

The Adventist Home: Networks of Personal and Family Religious Practices

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50-word abstract:

A network analysis of personal and family religious media use identifies Bible reading as a core religious practice. Nodes representing reading Ellen White's and other religious authors' writings occupy a position between infrequently-accessed religious media and core practices; reading these authors points Adventists to the 'greater light' of the Bible.

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“Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.” Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, January 20, 1903

There are many ways in which church members can practice their religion in their homes—both personally and as a family unit. Of these, Bible reading is a core Christian spiritual practice (Esqueda, 2014; Ovwigho, Cole, & Myatt, 2016). Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, personal Bible reading and prayer are recognized by church members (Rosario et al., 2014) and church leaders (Hattingh et al., 2016) alike as core to faith. As a result, in a study of Black Adventist university students, increasing ownership of the personal worship experience starting in the home and moving into the church was identified as an important part of internalizing religious belief (Ramirez, Ashley, & Cort, 2014). Indeed, personal religious behaviors (Bible reading, prayer, and personal devotions) were the strongest connection to the church for millennial emerging adults (Jacobs et al., 2019). However, church members face an increasingly wide range of media choices in personal and family religious practice. While mobile devices can enrich Bible reading and devotional study (Hutchings, 2017), new media can also disrupt members’ connection to the church (Jacobs et al., 2019). Indeed, broadcast media have long functioned as a replacement for church attendance (Gaddy & Pritchard, 1985).

In this study, we explore how different personal and family religious practices involving different media—Bible reading, personal devotions, Sabbath School lesson study, reading Spirit of Prophecy and religious books, watching or listening to religious broadcasts, and interacting with social media—are related to each other and to attendance at church programs. We are particularly interested in identifying those practices that strongly encourage other practices; targeting central and influential practices can allow church leaders to disciple church members into regular personal and family religious habits. We use a recently-developed technique known as network analysis (Christensen, 2018; Costantini et al., 2015; Epskamp, Rhemtulla, Borsboom, 2017; Jones, Mair, McNally, 2018) that uses the processing power of modern computers to explore possible relationships between many variables simultaneously. We apply this technique to worldwide data from the 2018 Seventh-day Adventist Global Church Member Survey.

We have identified two key patterns in this analysis, both of which are framed by the quotation from the *Review and Herald* above. First, among primary religious practices in the home, Bible reading is central, frequent, and connected to all other primary practices, including Sabbath School lesson study and family worship. Secondly, less frequently used forms of religious media (television, radio, social media) connect to primary practices by the reading of Spirit of Prophecy and religious materials written by Seventh-day Adventist and Christian authors. These lead to the ‘greater light’ of the Bible, and are a supplementary religious practice that could be quite influential in the adoption of a range of personal and family devotional practices. Finally, we have examined the stability of this network across the world divisions, and are able to identify influential practices (Bible reading, reading Adventist and Christian authors, small group attendance) that could be emphasized across the world church, as well as those that particular world regions may find more influential for their church members in developing discipleship practices in the home.

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