling, but over time, fewer and fewer required it. Many stayed for the fellowship, and AFS representatives and I remained until the last participant left.

Burning Ritual

After each session, the crosses and the prayer requests were gathered in an appropriate receptacle and burned immediately. AFS representatives and I witnessed the incineration. Weather permitting, this was done outside in the church's parking lot. Nothing was read or seen by anyone. During the last seminar, the participants were invited to witness the burning. They all stayed, and there were a plethora of emotions. Some excitedly recorded it on their smartphones while others watched silently. Many cried in clusters while some stood silent and alone. They watched until the last ember went out. The process appeared very cathartic. As the embers died, many sang hymns of praise. We ended with prayers of praise and thanksgiving. A light meal was prepared for the participants to share. Some stayed while others left straight away.

Beginning Again: The Family

At the last seminar, coordinators from a lay Prayer Ministry came to perform a special prayer for those who desired it. We had a mature couple share their journey of healing and restoration as a family. They emphasized the importance of parents apologizing to their children for mistakes they had made and praying blessings over them. They offered themselves as substitute parents for those who wanted such a

blessing. They all lined up. Some participants chose only the female for a maternal blessing, others chose the male for a paternal blessing, and many chose both for their blessings.

Before each person was prayed for, the Prayer Coordinators apologized for any intentional or unintentional harm their parents may have done. They apologized for how it affected their lives going forward and asked for forgiveness. Many wept as they were hugged and cradled during their prayer. In the end, the male representative of a father prayed an Aaronic blessing (Num 6:22-27) and pronounced a blessing upon them and their descendants.

The Aftermath

Following the ending of the project, the pastoral team and church board agreed that AFS and I would continue to provide ongoing support and follow-up to the participants and anyone else who had challenges due to emotional hurts and family trauma. We did not want the church and community to feel emotionally abandoned, and we wanted them to know that trained and licensed support was still available. We wanted them to feel confident that we were committed to supporting them throughout their healing journey.

Assessment Process

The participants were of African ancestry, one was African American, and the rest were African-Caribbean. They were comprised of church and community members above 18 years of age and could legally consent to participate in the project. Vulnerable groups, such as those going through court adjudication and young children and youth, were not

invited to participate. Some participants may have had experience with the courts at one point in the past. They were not required to disclose their emotional/mental history or if they were ever deemed vulnerable by society.

The participants attended the sermons and seminars in response to posters, announcements, or personal invitations. Participants were assumed to attend based on their interests and needs. Hearing the sermons and seminars was voluntary, with no enforced requirements of participation or attendance. Participants were informed throughout that they could leave at any point without fear of reprisal. No sign-in sheets were present to record attendance, and no names were recorded at the beginning of the sermons or seminars. At the beginning of each seminar, only the number of attendees was recorded (See Appendix E).

The Measure of Efficacy

Participation in the Evaluation Process

The evaluation process occurred on a Sabbath Afternoon at the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church. Those in attendance were eligible to evaluate the project, sermons, and seminars, regardless of how many or few times they could attend. For some, they were unable to attend the seminars on Sundays due to employment obligations. No coercion was used to elicit participation.

Participant Consent

Participation in the evaluation process was entirely voluntary. I ensured that each participant understood the nature, risk, benefits, and their right to terminate at any point. There were no known risks. They were informed that the consent form must be signed

before receiving the questionnaire. I introduced the questionnaire, read the instructions aloud, and demonstrated what was required. Once all the questions were answered, I thanked them for their support, wished them continued success in their healing journey, and left the room. The participants were free to choose to participate or not without the risk of investigator influence.

An elder of the Mount Olive Adventist Church distributed the consent forms and evaluation questions in my absence. At the end of the evaluation process, the same elder collected the evaluation questions and consent forms in two separate envelopes to minimize any chance of further identification.

Data Analysis Procedure

The sermons and the life skill-building seminars were completed at the end of June 2014. The project was exploratory. Evaluation of the life-skill seminars and demographics were compared between age, education, gender, and marital status.

Securing Data

The participants were informed that the consent forms and the evaluation forms would be kept safely in keeping with Andrews University standards and protocol. The researcher and limited others had access to this information. Participants were advised that the information gathered would be confidential and anonymous. The consent forms were signed and stored separately from the evaluation and demographics information to reduce the connection between participants to the data. In addition, the data were evaluated collectively, not individually. Finally, the subjects were also notified that the information would be destroyed once the project had met the university requirements.

Summary

The research methodology was carefully considered to ensure that the ethical requirements for the study met the strict standards of the Institutional Review Board, which approved the approach. The methodology employed a trauma-informed process that included cultural and spiritual variables that were meaningful to the participants. Symbolism and rituals were also used to encourage empowerment, minimize triggers, and facilitate participation.

The core project concluded some years ago, but many participants have remained in touch with me and are still reaping the benefits of the experience. The benefits have had a cascading effect on the participants' lives, the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist church, and the community. I still receive follow-up requests and referrals from the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist church and other communities.

The qualitative results will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATIONS

The twelve months of transformational preaching at the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church prepared the members for the following six-month project. The transformational sermons varied from traditional presentations as each carried practical lessons leading to change. The members gradually began to share past and current experiences of hurts associated with intimate partner and family violence. For some, their stories were mentioned in passing without any clear indication of the negative impact, while others were aware of the impact of trauma but were stymied by perceived barriers to getting help. Trained and licensed individuals from AFS were invited to be present during these meetings. There is a vacuum in responding to support from mental health services in Canada from many sectors of society. Blacks in Canada navigate socio-cultural hurdles, including anti-Black racism, systemic racism, and other barriers which make access to mental health services prohibitive (Toronto, 2022).

In this two-pronged research project, the sermons and the seminars provided an opportunity to evaluate whether transformational preaching could facilitate healing for those affected by trauma and whether the accompanying life-skill-building seminars could effectively provide the tools needed for optimal health. This chapter will present an overview of the research methodology, analysis of the results, outcome challenges, and recommendations.

Research Method

A transformational sermon series was initiated every month over 18 months. The sermons were about forty-five minutes long and preached on the Sabbath during Divine worship. They focused on biblical narratives of violation, family discord, and injurious relationships. The intention was to determine if “Scriptures speak on this matter” and “if so, what was God’s response?” After 12 months, a monthly ninety-minute life-skill building seminar was added on Sundays. “New Beginnings: A Time to Heal” seminars were created in tandem with the sermon preached the day before. If the sermon’s theme focused on the importance of trusting God, the seminar would focus on how distrust may stem from betrayal and disbelief and how to overcome it. The seminar would focus on anxiety and fears if the sermon’s theme focused on abandonment issues. The thrust of the programs was to build capacity for emotional, physical, and spiritual wellness during the healing process. The programs provided an unrestricted and non-judgmental environment for discussions and exploring coping strategies best suited for each circumstance. The themes covered during the seminars were to promote optimal health and wellbeing and transferable skills (See Appendix E).

Each program started with a devotion followed by a presentation from a mental health professional or testimony from a survivor of family violence. The participants were encouraged to document their feelings by writing on post-it notes as in a journal. The expected outcomes were to be privately shared with God, and the time for private prayers was included in each seminar. According to Hall (2020), people will embrace the truth about God based on the evidence of an experience with God. In other words, their belief in God will increase based on their experience with Him.

Evaluation Process

During Sabbath worship, the Elders announced the date and time for the evaluation. The evaluation occurred on a Sabbath afternoon. A detailed explanation of the project's purpose was provided, and participants were instructed that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without reprisal. After I left the room, the Elder, facilitating the process, ensured that all the participants read and signed a consent form before receiving a copy of the evaluation sheet (See Appendices A and B, respectively). Their signatures were the confirmation needed to commence the evaluation.

The participants were also asked, "Did you find the New Beginnings: A Time to Heal programs helpful?." Their options were "yes," "somewhat," or "no." The participants were also asked to share information about themselves regarding their gender, age range, level of completed education, employment status, and marital status.

Research Results

All data was compiled by Dr. Jerome Thayer, former director of the Center for Statistical Services at Andrews University, and verified by Dr. David Sedlacek, the second reader for the project, for accurate interpretation. Forty-seven evaluations were completed; two additional ones were incomplete and were excluded. All evaluations had a corresponding signed consent form. The participants were randomly assigned a number from one to forty-seven and will now be referred to as P1 to P47.

Gender

There were twelve males and thirty-five females. It was a one-to-three ratio of

twenty-five percent to seventy-five percent (See Figure 1). There was no statistical significance between the genders; therefore, all the data for age, education, employment status, and marital status were combined by Dr. Thayer and were the basis for the statistical analysis going forward.

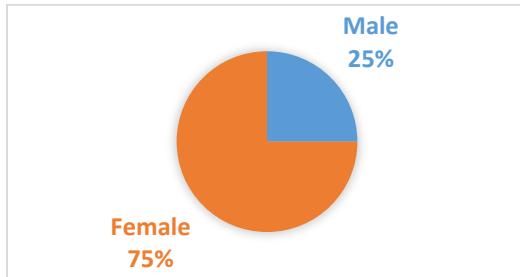


Figure 1. Gender breakdown.

Age

The demographics indicate that 51% of the participants were between 50 and 64. The second-largest group, at 23%, were between 30 - 49 years old, followed by those over 65, representing 15% of the participants. The smallest group, represented at 11%, were those between the ages of 18 – 29, referred to as young adults in the Seventh-day Adventist church (see Figure 2). The results indicate that 66% were over the age of 50.

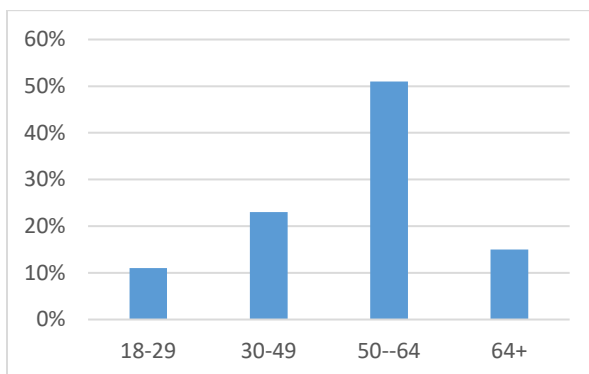


Figure 2. Age summary.

Education

The results from the education category indicated that 37% were college graduates. The second highest group at 26% were those with some high school education, followed by the group with some college education at 15%. Those who had achieved post-graduate education came in as the smallest group with 2%. The results gave me cause to pause. I know many older Caribbean individuals who have only elementary/junior high education due to circumstances beyond their control; however, there was no option for education lower than “some high school”. Perhaps embarrassment made them select that option (See Figure 3).

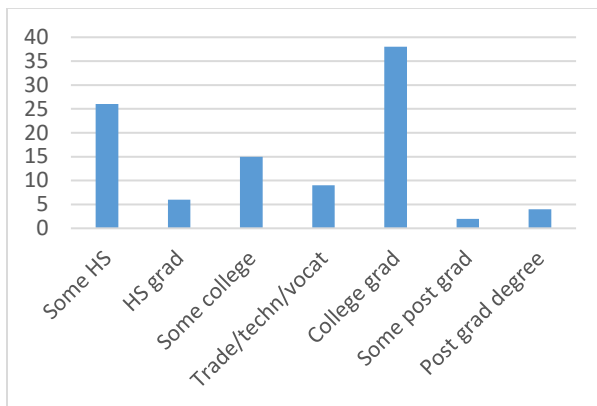


Figure 3. Education summary.

Employment

Employment status did not correspond to education, age, marital status, or gender. Some were unemployed or retired; the majority had some source of income, whether through part-time or full-time employment (see Figure 4). P2 and P9 participants indicated that they were employed full-time and part-time. I considered the responses truthful and included them in the analysis as valid. Many new immigrants work multiple

jobs simultaneously to build savings, gain Canadian experience, and for other practical reasons. Some even refer to their part-time jobs as a ‘side hustle.’ The results indicated that 62% earned an income through an employer, and 23% earned through a pension plan.

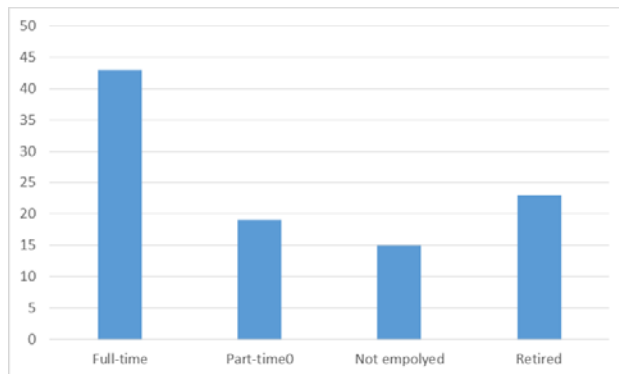


Figure 4. Employment status summary.

Marital Status

The results on marital status indicated that 47% of the participants were married, while 34% identified as single and never married, 13% were divorced, and 6% separated. Some singles who never married were adult children still living at home with their parent(s). Unfortunately, “widowed” was not an option that was offered. There may have been some who could have lost a partner through death (See Figure 5).

The summary of the demographic information collected seemed to reflect the Protestant church in general and the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church rather accurately. The typical congregant was a married female between 50-64 years old who was employed and educated.

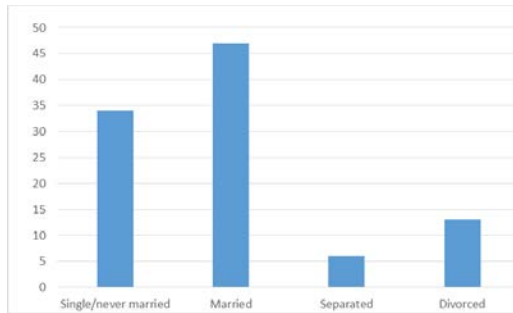


Figure 5. Marital status summary.

Evaluation of the Life-skills Building Seminars

Participants responded to the question, “Did you find the New Beginnings: A Time to Heal programs helpful?” The response was either “yes”, “somewhat” or “no.” Thirty-eight individuals or 75% said “yes,” and nine or 25% said “somewhat.” No one said “No.” Therefore, all participants found the life-skill building seminars beneficial in some way.

Kraybrill (2021) asserts that trauma shocks an individual’s cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual systems. Revisiting or reliving trauma may increase fear and anxieties resulting in unpredictability in all these systems. As I interacted with the participants, many were delving into their trauma for the first time. AFS felt it best to allow the participants to guide the process and that the life-skill building seminars would focus on self-regulation, minimizing regression, and triggering and promoting optimal health. It was also decided that the participants could not be relied upon to participate in a pre-test and post-test quantitative methodology given the 6-month timeline of the project. Dr. Sedlacek advised proceeding as an exploratory study, which I did. Exploratory research studies are flexible designs that require alterations to the research process to clarify the nature of the problem that needs to be investigated and to garner the most data,

qualitative data from the process (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

Even though there was no pre-test or post-test in this study and no way to quantify the impact, there were consistent, anecdotal responses from participants. During the project's aftermath, I received many personal messages of thanks and cards expressing gratitude for the seminars, patience, and commitment to their healing. Many shared how their lives had been impacted positively and expressed the desire to continue their journey towards wholeness. I, too, was transformed by the process and encouraged as I watched their growth and healing.

Answers From This Project

Outcome

My initial question, "Can preaching and skill-building seminars be used to promote conversation and dialogue on abuse and family violence?" the results positively affirm this is possible. The increase in personal stories and reflections were definitively attributed to the benefits of the project. The project covered a wide range of biblical teachings on the nature and heart of God and provided life-building skills to mitigate the triggering effects of trauma on the whole person.

The sermons and the seminars in the sanctuary challenged the participants and provided the perfect opportunity for each participant to test God. The sermons provided the content and information about the nature of God, while the seminar provided the space for exposure and exploration. The participants invited God into their experiences, and He met them in their pain. Many later shared how they experienced God more personally and authentically, and they added that He became relevant to their current circumstances. These revelations supported Hall's (2020) postulation about how faith in

God has shifted from information to tangible experience.

The resources and information provided during the project could be broadened for further study with this church and community. Many desired changes at the project's onset but seemed to lack the impetus or the "how-to" skills to initiate it, as evidenced by their conversations following the sermons in which pleas for additional support often concluded their stories. The seminars offered practical and adaptive skills for continued healing and optimal health. The project also destigmatized negative perceptions about counseling and its negative association with mental illness. More people benefited from the project than just those who participated. The project increased awareness of trauma and issues related to family violence in the community and other local Seventh-day Adventist churches. Participants took the information back to their churches which led to me receiving many speaking invitations across the city.

One outcome of the project was integrating culture, community, and faith as germane to addressing trauma. Even after the project ended, the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church continued to normalize dialogue around trauma through the partnership with church leadership and AFS to encourage a supportive and empathetic environment for worship and growth.

One of the project's highlights has been the ongoing evolution of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church. They have become a change agent in their community. As their experience increased with God, so did their trust and expectations. They created partnerships with other churches, community groups, and stakeholders like the judicial system. They used mental health professionals and front-line workers in the helping professions as members of their Community Services ministry. In addition, they have

successfully written and received numerous grants to support their new community outreach initiatives.

Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church now provides programs and seminars on mental health, addiction, anger management, and family violence to the church and the community. The grants fund a free (to recipients) weekly in-person counseling and referral service by a licensed mental health professional member at the church. The programs also serve those ordered by the court to attend anger management and conflict resolution programs. Counseling sessions are strategically held on Wednesdays when the church's food bank is operating and the church holds its Prayer Meeting service. The church continues to create a safe space to promote conversation and dialogue on painful life experiences. These strategies have increased the interactions between the church and the community. Through word-of-mouth, the church now welcomes more visitors and worshipers. The membership has grown spiritually and emotionally due to this authentic and intentional wraparound support system.

I proffered the following questions as expected outcomes of the project. These questions were salient to the process. Upon reflection, I will address them critically to determine what worked, the changes I would have made, and an overall evaluation of its effectiveness.

Question 1: Did This Project Challenge Other Pastors to Respond to Controversial Topics from the Pulpit?

The project created an immediate awareness amongst the membership and the leadership at Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church; however, there were no consistent overt changes from leadership among clerics within the Seventh-day Adventist

church. The women either opted to bring in speakers to address their issues on their special days, or they visited other churches willing to address them. Over time, Seventh-day Adventist women sought to create consistent support among themselves. However, things changed significantly when Alyssa Milano, a Hollywood celebrity and activist, posted a question on social media, “If you have been sexually harassed or assaulted, write ‘me too’ to this tweet.” The #Me too hashtag became an international symbol as it trended number one in 85 countries on Twitter and was posted over 85 million times on Facebook (Sayej, 2017). The groundswell response created a watershed moment in gender-based violence and gender equality affecting the community and the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Seventh-day Adventist women were emboldened to go from small, private group prayer to online ministries that attract international audiences to address issues relevant to women. – I am a regular contributor to ‘Women of Faith’ and a founding committee member of ‘Women on a Mission’. “Safe @7”, started by two social workers, invites men and women to bring their struggles, i.e., mental illness, addiction, and ‘church hurt’, to morning or evening worship. Women of the Seventh-day Adventist community around Toronto are no longer ashamed to face their emotional issues. They are becoming their own caretakers. They are no longer content to wait for it to be addressed by leadership or the pulpit. They are initiating it themselves. These online ministries show no signs of waning as safe spaces with options of the participants being seen or not but being able to communicate and interact. They routinely attract an intergenerational, international audience in the 90s. The city of Toronto declared March 2, 2020, as Toronto’s first Black Mental Health Day. In 2022 it was expanded to a week to promote greater awareness and

to facilitate culturally appropriate mental health support to Black individuals, families, and communities (Toronto, 2022). In 2020 the government of Canada allocated \$300 Million Cdn to fund programs that support at-risk women and survivors of family violence. Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church would be eligible to access this funding. My prayer is that all our churches will become lighthouses for their community.

Question 2: Did This Project Promote Conversation and Dialogue on Issues of Abuse and Family Violence?

Yes, the project accomplished the goals of promoting conversation and dialogues on the issues of abuse and family violence. There was an overall increase in awareness of how abuse and family violence lead to emotional harm. Many sought additional counseling supports to cope with ongoing issues. In the immediate aftermath of the project, I received many comments that the project stimulated change for individuals seeking emotional and spiritual healing. For many, acknowledging trauma was their first step. Recognizing that the survivor was not to blame and recognizing the need to offer forgiveness towards self was pivotal, leading to positive gains. The pain of self-blame was the hurdle many had to overcome to turn to God.

The project also enabled many to hear about trauma in the context of faith over many different biblical narratives, which deepened awareness and fostered biblical literacy. Removing it from the shadows and placing trauma in the context of the church community made it more relevant to followers of Christ and survivors of abuse (Palmer, 2014). It also encouraged a safer environment for some to remove the ‘mask’ they felt compelled to wear.

After the project ended, one couple separated due to ongoing abuse. The abuser

was unwilling to undergo counseling, and the partner felt their spiritual life would become severely affected if they remained in the marriage. This dramatic response made me believe that the marriage could have been saved if the partner had been willing to seek help.

Question 3: Where is Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church Now?

Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church strives to create a nurturing culture for its congregation and community, resulting in new members through transfers and evangelism. The pastoral team consistently supports and promotes access to mental health support to the congregation and the community. Their prayer team is also an integral part of their programming. They have special days and nights of praying, focusing on families and their struggles with mental health issues, addiction, parenting, and family/marital discord.

Challenges and Recommendations

Schedule

Sunday mornings from 11:00 am - 12:20 pm was the agreed-upon time for the seminars. However, it also proved challenging as it was the only day most people felt they had to prepare for the 'work' week. It was the only day they had to 'sleep in' and relax with family. It was also a day where other church programs, i.e., training, meetings, and weddings, were scheduled, resulting in our program being bumped or rescheduled. We did not want a revolving date that would make it even harder for attendees to remember, so we kept to the second Sunday of each month.

Time

The seminars were held in the morning. It was hard to find a time that was not ‘too early’ as some felt tired from the duties of the Sabbath or ‘too late’ to impact plans for the day. Despite the agreed-upon time, we started late on a few occasions as there was no one with a key to open the church. Other times, participants arrived late as they often overslept, while others with the same predicament opted to stay home. Many complained that they ‘forgot’ the meetings as they were new to their schedule and requested reminder calls/messages. I usually did the reminder calls about a week prior so they would have time to adjust their schedules as needed.

Despite the request for a Sunday meeting, some were just unable to attend due to work conflicts. Many switched shifts to work Sundays in order to worship on Sabbaths. It would have been a great idea if the presentations could have been recorded and placed on an online platform or shared as a link to the congregation.

Duration

The actual project that included sermons on Sabbath and Sunday seminars ran monthly for six months; many wanted it to continue. Many felt the support and tools they received were well needed and wanted more time to integrate and use them (with support). The momentum grew as we neared the end. As the process continued, many gained a deeper understanding and trust in mental health support. They became promoters of the programs, and they eagerly invited others who were undecided. Many also formed bonds with the other attendees, felt ‘safe’ during the sessions, and wanted more time to grow friendships. Upon reflection, I would have created an online chat group to encourage ongoing support after the project ended.

Location

The seminars took place in the sanctuary of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church. The choice intentionally demystified the room, clarified what was traditionally considered “holy” conversations, and established healing in the context of worship. However, there were times when other meetings were scheduled simultaneously at church, and this conflict created ambivalence and stress for those who felt compelled to choose. Given its proximity, there were times when attendees were called from the seminar to attend the other meetings.

Transportation

Many of the attendees relied on some mode of transportation to attend church. On Sabbaths, bus services were readily available, and those without cars could also rely on other brethren to carpool. On Sundays, the public transit operated on a later schedule. The subways opened later; the bus service started later, fewer buses on the road, and the wait times were longer. This modified schedule meant that those who relied on public transportation were either late coming or opted only to attend the sermons on Sabbaths. The ones who resorted to carpooling had to ensure there was always a designated driver. If the designated driver could not attend, it could jeopardize the meeting. Typically, there were 25 – 30 participants in attendance, with a consistent group of about eight attending every seminar.

Weather

The seminars were conducted during the winter months as well. The weather proved challenging, especially for those who relied on public transportation or traveled

from greater distances. During the winter, programs were rescheduled due to inclement weather. Cold weather and grey mornings made it even more challenging as many wanted to nest indoors rather than brave the elements to attend the ninety-minute program.

Demographics: Responses

There were some instances where the participant chose two answers as their responses. P2 and P9 both chose part-time and full-time work under employment. P2 was a married male between 18 and 29 years old and a college graduate, and P9 was a single male between 50 and 64 years old with technical and vocational skills. I had to think about how plausible their scenarios were in actuality. In the end, I accepted that their respective answers were truthful because it was common practice for people to work multiple jobs for additional income to meet financial goals.

In the case of choosing two answers for education, P6 was a married, retired female over the age of 65. She indicated that she was both a high school graduate and had completed some college. I understood this to be true again because it was prevalent for people her age to be educated overseas, but after immigrating, they find that employers require “Canadian experience or training,” so they return to school for additional training.

Demographics: Deficiencies

The demographics were not broad enough in the areas of marital status or education status. There was no option to select “widow”, which could have been relevant as many participants were older than 50 years and could have lost a partner to death. In addition, under the area of educational status, it did not include an option of “less than

high school”, which could have been a valid option. Many were older Caribbean immigrants who may not have completed high school education in their countries of origin but may have gained further training upon arrival to Canada.

The journey towards open discussions and dialogue about trauma and abuse is an individual one, often not linear or a quick process. For many, the trauma may have been deep-seated over many years. I hope that the sermons and the seminars will enable them to consistently bring their issues to God, leading to healing and restoration.

I hope that Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church will stay on course and use innovative outreach strategies to engage the community and be relevant and innovative in their methods. I also hope the worship service will always be where life issues can be addressed and tools provided for a healthy body, mind, and spirit. My desire is that Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church continue to be a beacon of light and a safe harbor for its members and surrounding community.

Summary and Conclusion

The exploratory study of using transformational preaching and life-skill seminars to promote conversation and dialogue on the issues of abuse and family violence was successful. The positive anecdotal updates and changes to the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church programs were directly related to the effects of the sermons and life-skill-building seminars. A multi-pronged approach to facilitating dialogue and conversation about the impacts of trauma included salient components such as culture, symbols, and faith for Seventh-day Adventist, Caribbean immigrants in Toronto. Finally,

healing requires a consistent, safe, and nurturing environment to enable each person to heal at their own pace. The body of Christ ought to show evidence of His restorative powers.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Department
Consent Form

Title of study: Transformational Preaching as a Tool to Facilitate Emotional Healing from Abuse and Family Violence at Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church in Toronto.

Jacqueline Peart, Doctor of Ministry Student, Principal Investigator
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 4145 E. Campus Circle Drive, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-1500
peartj2@hotmail.com
905-728-7762

Purpose:

The Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist church is presently located in an area of the city of Toronto which has high demographic indicators that result in abuse and family violence. Many of the members of the Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist church live in this community. Some have openly expressed during church programs/discussions about their history of abuse and family violence. The purpose of this study is to use biblical teachings/principles to facilitate healing from hurt and abuse. It is hoped that the subjects will gain information to facilitate their own healing and to provide spiritual support to those currently in abusive relationships. It is hoped that this program will also create a supportive environment for those affected by abuse and family violence.

Inclusion Criteria:

I have been informed that no minors will be involved in this study. The subjects participating in this study has to be 18 years of age or older.

Procedure:

I am fully aware that this study requires participation in a two hour seminar that will address biblical principles that may related to emotional hurts stemming from abuse and family violence. This seminar occur monthly over a 6 – 8 month period. Even if I have not attended for the full period, I can still participate in its evaluation, if I choose.

Risks and Discomforts:

I have been informed that there are no known risks for participating in this study. I have also been informed that the data collected from this experiment will be analyzed as a group rather than individual data. I am fully aware that the information that is collected will be anonymous to others and that my name will not be mention in any of the reports done in this study.

Benefits of Results:

I know that I may not receive direct benefits from participating in this study, however. I understand that the results may help church members as a whole to create a more supportive environment for those affected by abuse and family violence. I understand that the information collected during this study may be presented or published in professional meetings or journals, or as part of research forums on the Andrews University Campus.

Voluntary Participation:

I have been informed that my participation in this study is voluntary. I am fully aware that I may discontinue my participation in this study at any time without any penalty or prejudice. I know that there is no compensation in return for my participation.

I have been informed that I may contact the investigator, Jacqueline Peart, at 905-728-7762 or peartj2@hotmail.com. I am knowledgeable of the fact that if I wish to contact an impartial third party, I may contact the Chair of the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary at 269- 471-3537 for information and assistance.

I have read the entire contents of this consent form and I have listened to the verbal explanation given by the investigator or designated person (church clerk). All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give voluntary consent to participate in this study. If I have any additional questions or concerns, I will contact Jacqueline Peart using the information above. I have a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Subject

Date

I have reviewed the contents of this form with the person signing above. I have explained the potential risks and benefits of the study.

Signature of Investigator

905-728-7762
Phone number

Date

APPENDIX B

EVALUATION TOOL

Did you find the New Beginning: A Time to Heal seminars helpful?

_____ Yes
_____ Somewhat
_____ No

Please answer the following questions.

1. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female

2. What is your age?
 - 18-29 years old
 - 30-49 years old
 - 50-64 years old
 - 65 years and over

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - some high school
 - high school graduate
 - some college
 - trade/technical/vocational training
 - college/university graduate
 - some postgraduate work
 - post graduate degree

4. Are you now employed full-time, part-time, not employed, or retired?
 - full time
 - part time
 - not employed
 - retired

5. What is your marital status?
 - single/never been married
 - married
 - separated
 - divorced
 - widowed

APPENDIX C

SEMINAR ANNOUNCEMENT AND SCHEDULE

New Beginnings: A Time to Heal

Are you struggling with emotional issues that you want to overcome? Are you facing challenges in your life that overwhelm you? Do you want to live your best life ever? **Mount Olive SDA** church invites you to attend their monthly, **New Beginnings: A Time to Heal** seminars. They are designed to equip you with biblical truths and practical tools to support you in the healing process. Please come and bring a friend!! **The next meeting: April 13, 2014 from 11 am - 1 pm.** A light meal will be served.

Preaching and Seminar Schedule

I was among many speakers at the Mt. Olive SDA Church during this period. There was a Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Elders, and myself. Subsequently, deference was given to me to help me fulfill the program's academic requirements. However, preaching the Sabbath before the workshop was not always possible.

Transformational Sermons and New Beginnings: A Time to Heal (NBTH) Life-skills-Building Seminars - January 2014 to June 2014

1. January's Sermon: "Counting the Cost"
NBTH – Jan 12, 2014 - "Overcoming Your Inner-mes"
2. February's Sermon: "The Amazing Race"
NBTH – Feb 9, 2014 - "Detours and Delays"
3. March's Sermon: "From Bitter to Better"
NBTH: March 9, 2014 - "From Protest to Praise"
4. April's Sermon: "A Different Point of View"
NBTH – April 13, 2014 - "Spring Cleaning"
5. May's Sermon: "Moving Day"
NBTH - May 4, 2014 - "Finally Free"
6. June's Sermon: "What's in a Name?"
NBTH – June 8, 2014 - "Lies that Bind"

APPENDIX D

SERMON OUTLINES

Sermon #1: "Counting the Cost"

Key Text: Luke 14:28-35.

Big Idea: Everything we do for God must be intentional

1. The building of the tower - that's us the individuals. It affects us at the personal level.
I'll analyze that as a personal decision:

Some sees salvation as a game. They treat life like a spectator event. 1 Thess 5:3

- Are you a fan or a player? – 1 King 18:21

Jesus wants to know!! He's looking for active participants not spectators!

He's looking for commitment not convenience = marriage not just dating!

- Unprotected sex – Plan B - the morning after pill
- Pregnancy – abortion
- Poor financial planning – walk away - claim bankruptcy.
- Living together before marriage – no commitment
- Marriage – divorce when things can be resolved

God is looking for commitment! - Psl 37:5, Luke 9:62

We have to be reliable and consistent in our duties! We have to count the cost if we are not!

2. The church leaders as the King with the decision regarding to go to war or not:
 - The king has to know the troops. The leaders has to know the members!
 - Know their strength, their limitations.
 - Be willing to change plans to avert death and destruction to the troops;
 - Constantly monitor for threat to the army;
 - Seek God in prayer for direction.

We must stop paying more to get less

- Maintaining destructive and harmful behaviors and relationships at our own expense;
- We allowing fear to keep us back; preventing us from doing/trying new things
 - We must be willing to take biblical counsel
 - We must be willing to learn from other people's experience?
- Thinking we will be the exception - it" will never happen to us!

Discipleship – no middle ground. All or nothing. - Matt 6:24

Being a disciple of Christ means: Taking up your own cross daily and dying to self.

- losing things: sacrifice - ending close relationships
- It may mean struggles – your faith being challenged
- It may mean your life – dying for the cause (letting some of our fleshly desires die).

Jesus did it for us! God gave it all up for us! – John 3:16-17

Appeal: The commitment and sacrifices are being noted and will be rewarded. – Gal 6:9

Sermon #2: “The Amazing Race”

Key Text: Heb 12:1-3

Big Idea: The Christian journey is a race into the unknown, but Christ is with you.

1. Cloud of witnesses – Heb 12:1
 - a. There are people watching us – encouragers and detractors
 - b. We are watching others - draw inspiration and lessons from them
 - i. Job – suffered loss
 - ii. Caleb – suffered disappointment
2. Lay aside every weight – run with endurance – you cannot quit
 - a. Weights we have been given – molestation, abuse, abandonment, rejection etc.
 - b. Weights we have picked up ourselves – things we have done which resulted in our own pain.

The besetting sin –like a grain of sand in your shoe – it cannot be ignored. It must be dealt with as soon as it is detected. If ignored, it could hamper plans to finish the race.

Jesus is our burden bearer – He is Empathetic – Heb 4:13-16. He cares – Psl 55:22, 1 Pet 5:7

3. Keep focused – look to Jesus – Heb 12:2
 - a. Look to Jesus for we have a High Priest –He understands! Heb 4:13-16
 - b. He too endured shame, pain and degradation. – Isa 53:4-6, Heb 12:3
 - c. He finished His race – He overcame His pain. Look to Calvary – John 16:33
 - i. Delayed gratification – Crown of life – James 1:12, Rev

The Discipline of God – Heb 12:3

He stayed the course. He recognized why it was important to our salvation. He is our “Coach”

4. Author and Finisher – He will give what you need as you need it – Isa 65:24
 - He is our coach – He knows the way. – He has gone before us – Deut 31:8
 - He is the way - He is the only way we are going to make it – John 14:6
 - He is with us throughout. He is NOT watching from a distant- Matt 28:20
 - He wants us to win!! You can win!! – Jude 1:24

There will always be challenges along the way. God is with you. God is on your side. God will give you victory!

5. Appeal
 - Committing to running the race.
 - Surrendering the weights we carry
 - Victory is guaranteed through Christ

Sermon #3: "From Bitter to Better"

Key Text: 2 Sam 6:16-23, supporting texts: 1 Sam 18:12-27; 19:11-16.

Big Idea: Life's experience can lead to bitterness which can lead to barrenness and a wasted life

Michal became a pawn between the two men in her life – King Saul, her father and David, her husband. Saul hated David and used Michal against David. Life was unfair and unkind to both her and David, yet she became bitter and he did not.

Michal's name meant, 'pool' and "Who is like God?"

Pool: In a dry place conveyed desirable qualities. She was to have a refreshing and replenishing personality, one that would draw people.

Who is like God? She was expected to be patient, kind, forgiving and loving. That means that when people saw her, they were to see characteristics of God! In the end, Michal becomes bitter and barren. Like her, we have a choice in our outcome.

We are called Christians - do others see or experience Jesus when they interact with us?

We are called trees of righteousness – Psl 1:3, Isa 61:3

1. We are to bear fruit, much fruit and they are to last.
 - How many of us have allowed things people say, do things that have affected our potential?!
2. Because of her attitude Michal became barren.
 - How many of us are barren and blaming it on someone else or our circumstances?

We can overcome any and all things through Christ – He guarantees the victory!!

Lessons from the Life of Christ – He is Our Example and Guide

8 steps - from better to better

1. Pray – bring your feelings/issues to God and leave them. – Isa 1:18, Psl 55:22
2. Count your blessings – God readily forgives- 1 Thess 5:16-18
3. Look for the lessons – take time to reflect and review before responding – John 8:32,
4. Maintain perspective – it will eventually pass – Jer 29:11, Ecc 9:11
5. Learn the lesson – integrate the information and change your behaviour – Rom 8:28
6. Let go of resentment – poison you ingest hoping someone else will die.- Rom 3:23
7. Stay focused – do not become derailed. – 1 Pet 5:8, Heb 12:1
8. Forgive others (and yourself) - stop beating yourself up – Matt 6:14

When you forgive someone: it acts as a re-start. You can begin again with a blank slate.

Appeal:

Making commitment to take and release hurts to God. Forgiving others and yourself. Trust the process - releasing hurts brings healing. God heals, restores and reconciles us to Himself!

Sermon #4: “A Different Point of View”

Introduction:

2 Kings 6:8-17, Eph 6:11-13

Big Idea: Faith sees the impossible as if it already is.

- Elisha and his servant appeared outnumbered and out-gunned by the army of Aram.
- We are in a battle that is real, but invisible to the naked eye.
- Disease can distort our physical sight. There are also things that can affect spiritual sight.

Christians see things that no one else can see - Eph 6:11-13. Keep spiritual eyes clear.

The enemy distorts our spiritual sight in the following ways:

1. F.E.A.R – false expectations appearing real!
2. Intimidation – reminding you of your weakness/vulnerability
3. Guilt/shame – not deserving of God’s help or deliverance –
4. Doubt – the 12 spies who went into Canaan – only 2 thought it was possible.

Spiritual blindness leads to:

- 1) Increased Perception of Stress – when you perceive it as difficult or unfair.
- 2) Self-Limitation - If you say “I can’t handle this”, you more likely can’t.
- 3) Limited Thinking – prevents you looking to God as The source.

We overcome the enemies’ schemes through faith!

What is Faith?

1. Faith is based on facts, the Word of God and not feelings. We must believe.
2. Faith always work by love –looking to Calvary is to create faith in Jesus
3. Faith is a gift from God
 - Faith is trusting in God – believing that He loves us and knows what’s best.
 - Faith leads us to accept and choose His Way and not our own
 - His Wisdom – for our ignorance; His Strength – for our weakness
 - His Righteousness – for our impurity
 - Faith accepts His ownership of us and accepts its benefits
 - Faith works by love to purify the soul.
4. Faith is a belief in a person, Jesus Christ not a thing.

Appeal: Faith makes the power of the cross real

1. Negative thoughts that have sapped your optimism
2. Commit to more time studying Scripture to build faith
3. Commit to a new start of striving for more with Jesus!

Sermon #5: "Moving Day"

Key Text: John 14:1-3

Big Idea: We must get ready at all cost.

People are forced to move for natural disasters or emergencies. Christians know planet earth is not our home. We can ignore the prospect and be caught off guard or become alert and watchful to move.

People get anxious as they prepare to move. Decluttering and packing is time to reflect. You cannot carry everything. Things must be sorted and assigned based on usefulness.

1. Prepare – must use 'check list' to make appropriate choices. Trauma has made us hold on to many things. – Room 1:18-32. Only Holy Spirit can look deep inside our hearts/characters.

Hoarding tendencies – sin makes humanity resistant to letting go – negative behaviors/feelings.

2. Packing – labeling boxes. Sorting and separating issues/things. Not everything is needful or useful.

Inventory must be taken. One must be intentional. Only a few selected things can be taken. Search your hearts. Sort through the issues of life.

- a. Give-aways – share, be kind one towards another. Show love and mercy freely as you received it.
- b. Keep - keepsakes – keep/guard the Word of God in your heart and have daily communion with Him.
- c. Throw-aways – bad habits, negative behavior, past hurts.

Some are excited and want new beginnings, while others are resistant to change and are anxious.

We can only take a transformed character – like Christ's – Gal 5:23, 2 Cor 2:5.

Relocation – staying is not an options. All must be evacuated. Holy Spirit will prepare us.

Jesus is our relocation specialist. He knows what is necessary for successful relocation and settlement. He has gone to preplace a place for us. He knows the way. – John 14:6, John 6:33.

A Transformed Life for a Transformed Home

- A prepared home – Prepared with you in mind – John 14:2.
- A pure home - we must be victorious over sin. Rev 21:7-8.
- A populated home - ever nation, tribe, people and language - Rev 7:9-17.
- A perpetual home - No night. Being with God eternally - Rev 22:5.

Appeal:

Being ready and staying ready. Facing the future with faith and not fear. To be rid of the 'excess' weights of past hurts we carry.

Sermon #6: “What’s in a Name?”

Key Text: Matt 5:13 – 16

Big Idea: You are here to make a difference

Ugly Duckling – Hans Christian Andersen – Nov 11, 1843

Jesus calls us salt and light. Descriptors that many struggle with. Introduction: many struggle with a true sense of who they are. Their identity is distorted by life’s experiences. Negative experiences have the most profound impact.

Many are shaped by the words they hear and the experiences they have

Spend a life time trying to be someone else

Confidence is damaged and must be rebuilt. Change internal narratives

Light is critically needed to dispel darkness. Salt is critical for cellular function. It adds flavor, purifies, preserves and prevents degradation.

- We are all born with natural abilities for sight and tasting. Its absence leaves a deficit.
- In the absence of physical light - triggers emotional disorders.
- In the absence of spiritual light – also triggers emotional disorders.

Jesus restored sight to the blind and changed their lives. Do you want to be made well?

Jesus wants to restore spiritual sight to many of us. – John 9.

- We recognize the lies that we have been under.
- New healing – both physical and spiritual
- New identity, new purpose, God gets glory!
- No incognito Christians – Christians cannot be ashamed of the Gospel - Rom 1:16.
- Sharing our testimonies become light to those in darkness.
- Jesus offers a new narrative - 2 Cor 5:17,19.
- Everyone has to choose for themselves – Heb 3:15. Whom do you to believe?

On the cross Jesus dispelled the darkness and lies forever. He was bruised for our sins (our guilts), He was wounded, stripped and abandoned so we can be healed and vindicated. –Isa 53:5-6.

The different names of Jesus describe His roles – Counsellor, Savior, Emanuel, Lamb of God, High Pries, Living water, Truth, Way, Life, Bridegroom, Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

We get a new name – children of God, righteous, heirs of God, overcomers.

Appeal:

- New identify is being offered.
- Leave the past behind and embrace rebirth and new life.
- You will impact others and God gets the glory.

APPENDIX E

SEMINAR OUTLINES

Seminar #1: “Overcoming Your Inner-mes”

Scriptural Focus: Numbers 13-14

Big Idea: The biggest enemy may be within

Recap:

- All the spies saw and experienced the same things, but their reactions differed.
- Ten spies saw hardship, defeat, and ultimate destruction of their families and themselves.
- Two saw opportunities to claim the inheritance God had long ago promised Abraham. This decision is critical!

Have you ever stopped and listened to your self-talk or inner voice? Is it positive or negative? Record some of the things you hear.

The Bible admonishes us to focus on good things – Phil 4:8 Why?

Effects of negative self-talk increase anxieties, depression, stress levels, and lower feelings of competence and self-esteem.

God had given Israel a promise through Abraham 430 years before their inhabiting Canaan.

How many of us are like those ten spies? They forgot the promise. Truth be told. They are the majority because that’s true of us today!

Deliverance was within view, yet they wanted to turn away from it. What do you think of that? How many want to be whole? It sounds incredible that healing and wholeness are accessible, yet many would turn away from them. Why?

For many of us, our expectations are tied to self-talk or inner voice. Has your inner voice ever led you the wrong way?

Israel wanted to return to Egypt. They were slaves there! Fear made them regress to what they knew best - pain.

Change requires a shift in your perspective. How do you see yourself? Survivor or victim?

We must see ourselves in a different manner to overcome. Many of us are still living under a slavish mentality!!

Whatever we rehearse, we will practice and remember. Negative self-talk or their negative inner-mes made them see God as if He’d set them up to fail. They doubted God, and they did not believe Him! Caleb and Joshua were the only two spies who remembered what God had done in the past.

How to overcome our inner-mes:

- We need to recognize the source. – Phil 4:8-9
 - Is it in harmony with God’s promises to you?- James 1:7
- We cannot fight spiritual battles on our own. – Eph 6:11-12
- We must recognize them and leave them to God. – Exo 14:14

God does not ask us to fight but to stand still and see Him fight for us.

We must be intentional. We need to believe, trust, know and obey God. – Heb 11:8, James 1:8

Find people who share your optimistic expectation when you are afraid. Caleb and Joshua presented an alternative narrative to the other ten spies. Hope may look slim, but God is going to fight for you. – John 14:25-28.

Seminar #2: “Detours and Delays”

Scriptural Focus: Life of Joseph starts in Gen 30 and ends Gen 50:25

Life’s challenges: Stress: Positive vs. Negative

How do you respond to it? What role do your life circumstances contribute to or alleviate it?

The Effects of Stress on Your Body

Stress is the body’s reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental, and emotional responses.

How Does Stress Affect Health?

- 75% - 90% of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.
- Stress can play a part in headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions, asthma, arthritis, depression, and anxiety.
- The lifetime prevalence of an emotional disorder is more than 50%, often due to chronic, untreated stress reactions.

Joseph benefitted from being his father's favorite. Were you the favorite or the least liked in your family? How did you know?

His siblings so disliked Joseph that they sought to do him harm. Have you ever been harmed by someone you loved and cared for? Have you ever hurt someone you cared for?

How do you respond to frustration when situations do not go as planned? Whom do you blame?

How has your life been affected positively or negatively by the detours and delays you have experienced?

The Detour and Delays in Joseph’s life: betrayal (sold into slavery), success (Potiphar’s house), betrayal (Potiphar’s wife), success (Prime Minister) and success (forgiving his brothers and being reconciled with them), success (living a long life to see God's promises fulfilled).

Joseph turned to God even when he did not know how situations would turn out. Whom do you turn to?

What do we know about detours and delays?

1. They happen to everyone! – you are not alone
2. They are unpredictable – you cannot always foresee them coming
3. You have a choice in how you are going to react.
4. You have to remind ourselves that God has not forgotten you!!
5. Don't blame yourself! – It is not your fault.
6. See the lessons in it! – You can learn from it.
7. Learn from other’s experience without going through it yourself
8. God did not cause it, but He uses it to help us.

Your life’s story is still being written. You can only keep focus by turning to God. You can only find peace by forgiving yourself, others, and situations that may have caused you pain.

Seminar #3: “From Protest to Praise”

Scriptural Focus: Esther 4:13-17

- We often protest when we feel that things are not fair or overwhelming.
- We often protest when we are afraid.

How do you respond to your protest? Do you feel helpless? Do you think that things are stacked against you?

What do we do when things are not going as we want spiritually?

The odds were stacked against Esther: minority, woman, orphan, and her case seemed hopeless. She could hide and wait and see or step out and be counted.

She received a challenge from Mordecai to stand before the king. Initially, she was hesitant, but she rose to the challenge.

How do you respond to challenges? Are you governed by fear or faith?

In Esther’s case, she resorted to engaging her faith through fasting and praying.

How many times do we resort to fasting when things get tough?

We have a God who wants to dialogue. – Gen 18:16-33, Numb 27:1-12

Protesting in the spiritual realm is praying and fasting. There are times when deliverance is only available through praying and fasting! Esther’s fast dismantled nearly a whole year’s worth of planning!

We have a secret weapon! Protesting leads to two responses: 1) Acceptance of protest and b) Rejection of protest.

How do we find the answers? How do we know if we’re making the right decisions?

In the life and ministry of Christ, we see:

- He prayed and fasted to show us that it was the only way to be victorious over the enemy.
- He questioned but released His right to have it His way. He submitted to God and accepted the course of the cross for our supreme victory!
 - His victory is our victory!
 - He now lives to make intercession for us! Our prayers are always heard!

When we fight against the process of being still, we thwart the change and transformation. We see a tomb instead of a womb!

Tomb and womb -What’s the difference between these two words?

- Tomb – a place for decomposition, death, stench, grief
- Womb – a place of development, life, heartbeat, joy

For many of us, we don’t know the state we are in.

Some of us are in a place where God wants us to rest, grow, and change, but we struggle against it. We fight and resist – we see it as death = tomb. Jesus conquered the grave! We do not have to fear the process! - Rev 1:18

Seminar #4: “Spring Cleaning”

Scriptural Focus: Ecc 3:1-8

We live our lives in a cycle. We need to make room for each season, and if we do not, we can become overwhelmed by having too much. We can drown in clutter.

What areas do we need to focus on as we look at our lives?

- If you were a house, would it be the outside? I.e., The landscape, the roof, the gutters? Or the inside, the attics, the main floor, or the leaky basement? Or the not-so-obvious things, i.e., electrical and plumbing?
- Some of us have closets that are bursting at the seams. We may have clothes in different sizes, styles, and colors that we no longer wear, but instead of decluttering, we keep buying more.

What are some of the positive reasons for spring cleaning?

Benefits to spring cleaning:

1. More storage space –feeling overwhelmed and confined?
2. Finding lost items – struggling with brain fog?
3. Feeling in control – struggling with anxieties, fears, depression?
4. Maintenance and preservation – struggling with confidence and hope for the future?

Deterioration to mental health and wellbeing was happening on a daily basis, but you got used to it. Now things can become more efficient – you know where things are, and you may move items around. Things feel more organized and ‘lighter’ atmospheres. We begin to realize that spring cleaning is vital!

1. Gutters: - do you let things back up and flood when they should be redirected and passing through? - criticism, negativity, doubts
2. Windows – are the things you see/look at discouraging your spiritual growth and development? Do you see the negative and never the positive?
3. The exterior – when people see you, do they know how you feel on the inside? Is it your best self? Is it someone who represents God in talk, deed, and action?
4. Land Scaping/Flower Beds – are your talents (flowers) being choked out by weeds and discouragement or destroyed by bugs and other pests? You fertilize, but nothing seems to grow.

Exercise: reflection and doing an inventory! Identify things you want God to further develop in you.

- Why do you hold on to things? Fear or sentimentalism?
- Do you see God as your Provider? Can you trust Him to give you what you need when you need it?
- Are there experiences in your life that are not serving you well?

How to begin the process. 3 Categories:

1. Giveaways - things we give away – someone could also benefit from receiving them - affirmations, kindness.
2. Throw-aways - things we throw away – negative trait behaviors/thoughts/habits/flaws –
3. Keepsakes – valuables that we desire to have - fruit of the Spirit, prioritizing a personal relationship with Jesus

Hold onto God’s promises for renovation and restoration. God is able, and He wants to - Ezekiel 36:25-27.

Seminar #5: “Finally Free”

Scriptural Focus: Luke 13:10-17.

Keywords: bound and loosened

How do you tether a 10-foot tall, 5,000 kg elephant with a chain and a wooden peg? Through training. Why does the elephant not break free? It thinks it cannot.

While that is very sad and inhumane, it is even more tragic that adult humans become restricted by the chains they have around their minds/emotions.

What are some of the things that tie us?

String Exercise- tie a knot whenever you hear a phrase you were told.

1. You're useless
2. You're ugly – too dark, too fat (body shaming)
3. Nobody is ever going to want you
4. You're stupid/retarded/dumb – you even say it to yourself
5. You're never going to amount to anything
6. The sight of you makes me sick
7. It's your fault I treat you bad
8. You deserve to be alone

Trauma in childhood can become the foundation of mental health/relationship issues in later years.

Adverse Childhood Experiences – traumas of all types (physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, and neglect) that happen before age 18 show:

What are the Effects of early childhood trauma?

Here are a few that I can think of that hold us back from ever reaching our full potential:

- Verbal abuse - Continuous put-downs by someone close to you.
- Re-living a painful or embarrassing experience in the past.
- A lack of confidence in your ability – ‘imposter syndrome – you don't deserve it – job, family, success?
- Fear of failure (or success), anxieties, depression,
- Shame – Christians don't struggle with mental health issues
- Abandonment issues – a relationship of betrayal
- Rejection issues
- Suicidal thoughts – what if I wasn't here – are the leading cause of adolescent deaths.

While all the above reasons are quite sad, there is good news. You are limited only by your mindset.

Jesus loosened her from her infirmities. Immediately she was healed.

What are things tying you up? What issues do you want God to loosen you from?

- One way to become free is to be in the presence of Jesus. Pray and ask God to help you. Let God know what is binding you and your desire to be free.
- Getting counseling will help in understanding the effects trauma had on you.

When you are free, do not become entangled again. Stay away from a) negative thoughts, b) negative behaviors/situations, and c) people who tied you up in the first place. God desires you to be finally free!

Seminar #6: “Lies that Bind”

Scriptural Focus: John 1:1-9

Big Idea: The lies we believe can keep us bound

There are lies that we have heard our whole lives that sound true. When was the first time you heard them? Who told you?

It is not that the lies are true, but we hold them as valid, so they become self-fulfilling.

- He would have been seen as an example of God's disdain.
- He was relegated to being a beggar. A life he would live until he died.
 - He would likely not be married as he was seen as cursed by God.
 - He was ridiculed and cursed by men as well.
 - No descendants.
 - No legacy. His name would die with him.

We can develop feelings of shame, guilt, grief, and anger against others and God for these lies.

There are religious ideologies that we believe keep us bound.

Is God responsible, and is it punishment?

There are many curses and blessings in the Scriptures- Deut 28:15-19. How many times have we blamed God for the consequences of our choices?

Can I challenge your thinking for a moment? What if God means that if we reject His counsel/provisions, we leave/walk away from the blessings? Would that make a difference?

Jesus's Response: Jesus denounced the lie and restored his sight – spiritual and physical.

Today, God asks you?

- Who told you the lie? God said it was good – Gen 1:31
 - People say and believe negative things about themselves.
 - Do you think you are not worthy of salvation and eternal life? You need to check the source. Often, the negative things we believe are predicated on a lie. And the sources will always lead back to Satan. – Rev 12:9

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for perpetuating the lie – John 8:44-45

Believing a lie about yourself gives a corrupt image of God – a false theology. What does God want to do for you that would set you free?

Healing brings restoration and glory to God.

There will be some who will not recognize your change and will refer to your former state. Keep going forward. If you believe you can be set free – John 8:36.

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CURRICULUM VITA

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Name: Jacqueline D. Peart

Education:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 2011-Present | Doctor of Ministry (Emphasis: Preaching), Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary |
| 2008-2011 | Masters of Divinity, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist
Theological Seminary |
| -2006 | BS in Life Sciences and Psychology, University of Toronto |

Experience:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 2021-Present | Founder/Executive Director, SOVEREIGN Core, Non-profit
Organization (Whitby, ON, Canada) |
| 2015-Present | Volunteer Community Chaplain, Kendalwood Seventh-day
Adventist Church (Whitby, ON, Canada) |
| 2011-2014 | Pastoral Intern, Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church
(Etobicoke, ON, Canada) |
| 2009-2011 | Volunteer Student Chaplain, New Life Fellowship at Andrews
University (Berrien Springs, MI, USA) |
| 2008-2009 | Pastoral/Student Intern, Praise Fellowship Seventh-day Adventist
Church (South Bend, IN, USA) |
| 1997-2007 | Civil Servant, Ontario Government (Toronto, ON, Canada) |
| 1987-2007 | Youth Church Leader, Toronto East Seventh-day Adventist Church
(Toronto, ON, Canada) |