Practical Application of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine Through Narrative Preaching at Parkview Adventist Academy

Stephen Reasor
Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
DOCTRINE THROUGH NARRATIVE PREACHING AT
PARKVIEW ADVENTIST ACADEMY

By

Stephen Reasor

Advisor: Kenley Hall
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST DOCTRINE THROUGH NARRATIVE PREACHING AT PARKVIEW ADVENTIST ACADEMY

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Problem

Seventh-day Adventist teenagers are familiar with church doctrines but many do not understand how these doctrines relate to a relationship with Jesus Christ and the student’s daily lives. This study was to determine the effectiveness of a narrative sermon series to help academy-aged students understand the centrality of Jesus Christ to Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and how these doctrines relate to daily living.
Method

This study included two researcher developed surveys and group interviews. The surveys gathered qualitative and quantitative data, which measured understanding of, and attitude towards, Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.

Forty-four students from Parkview Adventist Academy in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada, of both genders, aged 15-18, took part in the study.

Results

Both student understanding of, and attitude towards Seventh-day Adventist doctrines improved over the four month period between surveys. Student response to the series was mixed; though more positive than negative. There was a correlation between attendance at the series and improved survey scores.

Conclusions

The narrative sermons were able to teach doctrine. However, growth in doctrine knowledge and spiritual faith are best supported by a broad range of preaching, teaching, and discipling strategies. The strength of narrative preaching lies in the long term impact on the listener and narrative’s ability to address difficult questions.
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST DOCTRINE THROUGH NARRATIVE PREACHING AT PARKVIEW ADVENTIST ACADEMY

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Stephen Reasor
July 2012
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project dissertation was to determine how effective a narrative sermon series could be in presenting doctrine in a way that fosters a faith relationship with Christ, specifically in the context of preaching to Seventh-day Adventist youth. This chapter will consider my ministry perspective and context, and the particulars of the project.

Personal History

The foundations for my ministry were laid at Campion Academy in Loveland, Colorado. My freshman year I unwittingly took a job as a literature evangelist. On the second day of training I realized I would have to knock on strangers’ doors and try to sell them Christian books. I am an introvert; I was horrified. However, my shyness kept me from telling anyone I did not want to be a literature evangelist. Over the course of the next seven years working with Joe Martin’s team at Campion I overcame my fear of talking to people and became a leader to train other young people to witness.

During this time, some friends and adults suggested I become a pastor. However, I had already decided that I would not take theology in college. Part of this decision had to do with the required Greek and Hebrew classes. I had taken Spanish in high school and had not done well, so I assumed I would struggle with these other languages as well.
I attended Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas, but I was not content with the courses I took, so after changing majors three times that first year I returned to Colorado to work with Joe for the summer. Through Joe’s influence and the prompting of the Holy Spirit I finally agreed to give theology a try. I reasoned that once things did not work out in the theology department I would be free to pursue other goals.

In autumn of 1997, I returned to Southwestern where I began theology classes, and thoroughly enjoyed them, especially Greek. The improvement in my linguistic skills can only be credited to God’s grace and sense of humor. The courses I used as an excuse for not taking Theology became my strongest subjects, and I learned that God calls people to do and learn more difficult things than they think possible.

My ministry reflects my belief that young people are capable of more than I, or even they, think possible. Our academy-aged students can understand deep biblical truths. I have served as a Bible teacher or chaplain at two senior boarding academies, one K-12 day academy, and two elementary schools.

My time is presently divided between three institutions. I am an associate pastor at the College Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada. In my ministry at the church I visit with members of all age groups, preach five or six times a year, sit on numerous church committees, and am generally involved in the worship and life of the church. I also serve as the chaplain of College Heights Christian School, which is operated by the College Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church. As chaplain of the elementary school I coordinate weekly chapel services, teach Junior High Bible classes, and conduct baptismal studies.
My third role is as chaplain of Parkview Adventist Academy, a boarding academy on the campus of Canadian University College in Lacombe. As chaplain of the academy my ministry involves three main components. First, I coordinate all worship services for the Academy. This includes regular chapel services, Friday night vespers programs, and Sabbath School, as well as academy church services several times a semester. Second, I serve as an administrator of the academy. This role includes participation in committee meetings and staff meetings, providing spiritual counseling to students and staff, and some limited involvement in religion classes. Third, I coordinate the outreach and mission activities of the school, including overseas and in-country mission trips, and community outreach projects.

**Statement of the Problem**

Many students at Parkview Adventist Academy are familiar with Seventh-day Adventist doctrines from experience with their parents, Sabbath School classes, sermons, and religious studies courses but do not seem to see how these doctrines relate to one another and to a relationship with Jesus Christ. They rarely view Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and biblical stories as connected to the events and choices they face in their daily lives. As far as many students are concerned, religion and spirituality have little to do with social, academic, and career concerns.

**Statement of Task**

I developed and preached a series of seven narrative sermons during Week of Prayer. The narrative sermons were evaluated to measure the effectiveness of narrative
preaching in helping academy students to understand the centrality of Jesus Christ to Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and how these doctrines relate to daily living.

**Justification of the Project**

According to Mark Kellner (2008) the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, released by the Pew Forum on Religion in 2008, found that roughly forty percent of young people raised in the “Adventist family of churches” would not remain in that family as adults. Researchers (Dudley, 2000; Kim, 2001) have found multiple reasons why Seventh-day Adventist young people stop attending church. They found that agreement with Seventh-day Adventist doctrines was the most common reason cited by young people who remained in the Seventh-day Adventist church. However, if Christ is central to Seventh-day Adventist doctrines then these young people have missed something important. Intellectual agreement with doctrine is a poor substitute for a faith relationship with Jesus.

**Expectations of the Project**

Through this project I hoped to develop a methodology towards preparing sermons, and a sermon series, that bring doctrine and application together in the context of biblical stories. I expected the sermons to keep the students’ interest. I hoped that elements of the sermons would remain clear in the students’ memories in the short term (through the following week) and that there would be some long term (two months) improvement in student’s attitude towards, and understanding of, Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.
**Delimitations**

This study took place at a Seventh-day Adventist institution and involved participants from a Seventh-day Adventist background therefore limiting the theological perspective of the study. The results of this study have limited application to other Christian denominations. Because of the unique setting of Parkview Adventist Academy as a boarding high school on a university campus, and as one of only two Seventh-day Adventist boarding academies in Canada, the results of this study are limited in their application in other Seventh-day Adventist institutions.

This study did not address the students’ attitudes towards the Seventh-day Adventist church in general or their intention to become or remain Seventh-day Adventists. Nor did it directly address attitudes towards preaching in general.

**Limitations**

As both primary modes of data collection involved self-reporting there was a risk that the participants would falsify or give expected answers. My relationship with the students encouraged them to participate in this study but also added to the limitations of the study’s findings due to bias. There may have been an increased tendency to answer the questions based on what they thought I wanted to hear.

**Definitions of Terms**

*Narrative preaching.* This study uses narrative preaching in a limited sense. Narrative preaching refers to the exegetical use of biblical narrative that presents God as the focus of Biblical narrative, as the basis of the sermon. The term also refers to the
plot-driven structure of the sermon itself, and the central role of biblical narrative within that plot.

**Methodology**

This study used a mixed-methods approach to collecting data. Since all the students were expected to attend the sermon series there was no control group. I implemented a researcher-designed questionnaire, which included both qualitative and quantitative questions (see Appendices A & B), and two semi-structured group interviews (see Appendix C) to answer the research questions. I also made qualitative observations. I did not use a comparison group for this design.

**Population and Participants**

The population of this study was the student body of Parkview Adventist Academy in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada. This student body fluctuated between 100 and 105 students during the 2009-2010 school year. Students ranged in age from 15 to 18 years of age and were enrolled in grades ten to twelve.

Students and parents were informed of the study on registration day and were given opportunity to question the researcher on the purpose and methods of the research. The participants in the study were students who expressed an interest in participating, signed an informed consent form and, if they were minors, had parents sign an informed consent form. Forty-eight students agreed to participate in the study and signed the necessary forms, which means just under half of the population participated in the study.
Variables

The independent variable for this study was the structure and presentation of the sermon series. The dependent variable was the students’ understanding of, and attitude towards, specific Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The questionnaire and group interviews were the primary instruments used to evaluate student understanding of, and attitude towards, the specific doctrines.

The questionnaire, which requested biographical information, qualitative responses, and quantitative responses, was administered two months before the sermon series, and again two months after the sermon series. The pre-series questionnaire was used to create baseline data for a comparative analysis with the data from the post-series questionnaire.

The group interviews were administered within a week of the conclusion of the sermon series. A facilitator trained in qualitative research, Charlene Irving, a graduate student at Loma Linda University, administered them. The groups consisted of five and six participants respectively who were selected using an online true random number generator.

Project Process

A theological reflection included three themes. First, I examined biblical examples of the use of narrative in preaching and theological instruction from the Old and New Testaments. Second, I studied core doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist church (including salvation, the state of the dead, the Sabbath, the heavenly sanctuary, and the pre-advent judgment) in relationship to the course of biblical history. Finally, I
studied the writings of Ellen G. White, who is recognized as having prophetic authority by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as to the legitimacy of narrative in preaching and to shed light on how the above doctrines relate to the course of biblical history.

I then reviewed current literature. This included books, articles, and dissertations on Seventh-day Adventist theology, narrative preaching, and youth ministry.

Participants were sought to answer surveys and take part in group interviews. I developed and implemented appropriate consent forms for the participants. I then developed a survey and implemented it two months before the sermon series. The survey measured student understanding of, and attitude towards, Seventh-day Adventist theology. I delivered the sermon series, which included seven sermons, during the course of a week of prayer at Parkview Adventist Academy, between April 12 and 17, 2010.

I invited my senior pastor, Ron Sydenham, to serve as a mentor to the sermon series. He evaluated each sermon and gave feedback prior to presentation. He also attended the Week of Prayer and gave a post-reflection of the series.

Group interviews took place the week after the sermon series. Defined questions were used to elicit the response of students to the presenter’s use of narrative sermons, and the effectiveness of narrative preaching to convey Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.

Approximately two months after the series was completed a second survey was implemented for comparison data from the first survey. Surveys results were tabulated and evaluated. Based on these results I have drawn conclusions and made recommendations in chapter five of this dissertation.
CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The task of this project involved preaching doctrinal truths. Students may be familiar with Seventh-day Adventist doctrines, but knowledge does not necessarily encourage faith or faithfulness. Doctrine must be presented in a way that encourages students to grasp its significance and to affect their thinking in the future. How could I present Seventh-day Adventist doctrine so that students would understand the centrality of Christ to those doctrines and recognize His importance for their daily lives?

I propose that doctrine is revealed through the story of God’s activity in Earth’s history, as found in the Bible, and is best understood in the context of that story. Although biblical truth is presented in poetry, wisdom literature, epistles, and many other literary genres, the Bible does present truth through narrative. There is a biblical precedent for preaching propositional truth in a narrative form. This is evident in the Old Testament in the relationship between covenant and narrative, and in the prophets’ use of narrative to influence the understanding and actions of their hearers. The New Testament blends doctrine and narrative in telling the gospel story and presenting Christian symbols, including the Lord’s supper. The preaching of New Testament characters sets a precedent for contemporary narrative sermons.
The Purpose of Narrative in the Old Testament

The Old Testament employs narrative on a corporate and personal level. On the corporate level, every prophet since Moses has spoken from the perspective of God’s actions in the past and pointed towards God’s future actions against, or on behalf of, Israel. At times prophets have used stories to address the wrongs of individuals. These stories, on both levels, were meant to teach the mind and reach the heart.

Covenant and Narrative

Some have argued (L. Christian Hall, 2002; Nabil Samara, 2007) that narrative is central to understanding the core of God’s covenant with Israel. In fact, narrative and covenant blend together in the Pentateuch. Moses prefaced the command to keep the words of the covenant in Deut 29:9 with a seven verse recitation of their collective story. He then projected a possible future for those who disobeyed the covenant (vv. 19-24). When the nations would question why this had happened to that land, the answer would be a story. A story of how the LORD sought to bless Israel and how they followed other gods and idols instead (vv. 26-28).

It was in remembering this story, the story of God’s faithfulness and Israel’s unfaithfulness, that a future generation, banished and dispersed to many nations, would turn their hearts to God and be restored and blessed (Deut 30:1-5). However, the ultimate purpose of recalling narrative is that they would “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,” (Deut 30:6b)¹. Narrative does what law alone cannot. It

¹ All scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.
conveys intentions and emotions. This can take time. Only after hundreds of years of God’s story with Israel would they look back and finally begin to trust and love the God who made the covenant. This did not excuse the Israelites of Moses’ day. It was the story of their deliverance from Egypt and guidance through the desert that God appealed to as the basis of His right to make a covenant.

Both the preface to the Ten Commandments and the body of the Sabbath commandment look to narrative for authority. In the Exodus account of the giving of the Ten Commandments, the congregation of Israel heard the voice of God. As a preamble to His law He reminded them that He was the One “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exod 20:2). On the basis of the Exodus narrative God claimed the right to give laws. But He did not limit His authority to that act. The reason given for the Sabbath commandment recalled the creation narrative of Genesis one, “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exod 20:11). God’s role as Creator and Deliverer from Egypt gave Him authoritative standing to make a covenant and dictate laws.

When Moses recited God’s law to the congregation in Deuteronomy, he added to, and altered it to focus on their narrative.

The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today. The LORD spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain. He said, 'I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Deut 5:2-6).
Again, Moses prefaced a covenant term with narrative: specifically the history of Israel’s journey from Egypt. He highlighted this further in his recitation of the Sabbath commandment. Instead of the creation narrative, he told them to remember their release from slavery every seventh day. “You shall remember (zakar) that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (Deut 5:15). The command to zakar pointed to the why of the commandment, it spoke to motivation.

This remembrance of deliverance was crucial to the Decalogue. M.G. Kline (1963) argues that the Ten Commandments and the book of Deuteronomy took the form of a suzerainty treaty common to the ancient near east. The treaty pattern contained a preamble that identified the suzerain (the superior party in the treaty) as well as some description of previous interactions between the parties (pp. 14, 28).2 These necessarily connected the stories of the parties with the covenant itself. The shared history had to be remembered.

But the force of the word zakar, “remember,” cannot be fully understood except in relationship with shakach, “to forget.” The verb shakach usually described a memory lapse, as in the case of the chief butler forgetting Joseph (Gen 40:23). However, it was used even when there was not a lapse in memory, but rather that the memory had no impact on decisions, actions, or behaviors. In the case of Joseph, the coming famine would not remove the memory of the years of plenty, those good times would simply have no impact during the hard times to follow. In this way “all the abundance will be

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2 Scholars note that God presents covenants in the Old Testament in other terms as well, including father-son, and husband-wife language.
forgotten in the land of Egypt” (Gen 41:30). In this relationship, to remember was to pay attention to; and to forget was to neglect to pay attention to. In this way the psalmist spoke of God remembering and forgetting. For God to remember would be very good (Ps 9:12) and to forget could cause great difficulties (Ps 13:1). Though there may be times the psalmist wanted God to forget (Ps 25:7), this was never true of His covenant with Israel. It was crucial to the covenant that both parties kept the covenant in mind in all their activities, words, and transactions.

One of the covenant stipulations was that Israel “remember” their history. In Deut 4:9-10 Moses commanded them not to forget what they had seen, but instead of telling them to remember (zakar), he equated remembering with keeping their history with God in their souls (nephesh) and hearts (lebab). This was the language of the inner life. Then he commanded them to pass this inner life on to their children.³

This command was reiterated in Deut 11, which explained how successive generations would receive the covenant; they were taught the covenant. No formal school is pictured here.

"You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall teach (lamad) them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut 11:18-20).

³ Deut 4:9-10 “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul (nephesh) diligently, so that you do not forget (shakach) the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart (lebab) all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’”
This command has resulted in the use of phylacteries today, which contain strips of parchment with three portions of the Torah written on them; Exod 13:1-16, Deut 6:4-9, and 11: 13-21. Not only do these texts command the Israelites to teach, but in the text in Exod 13 and Deut 11, they do so in the context of the Exodus narrative and God’s preferred narrative for Israel’s future. In 2007 Nabil Samara noted, “The purpose of this recitation was to teach the people, as well as the children of Israel in future generations, the story of God with Israel and the laws given to them” (p. 21). This learning was to be a life of constant lesson and story. Stories would give context to the lesson and convey the emotional side of the teaching. In this way the covenant would reach the inner person, the heart and soul.

This lamad, “teaching,” is either the sharing of knowledge or the sharing of experience (Judg 3:2). Though contemporary culture makes a distinction between teaching and story-telling (such as movies and television), the shared experience inherent in the transmission of the story is very similar to that envisioned in the deuteronomical command. Even the king was to be taught (lamad) daily from his own personal copy of the terms of the covenant,⁴ in order to set his rule in the historical context of God’s activity for Israel.

God’s covenant is incoherent if separated from the salvation narratives. At the same time, those narratives were powerless as simple stories. Until the story was experienced and became part of the inner life of the hearer the lesson did not stick. It seems the covenant teachings and stories proved difficult to pass on to each generation⁵

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⁴ See Deut 17:18-19.
⁵ See Judg 2:10.
as is evidenced by the history of Israel’s lapses into idolatry from Moses’ time until the Babylonian captivity. The Israelite’s failure to recount these narratives may have been partly responsible for these lapses.6

Stories Connected to Covenant Celebrations

Every male adult Israelite was required to go to the tabernacle/temple three times a year. The three feasts; Passover, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Booths shared at least one common purpose: the retelling of the stories of Israel. It seems that each of these celebrations helped to remind Israel of their national narrative.

Passover (Pesach) and Unleavened Bread (Hag Hamatzot)

The reason for celebrating Passover is given in Deut 16:1-3, that Israel would remember where they came from. Part of this remembrance had to do with the continual teaching of the children. One of the reasons for the continued observance of the Passover feast was that it would stimulate children’s questions. To the question, “What do you mean by this service?” the parents would have opportunity to tell the story of Passover every year to their children (Exod 12:26).

Festival of Weeks (Hag Hashavuot)

Though this festival is not mentioned in the Pentateuch, later Jews believed the 50 days of the festival represented the 50 days between Israel’s passage through the Red Sea and

6 As evidenced by a lack of knowledge of the covenant (Judg 21:25), and the temporary absence of the Pentateuch from public teaching (2 Chr 34:14).
the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai. As such, this period was to be a reminder of that journey.

**Festival of Booths**

In the same way, the Festival of Booths intended remembrance of that desert journey “so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (Lev 23:43) And every seven years this festival took on an added significance. Deuteronomy 31 indicates that it was at the Festival of Booths that the release of debts was to take place every seven years. On this special occasion, “when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing” (Deut 31:11). This recitation was to include every Israelite, regardless of gender or age, as well as any foreigners living within the land of Israel.

In addition to the three temple feasts, the Festival of Firstfruits (Yom Habikkurim) gave a strong reminder to each participant as to why they were presenting their first fruits to the LORD. They were called on to recite the narrative of God’s salvific work.

You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O LORD have given me.” And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God (Deut 26:5-10).

If these festivals had been celebrated faithfully, they would have served to check Israel’s rebellion against God during times of national apostasy. It suggests that when people forget the lessons of the past, they repeat the same mistakes in the future.

The Prophets and Narrative

Prophets used stories to teach and to remove the defenses of their hearers and reach their hearts. These examples demonstrate how narrative can remove barriers and convey important doctrines. Two come from the book of 2 Samuel and one from Ezekiel. These narratives not only related a theological idea, but they were meant to influence the understanding and action of their hearers.

2 Samuel 12:1-10

This use of narrative by Nathan takes place after David killed Uriah and took Bathsheba to be his wife. There is little doubt that David knew what he did was wrong. But his actions demonstrated a blatant disregard for right and wrong. The Lord then sent Nathan to confront David. Nathan did not need to inform David that he had broken God’s law, David already knew the law. Instead Nathan told the following story.

Two men lived in a city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had fields full of sheep and cattle. The poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb that he had raised in his own home. It played with his children, ate his food, drank from his cup, and cuddled beside him at night; it was like a daughter to him. One night a traveler stopped at the rich man’s house and instead of cooking one of his many sheep for the man he took the poor man’s lamb and cooked it for the traveler.
David responded angrily, “‘As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.’ Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’” (2 Sam 12:1, NKJV).

This portrays the power of narrative to illicit a response before the audience realizes their place in the story. This allows the audience to connect their sympathies with a person or idea they would not normally be sympathetic to. While it is possible that David would have confessed his sin if Nathan had simply confronted him with it, the prophet chose to tell a story and allow David to confront himself.

2 Samuel 14:1-21

The second narrative also involves the second monarch of Israel and is found in 2 Samuel fourteen. David had banished Absalom for killing his half-brother Amnon. Joab could tell that David was broken hearted over banishing Absalom but knew that he could not convince David to bring Absalom home. So Joab brought a wise woman from Tekoa and told her to tell David a false story. She went into David and told him she was a widow and that one of her sons had killed the other and now the family was trying to kill that son, her last. She asked the king to protect her son. When he promised to look after the situation she pressed him further. He promised his personal protection but still she pressed him until he finally said, “As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground” (2 Sam 14:11).
The king was able to discern that in this case what the law required would not be just for this “widow.” He made judgment that, for the parent’s sake, the child should not be harmed. As soon as he committed to this judgment the woman spoke again.

"Why then have you schemed such a thing against the people of God? For the king speaks this thing as one who is guilty, in that the king does not bring his banished one home again” (2 Sam 14:13).

The narrative allowed David to consider his own case in a detached manner and to come to a conclusion he would not have reached otherwise. The story changed perspective “in order to change the appearance of things” (2 Sam 14:20). Narrative creates emotional distance for the listener to re-evaluate strongly held beliefs.

**Ezekiel 16:1-63**

In the third narrative, God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel and told him to tell Jerusalem that their unfaithfulness to Him was spiritual adultery and that God would execute judgment on them. The prophet was not only to tell them this truth, but to “cause Jerusalem to know her abominations” (Ezek 16:2b). To help them understand this truth it was presented in story form.

The story was graphic, disturbing, and compelling. Ezekiel told of a child, abandoned at birth, that God found kicking in her own blood. He willed her to live, so He cleaned the child, sheltered and clothed her, and raised her as his own. Later, he passed by and saw that she had grown into a beautiful woman, so He married her and lavished His love and many gifts on her. However, she was unfaithful to Him, sought other lovers and even used His gifts as payment to her lovers. She bore Him children but then offered them as sacrifices to other gods. The story was designed to evoke outrage at
her actions. Then Ezekiel explained that Jerusalem, and its inhabitants, was the woman. Then he pronounced judgment on the city. “Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers . . . and because of the blood of your children which you gave to them.” Ezekiel casted the actions of Judah in the terms of the story, “I will judge you as women who break wedlock or shed blood are judged; I will bring blood upon you in fury and jealousy” (Ezek 16:36-38).

The people of Jerusalem knew of the LORD, their city housed His temple, they knew of His mighty acts on behalf of Israel and Judah, and they knew His law. However, knowledge alone may be insufficient to engender faith and obedience. I may become comfortable with contradictions between what I espouse and how I live. This created a scene that cast the subject in different terms. Though the people of Jerusalem had become comfortable with worshipping other gods, they could recognize the evil this woman committed and judge her for it, thus judging themselves.

**The Purpose of Narrative in the New Testament**

Narrative and doctrine are not distinct in the New Testament. Though the epistles take a more propositional approach than the Gospels and Acts, the New Testament writers often blended doctrine into their narratives and vice-a-versa. L. Christian Hall (2002) notes that “the historical narrative forms the basis of Luke’s theology” (p. 31). In fact, the term “Gospel” itself suggests a story, and the symbols and teachings of the New Testament writers were grounded in the remembrance of that story.

The Gospel Story
The central purpose of the New Testament is to proclaim and explain the *euaggelion*. This is a message of good news to be proclaimed. More specifically it describes the “content of the message as an offer of salvation” (Friberg, 1998, *euaggelion* entry). The *euaggelion* is not just a story, it is the truth of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ. But it cannot be divorced from the story of Jesus.

The gospel writer Mark equated Jesus’ story with the gospel; “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). Matthew quoted Jesus as saying that the preaching of the gospel would include a telling of stories, and not just Jesus’ story, but also the stories of those who interacted with Him.\(^8\) Luke’s gospel was written with the stated purpose that the reader would gain security by the truthfulness of the story of the Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, “so that you may know the exact truth (*asphaleia*, or security and safety) about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4). This explains the conspicuous absence in the gospels of any at-length explanation of what the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection meant to believers. The gospel writers evidently felt that the story alone, with little added commentary, was powerful for salvation.

When the apostle Paul described the *euaggelion* in Rom 1:1-6, he explained it through the story of Old Testament\(^9\) prophets’ promise of the coming of Christ, His birth and resurrection from the dead by the Spirit, and that same Spirit’s work in the lives of all

\(^8\) Matt 26:13 “Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”

\(^9\) Readers of the gospels should recognize the importance of this context. “Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14, 15). This proclamation of time being fulfilled and the kingdom’s arrival means nothing without a background narrative, which is found in the Old Testament.
believers, including Gentiles. He went on to say that the euaggelion was the power of God through faith (vs. 16, 17). This faith was revealed in the story of God’s people, as the writer of Hebrews demonstrated in Hebrews, chapter eleven.

As Paul described the effect of the euaggelion he concluded that this story must be believed; and to be believed it must be heard; and to be heard it must be preached; and the preachers must be sent.\(^{10}\) So for Paul, gospel is the story of Jesus and His people, preached. And, according to Revelation, this preaching would not conclude until Christ’s return.\(^{11}\) The euaggelion is not a moral tale. Yet, it does force a distinction between those who believe and those who do not. Belief generates trust in the Christ of the gospel story. This trust does have moral consequences.

The Lord’s Supper

Jesus Himself was evidently aware of the importance of remembering the gospel story. Paul describes the initiation of the Lord’s Supper, “in the night in which He was betrayed [He] took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me’” (1 Cor 11:23,24). This remembrance was intended to be communal and audible, much in the same way the Old Testament festivals were to be celebrated as remembrances. Paul intended that this celebration would include the story of Jesus, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes” (1 Cor 11:26). Roy Oswold and Otto Kroeger (1988) note, “The Christian church is built upon remembrance. Its

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\(^{10}\) Rom 10:14-15.

\(^{11}\) Rev14:6.
effectiveness is directly dependent on its ability to be faithful to the history and tradition of Jesus. One of its primary tasks is to hand down the story and teachings of Jesus” (p. 103). The Lord’s Supper, from the earliest Christian practice, was important for that remembrance.

Preaching, Narratives, and Doctrine

Within the over-arching gospel purpose of the New Testament, narrative played a key role in presenting doctrinal truth. New Testament characters used narrative to encapsulate doctrine, to invite belief, and to confront the audience with their position in regard to truth. I have taken examples of these uses of narrative from the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament church. They include two of Jesus’ parables and Stephen’s defense before the Sanhedrin. The first parable, in Luke 10, was meant to surprise and influence his audience. The second two narratives do not seem to influence action so much as to create interest and present a theological defense, respectively.

Luke 10:25-37

The first story from the New Testament has to do with a theological question, one I am asked by students in various ways. What must one do to be saved? The answer to this is found in Luke 10, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and 'your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:27). Whereas my students would likely follow up with a question about how to love God, a lawyer questioned the second part of the salvation formula, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). Jesus responded by telling the story commonly called “the good Samaritan.” Thieves attacked a man, stripped him, beat him and left him for dead.
A priest and a Levite both came across the unfortunate victim but skirted the crime scene. Then a Samaritan, never a hero in any Jewish story, stopped, bandaged his wounds, put him on his donkey, took him to an inn, and paid the innkeeper to take care of him. Then Jesus asked the question, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:36-37).

The narrative did three things that a deductive approach could not accomplish. First, it presented the question from the viewpoint of someone in need of “neighboring.” This allowed the audience to answer the question themselves, as if they were the man in need. Second, it demonstrated what “love your neighbor as yourself” looks like. Third, after the lawyer had answered his own question, it gave Jesus the opportunity to exhort him to do the very thing he had agreed to.

There is a danger in presenting a story with this type of question at the end. I may think the answer is obvious, but what if the lawyer had responded with, “the Priest was his neighbor since he let him suffer and suffering brings you closer to God?” Hall (2002) argues that non-propositional preaching opens the door to a subjective interpretation of truth. Yet, it is important to note that this parable contained propositional truth. Only instead of telling the lawyer how to be saved, Jesus showed him. If the lawyer had answered incorrectly at the end of the story, Jesus could have clarified. Regardless, the propositional element of Jesus’ answer (Go and do likewise) was arrived at by means of a vivid narrative.

**Matthew 13:1-23**
The second New Testament example is the parable of the sower in Matthew thirteen. I include this parable because of Jesus’ explanation for why he used this and other parables. After Jesus told the crowd about a farmer sowing seeds, they evidently did not understand it. Even His disciples were confused about what it meant and why He did not speak plainly.

His disciples came and asked him, “Why do you always tell stories when you talk to the people?”

Then he explained to them, “You have been permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others have not. To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But to those who are not listening, even what they have will be taken away from them.” (Matt 13:11-13, NLT)

On the surface this may argue against the use of narrative in doctrinal instruction. Jesus’ parables were not clear. Jesus’ purposely hid the truth about the kingdom in His parables so that those who did not accept Him would not understand what He was saying. This was both a tool for dealing with the Pharisees, who were trying to kill Him, and an admission that not everyone would understand what He taught.

This approach is incongruent with the idea that I must make everyone understand, that truth should be made as clear as possible. According to Jesus some people will fall on the footpath, “those who hear the Good News about the Kingdom and don't understand it” (Matt 13:19 NLT). When I use narrative there will be some in the congregation that think in very concrete and linear terms. They want truth to be clean, precise, and pure. They may resist any discussion of doctrine that does not involve logical deduction.
But this should not be a deterrent for preaching narrative sermons. Narrative sermons do not coerce the listener by presenting overwhelming evidence to prove a proposition. William Bausch (1984) suggests that this is risky and rewarding.

The use of parable is automatically an invitation to the listener’s involvement and response. Of course, any man or woman may listen and willfully not understand – Matthew nods to that (13:13-15) – but that’s the risk. But on the other hand, the listener may be caught. He or she may ruminate and respond to his or her grace within the story (p. 118).

This “rumination” gives staying power to a sermon. It welcomes the listener to dwell on the themes presented. Narrative invites belief, not based on proof, but rather based on the truth of the Bible story and comparison between that story and the life of the listener.

Acts 6:11-7:60

The final narrative I will discuss is a narrative sermon from the book of Acts. One of the first deacons, Stephen, was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin on charges of speaking against the temple and against the Law of Moses. When asked to answer these charges, Stephen began what, at first, may seem like a simple retelling of Israel’s history. Yet he carefully crafted the narrative to make two points.

First, Israel had a history of rejecting those God had chosen to save them. The stories of Joseph and Moses (Acts 7:9,35) illustrated that God used outcasts to save His people. This prefigured what Jesus would do and how the Israelites would treat Him. “Moses himself told the people of Israel, ‘God will raise up a Prophet like me from among your own people’” (Acts 7:37 NLT).

Second, even though God told Moses how to build the tabernacle, “the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands” (Acts 7:48 NLT). Stephen recounted the stories of Aaron and the golden calf, Joshua’s conquest of Canaan, David’s desire to
build a temple, and Solomon’s completion of it. He then quoted Isaiah “Heaven is My
throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will you build for Me?”
(Isa 66:1) Stephen had set the stage to bring home his points; that speaking against God
is worse than speaking against the temple and that killing prophets is against the Law of
Moses.

The Jews revered the stories of Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David, and
Solomon. They would have acknowledged these stories as true and would have agreed
with what Stephen said about them, until he came to his conclusion.

You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you
forever resist the Holy Spirit? But your ancestors did, and so do you! Name one
prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted
the coming of the Righteous One-- the Messiah whom you betrayed and
murdered. (Acts 7:51-52 NLT)

Stephen allowed the rulers to condemn those who acted against their heroes of the
faith and then he turned the tables on them by telling them their place in the stories. The
purpose of narrative is not necessarily to teach something new. Its aim is not to convince
the intellect, but rather to convict the heart about the truth of the doctrine. Stephen’s
narrative was designed to pierce the conscience of these leaders. He did it so well that
“they were cut to the quick” (Acts 7:54) and immediately killed him.

**Conclusion**

The biblical examples above lend support to a narrative approach to preaching
today for the following reasons: First, narrative discloses our identity in relation to God
and truth. Second, narratives give the audience new perspective to consider moral and
theological questions. Third, narrative appeals to the emotions as well as to the intellect.
Fourth, the truthfulness of a position becomes self-evident through narrative, without the
need for proving the position. Finally, narrative requires discernment on the part of the hearer and calls for action once the truth is understood.

Before moving on from this discussion of narrative in scripture I must be careful that I do not miss the forest for the trees. I have mentioned some examples of the theological use of narrative but I must not miss the fact that the whole of salvation history is wrapped up in a complex narrative plot that spans both Testaments. As Oscar Cullman (1962) points out, clues laid down in the Old Testament make sense in the light of the New Testament but also shed their own light on that Testament. “The death and resurrection of Christ enable the believer to see in the history of Adam and in the history of Israel the preparation for Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One. But only the thus understood history of Adam and the thus understood history of Israel enable the believer to grasp the work of Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One, in connection with the divine plan of salvation” (p. 137). This salvation narrative, sometimes referred to as a metanarrative, contains within it the stories of numerous individuals. Therefore, as I examine the individual narratives of scripture for theological important, I must keep in mind how that narrative instructs our understanding of the great narrative plot of salvation.
CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Narrative preaching, in a Caucasian preaching context, was popularized in the early 1980’s by Eugene Lowry following the publication of his book *The Homiletical Plot*. While it certainly has its detractors, narrative preaching has spread rapidly. Its purveyors have brought many cross-discipline concepts to bear on our concept of the sermon, its purposes and effects.

For my purposes, some questions remain. Are narrative sermons well suited for exploring Seventh-day Adventist doctrine? Are they effective in speaking to academically-aged students? What shape should those sermons take?

To answer these questions I reviewed preachers, homileticians, theologians and sociologists, who have addressed some aspect of narratives, preaching, and youth since the turn of the century. I also included some important works from the 19th and 20th centuries. I pursued a working definition of narrative preaching, and engaged the current discussion on why narrative preaching is, or is not, a valid approach to preaching. This discussion included what should make up the content of narrative preaching. I approached narrative preaching from what may be its weak side, its ability to teach doctrine and present propositional truth. However, this weakness may have an opposite strength in its relevance to the lives of young people. Finally, I invited the writings of
Ellen White, whom Seventh-day Adventists recognize as having a prophetic ministry, to speak to the purpose and shape of preaching to Adventist young people.

**What is Narrative Preaching?**

Many people have set out to define narrative preaching. The result is as many definitions of preaching as there are books and articles defining it. The space permitted for this paper does not allow definitive coverage here. A broad overview, with special attention paid to the definition I will use, will suffice.

A renewed interest in preaching began in the last half of the 20th Century. Called the “new homiletic,” it explored preaching from sociological, phenomenological, literary, and various other perspectives and disciplines. Within this movement induction and narrative preaching were significant focuses, however Keith Edwards (2000) reminds us that this is no new homiletic. Rather it is “as old as oral tradition itself” (p. 59). Haddon Robinson (1980) points to examples of both inductive and deductive preaching in the New Testament. He references Peter’s Pentecost sermon as an example of inductive preaching and Paul’s sermon in Acts 13 as an example of deductive preaching. He believes that Paul’s sermon to the elders in Ephesus was a mix of both methods. Robinson argues that inductive preaching (including narrative inductive preaching) should, among other things, be biblical preaching.

All proponents of a narrative approach do not share this emphasis on the central role of scripture. Fred B. Craddock (1986) separates the stories of scripture from actual historical events. He places the value of the story within its meaning in a community. This placement facilitates the shaping of the story to the preacher’s context while removing any need for historicity.
Robinson’s and Craddock’s divergent concepts of narrative preaching expose the flexibility of any type or style of preaching. No sermon structure demands faithfulness to the stories, teachings, and thoughts of the Bible. A deductive sermon is no more prone to biblical accuracy than an inductive sermon.

Though the term “narrative” immediately brings to mind the stories of scripture, narrative preaching does not necessarily preach story. Joe Sukkyun Kwon (2001) differentiates between narrative content and narrative form. He defines narrative as Eugene Lowry’s event-in-time; in other words that the sermon itself has a tale to tell (p. 12). Kendra Nolde (2001) points out the over-arching definition of a narrative sermon: that it moves in plot form and that the preacher’s meaning is delayed. The sermon is not defined as narrative by whether or not it contains stories and illustrations, though these can effectively exist in a narrative sermon, rather, as Eugene Lowry (2001) describes it, that both the preparation and presentation of the sermon revolves around plot.

I define narrative preaching in this study as having both a narrative structure, very similar to Lowry’s plot structure, and significant narrative content. I place a high value on scripture and agree with Robinson’s concern that all preaching be biblical. Each sermon was drawn from a Biblical narrative.

**Why Narrative Preaching?**

The arguments for narrative preaching follow three lines of thought. First, that since stories comprise the majority, though not all, of scripture, I can claim narrative as a primary language of scripture. Second, narrative is the best vehicle to convey ideas, relationships, and emotions with more than just information. Third, narrative best speaks
to an emerging aural/oral culture. These suggest that narrative preaching requires serious consideration.

Narrative the Language of Scripture

I demonstrated in chapter two that much of scripture is narrative. Yet does the narrative nature of scripture compel narrative preaching? Eric Garnes (2004) sees narrative preaching as unavoidable for every sermon since the Bible is a story. However, not all of scripture is narrative in form and it is certainly possible to avoid any narrative characteristics in a sermon. Even when preaching from a narrative text, preachers can and do preach deductive, non-plot, non-narrative sermons. Warren Wiersbe (1994) claims that, “To preach biblically means much more than to preach the truth of the Bible accurately. It also means to present that truth the way the biblical writers and speakers presented it” (pp. 304-305). Though his is a narrow definition of biblical preaching, it is representative of the homiletical attitude of literary critics.

Others deny that genre is of primary concern when preaching. L. Christian Hall (2002) places the narrative approach to preaching over against the grammitico-historical approach to biblical interpretation. This unnecessarily links literary criticism, narrative theology and narrative preaching. He may well argue for grammitico-historical interpretation over literary-critical or historical-critical interpretations, but that does not address the homiletical form of preaching. However I interpret scripture, I may still choose a narrative homiletical form. Hall admits that literary form is one of the pieces of the puzzle but he disagrees that it the most important piece.
However, the biblical evidence discussed in chapter two advocates the use of narrative in preaching. Nabil Elia Samara (2007) argues that narrative, and the telling of stories, is the very foundation of scripture. The covenant command in Deuteronomy to recite the story of God’s deliverance taught “the people, as well as the children of Israel in future generations, the story of God with Israel and the laws given to them” (p. 21). The covenant required that the story be told and retold in every generation. The rest of scripture continues this story tradition, through the history of Israel and the early Christian church. This is a significant precedent to emphasize Biblical narrative in preaching.

Narrative Communicates on Many Levels

Narrative is well suited to speak to emotional and relational receptors as well as the intellectual, logical part of our minds. Jonah Lehrer (2009) demonstrates that our decisions, far from being rational endeavors, are influenced by complex interactions between rational and emotional cortexes of the brain. James Gillman (1994) establishes a credible link between narratives and emotions and shows how both work together to influence believers as well as those who are undecided.

The longer this is retained in the hearer’s consciousness, the greater the impact. Here again, the narrative vehicle shows endurance. Edwards (2000) argues that preaching narratives as story not only captures the attention of the congregation, but also facilitates greater retention of the sermon in their memories. He points out that this impact is best when the sermon is told as a story as opposed to having propositional elements to it. No surprise, as David Buttrick (1987) suggests “Storytelling is much more than an innocent diversion, because stories join together to tell us who we are and where.
All of us have a storied identity” (p. 11). Stories are powerful because they are part of us. Malcolm Gladwell (2002) describes the limitations of early Sesame Street programming. They chose a decidedly non-narrative format. Instead, each of their sketches had a separate point and were unconnected to each other. Gladwell quotes psychologist Jerome Bruner as saying that when children “try to make sense of their life they use the storied version of their experience as the basis for further reflection. If they don’t catch something in a narrative structure, it doesn’t get remembered very well, and it doesn’t seem to be accessible for further kinds of mulling over” (p. 118). Stories have sticking power.

In fact, narratives may remain in the congregation’s memory sufficiently to connect the narratives of multiple sermons in a series. Todd Buurstra (2005) suggests biblical narratives interact with one another and he argues that the first narrative in a series can be instrumental as the background on which to develop and understand the narratives that follow. This may also be true of narrative sermon series. My project takes this into consideration and I will consider the role of the opening sermon of the series in detail later.

However, the benefit of this long-term remembering is determined by the strength of the story (and the storyteller) and its ability to encapsulate truth. Edwards (2000) recognizes that story sermons are limited in this purpose and that at times propositional sermons better achieve the purpose of the preacher, even for narrative texts. There is an important quality issue here. An excellent story, well designed to convey the intended truth, can be very powerful. Certainly many of our attempts at narrative fall short of the excellent category.
That being said, the rewards are worth the risk. Narrative not only allows a fuller experience of truth in the present, but also the ability to envision a preferred future. Elizabeth Anne Farly-Parker (2005) notes that narrative allows the listeners to see themselves possessing the virtues of the characters in the story and to then work towards realizing those virtues in their own lives. Exhorting a congregation to live better has no staying power once they leave their pew. Annice Barber (2001) suggests that we cannot draw a distinction between narratives and theological ideas and moral stances since our very existence takes place in narrative form. The all-pervasive nature of narrative causes it to necessarily impact our beliefs. Until they make a change in the narrative of their life, their morality will likely be unaffected.

Narrative Preaching and Oral Culture

Some (Jarrett, 2008; Wells & Luter, 2002) have suggested that recent trends in culture mirror the cultural scene of first-century Palestine and that New Testament preaching (like that discussed in chapter two) is gaining relevance. Kendra Nolde (2001) compares pre-literate (oral-aural) culture with the recent shift to a post-literate (electronic) culture. Narratives lost importance with the emergence of literature as the dominant medium of communication. We think differently about what we read than about what we hear. The re-emergence of narrative as a significant medium in radio, television and the Internet has changed how we experience the world.

Though technology plays a major role in this shift, it is producing a context closer to the New Testament writers’ perspective. C. Richard Wells & A. Boyd Luter (2002) and Fred B. Craddock (1986) argue for an oral origin for the majority of New Testament texts, regardless of genre. This has significant implications for preaching as narrative
since they suggest that the gospel writers put down on paper the content of their sermons (or sermons they had heard numerous times) about Christ’s life, work, and teachings. This moves the gospels away from the problematic classification of biographical/historical works and closer to a homiletical classification. Craddock notes that this tradition fell prey to a change in culture from oral to literal which altered our understanding of scripture as fixed. This now faces the shift from literal back to oral awareness in culture (p. 10). Nolde (2001) argues that preachers trained to preach to a literate culture are ill-equipped to reach a post-literate culture that thinks in narratives. (pp. 45-51)

On the other hand, a study of traditional oral culture suggests there are limits for narrative preaching, even in an oral culture. Peter W. Kinuthia (2004) sees a benefit of narrative sermons to be that anyone can readily understand the narrative, as long as it is crafted in terms of the larger culture (p. 61). The narrative form, then, must be recognizable and familiar to the congregation. The danger, as notes Kinuthia, is that the preacher may place form over clarity of truth, thus inviting hearers to make their own conclusions over against the teaching of scripture. He cautions against too much narrative preaching by making the argument that this preaching form does not lend itself to teaching (p. 64).\(^\text{12}\)

Kinuthia’s (2004) concerns notwithstanding, narrative preaching is relevant beyond its role in reaching an oral culture. William Ray Jarret (2008) suggests that the answer to the post-modern disgust with meta-narrative is to present Christianity in terms of narratives. These include not only narratives from scripture but also the narratives of

\(^{12}\) This is an argument I will address later in this dissertation.
the Christian community itself. Until people are brought into the community’s story line, and can identify themselves within that story, the truthfulness of the story is mostly irrelevant. Jarret sees a similarity between today’s culture and the culture of the Ancient Near East in New Testament times. He argues that a model of narrative preaching exists in the New Testament that would speak to disbelievers today (p. 34, 35), not only because of its narrative qualities but because it tells of community.

It is evident that narrative is powerful to speak to a generation that has lost interest in preaching. Even though it seems able to convey gospel truth, can narrative (1) support discipleship growth and (2) teach doctrine? This project will attempt to answer the second question.

Limitations of Narrative Preaching

The first question is beyond the scope of this study. However, Marshall MacClellan (1999) observes that preaching is limited in its ability to disciple believers. His study of the impact of narrative preaching on the spiritual lives of his congregation showed that it “brings people to repentance, sparks conviction and conversion, fosters growth, and inspires action” (abstract), but that this is a short term response and must be combined with a disciple building ministry. His study did indicate an increase in general awareness of sin in relationship to God as a result of narrative preaching, which may lead to long term spiritual growth as the “false sense of security” (p. 90) gives way to a true change of heart towards God. Preachers must not miss this point. Preaching, including narrative preaching is only one part of gospel ministry. It can, and should, positively impact all other areas of ministry, but preaching alone does not make disciples.
Stories can weaken sermons. Poorly written narrative sermons have led some authors and preachers to avoid them. In 2004, Eric Garnes summed up this problematic approach to narrative preaching:

> When we preach a narrative passage, we also have a lesser obligation to cite precise verses that support our statements. . . . The goal of storytelling is designed to simply support our statements in a mild manner to the congregants. Whether sight, memory or a dramatized act of the story, the text must confirm our words and we must reach our goal (p. 126).

This type of narrative preaching builds the message from the ideas of the preacher instead of from biblical thought. While this may be very interesting to the congregation it can fall short of Gospel preaching. Mark Elliot (2000) warns against the use of narrative since “narrative preaching, while full of good intentions, overemphasizes the human ‘story’ at the cost of the ‘story’ of Jesus Christ” (p. 2). Un-biblical narrative sermons give Elliot good reason to say so. Bryan Chapell (2005) cautions that non-traditional sermon structures emphasize the sermon experience over “biblical truth” (p. 135).

Responsible narrative preaching, then, requires thorough exegesis and a focus on biblical truth. The preacher must seek to understand the story on its own terms, in its overall context in scripture, before deciding what his or her sermonic goals should be.

**Content of Narrative Sermons**

If I preach from the narratives of scripture, which narratives should I preach? James Thompson (2001) believes that most churchgoers are unfamiliar with Bible stories. However, those raised in churches with active classes for children will be very familiar with a certain set of Bible stories; especially those stories that have an easily identifiable moral lesson. I would argue that morality is not the purpose of most biblical stories and should not be the purpose of our preaching. Rather our morality is determined by our
identity. Thomas Daniel (2006) contends that neither the church, nor Christians, nor religion can give true identity apart from the story of Jesus Christ; especially the story of an executed man coming back to life and the stories of those people whose lives’ were transformed by His story. I would also include the stories of those people in the Old Testament who prefigured and foreshadowed Jesus’ story. This makes all of the narratives of both Old and New Testaments available for narrative sermon material.

However, a cursory reading of the book of Judges gives us reason to pause before including too many Old Testament stories in our sermons. Church is no place to recount the violence, death, sex, and general immorality pictured vividly in a large number of these stories. However, Hillary Chute (2006) challenges our culturally acceptable silence about gruesome historical events. She shows how authors of graphic narratives have recently portrayed extreme trauma and death while neither glorifying nor turning away from the atrocities of the past. The graphic nature of both mode and subject matter give weight to the exploration of meaning in the narrative and serve as a platform for political statement. As it relates to the retelling of disturbing biblical narratives, Chute’s analysis and conclusions give greater latitude for honest descriptions of injury and death within the narratives.

That being said, I am responsible for what I preach on, and more importantly, how I tell stories. Buttrick (1987) cautions, “Designing a plot is an act of interpretation and, therefore, involves a particular reading of meanings, values, causalities, and so forth” (p. 10). Our purpose should not be to lionize the gruesome sins of biblical characters or glorify their heroic acts. Rather we tell stories, wonderful stories and horrible stories, for the purpose of knowing God. I believe the character of God shines
brightest in the darkest stories of scripture and the darkest moments of our lives. As William H. Willimon (2002) said, “Our task is to preach what seems like bad news as, in truth, good news” (p. 48).

For people who are unfamiliar with biblical narratives, our narratives should begin with the stories of Jesus found in the gospel. Until they know His story, they may misinterpret other Bible stories. But we also speak to those very familiar with Jesus’ story. We should not shy away from less-well-known, and troubling, narratives that also tell us about God.

**Narrative Preaching and Doctrine**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the arguments against narrative preaching is that it is a weak vehicle for teaching doctrines. Though narratives may well keep the congregation’s attention and remain in their memories, they should be limited in their use as they do not contribute to the theological and pedagogical aims of disciple-making. In order for this objection to be answered satisfactorily, I will have to demonstrate a model of narrative preaching that can and does teach doctrine.

I am encouraged in this process by the efforts of Jeffrey R. Maxwell (2000). He structures his narrative sermons to reach the different listeners in the audience. In so doing he modifies the sermonic plot to intentionally speak to listeners who listen for relevance, analytical thought, practicality, and implications for the future. The nature of narrative plot readily lends itself to this modification. Far from promoting individual values and relative truth, Maxwell found this form emphasizes the primacy of scripture. His sermon series on the Ten Commandments demonstrates that narrative sermons are able to convey analytical thought and propositional truth (p. 118-119).
Leighton Ford (2006) agrees that narrative can teach. In fact he does not view story as adding to the doctrinal teaching of evangelism, but rather as the heart of evangelism. In particular, he believes the story of the gospel changes lives. He points out that story came first and that doctrine came later. This suggests that story is not only useful but also necessary to understanding doctrine. That is the danger of relegating biblical stories to the role of moral illustrations. Sidney Greidanus (2008) points out biblical narratives are not moral tales nor should they be interpreted as such. The structure of the narratives of the Old Testament give direction to what lessons, or doctrines, should be taught from the stories.

Narrative and Doctrine in Scripture

To say that scripture uses narrative to convey theology is to miss the purpose of much of scripture. Vast sections of the Bible simply tell the stories of people with whom God interacted, whether that interaction was direct or through relationships and lineages. In response to a criticism for not demonstrating the use of story in the Bible, Ford (2006) said that “proving that the Bible teaches story is like trying to prove the air I breathe. The Bible is story, isn’t it? It is the story of God and God’s creation and redemption and his people” (p. 30). He claims that over half of the Bible is story and that the other parts of scripture can only be understood in relation to that story. Alister McGrath (1998) suggests this reflects a post-liberal emphasis on the experience of the faith community (p. 248).

In 2001, Marjorie Reeves claimed that “the Bible has been the main source of spiritual story throughout the Christian centuries . . . it was story rather than doctrine that nourished the spirituality of many generations because it fed the imagination. Story came
first; doctrine afterwards” (p. 84). Her high regard for story is admirable. While it is true that there is a primacy to story, Reeves’ claim that doctrine came afterwards suggests that doctrine is separate from story.

It was not usually the stated purpose of the Bible writers to convey theological treatises through the stories they told, though there are some exceptions – notably the gospels. However, the stories told, and how they were told, did convey meaning, shape belief, and recommend action. This morality, suggests Barber (2001), is part of every story. “Stories are central to human experience and, as such, are key in building a moral self. Morality, in fact, is a central aspect of all narrative. Since narratives deal with morality, every narrative inescapably takes a moral stance” (p. 211). So I find that in reading Bible stories my theology will be shaped by, and have to come to terms with, the stories I encounter.

**Narrative Preaching and Young People**

Perhaps the only biblical story that relates preaching directly to young people is the story of Eutychus in Acts 20:7-12. Anna Carter Florence (2007) suggests, tongue-in-cheek, that “this is the first recorded incident in the recorded history of the Christian church in which a young person is literally bored to death by preaching” (p. 234). She sees this story as descriptive of the current situation in many churches where “preaching can marginalize and even anesthetize youth to the power of the sermon event” (p. 234).

This can have disastrous results since young people seek identity in the church. Doug Fields and Duffy Robbins (2007) see this search for identity as one of the “big questions” to be addressed when speaking to youth (p. 65). If they are unable to find that meaning in the church they will shift their efforts elsewhere. Daniel (2006) recognizes
this quest for meaning among young people. He argues that Christianity is ideally suited
to answer their thirst for identity and meaning, since the quest alone cannot give meaning
apart from something larger that captures us and propels our life towards something, or
Someone. It is easy for mature clergy and church members to overlook this need in
young people since they found identity and meaning long ago.

Preaching to young people is not all that different than preaching to older
congregations. Fields and Robbins note five hurdles a sermon must clear in order to
transform the listeners, young or old. The listener must pay attention to the message,
comprehend it, believe it, remember it, and behave accordingly. These obstacles are not
necessarily harder for youth to clear. The main difference is that youth usually let you
know in subtle and not so subtle ways if you have lost their attention. They also have
fewer preconceptions about the shape of a sermon. So in some ways preaching to young
people has advantages.

One advantage is that young people are less confused about their culture, they are
postmodern, then their parents, who are also postmodern. Craig Loscalzo (2000) points
out that whether we like it or not “we, the church, are part of the postmodern mindset” (p.
56). This means that there is a shift away from objective absolutes of previous
generations. “Postmodernism responds better to subjectivity than to objectivity.
Postmodern people crave stories – their story, your story, human interest stories” (p. 39).

This requires the pastor to know the stories of the young people they are speaking
to, or at least know the stories of similar young people. For anyone wanting to speak
well to young people preparation for the sermon begins in relationships. Mark Galli and
Craig Brian Larson (1994) describe this preparation for preaching as being “more
interested in people than in the subject” (p. 16). More recently, Shannon Johnson Kershner (2000) noted the obvious connection between the speaker’s relationship with young people and their interest in the speaker’s sermon. Youth are more receptive to the sermon when the preacher speaks as a colleague instead of an authority. This requires that the perspectives and stories of the youth be considered in the sermon. The preacher must also share her story, her struggles and misunderstandings, as one who, like the youth, does not always know the answer.

A disadvantage to speaking to young people is that they are less likely to give credibility to pastors just because of their position. They also do not see sermons as an essential piece of their lives. However, in 1993, Gerard Pottebaum argued that this does not negate the importance of preaching for young people. On the contrary, “homilists are significant members of the village that raises our children. We are the village storytellers. We guide the children’s reflections on what lies hidden in their experience – God’s active presence” (p. 120). Whether young people acknowledge it or not, they very much need preachers and sermons that connect their story with God’s story.

While Rodger Nishioka (2000) may be right that “good storytelling is good preaching” (p. 41), when preaching to young people, there is a danger in our role of village storytellers. Too many stories from the pulpit are little more than thinly veiled morality tales. Though moral tales have their place in the raising of children (Uncle Arthur’s Bedtime Stories has fulfilled this role for generations of Seventh-day Adventists), as children become teenagers they become wise to the coercion inherent in these stories. Moral examples invite moral speculation and Annice Barber (2007) warns
that “the more moral negotiation there is, the more fluid the moral stance, and vice versa” (p. 115).

Through her research in the dynamics of Christian youth groups Barber demonstrated that collated narratives are effective in guiding moral choice to the extent that the example’s actions (in this case Jesus or some other Bible character) and the youth’s actions are favorably compared. In other words, comparing what Jesus would do with what a young person would do only means something to those who have already chosen to act like Jesus. Moreover, assent to the “correct” choice of possible actions in a youth group setting may not mean there is any change in moral identity. Barber describes a young man’s change in answers after prodding by the youth group’s leader as displaying his “knowledge” of the correct answer, not as a change in moral choice (p. 117).

So how can narrative preaching bring together the gospel story and the stories of the audience? The narrative must be more than simply telling what someone did. It must allow the listener to experience life from that person’s perspective. Lyndol L. Loyd (2000) characterizes the current generation of young people as seeking relevance. They participate if it connects and not because they are supposed to participate. This is the natural result of the self being the main reference point for life. These young people see “the desires, wishes and wants of himself or herself as the defining filter for how decisions are made and truth is defined” (p. 68). His focus group responses demonstrate that the young people claim final authority over taste, ethics, and morality.

The use of narrative to involve them in someone else’s story may give them a chance to challenge their own ideas as they see a question from someone else’s
perspective. John Eldridge (2001) recognized God’s ability to use narrative in his own life, “In some ways God had to sneak up on me through those stories because I wasn’t willing to just skip happily down the path to my heart’s deepest pain” (p. 127). Effective narrative preaching fosters that experience and then draws a connection between the narrative and the real-life experiences, choices, and morality of the listener. This happens more naturally with narrative than with other forms of communication. Calvin Miller (2003) promotes the use of metaphor in sermons for this very reason. “Most people hear stories better than they hear megabytes of truth framed in point-driven logic. Perhaps this is why Jesus used them so often.” The example of Jesus’ use of story seems compelling. “Yet many preachers still seem addicted to a plodding, logic-driven methodology. Metaphor is often entirely missing from such sermons, yet every modern communications specialist agrees that we both ‘think and store’ in mental pictures” (p. 8).

Narrative not only bridges the gap between scripture truth and the listener’s life, but also facilitates a common experience between the preacher and audience as well as between the individuals in the audience; much like a movie provides commonality to the movie-goers. Miller notes, “here is the glory of preaching, particularly narrative preaching. It breaks down our separateness as the attention we give the sermon makes us one. . . . Open sermons create rapt attention and dissolve audience separation in intense rapport” (p. 106). If people experience the sermon rather than simply hear it, that experience becomes a shared experience and plays a part in the culture of the congregation a new experience leads to a change in culture. This is the very purpose of preaching. Graeme Goldsworthy (2000) suggests preaching fulfills a crucial role in the re-creation of people and communities according to God’s plan.
In the prophetic word of hope the theme emerges of the future saving work of God, which comes about actually through the proclamation of the word of God. This is not surprising given the function of the word of creation. Thus, as God created by his word, so he will also bring about a new creation by proclaimed word. The difference between the first and new creations is human mediation of the word in the latter” (p. 39).

The wise youth-speaker will recognize the power of preaching to satisfy the great craving of young people; community.

The use of a narrative can be very effective in capturing young people’s attention. More importantly, narrative can help them see how the gospel, even gospel truth that they have heard before and not seen as important, is the key that gives life rich meaning.

Edwards (2000) sees story as being the basic foundation block for understanding our lives.

“We make decisions on the basis of stories that are coherent and ‘ring true’ when tested against reality. We view the world as a set of stories we use to shape ourselves and our reality. Our human stories are ordered by a central episode, a turning point that gives meaning to everything that happened before it, and starts a plot that leads to a conclusion (p. 43).

Whether I set out to preach a narrative sermon or not I must keep in mind that young people need to see that what I say fits into the story of their life. As mentioned above, the Bible writers consistently told and retold their national stories; to the point that Hall (2002) can claim “the Bible as a whole is a collection of stories. These are stories of battles, betrayal, farmers, fools, miracles, healings, and other subjects” (p. 16). These are the things that make up life: simple and profound, wonderful and difficult.

Narrative Preaching and Seventh-day Adventist Young People

It was partially an inductive process by which the Adventist pioneers arrived at their doctrines. The great disappointment of 1844 could truly be called The Great
Ambiguity. The questions formed in the minds of those advent believers compelled them on a journey of biblical study that yielded a fresh and unique understanding of scripture. Young people sense dishonesty in a purely deductive approach to explaining those same doctrines today. It has been noted that “If exegesis has to labor under the burden of providing particular support for a dogmatic conclusion already occupying one’s mind, it ceases to be exegesis” (Craddock, 1986, p. 124). Truth bears scrutiny. If I never question my doctrines how can I know they are true? And if I have questioned and found them to be true, should I expect the next generation to take my word for their veracity? That is the power of great evangelistic preaching on those unfamiliar with Christian doctrines. The great questions of life are raised, wrestled with, and answered. But many of our academy students have received the answers before they asked the questions.

Not that doctrine is unimportant for young Adventists; on the contrary, Gyung Gu Kim’s (2001) study of retention data for Seventh-day Adventist young people describes a complex network of factors related to those young people’s decisions about church attendance. Though certainly not the only factor that influences youth towards church attendance, those that understand and accept unique Seventh-day Adventist doctrines are more likely to attend church. In 2000, the eminent Adventist researcher R.L. Dudley explained why this is the case. He recognized that belief in unique Adventist doctrines “was the factor most often mentioned” by those young people who have stayed in the church. “That which fostered this strong conviction for many of these young adults was their personal discovery, reevaluation, and hands-on wrestling with their beliefs” (pp. 114-115). Those teens that understand what they believe and, more importantly, why they believe Adventist doctrines are more likely to remain in the Adventist faith, even in
the face of other discouraging factors. The question that remains for Adventist young people who are already basically familiar with Adventist doctrine is why it matters for them personally.

This situation seems favorable to test narrative preaching. Thompson (2001) argues that the narrative sermon spoke to a generation of people familiar with Bible stories and Christianity and that the current generation has little knowledge of the Bible or Christian beliefs. He believes this requires a new movement in preaching. He notes, however, that inductive preaching works best in a well-informed Christian environment, such as that described above. Thompson sees inductive preaching as a television series where each sermon is resolved by itself. He points out that preaching ministry happens over time and should look more like a miniseries with a continued, unresolved theme. I believe inductive preaching can look more like his miniseries model, a model I will borrow from in plotting my project sermon series.

Ellen White and Narrative Preaching

The Seventh-day Adventist tradition upholds the Protestant ideal of *sola scriptura*. Our fundamental doctrines are founded on scripture. At the same time we acknowledge the role of Ellen White, whom Seventh-day Adventists recognize as having a prophetic ministry, in the development of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and culture.

While teaching a seminar on writing sermons at the Alberta Conference Camp Meeting in 2009, two of the attendees at my seminar asked a pertinent question. I had just finished presenting the concept of narrative preaching when they held up a book containing several sermons from our Adventist pioneers, “Did early Adventists preach sermons like this? In all these sermons they just quote and explain scripture, they don’t
even use many illustrations” (personal communication, Keith and Tammy Clarke, July 9, 2009). As I begin this section on Ellen White’s view of narrative preaching I must answer this question; did Ellen White or any of the other pioneers preach narrative sermons? The answer is, “no.” There is no evidence that any of them ever preached a sermon like what I am proposing. I would not expect them to since this form of narrative preaching is a product of the late 20th century. However, as noted earlier, the ambiguous situation of the early Adventist church created intense interest in the preaching of new and exciting doctrinal beliefs.

So what did Ellen White think about progressive ideas towards sermon styles and would she have approved of the narrative sermon? She did encourage the use of what I call a narrative style, but she also gave many warnings about the improper use of stories in the pulpit.

**Appropriate use of Narrative**

The focus of my project dissertation is narrative preaching as it relates to preaching to young people. In discussing what worship with children should look like, Ellen White (1954) challenges those in charge, in this case the father, to make worship interesting.

The father, who is the priest of his household, should conduct the morning and evening worship. There is no reason why this should not be the most interesting and enjoyable exercise of the home life, and God is dishonored when it is made dry and irksome. Do not let your children or any member of your family dread them because of their tediousness or lack of interest. (p. 521)

Similar advice is echoed in her admonition that all worship services be similarly carried out. “Our meetings should be made intensely interesting. . . . Let there be no
long, dry speeches and formal prayers, merely for the sake of occupying the time.”
(White, 1889, p. 609) She seemed to be on guard against our natural movement toward complacency in worship. She saw the development of a routine worship style as a negative. “[God’s] service should be made interesting and attractive, and not be allowed to degenerate into a dry form” (White, 1889, p. 609). Though she was not speaking only of the sermon, it is reasonable to argue that she would not approve of a pastor’s sermons degenerating into a “dry form.” On the contrary, in counsel to pastors in the February 19, 1895 issue of the *Review and Herald*, White urged ministers to bring Bible stories to life in their sermons. The sermon should offer the congregation opportunity to contemplate the stories and word pictures presented in scripture. “Their minds should be filled with stories of the life of the Lord, and their imaginations encouraged in picturing the glories of the world to come” (par. 17). This is not an explicit endorsement of narrative preaching, but her statement places value on the role of biblical stories in the sermon.

White (1915) urged ministers to preach sermons that would appeal to the hearts as well as the intellects of the hearers (p. 152). One benefit of a narrative style of sermon is that it allows the preacher to present a situation for the congregation to consider, analyze, and put themselves into before showing them what part they really play. This allows their sympathies to connect with people and ideas they might otherwise resist. White (1900) pictured Jesus doing this very thing in his parable of the vineyard. “The priests had been following the narrative with deep interest, and without considering the relation of the subject to themselves” (pp. 294-295). This approach gives the preacher freedom to explore possible answers to the question raised at the beginning of the sermon before the congregation has made up its mind on the subject. Thus the hearts of the hearers are
engaged in the sermon.

Cautions for Narrative Preaching

There is need for caution in using narratives in the pulpit. If a sermon is to be built around a narrative, that narrative should be taken from scripture. While it is true that extra-biblical stories can convey powerful truth, a sermon must be built on Scripture. White (1888a) portrayed Zwingli as a preacher of the narratives of Scripture, specifically the Gospels. On the other hand she cautioned preachers to “Keep your stories to yourself” (White, 1946, p. 210, emphasis mine). She felt they should primarily present the word of God.

Second to scripture, the stories of the natural world form an important resource for sermons. This is evident in Christ’s use of natural parables. In 1900, White described Jesus’ use of natural lessons as having a high compatibility with the daily experiences of his hearers. “Natural things were the medium for the spiritual; the things of nature and the life-experience of His hearers were connected with the truths of the written word” (p. 17). This may suggest that the life-experiences of the young people you are speaking to could be used to illustrate Scripture truth.

Again, there is need for caution in choosing our illustrations. Though many life experiences will encourage laughter, this is by no means an adequate reason to use them. As important as it is to illustrate the truth I speak, it is no less important to present truth through our illustrations. There must be a purpose to each illustration used. Leighton Ford (2006) emphasizes this point; “we preachers ought to ask, when we use a story of ourselves or others: Do these stories exalt God or ourselves? Do they lead to worship God or to self-flattery? Do they create a hunger for holiness or just bring a good
feeling?” (p. 32). Speaking of Jesus’ use of stories White (1888b) writes, “How clear and forcible are His illustrations! His style is characterized by simplicity and solemnity. Throughout the teachings of Christ, there is nothing to justify the minister in the relation of humorous anecdotes in the pulpit” (p. 111). Simply because you have found a funny or interesting story does not mean it should be part of the sermon.

It seems that White encouraged the portrayal of Biblical stories in a captivating manner. She does describe the need for sermons to be fresh and engaging. But this is combined with a caution against mere entertainment. Nowhere is this more pertinent advice then when preaching to young people.

**Conclusion**

I am encouraged by the potential for presenting doctrines to young people through narrative preaching. Speaking in narrative form is not only allowed (by biblical example) but may be the preferred way to preach to young people, based on their ability to carry the sermon in their memories and connect its lessons with a preferred future. This preaching style crosses easily into the consciousness of an oral/aural culture, and gives the preacher opportunity to share her story in the context of God’s greater story. The question remains, however, is narrative preaching a functional vehicle to teach Adventist doctrines to academy students in an authentically Adventist way?
CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION NARRATIVE

This chapter will focus on the development and implementation of the narrative sermon series. Student input was helpful in directing the theme of the series as well as the individual sermon topics. Generally, the events are described in chronological order, though some parts of the process overlapped.

Profile of Ministry Context

As chaplain of Parkview Adventist Academy, a private, Seventh-day Adventist boarding academy located on the campus of Canadian University College in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada, I minister to just over one hundred academy students. Most, though not all, of these students are generally familiar with Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. However, I have observed that the students generally do not understand how those doctrines relate to their personal lives and their relationship to Jesus Christ. This has resulted in students who are Adventist in lifestyle but who are unsure of their faith and standing with God. The purpose of this project is to determine the effectiveness of narrative preaching to improve the students’ understanding of, and attitude towards Adventist doctrines and how they relate to their lives and their faith in Jesus.
Initial Choice of Adventist Doctrines

A survey of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines, compared with other conservative, evangelical doctrines, revealed five major, unique SDA doctrines: The Second Advent, the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the pre-advent judgment, and the heavenly sanctuary. As part of the Adventist family of churches Seventh-day Adventists look for the imminent return of Jesus and the destruction of the world. Seventh-day Adventists are also sabbatarian, meaning they observe the seventh day of the week as a holy day of rest. Seventh-day Adventists believe that death is an unconscious state and that believers who have died remain in that state until the second advent of Jesus. This second advent follows a period of investigation by the heavenly courts that searches the character of God and humanity and verifies the justness of God in saving the redeemed and destroying the wicked. This is part of the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary before the end of time. Seventh-day Adventists are the only major religious body that hold all five of these distinctive beliefs.

I initially intended to conduct my research on these five Adventist doctrines. However, I realized that I have encountered very little confusion or questions from SDA youth on the topic of the Second Advent. On the other hand, academy students often ask questions about their salvation. Based on this experience, I decided to adjust my list of doctrines to include the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the pre-advent judgment, the heavenly sanctuary, and salvation.
Research Methodology

To collect data for my research I implemented a mixed methods approach. My initial plan was to administer two quantitative surveys; one two months before the sermon series, and one two months after the series.

The surveys served two purposes. I would use the first survey to guide my topic selection for the sermon series. I had selected five unique Seventh-day Adventist doctrines that I thought students did not fully understand. This first survey would clarify what misunderstandings or negative attitudes they had about the selected doctrines.

The second survey, when repeated two months after the sermon series, would measure any long term effects the series might have had on the student’s understanding of, and attitude towards the selected Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.

I also planned a set of group interviews during the week after the sermon series. These interviews would be conducted by an external facilitator and would measure the immediate student response to the sermon series.

I reviewed literature on the topic of Adventist doctrines and young people to help me define terms and gauge what questions would best meet the objective. I also looked for any research that had already covered this, or similar topics, and used that research to inform my creation of the survey. The work of R.L. Dudley and the Barry Gane were especially helpful.

I then met with my campus ministries team\textsuperscript{13} to discuss the survey and ask for their opinions about the survey objectives and what type of questions to ask. This happened as an informal interview with the five people on my team. From this meeting I

\textsuperscript{13} This group of students was instrumental in planning and executing all of the spiritual events on the campus, including my sermon series presented during Week of Prayer.
developed a set of preliminary closed questions. Then, using a stratified random sampling, I selected a total of six students from two subgroups, three students who had, and three students who had not been actively involved in the academy worship services in the past three months, and conducted another informal interview with these students.

The data collected from these interviews suggested that the students related those doctrines to what they thought about God and the Seventh-day Adventist church. Since I had delimited my study to exclude attitudes toward the church in general, I did not address those attitudes except in relation to Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. However, student understanding and attitudes toward God have theological and doctrinal implications. So I decided to include questions on the character and sovereignty of God.

The information I gathered helped redefine the questions asked. I decided at this point that a mixed methods approach to my survey would best measure both attitudes and knowledge base. I felt that either quantitative or qualitative research alone would be inadequate to address the complex interrelation of these two objectives. To this end I divided the survey into three sections. The first collected pertinent biographical information. The second section posed five qualitative, open questions. The third section consisted of quantitative, closed questions. The questions in this section were ordinal; specifically, eighteen used a 5-point Likert scale, and one used a 3-point Likert scale. I placed the qualitative questions before the quantitative questions to reduce introduction of bias in the qualitative responses.

After I completed the second draft of the survey, including the qualitative questions, I then forwarded it, along with the questions for the group interviews, to Kenley Hall at Andrews University. Hall is my advisor and was, at that time, the project
coach for the Doctor of Ministry program. Hall reviewed my survey instruments and made several recommendations. I incorporated those recommendations into my survey. I then provided a copy of the survey and the group interview questions to the academy administration to examine it, ask questions, give recommendations, and give approval to administer the survey and the interviews at the academy. After making final modifications to the survey, I ran a pilot test of the revised instrument with two students. At that time I submitted my surveys and group interview questions to the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University. After adjustments to consent forms, on September 15, 2009, the IRB gave approval for the research project.

Since the population of the school was under one hundred ten students, a census was possible and preferable. However, due to the timing of approval by the Andrews University Institutional Review Board, I was unable to obtain parents’ permission on registration day. Instead, I mailed letters of explanation and permission forms to all the parents of minor students after the school year commenced. Response rates were not as high as I had hoped. The number of students 18 years old or older who volunteered for the survey, and minor students who volunteered and whose parents signed permission forms, totaled 48 students at the time of the first survey.

I had several options for administering the survey. I could use a self-administered questionnaire, either paper or electronic, or I could administer each questionnaire in an interview. The interviews would take considerably more time, and since nothing in my reading suggested any benefit to interviews for a survey of this nature, I chose the self-administered route. The most efficient approach probably would have been a paper survey administered during a school assembly. However, it would have been difficult at
best to protect the anonymity of the test subjects while at the same time ensuring that only eligible students took the survey during a school-wide assembly. I decided to use an electronic survey, since it would allow tight control over who had access to the survey, and automatically tabulate and report the data.

**Development of the Intervention**

Preliminary Choice of Topics for Sermons

Since I would be administering the first survey only two months before the sermon series, I began putting together a rough idea of topics and sermon ideas before I received any data from the first survey. I had to cover five doctrines in seven sermons, so I reasoned that I could cover each of the doctrines in a sermon and spend an extra sermon or two on those doctrines that students understood the least, based on the survey. At the same time I was looking for a way to tie all of the doctrines together with biblical stories, all under an overarching theme. At this point, telling the stories of people listed in the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke looked like a promising approach. This theme opened an incredible array of interesting stories and I was fairly certain that I would find opportunities to flesh out doctrines in the details of these stories.

My early work in choosing sermon topics was promising. The story of Adam and Eve introduced the Sabbath. The death of Able would allow me to dig into the state of the dead. The story of Judah and Tamar would be a compelling picture of judgment. The story of Rahab and Salmon, or that of Ruth and Boaz, would illustrate redemption and salvation. And Solomon, who built the first earthly temple, could introduce the students to the concept of the heavenly sanctuary. I felt positive about following Jesus’ lineage
through a sermon series, and the stories lined up nicely with the chosen doctrines. Then I administered the first survey.

First Survey Implementation and Results

Out of 48 eligible students, 44 completed the first survey. The results made me rethink the series theme. Students responded very positively in their understanding of, and attitude towards two of the doctrines, the Sabbath and the state of the dead, but were mixed in their responses to the other three doctrines.

The Sabbath

The students showed agreement with Adventist teachings on the Sabbath and a generally positive attitude towards it. In response to the open question “What does resting on the Sabbath mean?” all of the students spoke in generally positive terms about the Sabbath, and many of their responses mentioned resting in connection with spirituality and God. One student said, “It means spending time with God, taking a break from things that can distract you and take over your life in this world and truly enjoying a ‘day off’ with my BEST FRIEND.”

A question in the quantitative portion of the survey asked students whether they could tell someone else why Sabbath was important in their lives. Eighty six percent of students agreed that they could explain that to someone else.

The State of the Dead

When asked what happens to a person when they die, the students were nearly unanimous in their description of death as an unconscious state until the person is resurrected by Jesus. Ninety-five percent of students either agreed or strongly agreed that
dead Christians don’t know anything until Jesus second coming. This aligned with only five percent wanting a dead family member or friend to know what was happening in their lives. Not only did 95% of the respondents understand the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine on the state of the dead, they agreed with, and felt positive toward it. They answered the open question of “what happens to a person when they die” with confidence.

These encouraging responses to my questions on death and the Sabbath caused me to question whether I should devote much sermon time to these two doctrines. Not that I felt there was no room for improvement, but responses to the other doctrines compelled me to focus my series on them instead. Students did not understand the other three doctrines as thoroughly.

The Sanctuary in Heaven

Several students candidly replied to the question, “Why is there a sanctuary in heaven?” with a simple, “I don’t know.” Answers ranged from an orthodox Adventist description of atonement and judgment, to a place where people “can praise Jesus,” to a place where God worships, to a place “to get away from your spouse.” One student denied there is a sanctuary in heaven. Few responses showed any level of knowledge about the purpose of the heavenly sanctuary.

Beyond being able to discuss the sanctuary, only 49% of students believed that the heavenly sanctuary had anything to do with them at all. This did not surprise me, but I was concerned with the responses; especially since the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist church developed out of a unique understanding of the heavenly sanctuary. The doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary is crucial to understanding the inter-relatedness of
Adventist doctrines. In 1888, Ellen White wrote that “The subject of the sanctuary was the key which . . . opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great advent movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people” (1888a, p. 423). I realized that this “key” was missing in the students’ doctrinal system.

**The Pre-advent Judgment**

A high percentage of students (73%) agreed that something important happened in 1844, and 64% of those claimed to know what happened. This was higher than the 53% Barry Gane (1997) reported. However, only 40% of my respondents felt positive about God’s final judgment.

Gane mentioned a lack of preaching on the topic as being partly responsible for the low scores in his report. So I decided to make the judgment a central theme of the series. The details of what happens during the pre-advent judgment, and when that takes place, are important. However, the purpose of the judgment, and student reaction to that purpose, seemed like the more important first step in a discussion of God’s judgment.

This seemed especially true in relation to the students’ understanding of salvation. I found an inverse correlation between assurance of salvation and a negative attitude about the judgment. Eighty-seven percent of students who said they did not like to hear about the judgment also did not know if they were saved. A majority (75%) of this group did not know what happened in heaven 1844, and the same number were neutral or negative about whether a heavenly sanctuary mattered to them personally. However, 60% of students who did not mind hearing about the judgment responded that they
thought or believed they were saved. I decided that for the purpose of this series I would focus on the nature, rather than the timing, of the pre-advent judgment.

**Salvation**

I had hoped the students would clearly understand salvation and their standing with God. Gane (1997) reported a high level of agreement with the doctrine of salvation by faith (91%) in the valuegenesis project report (94). Many students responded to an open-ended question about how one is saved with thoughtful, accurate descriptions, including the student who said, “By excepting (sic) that Christ has already ‘paid our way into heaven’ and that no amount of ‘good deeds’ is going to get us there, but that only humbly excepting (sic) Christ's love, forgiveness (sic) and salvation is all Christ asks of us.” The students were not confused about how to be saved.

However, only 8% of students responded that they believed they were saved. On the other hand, 40% of the students responded that they thought they were saved. This may have indicated their reticence to appear proud, but I was concerned that it reflected some ambiguity about their standing with God. It has been my experience that failure to live a sinless life produces guilt in young people’s lives, and they often confuse how they feel about themselves with how God feels about them. Their ability to be “good” then gauges their chance of salvation.

One open response in particular demonstrated the confusion the students feel about salvation by faith and living a faithful Christian life.

A person goes to heaven by accepting Christ and his sacrifice. This sentence is more complex than it seems to be. In order to truly (sic) accept Christ, one must spend at least one hour everyday in the study of the life of Christ to be able to understand exactly what this means. Accepting Christ requires an effort. You can not know what you are
accepting until you give up yourself and take on the body of Christ through the study of the Bible. If a person were to tell you exactly where to find a fortune of buried treasure, how much time would you spend in search of it? With the Bible it is just that, the difference is that you can take this treasure with you forever, and all you need is an hour a day.

This and other student responses suggested that I should give attention to salvation, and how they are saved in particular, during the sermon series.

Reassessment of Series Themes

At this point I realized that Jesus’ lineage did not give the appropriate focus to this series. I needed a theme that would allow me to develop topics on salvation, the sanctuary, and judgment. It seemed that the best theme would be the earthly sacrificial system and what it teaches us of Christ and salvation; namely that salvation requires death. This meant I would have to explore Old Testament stories that developed the theme of sacrificial death, salvation, and judgment.

My earlier study into the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 had raised some questions that set the stage to develop those very topics. Those questions included: Why were Adam and Eve not killed “the day” they ate from the forbidden tree? Why were they barred from Eden instead of God simply removing the Tree of Life? What were the Cherubim that were sent to guard the path to the tree? The answers to these questions are found in later stories in scripture.

These questions allowed me to develop several sub-themes throughout the series. The first sub-theme was the power of blood to save. The second was how God draws near to humanity. And the third sub-theme was God’s deadly actions in combating sin. In the context of these three sub-themes I felt I could develop a series of interconnected narrative sermons.
Process for Developing the Week of Prayer Series

In order to make sure the sermons carried these themes throughout the week, I decided to create a master story; a narrative that would flow from sermon to sermon. First I selected the narratives. I selected six stories to answer the questions raised in Genesis 3; Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, Moses and Zipporah in Exodus 4:24-26, Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel 8, Ezekiel’s allegory in Ezekiel 16, Jesus and the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-27, and Ahab and Naboth in 1 Kings 21. As I began to research these stories I created a master list of the biblical narratives of each sermon, which themes they addressed, and what questions they raised or answered in relation to those themes. I continued to revise this list throughout my sermon writing, since I was concerned with preaching exegetical and narrative sermons, and found that the texts required a different interpretation or application than I first envisioned.

Process for Writing Narrative Sermons

My research indicated that stories are powerful to change people’s hearts and minds. The stories of scripture are grand and terrible and redemptive. However sometimes I am reticent to move beyond an elementary understanding of Bible stories. So, I simplify them and make them bright and happy for our children, and rightly so\(^\text{14}\), but Adventist teenagers are ready for more than that. I wanted these stories to have as great an impact as possible. To this end, my first step was to understand each biblical story in its historical, theological, and literary context. I intended to provide a setting for the story that was as accurate as possible and at the same time unfamiliar to how the story was traditionally told.

\(^{14}\) Some of the sermons for this series could be frightening or disturbing for young children.
students had imagined the story previously. From this point on, my process varied somewhat between sermons, since sermon development is not a linear exercise. However, my preparation generally unfolded in the following manner.

After becoming familiar with the story and its context I looked for significant questions or problems raised by the story. Was there something confusing or disturbing that I had run into in my study? Did the story raise a question I could not answer? What was the intended impact of the story? No two stories raised the same questions, but I was overwhelmed at what I did not know about some familiar Bible stories. I should note here that this preparation began months before the sermon series. I find that I ask bolder questions the earlier I start my sermon preparation. Given a week to prepare a sermon I will usually play it safe, but given time I can risk asking questions I do not have the answers for.

I then took my questions to multiple sources (books, journals, research papers, commentaries, etc.), looked for answers, and prayed, a lot. Again, there is no formula to this type of sermon preparation, I simply kept digging until I ran into what Lowry calls an “aha” moment. Sometimes the answer was along the lines I was expecting, but often it surprised me.

Once I had answered the questions I could, I selected the answers that best clarified the text and spoke to the theme of the week of prayer. I took the new insights and began outlining a sermon that was both exegetical and inductive. To help me in this process I developed an outline map that visually traced the plot of each sermon. Each compartment on the map represented a task that needed to be completed at that point in the sermon. The map consisted of five sections: the introduction, where the story
introduced the question, problem, or ambiguity of the sermon; the analysis, where various inadequate solutions and answers were explored; the clue to resolution, which introduced the significant answer I had found to the ambiguity; the gospel, where I related the answer to how we understand the gospel in each story; and the anticipated consequences, where I explored what this might mean for the students. Once the outline was sufficiently developed I began writing the manuscripts.

**Project Implementation**

The following sermons were preached during the Week of Prayer. A meeting was held from 11:00am to 12:00pm each day from Monday to Saturday. One evening meeting was held on Friday from 7:00pm to 8:30 pm.

**Monday**

The first sermon introduced the themes of God’s judgment against sin, and substitutionary sacrifice. This was done in the context of the story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2. I introduced four unresolved questions from this story with the promise that I would answer them later in the week. They were as follows: 1. God said they would die the day they ate the fruit but the serpent told Eve she would not die. Since they did not die that day, was the serpent more honest than God? 2. Why did God give them animals skins for clothes? 3. Why did God drive them from the garden? 4. Why did God send Cherubim to guard the garden?

**Tuesday**

The narrative of the second sermon was the story of Abraham and Isaac’s journey to the mountains of Moriah. This sermon explored the reasons why God drove Adam and
Eve from the Garden of Eden instead of simply removing the Tree of Life from the garden. This question related to the question I posed for the Abraham narrative; that is, why did God send Abraham to Moriah to sacrifice Isaac? The sermon answered that question with a pan of the history of the region of Moriah. The conquest by the Israelites, the capture of Jebus and its subsequent role (renamed Jerusalem) as the capital city of Judah, the sight of the temple of YHWH, and the place of Christ’s death. It was a place of connection between God and man, a connection God has always protected, even in Eden when He chose not to remove the Tree of Life from the garden when Adam and Eve rebelled.

Wednesday

Wednesday’s sermon told the story of God’s attack on Moses in Exodus 4:24-26. The question raised in the sermon was, “why did God try to kill Moses?” Several possible answers were discussed but all failed to fully answer the question. However, the symbolism of what took place in this story is ripe when compared with how Moses will finally secure Israel’s release from Egypt. He has first-hand knowledge that blood is powerful enough to stop even the LORD from taking a life. I then connected the power of that blood with the greater power of Jesus’ blood to protect those who believe in Him.

Thursday

Thursday’s sermon was based on portions of Ezekiel’s vision of the sanctuary in Ezekiel 8:1-11:25. Ezekiel was taken in vision to see God’s judgment against the worshippers at the sanctuary in heaven. This vision included a description of Cherubim. This reintroduced the question from Monday, “Why did God send Cherubim to guard the
garden?” Implicit in this is the question of whether God has our best interest at heart. Stories of God killing people, or commanding others to kill them, confuse many people about the loving nature of God. In Ezekiel’s vision God commands warriors to kill men who are worshipping a foreign god in front of the sanctuary. This sermon answered these questions by looking at the sanctuary service and what it teaches us about the sanctuary in heaven. A loving God must take extreme measures to defeat sin. Those measures were acted out in the earthly sanctuary and God would not allow those responsible for those actions to willfully corrupt Israel’s access to God’s solution for sin.

Friday

Friday’s sermon began with the young man’s question in Mark 10:17-27, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” This story allowed me to discuss what part we play in salvation, whether obedience saves or whether I only must believe and do not have to obey. The young man goes away sad because the cost is too high. I asked the students to consider what would have happened if the young man had given everything to the poor and followed Jesus. It would have at least been a powerful witness. When we believe and obey it is a powerful witness. One that echoes into heaven itself, as described in the heavenly battle scene of Revelation 12 (especially verse 11). I then invited the students to commit to being a public witness (including baptism for those who were not already baptized) to their faith in Jesus wherever they went. I invited them to come to the front of the chapel to express that commitment. A large majority of the student body came forward.
Friday Evening

Friday evening’s sermon generated the most interest from any of the week’s sermons. Based on the allegory of Ezekiel 1615, it told the story of a girl, abandoned at birth, who is adopted by a wealthy businessman. She grows up and they fall in love and marry. After they have children she begins a series of affairs with other men and leaves her husband many times. But when she returns he always forgives her and takes her back. She eventually kills their children and finally kills him as well. Through it all he never revokes his vows and always offers her forgiveness. I connected this picture of a serious, eternal vow of love with what God offers us in the symbolism of the Sabbath. He offers it as a sign of creation and salvation and does not revoke this covenant sign when we are unfaithful. It is eternal evidence of His love for us.

Saturday

The last sermon dealt with the question of why evil people go unpunished. The plot of this sermon revolved around the story of Jezebel’s murder of Naboth for his vineyard. This allowed me to explore God’s purposes in the judgment. The question of why God did not kill Adam and Eve the day they ate from the forbidden tree is answered as we realize that the judgment paints a picture of a patient and caring God who long suffers evil to continue in order that He may save as many as possible.

Series Location

The Week of Prayer series took place in the Administration Building Chapel of Canadian University College, which is the usual meeting place for the Academy Sabbath.

15 I based this retelling of the allegory on a story Bryan Williams, a high school friend, told in 1995.
School. The chapel is equipped with a sound and light system, including color light-emitting diode lights that had been installed just prior to the series. This allowed me to utilize music and lighting effects during the sermons. I used lighting most dramatically on the first day of the series when I used color lighting to create mood during certain parts of the story.

Student reaction to the use of music and lighting effects was initially mixed, but by the end of the first sermon it seemed like a majority of students had been positively impacted by the dramatic nature of the story. A student later noted during the interviews that even though he normally does not want to attend Week of Prayer meetings, he did want to attend the meetings after hearing the story the first day. Even though all of the sermons were inductive and narrative, the sermons presented on Monday and Friday night contained more story element. This seemed to capture the student body’s attention on the first day.

I sensed that student interest remained strong during the week. I observed at least three factors contributed to this sustained interest: First, the students heard stories that they had not heard before, or had not heard told in the way I told them. Students came to the front after a sermon, or later stopped me in the hall, and ask about the story and where they could find it in the Bible. Many seemed genuinely surprised that there were such interesting stories in scripture. Second, I raised questions on Monday that were answered as the week went on, but were not all answered until Sabbath morning. Again, this evoked great curiosity and I had to tell students repeatedly that I would answer those questions later in the week. I should note that when I later addressed the questions I raised earlier in the week, that I reframed those questions in the context of another
biblical story in order to give context to the question, as well as to renew interest in learning the answer. Third, themes introduced at the beginning of the week recurred throughout the week. This helped the students grasp how each story and sermon related to the series as a whole. With these recurring themes I hoped to add new meaning to familiar stories like Abraham’s almost-sacrifice of Isaac and Jesus’ death on the cross.

**Altar Call**

I believe that all Adventist doctrines point to Christ and are only fully understood in their relationship to Him. This applies to the uniquely Adventist doctrines of the sanctuary and judgment and their impact on our doctrine of salvation. If these doctrines help students to see Jesus more clearly, then the better they understand them, the more they will be drawn to Jesus. After preaching about these three doctrines all week, on Friday morning I gave the students an opportunity to respond; and I got my first feedback as to what the students had learned and experienced.

I have made altar calls where a few students came forward and I have made altar calls where no one came forward. I did not know what to expect this time. Friday morning I preached a sermon that clearly set two options before the students; serving God or serving anything else. When it came time for the altar call I explained what I was asking of the students and what it meant for them to get out of their seats and come forward. I connected coming forward with being a public witness that God was doing something in their lives. I then turned my back on the students, faced a cross on stage, and invited the students to join me at the foot of the cross while I sang a song about offering our lives to Jesus.
The response was overwhelming. Nearly the entire student body came forward. I would love to say my preaching or my personality brought them forward, but I have had too many poor responses to an altar call to believe that. I do believe that narrative gives the Holy Spirit an unprecedented opportunity to overcome our internal barriers and reach our hearts. Peter placed his sermon within a narrative and the Holy Spirit pierced three thousand hearts on the Day of Pentecost.

This topic came up, unprompted, during the group interviews the following week. The students mentioned that the altar call was not “normal” and that they appreciated the way it was done. But they didn’t come forward because it was a good altar call. They heard God speaking to their hearts through the Biblical story, and they responded.

**Conclusion**

I felt that I successfully presented the sermon series as I had intended. It seemed that student input through interviews and the first survey had made the series’ more interesting and appropriate for the academy students. Based on my own qualitative observations, I expected the data from the post-series interviews and survey to show improvement in understanding of and attitudes towards Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.
CHAPTER V

OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

The students at Parkview Adventist Academy generally agreed with Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and had a mostly positive attitude towards those doctrines. Over the four-month period of this project a majority of the students increased understanding of, and attitude towards, those doctrines presented in the sermon series. This chapter will review six case studies as well as use the data collected to answer the research questions of the project.

Research Methodology

This project attempted to measure the effectiveness of narrative preaching to present Seventh-day Adventist doctrines so that students would understand the centrality of Christ to those doctrines and recognize His importance for their daily lives. The following questions were designed to guide the process of the project and help evaluate the outcomes of the research. The overarching research question of this study was “to what extent have the participants’ understanding of, and attitude toward Seventh-day Adventist doctrines been affected by the narrative sermon series?” The following questions helped clarify the goals and results of the project. To what extent were the participants interested in the sermon series? To what degree did the participants better
understand the doctrines presented in the series? How did the participants’ attitudes towards the doctrines change? To what extent did the series affect the participants’ view of themselves, their world, and their faith?

To answer these questions I developed and preached a series of seven narrative sermons during Week of Prayer. The series addressed unique Seventh-day Adventist doctrines for the purpose of clarifying the doctrines and demonstrating the centrality of Christ in the doctrines and their importance for students’ lives. I sought to demonstrate that narrative sermons are able to teach doctrine, as I believe stories are best suited to show the relevance of doctrines and how they apply to students’ lives.

Group interviews looked for evidence that students better understood Adventist doctrine, and that this understanding applied to them personally and affected their religious practices and relationship with Christ. The week after the sermon series, a facilitator set up two sets of group interviews to invite student response to the sermons.

The post-series survey measured a longer-term change in those beliefs and attitudes. The quantitative portion of the survey was scored using a Likert scale and a cumulative point total given for each student. These scores, when compared to the scores from the first survey, showed to what extent the students had grown in their agreement with the doctrines.

Case Studies

Eleven students participated in the group interviews. However, only six of those students completed both the first and second survey as well. Following are brief discussions of each student’s experience and reaction to the sermon series. They will be discussed according to their order in the interviews.
Student Two

Student two was a grade 11 male student. He led the discussion in the first group interview. He remembered the topics and many of the stories from the sermon series. He described Friday night’s sermon at length, and demonstrated that the details of the story were still fresh in his mind at the time of the interview. He said he wanted to spend more time with God and reach out to other people more as a result of the series.

This student did not seem to understand what the sermons taught about the sanctuary and God’s judgment. Another student in the interview mentioned these topics but this student redirected the conversation to the story connected with the topic, but without grasping the point of the sermon.

Though he could remember the story parts of the sermons, by the following week he said he could not think of anything he had learned about Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. He mentioned the story of Moses wrestling with God and discussed the theme of blood, and the power of Jesus’ blood for salvation. However, two months later, he did not mention Jesus’ blood when answering an open question about salvation. His cumulative score on the second survey (16) was lower than his first survey (21).

Student Three

Student three was a grade 10 female student. She did not respond to any group interview questions unless addressed directly by the facilitator. When asked for her perspective she mentioned things the rest of the group had already discussed. She said that even though she had heard these things before it still was very powerful because of the stories. She enjoyed how intense the stories were, how they were told; she thought it
was more interesting than just reading the Bible. However, she seemed disengaged and uninterested in the interview, the series, or the topics other students were discussing.

Her first survey responses demonstrated that she understood and was generally positive towards Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. In fact, she scored the highest of any student (25) in the quantitative portion of the first survey. Her second survey was much like the first. Her answers to the open questions were similar to the first survey and all her quantitative responses on the second survey were the same as, or within one point of, her answers on the first survey. The sermon series seemed to have had little effect on her knowledge, attitudes, or beliefs.

Student Six

Student six was a grade 10 female. This student took the lead in the second interview by discussing the sermons and describing in order the stories and topics of each day’s sermon. She said the sermons were very descriptive and helped her feel like she was experiencing what was happening. She mentioned the main series theme of blood and especially the power of Jesus’ blood. She also noted that there were many ways that the sermons were connected throughout the week.

She said that the sermons made her more interested in Bible stories and reading her Bible. She appreciated that the sermons discussed the details of the stories. The question of why God would attack Moses was still unresolved in her mind, and she rebuffed an attempt by another student to resolve it.\(^\text{16}\) That question was unresolved in the sermon. This may confirm the power of ambiguity and the danger of not resolving

\(^\text{16}\) That question was unresolved in the sermon, as well as in my own mind. This may confirm the power of ambiguity and the danger of not resolving those ambiguities – it can be very distracting.
those ambiguities: it can be very distracting. When questioned about what she had learned she described a richer understanding of the people and stories of scripture. She seemed to be quite sure of her decision to follow God as a result of the sermon series. She felt that she was able to connect better with me after the sermons; that the stories I shared helped her get to know me better.

Her scores improved from the first survey (16) to the second (24). Her responses to both open closed questions in the second survey showed that she better understood the role of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment. Although she still did not like to hear about the judgment she was more positive in the second survey about God being the judge. She was not sure of her salvation in the first survey, but in the second survey she reported that she believed she was saved.

Student Seven

Student seven was a grade 10 female student. She said the sermons made her feel like she was in the story and that she felt the emotion displayed in the sermons was genuine. She felt it was important that she was able to connect with me as well as with the sermon. She also mentioned that the version of Bible (New Living Translation) helped create a connection between what I said and scripture. When Seventh-day Adventist beliefs were mentioned, she understood beliefs to mean certain Adventist standards about dress, and she felt there are bigger issues that are more important.

Even though the series presented a complex, and not always positive image of God, she said the series confronted her with the power of God’s love and how He could give His son for us. This made her want to get to know God more. She was the first in her group to bring up the main theme of the series, which was the power of Jesus’ blood
to save us. However, two months later she mentioned nothing about blood when asked an open-ended question about how a person gets to go to heaven. On the other hand, although her score for the second survey (18) fell below her first survey (21), she felt more confident of her salvation.

Student Eight

Student eight was a grade 10 female. She did not speak as much as the other students in her group but was responsive and did not need to be drawn out by the facilitator. She said she had not understood why Adam and Eve were saved and now she did understand it. When questioned about how her Seventh-day Adventist beliefs had been impacted by the series, she responded that she understood more about how her thought life affected the things she does.

Her scores showed the most improvement of any student between the first and second surveys (10 and 22 points respectively). She demonstrated an improved understanding of the sanctuary in both open and closed questions and felt more positively about the judgment. She also demonstrated a clearer understanding of Jesus’ sacrifice and salvation. However, she was not sure of her own salvation, either before or after the sermon series.

Student Eleven

Student eleven was a grade 10 male student. He claimed that this week of prayer series was very powerful, that it reached him on an emotional level that nothing had reached him at in the past four years. When the discussion turned to Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, he commented that the series “made God your buddy,” not someone
who will just destroy you. He mentioned the reality of God’s judgment and that it would happen from His perspective and not from human perspectives.

He discussed the reality of a savior who carries our burdens and sins. He felt relieved to turn those things over to Jesus at the end of the week. His scores showed improvement from the first survey to the second (14 and 19 points respectively). He demonstrated more trust in God and a better understanding of, and attitude towards, the judgment. However, he was not sure about his salvation, either before or after the sermon series.

Summary

Although none of the students displayed a negative reaction to the series during the interviews, two students scored lower in the second survey. Since both of those students showed considerable knowledge of the details of the series it seems that they understood the narratives. This suggests that the narratives did not help them understand Seventh-day Adventist doctrines better. On the other hand, the increased scores of three students suggest that they did understand the doctrines better because of the series.

Research Questions

The first research question addressed a significant concern in speaking to youth. To what extent did the students pay attention to the sermons? It was my opinion that an inductive, narrative based sermon was ideally suited to holding the attention of academy-aged students. The group interviews verified this opinion. The students in those interviews were able to recount the topics, themes, and even details of sermons that had taken place the previous week, without prompting from the facilitator.
The second research question concerned the students’ knowledge of doctrine. To what degree is a narrative sermon able to instruct in doctrine? Would students merely remember the stories and their emotional impact, or had they grasped the doctrinal import of the sermons? The group interviews and second survey presented a less-than-clear answer to this question. Though some students demonstrated greater doctrinal understanding, others showed neutral or negative growth in their understanding of the doctrines.

The third research question considered the student’s attitudes. How did the participants’ attitudes towards the doctrines change? The students demonstrated some improvement in attitude towards the doctrines. However, most of the quantitative data fell within the margin of error. There was a statistically significant change in attitude for one doctrine, though, the Sabbath.

The fourth research question considered how the combined effect of change in understanding and attitude towards the doctrines and seeing the doctrines as an interconnected whole shaped the student’s view of faith. To what extent did the series affect the participants’ view of themselves, their world, and their faith? Some of the students noted that they had a new concept of God and a deeper experience of Jesus’ love for them.

Research Question 1

To what extent were the participants interested in the sermon series? The students felt that the material I presented was easy to follow and understand. They appreciated that the Bible texts I used were from a contemporary translation.17
In the first interview, the conversation quickly moved to Friday night’s sermon, George O. Draper. I wrote this sermon based on a story a friend, Bryan Williams, told me in high school. It is a contemporary telling of the allegory of Ezekiel sixteen. In response to a general question about the sermon series, this sermon clearly stood out in the students’ memories. Even a student who had missed the first half of the sermon found it compelling.

Two aspects of this sermon made it memorable. First, in the words of a student, “it was so harsh.” Disturbing stories captivate young people! Biblical stories that would be inappropriate to tell in some venues fascinate teenagers. I believe this stems from the idea, especially among church-raised youth, that the Bible is a collection of pleasant stories about nice people and everything works out well in the end. While there certainly are a lot of pleasant stories in the Bible, and these should be emphasized for children and young Christians, scripture deals with the realities of a sinful world. Teenagers, who have deep questions about life, may mistakenly think that the Bible has little to say about what they are going through. They are surprised, perhaps, to find stories of danger, death, love lost, and failure in the Bible. Stories about situations going very, very wrong connect with them and stick in their memory. Students in the first interview especially kept mentioning this aspect of the sermons. They mentioned how intense the stories seemed compared to the Bible stories they were used to. One student voiced a desire to pay more attention to the details of the Bible stories he read. I would

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17 Most textual quotes for the series were taken from the New Living Translation.

18 At a recent student week-of-prayer, the speakers chose to preach on the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19, the lion that killed the man of God in 1 Kings 13, and when God told Isaiah to walk naked for three years in Isaiah 20, to name a few of the topics. It should be noted that the topics captivated their classmates, and made more than one faculty member extremely nervous.
count it a success for this series to have encouraged students to read their Bibles and pay closer attention to the details of what they read.

Second, in the end they saw themselves in a character they had already judged. The narrative allowed them to make an objective decision about the story before they saw themselves in any of the characters. The girl, who had been given everything her husband could give her, rejected him and eventually killed him. The students wanted him to stop loving her because they saw the price he paid for his love. They put themselves in his shoes and made a judgment about her, only to find that they were the ones who had rejected God over and over again. I believe most of the students already understood on a logical level that God offers grace every time they sin, but this story connected the logic with an emotional and relational realization of God’s grace in the context of their own failures. One student recounted “when he finished his story that was based on Ezekiel twelve (sic) I was sitting beside a girl and she was just in tears.” The moral of a story means nothing until a young person can see it worked out in the details of her own life.

This connection between biblical content, relationships, and emotions is what gives narrative power. In response to various questions by the facilitator, of which none used story or narrative language, the students continued to discuss the stories they remembered. They were able to recount the stories in significant detail! However, more importantly, they sensed that the stories meant something to them. One student claimed the sermons put him “back on track.” This same student struggled to identify how the sermons had impacted him and why, but he sensed that these sermons were different. “It meant more because, I don’t know, just because the stories were . . . so powerful.”
Stories create complex logical, emotional, and relational matrixes that language has difficulty defining.

I found that when young people hear stories and ideas they do not like or do not agree with, they pay closer attention to them. I began the series with a familiar story, the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, only I created a picture of the story that differed from how they had imagined it. A grade ten male student recounted his struggle with this in the interviews. He did not like my description, but it caught his attention for the rest of the series because I indicated that his questions would be answered in subsequent sermons. The following week, when asked about the series, this student mentioned the Adam and Eve sermon first.

The students in the second group interview recalled considerably more details about the sermon series. In response to the first general question about the week of prayer, they began to recount the main stories from each of the sermons, beginning on Monday and working their way through the week. More importantly, the students grasped the sub-plots that I wove through the entire series. They noted that the verbal imagery kept their interest and helped them remember the sermons and draw connections between the stories from sermon to sermon. A grade twelve male student drew a connection between the sermons’ ability to keep him interested and his ability to learn from them.

Another student tried to explain how this sermon series was different than other sermons. She claimed that “it was more interactive. It seemed like it wasn’t just someone talking to you.” She seemed to be trying to describe it as a conversation where
both the preacher and audience are involved with the sermon, but she struggled with how to say that, she finally said, “we were basically in it.”

One student commented that he could tell I had the sermons memorized, and the rest of the group agreed. This speaks volumes about the narrative sermon’s power to capture a student’s attention. I am a manuscript preacher. I read almost every word of the entire series. Evidently, the stories created a different effect in the students’ minds.

Research Question 2

To what degree did the participants better understand the doctrines presented in the series? Since only thirty-three students, out of a population of approximately 100, responded to the second survey, most of the results of the quantitative portion of the survey fell within the average confidence interval (14.03) for a confidence level of 95 percent. That being said, the overall trend in surveys for students who attended the week-of-prayer was positive in their understanding of, or agreement with, Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.

In the first survey, responses for two doctrines suggested that the majority of students understood and agreed with those doctrines. Ninety-five percent of respondents agreed that those who die know nothing until Jesus’ Second Coming, with 74% being in strong agreement. As well, 86% of students could explain to some degree why Sabbath is important to them, and 84% agreed that Sabbath helps their relationship with Jesus.

Based on these results, which were significantly higher than the other doctrine responses, I decided to focus the series on the doctrines of salvation, the sanctuary in heaven, and the pre-advent judgment.
The State of the Dead

The qualitative answers in the second survey were similar to the first survey. The overwhelming consensus of these Adventist young people is that the dead sleep in the grave until Christ’s second coming. This remained relatively unchanged from one survey to the next, though there was a slight (6%) increase in those who strongly agreed with unconsciousness in death with a corresponding decrease (6%) in those who merely agreed with death sleep.

The Heavenly Sanctuary

When asked in the group interviews what they understood better after the series, several students claimed they understood the sanctuary better. When pressed on the question, they related the sanctuary to God’s judgment. “Like God’s judgment and everything like that and the few people who didn’t understand it in the first place might understand it more after he explained it.” This may help validate the explanatory ability of narrative sermons, though a claim to understand a concept more accurately is not the same as understanding the concept or being able to articulate it.

One grade twelve girl explained the sanctuary in the first survey. “A sanctuary is in heaven because it shows that God is Holy and still worshipped even when we live with him.” Her explanation is representative of the one in two students who equated the heavenly sanctuary with a place for us to worship when we get to heaven. Her answer in the second survey reflects a growing understanding of Jesus’ mediation in the sanctuary. “There is a sanctuary in heaven in order to cleanse our sins.” Again, her answer represents a shift in understanding, away from a place for worship and towards a place for atonement and judgment.
A grade twelve male initially explained the sanctuary as being for ceremonial purposes but revised his answer in the second survey to claim that there is a sanctuary “so God can judge man.” Even though students who attended most of the meetings were able to better articulate their understanding of the purpose of the heavenly sanctuary, a majority of them still did not relate it to Jesus’ atoning work; in fact, only one student mentioned the atonement imagery used in the series. The theme of blood, though mentioned elsewhere in the survey, was never mentioned in relation to the sanctuary.

The Pre-advent Judgment

Students, after the series, felt more strongly that God judges everyone than they did before the series. However, after the graphic portrayal of God’s judgment during the series, 16% more students said they did not like to hear about God’s judgment. This points to a weakness in the series, in that it may have emphasized the negative results of God’s judgment over against the positive aspects of God’s judgment. However, at the same time, 10% fewer students disagreed with the statement, “I’m glad God is going to judge everybody.” This could suggest that students are less opposed to the idea of God’s judgment, but at the same time, uncomfortable with hearing it.

Salvation

Nearly half (48%) of the students in the first survey answered, “I think I would be” when asked if they would be saved if they died today, while only 4% answered, “Yes I believe I would.” The uncertainty displayed in saying, “I think I’m saved,” concerned me, especially when added to the 26% who answered, “I’m not sure.” I hoped that the series would shift the students’ focus from their unworthiness to be saved to the power of Jesus,
and his death, to save them. The positive response to the altar call at the end of the series indicated that this might have taken place.

During the second group interview, the facilitator asked what the students understood better after the series and the topic of salvation came up. The students mentioned forgiveness, the power of Jesus’ blood, and what they have to do get to heaven. This list generated a discussion of how they are saved, a topic that most of the students admitted they had not understood before this sermon series. The discussion demonstrated that the students understood how unworthy of salvation they are, while at the same time recognizing how much God loves them and that Jesus’ death offers them salvation.

The results of the second survey were mixed. The number of students who answered negatively did not change much, but those who said they were not sure about their salvation increased by five percent. However, I was encouraged that 32% said, “Yes I believe I would” be saved if I died today. This increase (28%) of students who are confident in salvation is statistically significant. From a ministry perspective, this was the most encouraging result of the week-of-prayer series.

One student said she believed that she would be saved if she died today, but answered “neutral” to the statement “I am saved because of Jesus’ death on the cross.” This student answered positively about her trust in God and that He has her best interest in mind in everything that happens to her. However, she was neutral as to whether it mattered to her personally if there was a sanctuary in heaven. Though she agreed that the sanctuary in heaven played a role in her salvation, she seemed to have missed the
connection between the saving work of Jesus on the cross and His ministry in heaven. The series was only somewhat effective in clarifying the salvation doctrine.

**Summary**

When asked what they understood better after the series, the students mentioned the power of Jesus’ blood (a main theme of the series), that the sanctuary was important to them now, and that the Bible stories felt more realistic and connected to them. One student mentioned that he understood the big picture better. “It was like all the information showed at once, instead of having to go through like a year of Bible studies and figure all this stuff out, it’s there in a week.” This was part of my original hypothesis, that doctrines relate better when students see them as part of a bigger picture of God.

**Research Question 3**

How did the participants’ attitudes towards the doctrines change? The overall indicators for attitudes towards the doctrines were positive. However, four questions, from the quantitative portion of the second survey, showed a decrease in agreement from the first survey. Of those four, three had to do with the student’s attitude.

**Comparison of Judgment and Salvation Doctrines**

After having emphasized judgment and salvation, did students feel more positively about God’s judgment and more assurance of salvation? Students were less open to hearing about the judgment (16% more students agreed that they did not like to hear about God’s final judgment) but there was no change in percentage of students who
said they were glad God was going to judge people. However, 28% more of the students who attended at least three meetings believed they were saved. I had expected that increased assurance of salvation would result in less resistance to hearing about the judgment.

This inverse relationship did not seem to be the result of increased confusion about the pre-advent judgment. In the second survey, 91% of students who responded that they did not like to hear about the judgment said something important happened in 1844 (and 70% of those students claimed to know what happened).

On the other hand, a positive view of the judgment did correlate with trust in God. Eighty-seven percent of students who were glad God will judge everyone also believed God has their best interest at heart in the things that happen to them. There was a 100% correlation between a positive attitude towards the judgment and belief that God is in control of what happens on earth and that the student is saved because of Jesus’ death on the cross. Their fear of judgment decreased the more they believed God is in control and on their side.

**The Sabbath**

The most significant change in attitude towards any of the doctrines had to do with the Sabbath. As mentioned above, the Sabbath doctrine was not a major emphasis in the series since the students already understood and generally agreed with this doctrine. However, one sermon did address the Sabbath.

I preached the Sabbath topic sermon on Friday night, which led to an interesting finding. It was one of two sermons in the series that consisted almost entirely of narrative. Friday night’s sermon consisted of a contemporary retelling of the allegory of
Ezekiel 16:3-63. Whereas I presented the other five sermons in an inductive form, which involved telling a biblical narrative, in this sermon the narrative overwhelmed the structure of the sermon to the extent that there were only a few minutes of non-narrative speaking. This sermon, more than any other in the series, caught the students up in the story, allowed them to connect emotionally with the characters and plot, and then used the images and symbols of the story to connect the doctrine of the Sabbath with the hearts of the students.

Respondents were questioned, in the second survey, as to how many meetings they attended. Assuming that those who attended five or fewer meetings likely attended those meetings during the week,\(^19\) the survey revealed an interesting response to the only sermon preached on the topic of the Sabbath. In the group that attended five or fewer sermons, their understanding of, and positive attitudes towards the Sabbath dropped by 36% (from 22 to 16 points combined from three questions on the Sabbath\(^20\)) over the course of four months. I was not surprised by this in the context of students’ institutional Sabbath experience. What did surprise me was that the attitude of those students who attended six or seven meetings, and so were the most likely to have heard the sermon described above (which took place Friday night), rose favorably by 14% (from 81 to 92 points combined from the same questions) over the same period.\(^21\) This movement took

\(^{19}\) The meetings on week days were required of all students, both dormitory residents and students who lived in town. The weekend meetings were only required of the dormitory residents. Though there is no way to know for sure which meetings any student attended, it would be reasonable, based on my knowledge of student attendance behaviors, to assume a correlation between attendance in five or fewer meetings and non-attendance on the weekend.

\(^{20}\) Seventeen percent fewer students usually looked forward to Sabbath; 16% fewer students were in strong agreement that Sabbath helps their relationship with God; and 10% fewer students could positively explain why the Sabbath was important to them.
place with those who already agreed with Adventist doctrine. For instance, in the first survey 94% of those who would later attend most of the sermons either agreed or strongly agreed that Sabbath helps their relationships with Jesus. However, when those two answers were taken individually, only 33% strongly agreed. Post week-of-prayer, 57% of this same group strongly agreed that Sabbath helps their relationship with Jesus. In a group that was already committed to the doctrine of Sabbath the stronger commitment evident in the second survey surprised me.

When questioned about what they had learned about Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, one student replied, “I think one really special thing was . . . seeing the realism, or the importance, in the Sabbath.” There was general agreement to this in the group. Then the student continued. “Like, that it’s actually not . . . something that’s, like, enforced on people. That, you know, sometimes it seems like a negative day. But, um, the Sabbath should be something that, you know, you look forward to.”

The overall trend in attitude towards Adventist doctrine improved between the first and second surveys. Some students did respond less positively to the doctrines after the series, but only one student scored in the negative range (answered negatively to a majority of questions). While the Sabbath doctrine showed the most positive change, eleven questions showed positive change from the first survey and four questions showed a negative change.

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21 Twenty-three percent more students usually looked forward to Sabbath; 25% more students were in strong agreement that Sabbath helps their relationship with God; and 15% more students could positively explain why the Sabbath was important to them.
Research Question 4

To what extent did the series affect the participants’ view of themselves, their world, and their faith? Doctrine instructs the convert, but doctrine without conversion is powerless; and our young people know it. The honest seeker of truth, when she sees it (however it is presented), will respond with joy. However, Adventist youth have been immersed in truth their entire lives. I would not describe them as seekers of doctrinal truth. They have a bigger question, “What does it all mean?”

Several students mentioned that the series had helped them see the bigger picture of what God does in the world and what He was doing in their lives. The second interview group as a whole agreed that they all had a deeper spiritual hunger, were praying more (or again) and reading their Bibles, after hearing the sermon series.

When the facilitator asked the students how their ideas about Adventist beliefs had changed, the conversation went in an unexpected direction. It was unexpected for me at least. I had spent much time thinking about the five specific Adventist doctrines that were the focus of this study, and I had secretly hoped the students would launch into a doctrinal recital at this point. They did not. Instead, they shared what Adventist beliefs meant to them. A grade 10 female student summed up the feelings of the group when she said:

I kind of, I realized that I have to, like, not just, like, things that I do, but even the things that I, like, think about, it’s so much easier that, like, if we, like, block it out of our mind not to sin, rather than actually just, “I should do this,” and never do it again but you always think about it.

At this point in the interview the students’ body language changed. They stopped looking at whoever was speaking, stopped laughing (there was much laughter up to this point), their rate of speech decreased, they stopped interrupting each other, and they
struggled for words. This indicated they were moving into vulnerable, yet passionate territory.

For these students, Adventist beliefs had everything to do with how they lived their lives. All of the students in this particular interview had grown up in Adventist homes. As the conversation continued, it became clear that whereas they sensed a connection between doctrines and spirituality, they thought many adults equated doctrine and lifestyle standards; and they disagreed with this perceived attitude. As one student put it, “You have to have the Christian soul, not the Christian shell.” Their conversation touched on what you wear to church and being judged about it, and that there are more important issues to be worried about. The students indicated that they had a stronger personal faith but this did not seem to coincide with a more positive view of Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle standards.

Summary

The general improvement in understanding of, and attitude towards, doctrines over the course of four months suggests that narrative preaching is able to teach doctrine. However, the results also suggest the more compelling the biblical story, the more effective the sermon will be in impacting understanding and attitude. The case studies revealed that not only did students vary in their experience of the sermon series, but also in the long-term effect it had on them.

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22 It has been my experience that the closer young people get to speaking their deep feelings, the more they use phrases like, “um,” “iike,” and “you know.”
Unexpected Discoveries

Though I did not set out to study them, two findings became evident as a result of this project. The students felt better able to speak with me about their doubts and concerns. As well, the students who best understood the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and felt most positively about them were more likely to attend the sermon series.

Preaching, Vulnerability, and Ethos

I had expected that my years of work with these students\(^\text{23}\) would give me greater credibility with them during the series. To a degree this was true. My senior pastor, Ron Sydenham, remarked during the series that the students seemed to like me. I was surprised, however, by a conversation in the group interview. The students brought up the topic of me being available to talk with confidentially about their problems.

Facilitator: So how different is that for you guys now knowing that? Seeing that you’ve had that week of connection and everything?

Student 11: It opens his office door more.

Student 6: I think it’s pretty cool. It seems like he’s more available to us now, like he wants to know us too.

Trust begets trust. I made myself vulnerable by admitting that I did not understand everything I was preaching about. This helped them feel that they also could risk vulnerability. Even though this was not the sermon series’ purpose, it is a remarkable finding, and should inform my ministry on this campus.

\(^{23}\) I had worked with many of these students for nearly five years at this point, through junior and senior high.
Attendance and Degree of Influence

The group of students who attended 3-5 meetings had almost no change in their mean score (an increase of .4), while the mean score of the group of students who attended 6-7 meetings increased more (an increase of 1.7). However, the group of students who attended 6-7 meetings scored higher on the initial survey than those who attended fewer meetings (a mean score of 17.3 compared to 11.3). In general, the students who scored higher on the first survey were more likely to attend more meetings and increase their scores on the second survey. This indicates that the sermon series had a greater influence on those students already in greater agreement with Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.\textsuperscript{24}

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to determine how effective a narrative sermon series could be in presenting doctrine in a way that helps students see its importance in their daily life and fosters a faith relationship with Christ. I preached the sermon series during a week of prayer at Parkview Adventist Academy in 2010. A combination of surveys and group interviews provided data to assess the effect of the series. Based on my observations, overall this series positively impacted the student’s understanding of, and attitude towards Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and their faith in Jesus.

Not all the students grew in faith as a result of the sermons series. Not all the students better understood Adventist doctrines. This is the risk of parables and images and stories; the listener may not understand. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the reward is worth this risk. Many students did grow in faith, attitude and understanding.

\textsuperscript{24} This does not mean that the series did not influence those who scored lower in the first survey; the student with the lowest score (-13) in the first survey scored higher (-7) in the second survey.
The stories remained in their memories. Based on my subjective observations over the two years since the sermon series, some students still remember the images and stories from the series.

Others may not remember much, if anything, from the series. For them the residual effects of the sermons eventually faded from consciousness and their power, whatever of it remained, resides only in however they changed the stories of the students themselves.

However, I do recommend the use of a narrative style to address the difficult and deep questions we ask. The students have questions and ideas about God. They question God’s consistency in scripture. They struggle with a God who is characterized as loving and yet destroys entire cities. The narrative sermons provided a framework to engage in this struggle through the course of the series.

The biblical precedent for the use of narratives discussed in chapter two provided several expectations for this series. First, narrative discloses our identity in relation to God and truth. Second, narratives give the audience new perspective to consider moral and theological questions. Third, narrative appeals to the emotions as well as to the intellect. Fourth, the truthfulness of a position becomes self-evident through narrative, without the need for proving the position. Finally, narrative requires discernment on the part of the hearer and calls for action once the truth is understood. The series met four of these expectations.

The group interviews revealed that students had a new understanding of where they stood with God as a result of the series. They demonstrated a more keen sense of
their sinfulness and the dreadful actions of God in response to sin. An appropriate
gavity marked their discussion of Jesus’ sacrificial death for their sin.

Throughout the group interviews students referred to the new perspectives they
had on the topics the sermons addressed. This new perspective included a broader
understanding of the plan of redemption and how the various doctrines relate to it. The
students also had a grander view of God’s love.

I was not able to verify the fourth expectation of this series since there was a
logical structure to each sermon and the series as a whole and the questions were
answered with supporting evidence. However, the students did connect emotionally with
the sermons. I do not typically put a great amount of pathos in my sermon delivery. The
pathos inherent in the narratives however generated an emotional response in the
students.

My review of relevant literature indicated that a narrative preaching style would
facilitate memory retention, resonate with the oral/aural culture of young people, and lend
itself to contextualizing personal stories with the Gospel. The surveys indicated long
term memory retention. My personal qualitative observations over the last two years
suggest that the sermons have in fact been carried in the memories of some students up to
the present. Several interview responses confirmed that the preaching style spoke
naturally to the aural culture of the students. They experienced the sermon as something
other than preaching.

The students felt they knew me better and perceived me as being more available
to them. As Kershner (2000) points out, speakers gain credibility with youth when they
speak as a colleague. Thomas Long (2005) argues that the preacher comes from within
the community. Teenagers may consider most preachers to be from somewhere else. These inductive sermons tacitly told the students that I was one of them. Two students noted in the interviews that it seemed like I was struggling with these questions with them. Another noted, “It was more like a conversation with us, more, to say, then, just like, telling us, he wasn’t just telling us, he was talking to us about it.” The sermon structure, specifically the process of raising questions and leaving them unresolved through much of the sermon, signaled to the students that we were at a common starting point. This agrees with Fields and Robbins (2007) suggestion that students should know you do not think you have “arrived yet” (p. 77).

In the end, the students were not more excited about Adventist doctrine. Did I fail to capture their interest? No. Did I fail to present doctrine? No. It seems narrative preaching is poorly suited to apologetics. Which raises the question, how effective are apologetics in convincing Adventist youth that Adventist beliefs are beneficial for them? It seems there is a segment of Adventist-raised youth, inoculated early against heresy, who are now immune to the power and beauty of the picture Adventist theology paints of Jesus Christ. They do not need the same picture clarified; they need to encounter the living Christ.

The Friday night sermon, mentioned above, exerted a profound influence because it was primarily a picture of Jesus’ grace towards us. The Sabbath doctrine was then cast in light of that grace. Students responded in faith first, that faith changed their attitude about Sabbath, not the other way around. The beauty of narrative is not that it can teach doctrine, but that even when teaching doctrine it is able to present Jesus.
Recommendations

The results of this project have caused me to reevaluate my ministry perspectives in two areas. First, I have found that hearing sermons alone is inadequate to fully develop the students’ faith. As noted in chapter 3, preaching alone will not make disciples. A more effective approach, over the last two years, has been to train a small group of students to effectively prepare and present their own narrative sermons in the context of a student week of prayer. If students hear quality narrative sermons from their peers they have a more positive response. The purpose of this process, however, is the effect this has on the faith of those students who are equipped to preach. These students have been challenged to better define their faith and put it in action. As well, the students have been brought more fully into the faith community’s story, which Jarret (2008) suggests helps them realize their own faith identity. The effects of this initiative have been very positive in the lives of the student preachers. I have experienced a more fruitful ministry within this group and through them.

Second, I understand my preaching ministry to be more closely related to my pastoral/chaplaincy ministry. At the start of this project a small portion of the students at the academy came to my office for pastoral counseling purposes. Since the conclusion of this project that number has been growing and I have found a direct correlation between my honesty, vulnerability, and questions in the pulpit and their willingness to seek my counsel. However, I still find that I am more effective in reaching those students who are in greater agreement with the church. Since this series had a greater positive influence on those students who were already more in agreement with Adventist doctrines, then the power of narrative preaching to win young people who are hostile to Christianity and/or
Seventh-day Adventism remains undemonstrated. My reading suggested that this should be one of the strengths of narrative preaching. Further research is needed to explore how narrative preaching may effectively reach skeptical young people.

As I look back over this project I realize there are several things I would do differently if I were to do it again. First, several questions on my survey instruments did not give me any useful information since there were several possible reasons why the students gave the answers they did. If I were to do this again I would ask better, more focused questions that would directly relate to the sermon series itself. Second, I would have worked harder to get a higher percentage of students to participate, perhaps by working with the school to set aside time for them to fill out the questionnaires in class. Third, I would include a little less biblical material that was shocking, graphic, and brutal. A small number of students felt the series was too negative, which in hindsight is a fair critique. Finally, I would have prepared another interview, up to a year later, to measure longer term retention of the sermon series and its impact of student understanding of, and attitude towards Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY 1
PAA Survey of Beliefs

This survey is part of the research Pastor Steve Reasor is conducting for a project dissertation through Andrews University. Your honest answers will help him evaluate the effectiveness of narrative sermons. Your identity will not be disclosed nor will your answers impact your status at Parkview Adventist Academy.

Please complete the questionnaire as thoroughly as possible.

1)*

Please enter your survey code.

______________________________

Next >>

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

2) What grade are you in?
   - Grade 10
   - Grade 11
   - Grade 12

3) Gender
   - Male
   - Female

4) How many years have you attended Parkview Adventist Academy?
   - First year
   - Second year
   - Third year.

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

5) What is your religious background?
   - Atheist
   - Catholic
   - Evangelical Christian
   - Jewish
   - Mainline Protestant Christian
   - Muslim
   - Non-denominational Christian
   - Non-religious
   - Other religion
   - Seventh-day Adventist

6) Are you currently:
   - □ Taking RS 15
   - □ Taking RS 25
   - □ Taking RS 35
   - □ Involved in Bible studies or baptismal studies
   - □ Studying the Sabbath School lesson

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7/17/2009
PAA Survey of Beliefs

8)

What happens to a person when they die?

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

9)  
What does resting on the Sabbath mean?

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

10) How does a person get to go to heaven?

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

11)
Why is there a sanctuary in heaven?

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

12)

What gives God the right to judge everyone on earth?

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### PAA Survey of Beliefs

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|     | - Neutral  
|     | - Disagree  
|     | - Strongly Disagree  |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13)</th>
<th>When Christians die they don’t know anything until Jesus comes back.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|     | - Strongly Agree  
|     | - Agree  
|     | - Neutral  
|     | - Disagree  
|     | - Strongly Disagree  |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>14)</th>
<th>Did something important happen in heaven around 1844?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|     | - Yes, and I know what happened  
|     | - Yes, but I'm not sure what  
|     | - I don't know  
|     | - No, I don't think so  
|     | - No, definitely not  |

<table>
<thead>
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<th>15)</th>
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</table>
|     | - Strongly Agree  
|     | - Agree  
|     | - Neutral  
|     | - Disagree  
|     | - Strongly Disagree  |
PAA Survey of Beliefs

16)

The sanctuary in heaven plays a role in my salvation.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17)

Could you tell someone else why the Sabbath is important in your life?

- No, it isn’t important in my life
- No, I wouldn’t know what to say
- I’m not sure
- Yes, I could tell them a little
- Yes, I could tell them exactly why it’s important

18)

I am saved because of Jesus’ death on the cross.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

19)

How I live my life has little to do with what happens to me when I die.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

## PAA Survey of Beliefs

### 20)
Sabbath helps my relationship with Jesus.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

### 21)
God has my best interests at heart in the things that happen to me.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

### 22)
Would you want a dead family member or friend to know what is happening in your life?
- Yes, definitely
- That would be alright
- It doesn’t matter to me
- Not really
- No, definitely not

### 23)
I don’t like to hear about God’s final judgment.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
PAA Survey of Beliefs

24) Do you look forward to Sabbath?
   - Almost always
   - Usually
   - Sometimes
   - Not usually
   - Almost never

25) If you died today would you be saved?
   - Yes, I believe I would
   - I think I would be
   - I'm not sure
   - I don't think so
   - No, I wouldn't

26) Do you trust God?
   - Yes, not matter what
   - I usually do
   - Sometimes
   - Not very often
   - No, never

27) It doesn't matter to me if there is a “heavenly sanctuary.”
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
PAA Survey of Beliefs

28) I'm glad God is going to judge everybody.
   ○ Strongly Agree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Strongly Disagree

29) Are you afraid of dying?
   ○ Very afraid
   ○ Somewhat afraid
   ○ Not afraid

30) Do you believe in God?
   ○ Yes, I definitely do
   ○ Yes, I think so
   ○ I have no idea
   ○ No, I don't think so
   ○ No, I definitely do not

APPENDIX B

SURVEY 2
PAA Survey of Beliefs

This survey is part of the research Pastor Steve Reasor is conducting for a project dissertation through Andrews University. Your honest answers will help him evaluate the effectiveness of narrative sermons. Your identity will not be disclosed nor will your answers impact your status at Parkview Adventist Academy.

Please complete the questionnaire as thoroughly as possible.

1) *

Please enter your survey code.

[Survey code]

Next >>

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

2) What grade are you in?
   ○ Grade 10
   ○ Grade 11
   ○ Grade 12

3) Gender
   ○ Male
   ○ Female

4) How many years have you attended Parkview Adventist Academy?
   ○ First year
   ○ Second year
   ○ Third year.

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

5) What is your religious background?
   - Atheist
   - Catholic
   - Evangelical Christian
   - Jewish
   - Mainline Protestant Christian
   - Muslim
   - Non-denominational Christian
   - Non-religious
   - Other religion
   - Seventh-day Adventist

6) Are you currently:
   - Taking RS 15
   - Taking RS 25
   - Taking RS 35
   - Involved in Bible studies or baptismal studies
   - Studying the Sabbath School lesson

7) How many meetings of this semester's PAA Week of Prayer did you attend?
   - 0-3
   - 4-7
   - 8-11
PAA Survey of Beliefs

5.

What is your religious background?

- Atheist
- Catholic
- Evangelical Christian
- Jewish
- Mainline Protestant Christian
- Muslim
- Non-denominational Christian
- Non-religious
- Other religion
- Seventh-day Adventist

6.

Are you currently:

- [ ] Taking RS 15
- [ ] Taking RS 25
- [ ] Taking RS 35
- [ ] Involved in Bible studies or baptismal studies
- [ ] Studying the Sabbath School lesson

7.

How many meetings of this semester’s PAA Week of Prayer did you attend?

- [ ] 0-2
- [ ] 3-5
- [ ] 6-7

PAA Survey of Beliefs

8)

What happens to a person when they die?

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

9) What does resting on the Sabbath mean?

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

10) How does a person get to go to heaven?

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7/17/2009
PAA Survey of Beliefs

11)

Why is there a sanctuary in heaven?

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PAA Survey of Beliefs

12) What gives God the right to judge everyone on earth?
PAA Survey of Beliefs

12) People will never have to pay for the bad things they have done.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

13) When Christians die they don't know anything until Jesus comes back.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
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14) Did something important happen in heaven around 1844?
   - Yes, and I know what happened
   - Yes, but I'm not sure what
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   - No, I don't think so
   - No, definitely not

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## PAA Survey of Beliefs

### 16) The sanctuary in heaven plays a role in my salvation.
- Strongly Agree
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- Strongly Agree
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---

## PAA Survey of Beliefs

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- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

---


7/17/2009
PAA Survey of Beliefs

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○ Almost always
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○ Strongly Agree
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PAA Survey of Beliefs

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   ○ I have no idea
   ○ No, I don't think so
   ○ No, I definitely do not

APPENDIX C

GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Dear Charlene,

Thanks again for your help with this.

Your responsibility as a facilitator will be to encourage discussion amongst the group while making sure that the discussion does not stray too far from the following questions. As a facilitator you may need to ask secondary, probing questions to help the students clearly say what they mean. These secondary questions must, however, remain within the intent of the following questions.

Please read the following paragraphs to each group before you begin.

You have been randomly selected to participate in a group interview. The purpose of this interview is to collect data about last week’s Week of Prayer. The information collected will be used to evaluate Pastor Reasor’s sermons and will, under the guidelines of Andrews University, be kept confidential. Your name will not be released or attached to any of the collected data.

Please feel free to answer each question in your own words. This session will be video and audio recorded for the purpose of making a transcription of the interview. Again, your name and image will not appear in any publications or reports.

The primary questions for the group interview are:

1. What did Pastor Reasor talk about during the recent Week of Prayer?

2. Was there something you liked about Pastor Reasor’s presentations at Week of Prayer?

3. Was there something you disliked about Pastor Reasor’s presentations at Week of Prayer?

4. What do you understand better as a result of Pastor Reasor’s presentations?

5. What Seventh-day Adventist beliefs do you understand better as a result of Week of Prayer?

6. Did you make any decisions about your life as a result of the Week of Prayer sermons? If so, what did you decide?


Gane, A. Barry (1997). Youth ministry and the transmission of beliefs and values: Valuegenesis project report no 3. Victoria, Australia: Signs publishing company.


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White, Ellen G. (1888b). *The voice in speech and song*. The Published Ellen G. White Writings, Folio Views.


White, Ellen G. (1900). *Christ’s object lessons*. The Published Ellen G. White Writings, Folio Views.


VITA

STEPHEN REASOR

EDUCATION

Master of Divinity 2005
Andrews University

Bachelor of Arts 2001
Canadian University College

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Instructor 2009 - present
Canadian University College

Chaplain 2005 – present
Parkview Adventist Academy

Religious Studies Instructor 2003 – 2005
Ruth Murdoch Elementary School

Chaplain/Religious Studies Instructor 2001 – 2003
Chinook Winds Adventist Academy

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Ministerial Credential Ordained July, 2008

Certified Prepare/Enrich Counselor March, 2005

ORGANIZATIONS

Academy of Homiletics

Adventist Theological Society

Updated March, 2012