

Introduction

The themes which form the basis of our Christian religious experience, rely on the language inherited from the pages of Scripture: salvation, sin, atonement, sacrifice, justification, sanctification, covenant, blood, ransom, righteousness, perfection, etc. And yet, all the stories in the Bible come from a time long gone and foreign to us, and as such, reflect their time and context. One of the main challenges presented is that those societies which gave birth to the Bible narratives and its main themes, are transactional in nature. Consequently, the metanarrative of the Bible as well as most of our Christian practice is transactional.

There are two questions which deserve exploring:

- (1) If God were to reveal Himself to us today for the first time, would He use the same concepts, realities, examples, or would they be different and relevant to our world? Are there other themes and language already in the Bible which reveal different realities about God and us?
- (2) If such language and themes are available, how will our understanding of God, ourselves and others as well as our practice be different?

Background

Having grown up in an Adventist family and being involved in church life from an early age, I craved for a greater understanding of God and a meaningful Christian experience, which seemed illusive, despite good teaching and my best attempts. In my early 20's I was introduced to a new reality, which revealed a new and much more appealing dimension of God, contained in the short name of Jesus – 'God WITH Us'. This theme fuelled more than 20 years of pastoral ministry and was developed more and more with each passing year. In my ministry, I saw the limitations and severe damage transactional models do to our practice and witness. In contrast, I experienced and participated in this different, relational approach and saw the difference a change of focus makes in people's lives.

Methodology

During one of the COVID lockdowns, in response to several young people who requested baptismal studies, I developed a new set of Bible studies in three parts, which captures what *Living Life WITH God* is like. These studies were conducted on Zoom with each child accompanied by one parent. The parents were instrumental in learning with their children and responsible for implementing the practices spoken about as well as using the language of relationship in their daily lives.

References

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Body

The main characteristics of the studies are:

- (1) Their essence is relational (not transactional).
- (2) The studies are divided in three distinct parts. The 1st part of the studies develops a deep understanding of what it means and what one can do to experience an intimate relationship with God. The 2nd part outlines a different Biblical metanarrative – God WITH Us – as the main theme which reveals how God's unchanging nature (to be in relationship WITH His children) encompasses and unites the before-Creation, the Creation, Fall, OT narratives, Emmanuel (His life, death and resurrection), the Holy Spirit era (God In us), today, end-time events, and eternity. The 3rd part looks at how many of our Adventist doctrines are best understood in the context of Living Life WITH God.

Conclusions

As a result of the studies, we conducted several baptisms, and more are planned. Furthermore, three new groups of students are already enrolled this year: one of tweens and teens, a second one of adults (of Adventist background and non-Adventists), and a third one of young people (in the process of organising).

LIVING LIFE WITH GOD An Intimate Relationship

Observations:

- a. Parents and children, young people and adults, Adventists and non-Adventists respond extremely well to having and intimate relationship with God.
- b. It is very difficult to abandon the transactional language and concepts, as well as the related practices.
- c. More work is required to embed the learning both in reading the Bible as well as the practice of it.

Future Work

As alluded above, the next steps include:

- (1) Deploying the studies to different groups of people (youth, Adventists, non-Adventists, adults)
- (2) Using different teaching contexts: Zoom, in person (one on one, group), potentially incorporating it into sermon series
- (3) Writing a new series which reads different Bible stories from a relational point of view (rather than transactional)

Contact

Project: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/g291bcbaxtdcb0/Project%20-%20Life%20With%20God%20-%20APA.docx?dl=0>
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