
Growing in a Relationship With God



Whether you've grown up a Seventh-day Adventist or are new to the faith; whether you've read many or few *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guides*; and, finally, no matter where you find yourself spiritually today, the topic of how to grow in a meaningful relationship with God is crucial.

This topic affects all others. Your picture of God may have become tainted or blurred; if so, pray for greater clarity as you study. You might be wondering how to refresh your devotional life (prayer and Bible study), or you might be pondering other areas that impact your relationship with God, such as the role of pride and humility, faith and knowledge, sin and God's law, repentance and forgiveness, how to overcome strongholds and setbacks, and how to encourage others in their walk with God.

Your relationship with God is your most important relationship. Don't delay in building it, in fortifying it, in making it as strong as it can be. Now—not sometime in the future—is the time to work on this relationship, which will impact everything else: your marriage (if applicable), your parenting (if applicable), your friendships, your financial decisions, your leisure, your aspirations—and, of course, your eternal future.

Because this topic—that of God's desire to be in a relationship with humankind—encompasses the entire Bible, there are many different angles, stories, and Bible pas-

sages that could have been chosen to teach this important topic. Given the nature of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, we can follow only a limited number.

Whatever your relationship with God is like today, these lessons are written with you in mind. Ultimately, the desire is that these 13 short, focused lessons will reawaken your love and commitment to Jesus Christ as you seek Him anew this quarter.

Because the nature of this topic is about relationships, this *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* reads a little differently from previous ones. The lessons are written in a more personal style because they are about a personal God who wants to know you personally.

Ellen G. White says that “a consistent life in Christ is a great miracle.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 407. The Bible uses the metaphor of a race to describe life’s journey with God. Our reward is an imperishable crown (*1 Cor. 9:24, 25*) and eternal life with our God. Our spiritual race is a marathon, not a sprint. There may be times we stop running or even fall flat on our face. It happens, and when it does, we just get up and keep moving. We must stay the course, in spite of trials and hardships that inevitably come (*Heb. 12:4–11*). And we don’t run this race alone; other runners who love Jesus and His Word run with us. Most important, Jesus promised to give us the Helper. “‘And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you’ ” (*John 14:16, 17, NKJV*).

We do not run life’s race alone—the Helper is not only with us but dwells in us in order to strengthen and sustain us as we run and as we fix our eyes on “Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (*Heb. 12:2, NET*).

As I write, I am praying that the Holy Spirit will move upon us individually and as a worldwide church to draw us closer to God as never before. For surely there could be nothing more important than having a strong relationship with God.

So, let’s study together—to learn, to love, and to abide in Him.

Nina Atcheson is the curriculum manager and senior editor of the Alive in Jesus Sabbath School Curriculum at the General Conference. She lives to inspire and equip others to know God deeply and personally through His inspired Word. Atcheson is married to Matt, and together they have three teenage children.

The Bible uses the metaphor of a race to describe life’s journey with God. Our reward is an imperishable crown (1 Cor. 9:24, 25) and eternal life with our God.

Reality Check



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 3:14–22; Rev. 4:9–11; Gen. 2:7; Gen. 3:8–10; Jer. 31:3, 4; John 15:1–11; Rom. 8:9–11.*

Memory Text: “‘As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love’ ” (*John 15:9, NKJV*).

How would you describe your relationship with God today? Is it vibrant and strong? Do you spend time investing in this relationship, searching His inspired Word, and talking to Him as a Friend? If so, how much time do you spend doing it?

Also, are you compelled to share with others about your relationship with God because it's the most wonderful relationship in your life? Or, instead, has your relationship with God waned over time? It's there, yes, and you check in from time to time, but to be honest, it's not as strong as it used to be. Or, perhaps, you're somewhere in between, what the Bible calls “lukewarm” (*Rev. 3:16*).

Have you ever wondered if angels ponder why we don't live in adoration of our Savior and Redeemer, with hungry hearts and eager minds to grow closer to God every day? But, truly, a relationship with God changes *everything*—both here and into eternity.

This week, let's consider the current state of our relationship with God and what the Bible's advice is for us. Indeed, we can't move from where we are to someplace better until we take an honest reality check of ourselves and listen to the solution that Jesus describes.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for April 4.

Our Condition

Have you ever wondered what Jesus might say if He were to describe your relationship with Him right now? Perhaps He'd say it is strong or that it has been stronger in the past. Have you ever wondered what Jesus might say if He were to describe His people in these last days? In Revelation 3:14–22, Jesus actually does describe them.

He begins by stating that He's the “ ‘Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God’ ” (Rev. 3:14, NKJV). A faithful and true witness doesn't lie but speaks plainly and honestly.

Read Revelation 3:14–17, where Jesus describes the spiritual condition of His people today. How well do these verses describe you personally?

Jesus tells us, Christian individuals who live in the last days, that He knows us. We're neither hot nor cold, because, from our vantage point, we don't need anything. The days and weeks pass by, and we spend a little time with God here and there, and we think that's enough. But it's not. Instead, we actually need Him far more desperately than we realize. If only we could love and live for Jesus wholeheartedly or not at all. That would be better from God's perspective than being lukewarm. Jesus says that He'll vomit us out of His mouth because we taste as bad as we are. But He hasn't yet done this, and He asks us to make some bold choices right now.

What is His advice to us in Revelation 3:18, 19?

In ancient times, “buying” something meant bartering or exchanging goods. Here, Jesus generously offers an exchange: our apathy for His gold, for His white garments, and for His eye salve. He wants to make us rich in His eyes; He wants to cover us with His perfect robe of righteousness; and He wants to open our eyes to see the truth of how an abiding relationship with Him will change absolutely everything. He offers us all that we need, especially because what we need, we can't provide for ourselves. He alone can, and will, but only if we are willing.

If you find it painful to look at yourself and your own spiritual condition, what hope is offered you in these verses for today?

Rebuke, Repent, and Reward

“ ‘As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten,’ ” Jesus tells us in Revelation 3:19. “ ‘Therefore be zealous and repent’ ” (*NKJV*). None of us, for even a second, could justly say that Jesus doesn’t care about us or our future. How much easier it would have been for Jesus to give up on humanity and not travel the painful road He chose on this earth. It’s precisely because He loves us so deeply that He rebukes us in our current state. He wants a much stronger, deeper relationship with us. He’s not satisfied with our on-and-off attitudes, our “I’ll come to Him when I need Him” approach.

Instead, Jesus rebukes us for our own good. He tells us to repent. But we can’t repent unless we realize that there’s something wrong. Yet, He’s told us exactly what’s wrong with us: we think we’re rich, but we’re actually “ ‘wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked’ ” (*Rev. 3:17, NKJV*).

Read Revelation 3:20. What are we promised here? But what must we do to receive that promise?

This is such a beautiful and extraordinary word picture. The God of the universe wants to sit down over a meal with you, with me. He desires mutual engagement and conversation over good food. He wants a close, abiding relationship, and Jesus invites us to have this with Him.

Jesus stands patiently waiting and knocking at the door of your heart. Perhaps you’ve seen pictures of this in children’s books—a tall, graceful Savior, knocking gently. He doesn’t barge in and force you to talk with Him. He doesn’t impose on your time or your busy life. Time is short; so, if you hear Him, open the door. He will be there to step into your life.

This metaphor illustrates the kind of relationship Jesus wants to have with each of us. But one day, when you meet Jesus face-to-face, when you cast your crown at His feet in adoration and praise with thousands upon ten thousands of others in worship to the Creator (*Rev. 4:9–11, Rev. 5:11–14*), when you think back to your earthly trials and see that they dim into insignificance—do you think at that point you’ll ever regret the time you spent with Jesus on earth?

Right now, Jesus is knocking. He is calling. You, though, have to make the conscious choice to open your heart to Him. How can viewing the Cross and thinking about what it means inspire you to make that choice?

Everlasting Love

After depicting our apathetic condition, Jesus tells us that this is something to be overcome. “ ‘ “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” ’ ” (Rev. 3:21, NKJV). For some of us, it may be the greatest battle we ever face—simply realizing our weak, self-sufficient condition; accepting Jesus’ rebuke; repenting; and receiving Jesus’ robe of righteousness over us.

What is so amazing is that Jesus understands our apathetic, lukewarm condition and identifies with us (not that Jesus was ever lukewarm). He says, “ ‘ “To him who overcomes . . . as I also overcame” ’ ” (Rev. 3:21, NKJV). Because He died to save us, Jesus has overcome sin and its penalty. He understands the battles of sin that we face and promises to help us.

Many people in the Bible responded to God’s invitation to be in a covenant relationship with Him. This is the overarching narrative or theme of the entire Bible. When we look at some of these people, we can see that God interacted differently with them at different times.

What do these accounts teach us about how God interacts with people in various situations?

Gen. 2:7, Gen. 3:8–10 _____

Gen. 5:24 _____

Gen. 6:13 _____

Gen. 12:1–4 _____

Exod. 34:29 _____

Whether God physically walked with His children or whether He just talked with them, the truth is that He has always desired to be close to humanity. No matter what your relationship with God is like today, God wants to be close to you. We can read about this idea in Jeremiah 31:3, 4 below:

“The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt’ ” (NKJV).

Whether your day is beginning or ending right now, God is seeking you and waiting, wanting to draw you closer to Him. He wants to build—or rebuild—your relationship with Him. If it’s not happening, the fault is on your end, not His.

What are the things in your life right now that, unless overcome, can and do hinder your relationship with God?

Abide

The disciples followed Jesus down the stairs from the upper room onto the street below. As they walked together to Gethsemane, on what was one of the most significant nights in earth's history, they probably didn't realize how poignant some of Jesus' last words to them in the upper room really were.

What did Jesus say in John 15:1–11? What does that mean for us?

These words, spoken by Jesus Himself, describe what a close relationship with God is like. Notice the word that is repeated, not just twice but ten times: *abide*. To abide in Jesus is to live in connection with Him.

As He faces the Cross, not only does Jesus emphasize the great importance of this abiding in Him, but He clearly and simply states the practical aspects of what it looks like in our lives.

Which is: Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches. As a result of our abiding with (being connected to) Him, fruit will grow on our branches. We can't make fruit grow ourselves. Sometimes we might look as if we're abiding, but the evidence will be in our lack of fruit, and eventually our branches will dry up. If we're withered, the Vinedresser will eventually cut off the branches. Regardless of whether we bear fruit or not, our branches will be pruned.

At the same time, we all face challenges and painful moments. If we abide in Him, these moments will produce more fruit long-term. Fruit-bearing confirms who we are: His disciples. We bear fruit to bring Him (not ourselves) glory. Abiding in Jesus means keeping His commandments, which are a reflection of His beautiful character of unselfish love. Abiding in Jesus brings great joy. Abiding in Jesus means doing what He asks of us, as a response to Him. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3, NKJV).

If you think about it, abiding in Jesus is one of the antidotes to our Laodicean condition (Rev. 3:20, John 15:4). It's the great secret of a fulfilled and meaningful life on earth and into eternity; yet, somehow we so easily forget Jesus' counsel.

Ultimately, Jesus says to each of us, " 'As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love' " (John 15:9, NKJV). The love of Jesus is the most compelling cord that draws us to Him, and when we know this love, we will be deeply moved to respond with love to God and to others.

Linked to the Vine

Abiding in Christ can sometimes feel like one of the hardest things to do. We might know that it's what we need, but the rush of life pulls us into its stream, and it all feels too hard. Following God can seem like the biggest burden ever, especially for those badgered by someone trying to get them to follow Jesus. This kind of religion can feel like drudgery because it's all about external actions rather than what's in the heart. Nothing could be further from what God desires, which is a relationship whose foundation is mutual love, not just rules; a chosen relationship (in which He first chose you) based on love and free choice.

Sometimes we might be partly connected to the Vine but not really abiding with every fiber of our being. We might go to church, pray, and do what we know is right, but inside we feel shriveled up. The truth is this: we can't make ourselves abide in Jesus any more than a branch can make itself connect to a vine. God loved us first; He made the first move. Our response is always a reaction to what God has first done for us.

If you, meanwhile, look at how a grapevine survives through winter, you'll learn a fascinating fact—the buds on the branches become dehydrated and isolated from the growing system until spring. When the soil warms up, the roots absorb water, and sap flows up through the trunk of the vine into the buds and then initiates growth. Without the sap flowing through the vine, no growth will happen.

The sap in a grapevine is like the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We might be like a dead branch, but when we choose to spend time with God, the Holy Spirit enters into us like the sap from the roots and brings us to life so that we start to grow. In the same way that we need to make a conscious choice to want to abide in Jesus, we must also ask for the Holy Spirit (the sap) to flow into our lives.

Read Luke 11:13 along with Jeremiah 31:3, 1 John 4:19, and Romans 8:9–11. What is the essential message here for us?

It's actually the Holy Spirit who brings growth and ensures that we're thriving and connected to the Vine. We need to ask daily for the Holy Spirit, who is here with us on earth to:

- be our Comforter (*John 14:16–18*),
- reveal Jesus to us (*John 15:26*),
- convict us of sin (*John 16:7, 8*), and
- guide us into all truth (*John 16:13*).

Read this list again. How can each aspect of what the Holy Spirit does impact your relationship with God?

Further Thought: Before we were born, God loved us; He had a plan to know us and for us to know Him. He seeks us out, like a good Shepherd, and invites us to abide in Him every day. We merely need to choose to respond to Him, and then to exchange our wretchedness and our Laodicean condition for His good gifts (*see Rev. 3:18, 19*).

Like the slow growth of a grapevine's branches, our relationship with God might grow slowly, or it might come in bursts as a result of much-needed rain. Regardless of the pace at which we grow and the abundance of fruit that is produced in our lives, we need daily "sap," or the Holy Spirit, to ensure that we're remaining connected to Jesus.

"Abiding in Christ means a constant receiving of His Spirit, a life of unreserved surrender to His service. The channel of communication must be open continually between man and his God. As the vine branch constantly draws the sap from the living vine, so are we to cling to Jesus, and receive from Him by faith the strength and perfection of His own character."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 676.

"How is the dry disconnected sapling to become one with the parent vine stock? How is it to be made a partaker of the life and nourishment of the living vine? Only by being grafted into the vine, by being brought into the closest relationship possible. Fiber by fiber, vein by vein, the twig holds fast to the life giving vine until the life of the vine becomes one with the branch, and the branch produces fruit like that of the vine."—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 67, 1897.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Reflect back over your life. Can you identify any life events that have lulled you into a Laodicean spiritual condition? What events have drawn you closer to God?
- 2 Ellen G. White talks about "a constant receiving of His Spirit." How often do you pray for the Holy Spirit? What might change if you received the Holy Spirit every day?
- 3 What might change if we, as a church, were to pray for the Holy Spirit more earnestly and more regularly?
- 4 Be brutally, even painfully, frank with yourself over your relationship with God. What conscious choices do you need to make in order to have the closeness with Him that He wants but that you hinder?

Summary: Before we can start growing in a relationship with God, we first have to pause to consider what our current relationship with Him is like. If it's Laodicean or if our branches are not flourishing, Jesus has the perfect solution for our spiritual condition: to abide in Him.

Business of Being a Blessing

Kavono Kivatsi Samwele loved playing the drums in his village in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was a good life, playing the drums while his wife sang, as he waited to become village chief.

But then Kavono, who was in his early 20s, got an idea. It would be even more fun to accompany his wife on the drums if he could write the songs that she was singing. To do that, he needed to learn how to read and write. He noticed that a Seventh-day Adventist school had opened in a neighboring village, and he enrolled in the first grade.

At the school, he learned to read and write, and he also learned about the God of heaven. As he studied, he felt called by God to become a pastor. So, he gave up his claim as village chief and became an Adventist pastor. He also had a son named Kasereka Maghulu Kavatsi.

As a boy, Kasereka accompanied his father on pastoral trips and felt called also to engage in mission. But his talent was in entrepreneurship, so he went into business, establishing a farm, expanding into fishing, and then opening a clothing store. His businesses grew into a thriving empire.

Kasereka did not forget the Bible truths he learned from his father, and he returned a 10 percent tithe. After marriage, the couple's first tithe amounted to US\$10,000. Kasereka's wife, the daughter of a church evangelist, said they also needed to give an offering of 10 percent. Kasereka had long been uncertain about how much to give for offering, and her appeal persuaded him. The couple gave another \$10,000 for offering. After that, they regularly gave a 10 percent tithe and 10 percent offering, and they never lacked anything. "When you help the church, you get a blessing back," Kasereka said.

Seeking to do his part to proclaim Jesus' coming, Kasereka distributed copies of *The Great Controversy* to fellow business leaders and government officials. He opened an orphanage. He sponsored orphans and others in their studies, including helping them obtain master's degrees and doctorates.

As he sought to bless others, blessings always returned to him. He put more than 100 people through graduate school, but many of the graduates couldn't find work because of a lack of highly qualified jobs in the country. So, Kasereka ended up hiring them to work for him, and their skills proved to be a blessing to his businesses. "You cannot outgive God," he said.



Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, will support projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere in the East-Central Africa Division. Thank you for your generous offering to help proclaim Jesus' soon coming.

Part I: Overview

Key Texts: *Revelation 3:14–22, John 15:9, Jeremiah 31:3*

Study Focus: *Rev. 3:14–22.*

In this lesson, we will confront the reality of our current spiritual condition as a church. This reality concerns us both corporately, as God’s people, and personally, as individuals. Our analysis of our condition will be conducted in light of the apocalyptic message to the church of the Laodiceans. This message comprises the seventh, and final, letter to the churches in Asia Minor, as found in the book of Revelation. The seven letters, contained in chapters 2 and 3, are prophecies that cover the history of the Christian church, from the period of the early church to the time of the end. God Himself addresses His church in these letters.

Of course, the seven churches of “Asia” do not refer literally to contemporary churches, which, obviously, are far more numerous today than in John’s time. Rather, in the tradition of the Old Testament prophecies (*Dan. 2, 7, 8; Jer. 6:2*), the book of Revelation employs figures to convey its eschatological message. Specifically, the literal churches, with their historical and geographical characteristics, are used as symbolic representations of prophetic truth. By way of example, a cursory glance at the progression of the Lord’s movements on behalf of His church, as portrayed in the seven letters, suggests that the literal coming of the Lord advances nearer and nearer:

1. *Ephesus*: The Lord “walks” (*Rev. 2:1, NKJV*).
2. *Smyrna*: The Lord “was dead, and came to life” (*Rev. 2:8, NKJV*).
3. *Pergamum*: The Lord admonishes His people to “ ‘repent, or else I will come to you quickly’ ” (*Rev. 2:16, NKJV*).
4. *Thyatira*: The Lord earnestly urges His people to hold fast to what they have “ ‘till I come’ ” (*Rev. 2:25, NKJV*).
5. *Sardis*: The Lord warns His people that if they don’t hold fast and repent, “ ‘I will come upon you as a thief’ ” (*Rev. 3:3, NKJV*).
6. *Philadelphia*: The Lord exclaims, “ ‘Behold, I am coming quickly!’ ” (*Rev. 3:11, NKJV*).
7. *Laodicea*: The Lord states the proximity of His position relative to the heart of His people, announcing, “ ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock’ ” (*Rev. 3:20, NKJV*).

The message to the Laodiceans marks, therefore, the crucial moment when the coming of the Lord is the closest: He now knocks at the door of the heart. He awaits our response to His gracious invitation to give Him entrance that He may abide with us (*read also Col. 1:27*).

Part II: Commentary

Introduction: The letter to the church of Laodicea is a prophecy that predicts the spiritual condition of God’s people in the last days and urges them to respond accordingly. The Author of the message is designated by three titles, which refer to human history from the end to the beginning, following the effect-cause-effect sequence that is typically Hebrew. The first title is “the Amen” (*Rev. 3:14*), the word that concludes Christian prayer and expresses the eschatological hope of the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation (*2 Cor. 1:20*). The title “faithful and true witness” refers to God’s presence during the continuous course of human history. “The beginning of the creation of God” refers to the Creator who began history. These titles harken back to the description of Jesus Christ, as seen in Revelation’s introductory vision of the Son of man, who is portrayed as “the faithful witness” and “the first begotten of the dead” (*Rev. 1:5*).

The letter to the church of Laodicea involves three principal figures: (1) the messenger, who is the angel of the church of Laodicea (*Rev. 3:14*); (2) the Author of the letter, who is Jesus; and (3) the people who receive the message. The message itself is divided into four sections. First, God is presented as the Judge who knows (*Rev. 3:15*). Second, attention is directed to God’s people, who are unaware of their true condition (*Rev. 3:16, 17*). Third, the Lord responds to their plight and counsels His people as to the remedy (*Rev. 3:18*). Fourth, the letter reveals the extent of God’s love for His people (*Rev. 3:19–21*).

We shall look more closely at each section in the commentary that follows.

Section 1: The Judge of the People. In this first section, the Lord confronts His people with a diagnosis of their condition. But even before He diagnoses them, He reminds them of His omniscience: “‘I know your works’ ” (*Rev. 3:15, NKJV*). In the Psalms, David begins his prayer of confession with this same awareness: “O LORD, You have searched me and known me” (*Ps. 139:1, NKJV*). The people cannot escape God’s eyes: “Where can I go from Your Spirit?” (*Ps. 139:7, NKJV*). God is perceived as the Judge who can see everything (*Heb. 12:23, 2 Tim. 4:1, Prov. 5:21, Prov. 15:3*). There is no evading or deceiving the penetrating eye of the great Judge, who is also our Creator: “For You formed my inward parts” (*Ps. 139:13, NKJV*); and “He who formed the eye, shall He not see?” (*Ps. 94:9, NKJV*).

Significantly, in the tradition of the ancient Hebrew prophet Micah (*Mic. 1:10–16*), John plays on geographical place names, which imbue the biblical text with deep spiritual significance. Thus, the name Laodicea, which means “justice of the people,” reminds God’s people that He will do three things for them: (1) He will deliver a favorable and just verdict on their behalf in the day of judgment; (2) He will avenge them against their enemies; and (3) the meaning of the name Laodicea, “justice of the people,” reminds us of Christ’s substitutionary work to save His followers

from the wrath of a just and holy God against sin. The just requirements of the law have been fulfilled through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Thus, God can mercifully deliver His people from sin's penalty. In the fullest sense, then, as the One who commutes their death sentence by accepting the penalty Himself, Christ stands in as the "justice of the people."

Section 2: The People's Condition. God's first charge against Laodicea concerns their religious profession. They are "neither cold nor hot" but lukewarm (*Rev. 3:15, 16*).

God's people claim to be "rich" (*Rev. 3:17*). That is, they are wealthy in Bible truth; they are "the remnant," after all. They think that they are the *laos dikaios*, "the righteous people" (ironically, another meaning of the name "Laodicea"). Yet, they are guilty of a fivefold deficiency: they are poor, wretched, miserable, blind, and naked. They believe that they see; they claim to have great spiritual understanding. They boast about the great truths of which they are the custodians. Yet, they are unable to see their own condition or their true need: they are destitute of the Holy Spirit. They are not sanctified by the truths they profess. It is their self-assured claim and their inability to see their need that produces and nourishes their pride and their lack of humility: thus, they boast that they "have need of nothing" (*Rev. 3:17*). Nor do they feel the need to learn anything, to grow, to change, or to realize the cause of their miserable condition. As a result, they do not feel the need of repentance.

Section 3: The Lord's Counsels. Considering the people's condition, God's counsels to Laodicea are a direct response to their three needs. The first need concerns their profession of faith, which is compared to lukewarm water. Lukewarm water is repulsive to drink. For this reason, God warns His people that He will "spue thee out of my mouth" (*Rev. 3:16*). That is, He will vomit them up, just as ancient Israel in Old Testament times had been warned (*Lev. 18:25*). The fact that the Laodicean people are neither cold nor hot further indicates their delusive thinking that they are rich in God's favor while, on the contrary, they are spiritually impoverished.

God's advice, then, to Laodicea is first to buy from Him gold refined in the fire. This small detail about the quality of the gold has significant implications: it suggests that God's people should not content themselves with cheap gold, amalgamated with dross. Nor should they settle for false gold, which has only the color and the appearance of genuine gold. By these symbols, the Lord warns His people against a false and superficial religion. Thus, God urges His people to buy the genuine article from Him.

God's second piece of advice concerns the garments of His people. Because they are naked, God counsels them to buy also "white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed" (*Rev. 3:18*). Elsewhere in Revelation, John tells us that the New Jerusalem, the Lamb's bride, is "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (*Rev. 19:8*). Because our righteousness

is, at best, “as filthy rags” (*Isa. 64:6*), we need the righteousness of Christ to cover our nakedness, as illustrated by the white raiment. The whiteness exemplifies purity, representing God’s imputed and imparted righteousness. Because His people are unable to see their true condition, God recommends that they anoint their eyes with “eyesalve” to restore their vision. Then they may become aware of their nakedness and their dire need of the divinely appointed remedial agencies.

Section 4: The Lord’s Love. God’s diagnosis of His people’s true condition is designed to awaken within them a sense of their genuine helplessness, and hopelessness, apart from Him (*Rev. 3:15–18*). Then, in verse 19, God expresses the infinite measure of His love.

The prophet Jeremiah uses the same language when He refers to God’s “everlasting love” (*Jer. 31:3*). The Hebrew *‘olam*, which is generally translated “everlasting,” refers to more than a chronological quality or long duration. This term is an idiomatic way of expressing the idea of great intensity. That is, God’s love is so intense and so great that it is beyond measure. It is like the infinite character of eternity itself. The eternity of God’s love is thus revealed to His people in order to awaken within them a positive response to His chastening: “‘Therefore be zealous and repent’ ” (*Rev. 3:19, NKJV*).

At this moment, immediately after His words of pastoral exhortation, the Lord’s discourse becomes more personal. So far, God has addressed Laodicea collectively as His people, as the aggregate church of the last days. Now, in verse 20, He suddenly turns to each believer within that church as the unique individual whom He loves personally and with whom He entertains a distinct relationship. It is significant that in the apocalyptic repetition of the number seven, the verb “I love,” in the first person, is followed by seven more verbs that express the Lord’s intense and personal love for each one of us (*Rev. 3:19–21*): (1) “‘I rebuke,’ ” (2) “‘I chasten,’ ” (3) “‘I stand at the door,’ ” (4) “‘[I] knock,’ ” (5) “‘I will come in to him,’ ” (6) “‘I will dine with him, and he with Me,’ ” and (7) “‘I will grant to sit with Me on My throne.’ ”

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip: Ask for a volunteer to reread the message to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14–22. Then discuss the following activities and questions with your class.

God’s Critiques of His Church:

1. “You are neither cold nor hot” (*Rev. 3:15, NKJV*).

- A. Find cases in which this prophecy has been fulfilled in the church and within your own personal experience.

B. What can you do to address the problem of lukewarmness without falling into fanaticism?

2. **“You say, ‘I am rich . . . and have need of nothing’ ”** (*Rev. 3:17, NKJV*).

A. List cases in which your church, in the past or in the present, has boasted, to its detriment, of spiritual, material, or missiological wealth and achievements.

B. How does God’s counsel to the Laodicean church help guard against this prideful attitude?

God’s Demands

3. **“Buy from Me gold refined in the fire’ ”** (*Rev. 3:18, NKJV*).

For Reflection: In Revelation 3:18, Christ makes an appeal that goes against human tradition and the human effort to reach truth. The immediate application of this counsel concerns the need to look for God’s revelation and to search the Scriptures seriously. We must not search just to find there an argument to defend our system of truth, as in the case of a series of proof texts. We also must take joy in the discovery of truth that will surprise, challenge, and disrupt entrenched ideas, ultimately leading to repentance and our transformation into the image of God. The search for gold refined in the furnace of affliction also refers to the love and faith that are developed amid the challenges and sufferings that come with the choice to walk with God.

1. What does God’s counsel to dress in “white garments” (*Rev. 3:18, NKJV*) mean to you in your spiritual journey?

2. What must you do to acquire these white clothes?

Activity:

God’s Love

Ask your students to keep a journal this quarter, recording stories in their lives in which they experienced God’s love. Have them consider or reflect on the following questions and write down their responses:

1. When were you chastised by God?

2. When did you cry at the foot of the cross?

3. When did you hear God knocking at the door of your heart?

4. When did you joyfully respond to His appeal?

5. Did you experience a special moment with the Lord in the midst of the intimacy of prayer?

6. Have you ever clearly seen the Lord’s hand in some particular event in your life?

To Know God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:1–5, Lev. 20:26, 1 Sam. 2:2, 1 John 4:7–19, Gen. 1:1, Gen. 2:7, Matt. 1:23, Matt. 28:20.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’ ” (*John 17:3, NKJV*).

Having a clear understanding of God's character is foundational to having a strong relationship with Him. That is why, this week, we will look carefully at what the Bible says about the character of God, keeping in mind that it “is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth. . . . The last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415.

It seems impossible to describe God adequately, and so the most we can do is point to what the Bible says about Him. Although we will never know, especially now, everything there is to know about God's wonderful character, let's pray that as we learn more about Him, our understanding of and love for Him will deepen, so that, ultimately, we will want to grow closer to Him in order to reflect His love and character to others.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 11.

A Clearer Picture of God

The Bible gives the truest, clearest, and most consistent picture of God. The entire Bible seeks to peel back the unseen veil between our visible world and the invisible; to show us where we've come from and where we're going; and, ultimately, to show us who is in control and what God is like.

From Genesis to Revelation, we read about the one true God, who makes Himself known to us through the Bible and through Jesus Christ, God incarnate. We can read about God's omnipotence (*Job 1:12*), His omniscience, His all-knowing nature (*Isa. 46:9, 10*), His justice (*Isa. 30:18*), His mercy (*Deut. 7:9*), His loving-kindness and patience with us (*Rom. 2:4*), His wisdom (*1 Cor. 2:7*), His grace (*2 Cor. 12:9*), His forgiveness (*Matt. 6:14*), His will for our lives (*Jer. 29:11*), His power to defeat death (*John 11:25*), His kingship (*Psa. 47:8*), His eternal nature (*Deut. 33:27*), and many other characteristics that give us abundant reasons to love and have an abiding relationship with Him. The more we know about God and what He is like, the more we will love Him and desire a close and abiding relationship with Him.

It was Lucifer who first doubted God's character. His doubts about who God is ultimately led to the greatest battle in the history of our universe. Ever since that time, "it is Satan's constant study to keep the minds of men occupied with those things which will prevent them from obtaining the knowledge of God."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 740. Satan doesn't care what kind of picture of God we have (pantheism, polytheism, deism, etc.), as long as it's not an accurate one.

Read Genesis 3:1–5. What was Satan's goal in his conversation with Eve? What lies did he tell Eve about God's character?

Ultimately, Satan's message to Eve was this: *God is keeping secrets from you. God does not want what is best for you. You can't trust Him.* Ellen White expands on this when she says, "From the opening of the great controversy it has been Satan's purpose to misrepresent God's character and to excite rebellion against His law."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 338.

How is God's character misrepresented in our world? More important, how might you, at times, have misrepresented His character to others? If you have, what can you do to change with the Holy Spirit's help? How can you show God's love to the people around you?

God Is Holy

Holiness is not a word that most people use very often in their everyday language, perhaps because there are so few holy things around us and about us. The Sabbath is a holy day in time, and God is, of course, holy. Apart from God, our everyday lives lack holiness.

If you do a study into the attributes most often associated with God's character, you'll discover that holiness is at the center of who God is. But what does that mean?

How do the following verses describe God: **Leviticus 20:26, 1 Samuel 2:2, Isaiah 57:15, and Ezekiel 38:23?**

When the Bible describes God as the epitome of holiness, it means that He is completely void of and completely separated from evil and sin. God is 100 percent good from beginning to end. In this sense, God's holiness is central to all His other attributes.

For example, God's love is a pure, holy love—a love that is completely free from all selfishness and egotistic motives. His omniscience (all-knowing) is holy omniscience, meaning it is free from evil intentions. Would we trust an omniscient God if He weren't holy? Of course not! We would be afraid of Him, and rightly so.

God's omnipotence (being all-powerful) is holy omnipotence. Imagine a God who is omnipotent but not holy. He could be a powerful, evil tyrant. Only God's holiness allows and enables us to really love Him, because He is good from beginning to end. This is why holiness is perhaps the most important characteristic to understand about God's character. Yet, perhaps, it is one of the most misunderstood, as well.

Think about Bible characters such as Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John who came into God's presence. What was their first response? They removed their shoes, hid their faces, or fell down as though dead. As human beings, we are sinful and so unholy that we can't bear to stand in God's presence. Any human who looks at God's face will not live. Similarly, when Ellen G. White went into vision, she often cried "Glory . . . glory . . . glory" because it was the one word that seemed to most capture what she saw. And, of course, the four living creatures do not rest day or night without saying, " 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!' " (*Rev. 4:8, NKJV*).

Truly, God is pure holiness, and when we come to Him, we must see Him as such. How does knowing this inspire you? In what ways does this challenge you regarding your own character?

God Is Love

Love is perhaps the most common word used by Christians to describe God's character. This could be because of the identity statement about God in 1 John 4:8, which says, "God is love." John doesn't say, "God is loving," but rather, "God is love." Love is His character, the very essence of who He is.

For many people, their picture of God emerges from their human definition of love, which is always distorted and imperfect. Instead, our very definition of love should be shaped by who God is and what He reveals about Himself in His inspired Word.

What does 1 John 4:7–19 explain to us about love?

God's love is perfect, free, and deeply relational, as revealed in the repeated invitation to "abide" in Him in 1 John, because "we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16, NKJV). God is love, and He created us in His image (Gen. 1:27) to love and to desire love. In Hebrew, one major word for love is *hesed*. This describes God's covenant love for humanity, which encompasses traits of loyalty, protectiveness, steadfastness, and tenderness.

The ancient languages of Hebrew and Greek use many different names to refer to God, names whose meanings capture and shed light on different aspects of God's beautiful character. Here are just two examples:

- *Adonai*: The Lord of all, who reigns forever, in reference to the covenant (Gen. 15:2, Judg. 6:15, Mal. 1:6, Ps. 97:5).
- *Yahweh-Yireh*: The-LORD-Will-Provide (Gen. 22:13, 14, NKJV).

Ultimately, the greatest expression of God's love is revealed through the gift of His Son to this earth (John 3:16) who died for sinners (Rom. 5:8). God could have withheld this from humanity, yet because of His magnanimous, radical, supremely altruistic love, God sent Jesus to earth so that we might freely choose to respond to His love, revealed in His substitutionary death on our behalf. Not only did Jesus bridge the separation that sin has brought between us and God (Isa. 59:1, 2), He lived to show us God's perfect character of love (John 14:9, Heb. 1:3) and to draw all people to Himself (John 12:32).

Many of God's names capture His holiness and love at their core. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 (NKJV), and in every case, replace the word "love" with "God." How does this expand your understanding of God's character? If you were to place your name where it says "love," how well would that fit you?

God in Creation

You probably know from memory the first words in the Bible: “In the beginning God.” In Hebrew, the word for God here is Elohim. Although this word can be used when talking about false “gods,” when it refers to the one true God, it describes an almighty, all-powerful Creator in connection with the whole of creation; the transcendent God who is beyond our understanding but in control of everything. He is so powerful that when He speaks, something is created just from His voice.

But in the next chapter, Genesis 2, there appears a different name for God: Yahweh. This name connects to Elohim (*Yahweh Elohim*), the same all-powerful, almighty God; but the name Yahweh is the more personal name of the one true God, often used to emphasize that God is the covenant God, in loving relation with His created people.

Compare the descriptions of God in Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 2:7. What do you notice?

In Genesis 2:7, we can imagine God kneeling to form the first human being out of the ground with His own hands. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” This is a God who gets close—so close that He breathes into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life. This name, Yahweh, presents a more intimate picture of God, but Moses uses both names in the first two chapters of the Bible to describe these two characteristics of God to us.

How astonishing! We see here God’s transcendence to us as Elohim, and His immanence, His closeness to us, as Yahweh. How good for us to think of both of these aspects of God’s character: His overall control of everything and His nearness to us. As Paul said to the Athenians on Mars Hill: “‘He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being’ ” (*Acts 17:27, 28, NKJV*).

It’s important that we continue to seek a clear, balanced picture of God based on what the Bible tells us about God’s character in order to grow in a relationship with Him. This is why it’s important to read all parts of the Bible rather than focusing on only one portion. Truly, the more we learn about the character of God, the more we will learn to love Him.

Read as Elihu describes some of God’s attributes in Job 36:24–33 and Job 37. Then read God’s declaration of His omnipotence in Job 38 and 39. What do these passages reveal to us about God?

Immanuel, God With Us

If you were looking to share with a non-Christian a description from the Bible about God’s character, where would you turn?

The best answer, of course, would be to Jesus. The Bible says that Jesus not only reflects God but reveals God. There are many Bible passages that explain this, but the one that does so most simply is John 14:9. Here, Jesus says, “ ‘He who has seen Me has seen the Father’ ” (*NKJV*). In order to know more about what God the Father is like, we should look to Jesus—His words, His actions, His manner, and His great love toward humanity as displayed in His death and resurrection.

The love and care of the Father is most clearly expressed in His Son, Jesus. The beauty of the Bible is that God has given us four rich perspectives on the life of Jesus so that we can have a fuller picture of who He is. In Matthew (written by a Jew, for Jews), we see Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah who fulfilled what was promised. In Mark, we see Jesus living an active life of service and sacrifice. He was always thinking of others and always responsive to the will of His Father. In Luke, we can read about how Jesus felt, with His humanity and compassion, and we can read this account to have assurance that what we read is true (*Luke 1:3, 4*). In John, we see the incarnate Son of God and are invited to believe that Jesus is who He says He is, so that our spiritual lives can be revived. Although all four Gospels explore the same ground, “they do not represent things in just the same style. Each writer has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds.”—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 105, 1900. Which Gospel have you read most recently?

In Matthew 1:23, a specific name is given to Jesus. Why is this so significant in understanding God’s character? Read Matthew 28:20, focusing on the last part of the verse. Compare these two verses. What do you notice?

We’ve touched only the surface of this huge topic, the character of God. God is greater and more incredible than we can fathom, and we will forever be learning about Him into eternity.

God deserves our praise for who He is and what He has done and is doing in our lives. Take some time now to offer up a prayer of praise to God for who He is. Be specific about what the Bible tells you about God. (For example, “Thank You, God, for being _____, as You tell me in _____.”)

Further Thought: God calls His people to represent His character, but to do this, we need to know Him for ourselves. The best way to see Him clearly, despite our sinful human eyes that too often misunderstand His holy and perfect ways, is through searching His Word, the Bible.

“All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it. Yet as we study the Bible and meditate upon the life of Christ and the plan of redemption, these great themes will open to our understanding more and more.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 740.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As you consider the attributes of God that you’ve studied this week, which one has most impacted your understanding of God?
- 2 What other attributes of God could you study to deepen and strengthen your relationship with Him?
- 3 With a family member or friend, read or listen to *Steps to Christ*, chapter 1, and discuss it together. What new insights about God’s character and Jesus has this chapter made you think about?
- 4 Many people have a distorted picture of God, which Jesus came to correct. What can you do to share a clear, accurate picture of God’s character to those in your sphere of influence?
- 5 Consider again what you learned on Monday’s reading. Although we’re clearly sinful and not holy, the Bible also makes some clear statements about God’s people living holy lives. Read 1 Peter 1:13–16, Romans 6:22, and Hebrews 12:14. God is holy and invites us to be holy. But what does it really mean to live a holy life?

Summary: From the beginning of Creation, God has desired to be in a close relationship with us. Although our understanding of His character is the target of Satan’s attacks, God reveals Himself to us most clearly through His Word and through the life of His Son, Jesus. Ultimately, having a clear, beautiful picture of God is essential if we want to deepen our relationship with Him.

Refusing to Fly on Sabbath

Seventh-day Adventist entrepreneur Kasereka Maghulu Kavatsi built a business empire in the Democratic Republic of Congo that included farming, fishing, clothing, and a cargo airline called Kavatsi Airlines.

At one point, Kavatsi Airlines leased a Boeing 707 jet from a partner in Kenya. It was a complicated agreement involving the Kenyan partner leasing the plane from a Dubai company, and the Dubai company in turn leasing the plane from the owner in Britain. Under the lease terms, Kavatsi Airlines was to share its profits with the entities in Kenya, Dubai, and Britain.

The cargo transports went smoothly until bad weather canceled a flight on a Friday. The Kenyan partner insisted that the flight take off on Saturday, but Kasereka refused. “There is no way that I can fly on Sabbath,” he said.

The partner called Dubai. “We gave this man our jet, and he doesn’t want to fly on Saturday,” he said. “Try to convince him. This is a business matter.”

The Dubai company appealed to Kasereka, but he wouldn’t waver. So, the Dubai company contacted the British owner, a white man who knew Swahili. He called Kasereka and asked, “Why aren’t you flying today?”

“I’m a Seventh-day Adventist,” Kasereka said.

“Is that a church?”

“Yes, it’s a church.”

Then the owner contacted other people who had leased aircraft to Kavatsi Airlines and asked about Kasereka. They described him as a good man.

“This is a matter of faith,” they said. “The Sabbath is related to his faith.”

The owner instructed his partners in Dubai and Kenya to back off.

“It’s a matter of faith, so leave him alone,” he said.

During the four-month lease, Kasereka flew the jet every day of the week except on Sabbath. Then he returned the aircraft.

A year later, the British owner made a phone call to Kasereka. “I’d like to meet you face-to-face,” he said. “I want to come to your house and see where you live.”

The man flew to the Democratic Republic of Congo and stayed in Kasereka’s guesthouse. “I came here with a purpose,” he said. “I wanted to know if I would find a man still holding onto the faith that made him refuse to fly on Saturdays.”



Then he dropped a bombshell.

“I have never made such a big profit as I did during those four months that we worked together,” he said. “Because of your faith, I’m giving you a small aircraft for free.” He presented Kasereka with an 18-seat private jet.

Kasereka was humbled and amazed.

“I am just serving the Lord,” he replied.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *John 17:3*

Study Focus: *Jer. 23:23, 24; Gen. 1:1; Gen. 2:7; Isa. 7:14.*

We cannot fully fathom God in all His glory or majesty. God’s ways and thoughts are beyond our understanding (*Isa. 55:9, Rom. 11:33*). Indeed, they are as far from our finite comprehension as the heavens are from the earth. And yet, wonder of wonders, the Bible insists that we may, and should, know God (*Jer. 9:23, 24*).

To the Babylonian king who believed that the gods were unreachable because, as his wise men insisted, their “dwelling is not with flesh” (*Dan. 2:11*), Daniel responds to the contrary. Although God is in heaven, Daniel declares that God reveals secrets (*Dan. 2:28*). The Bible conveys, then, a paradoxical message about knowing God: God is both far and near (*Jer. 23:23, 24*). This dynamic tension is already present in the Creation story, which presents the simultaneity of God’s farness and nearness (*compare the divine-human relations within Genesis 1 and 2*). Furthermore, the Creator is also the Savior (*Gen. 3:15*). This basic truth, which we learn in the beginning of the Scriptures, contains an important lesson about our worship response to our powerful and great God: not only did He create us and the universe, He is also the approachable and loving God who came down in human flesh to be “with us” (*Isa. 7:14, NLT*).

Part II: Commentary

“Knowing God.” Implicit in the Hebrew concept of “knowing” is a conjugal metaphor, as exemplified in the phrase “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived” (*Gen. 4:1*). To know God, essentially, refers to the conjugal, or covenant, relationship we entertain with God. This covenant language (*Gen. 17:7, 8*) is also reflected in the love language of the Song of Songs (*Song of Sol. 2:16*). In the New Testament, Paul plays on the paradox of knowing God, which he explains to mean that we are known by Him (*Gal. 4:9*).

The God of Creation and Salvation. The Bible begins with two parallel Creation accounts: Genesis 1 and 2. The name of God, *'Elohim*, in the first Creation account (*Genesis 1*), connotes the ideas of grandeur and power. The name *'Elohim* is plural, which expresses intensity and majesty. *'Elohim* evokes the ideas of power and strength. The name *YHWH*, in the

second Creation account (*Genesis 2*), connotes the ideas of proximity and existence. This name, which is etymologically related to the verb *hayah*, “be,” refers to the God who exists for us: He comes down to earth, speaks to humans, and walks with them. He is the God of history, the personal God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

There is also significance in the respective proportion of references to God in the Creation accounts in comparison with the number of references to humans. While *'Elohim* occurs 35 times in the first Creation account, *YHWH* occurs 11 times in the second account. In the first account God speaks to humans only twice and in a general way. Also, in the first account, humans are created in God’s image (*Gen. 1:27*). In the second account, God creates man by shaping the dust, the medium of his making, with His own hands, and by breathing into him the breath of life (*Gen. 2:7*). In the first Creation account, God speaks to humans, but no human response is recorded. In the second Creation account, God speaks personally to humans, and they respond to Him.

The contrast between the two parallel accounts of Creation is intended to highlight the glorious paradox of God: the powerful God of Creation who created the universe is simultaneously the personal God of salvation who relates with humans.

The God We Worship. God is our Creator and Savior. These two revelations of God impact our worship. Furthermore, these revelations contain important lessons about the reasons we should worship. The first and fundamental reason is Creation: God created the heavens and the earth (*Genesis 1, 2*), including the human species (*Gen. 1:26, 27; Gen. 2:7; Ps. 139:13–16*). In the Bible, worship is a response to God’s works of Creation: for instance, the worship of God on the seventh-day Sabbath (*Gen. 2:1–3*) constitutes the first human response to God’s creation. Fearing God means keeping His commandments, and the commandment of the seventh-day Sabbath is the only commandment that refers to Creation (*Exod. 20:8–11*).

In the Psalms, worship is always directly connected to Creation. Also, the book of Revelation refers to Creation as the primary rationale for worship: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things” (*Rev. 4:11, NKJV*).

The second reason for worship is rooted in the understanding of salvation as a re-creation that will take place at the end of time. The first angel’s mention of the “springs of water” (*Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV*), in addition to the usual components of creation—namely, heaven, earth, and sea (*Exod. 20:11, Neh. 9:6*)—conveys the eschatological connotation of life and, by extension, hope (*compare with Gen. 16:7, Exod. 15:27, Ps. 107:35*). In the book of Ezekiel, the New Jerusalem abounds with springs of water (*Ezek. 47:1–12*), which evoke the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 2:10–14; compare with Joel 3:18, Zech. 13:1, Ps. 46:4*). Likewise, in

the book of Revelation, the “rivers of water” denote life (*Rev. 22:1, 2*). The Lamb, representing Christ, leads His people to the springs of water (*Rev. 7:17, Rev. 21:6, Rev. 22:17*). The “springs of water” thus have a future ring, pointing to the final redemption, the recovery of the Garden of Eden, with the promise of the actual presence of the Lord among His people (*Rev. 22:1–3*).

The God Who Hides His Face. In the book of Isaiah, the theme of God’s hiding His face (*hester panim*) is an important motif. But it is in the context of the Suffering Servant that this theme takes on its most poignant significance. The image of the hidden face, used in Isaiah 53, does not mean God’s death or ours and, hence, our separation from Him. It is, on the contrary, a hiding that saves and, paradoxically, restores God’s relationship with sinful humans. Significantly, this particular divine feature is contrasted to the idols. The idols are seen, unlike God, who is hidden (*Isa. 45:15*).

Our verse makes it clear that, in contrast to the idols, the God who hides Himself is the true God, “the Savior.” The next verse emphasizes the contrast between God and the idols. Immediately after mentioning the shame and confusion of the makers of idols in Isaiah 45:16, verse 17 refers to the salvation of Israel by the Lord, the Creator. Salvation does not come from the idols that one makes and sees, but from the God whom one does not make and whom one does not see. That is, salvation comes from the God who hides His face.

“God With Us.” The background story of the prophecy of the birth of Immanuel contains a lesson of hope in spite of human skepticism. Ahaz is afraid that he will lose the war against his enemies and that the Davidic line will be disrupted. Then the Lord admonishes him: “ ‘If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established’ ” (*Isa. 7:9, NKJV*). Yet, Ahaz still refuses to believe, and rejects God’s offer to ask Him for a sign (*Isa. 7:12*).

God’s response seems to be filled with irony: because the king of Israel refuses to be involved in God’s plan, “therefore” the child will be conceived without “his” help; that is, apart from any human agency. Thus, “a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son” (*Isa. 7:14*). The prophet Isaiah predicted to the king a birth of a supernatural character. The birth of this child would come from a virgin woman; also, the name of the child would be “Immanuel,” meaning “God with us.” The birth of this child would, then, bring God closer to His people, an experience that is the actual evidence that God would respond and be present in history, in spite of the king himself.

For Ahaz, the future birth of Immanuel from a virgin is a sign that the throne of David would not be empty, a guarantee that the Davidic

line would not be disrupted. For Ahaz, the promise of the future birth of Immanuel was intended as a sign of hope to comfort him in his present circumstances. For us today, the promise of Immanuel, who came and will return, should suffuse and illuminate our present journey from now until the end. As our Savior said: “‘I am with you always, even to the end of the age’” (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*).

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip: What are the many ways that we may know and respond to God? To explore these topics further, ask for volunteers to read the passages below. Then discuss with your class the questions that follow.

Read Psalm 139:19–24.

1. Paul says that we are “known of God” (*Gal. 4:9*). How does this fact affect my life?
2. What effect does this knowledge have on my thinking and on my anxieties?
3. What impact does being known of God have on my relationship with other people (*Ps. 139:19*)?
4. How does being known of God inspire my relationships with people and my daily decisions (*Ps. 139:23, 24*)?

Read Revelation 14:7.

1. How do you respond to the God of Creation?
2. In Revelation 14:7 (*NKJV*), how does the use of the pronoun “Him” after the verb “worship” affect your way of worshiping?
3. Is it possible to worship without “Him”? Explain.
4. As a church minister, or as a church member, ask yourself, What can I do to ensure God’s presence in the church and in my mind?
5. **Activity:** The fact that worship is a response to Creation should inspire our way of worship. The God we worship is both the powerful and the transcendent God, Elohim (*Gen. 1:1–2:4*), and the personal and loving God, YHWH (*Gen. 2:4–25*). The psalmist’s call for worship resonates with this same tension: “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (*Ps. 2:11*). Prepare a liturgical program, including music and preaching, that reflects the tension of the two Creation stories.

Read Daniel 3.

1. Make a comparative list of the characteristics of false worship (the Chaldeans) and true worship (the three Hebrews).
2. What does this comparison teach you about the difference between true and false worship?

Pride Versus Humility



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *1 John 2:15–17, Luke 18:9–14, 1 John 1:9, Heb. 11:24–26, Luke 22:24–27, Phil. 2:3–8.*

Memory Text: “‘For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted’ ” (*Luke 14:11, NKJV*).

We’ve all known people with big egos, those who think they are *never* wrong. Or perhaps you know someone who wants to be in control, who never is open to instruction or constructive criticism. Or someone who seems to be constantly in conflict or is a master of putting others down. Our minds might immediately think of others, but the real question is: *What about each one of us?* By pointing the finger at others and denying pride in our own life, we deceive ourselves.

We’ve all battled with pride. We’ve all experienced times we want to look, act, speak, or appear better than those around us because we believe that we *are* better than they are, at least in some way. Someone once said that pride emerges from the desire to show that our lives have value. Yet, we should already know that our lives have value because we were created by God, and we are those for whom Christ died.

This week we’ll explore the impact that pride can have on our relationships with God and with others, and we’ll look at what the Bible teaches us about humility before others and, of course, before God.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 18.

The Tight Fingers of Pride

Pride. When you think of this word, you might picture a proud politician, a rich or famous person, or a peacock. Pride is a feeling that you are more important or better than other people. Indeed, pride is a feeling—one that cannot, and should not, be relied upon.

Pride first began with Lucifer, the covering cherub, who was in close service to God. We don't know when or how those thoughts of selfishness crept into his heart, but we do know that these thoughts propelled the universe into what we know as the great controversy. We see that Satan is the opposite of God. (*Compare Isa. 14:12–14 and Phil. 2:5–11.*) As a result, our world has battled the consequences of sin ever since Satan planted doubt in Adam's and Eve's minds and then tempted them to love and trust self above God.

Read 1 John 2:15–17. What three main points does this passage teach you about pride and loving the world?

Can pride ever be positive? Perhaps not in the context that we know it, although we might use the word positively, when speaking about a person's achievements or in the context of a deep appreciation for something someone has done ("I'm so proud of you!"). It's important to understand that pursuing excellence and acknowledging and appreciating the gifts and abilities God has given us is not necessarily being proud. According to Scripture, there is a proper kind of self-love (think about Jesus' command in Mark 12:31, where He says to love others as we love ourselves), but this is always *unselfish* love. People are also not proud when they have God's presence in their lives and have a purposeful direction (*see 1 Tim. 3:1*). People are proud when they don't give God the glory for what He is doing in their lives.

We should be careful to remember that our possessions, abilities, and accomplishments don't determine our value. Instead, our value should always come from God, because everything that we have, even that which tempts us to pride, comes only from Him anyway. This is a point we must never forget.

Ask yourself: *How prideful am I, really? How might personal pride be impacting my relationship with God and others?*

Know Yourself

Two men go to church to pray. One is a respected elder who stands at the front before church begins, in front of the congregation so they can see him. He prays aloud, thanking God for his own perceived goodness. The other man, a fringe dweller of society, stands at the very back of the church. His eyes are blurry with tears because of the weight on his shoulders from his sins. In the back corner of the church, he falls to his knees, whispering in desperation, “Please, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

Read Luke 18:9–14. What do you think of these two men? What did Jesus think? What important lesson is here for us all?

It’s very easy for us to exalt ourselves. Sometimes it becomes second nature to let others know of our accomplishments and how good we are. But these things, in and of themselves, make no difference to our reputation in heaven’s eyes. In fact, it’s actually contrary to what we might think, because “ ‘everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted’ ” (*Luke 18:14, NKJV*). Jesus also counsels us to take the lowest seat and let the host elevate you if he or she so wishes (*Luke 14:8–10*). This upside-down kingdom that Jesus teaches is the opposite of what we expect. “It is only he who knows himself to be a sinner that Christ can save.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 158.

In first realizing our true state of sinfulness and our desperate need of Christ, we can come to Him knowing with confidence that if “we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (*1 John 1:9, NKJV*).

The closer we draw to Christ, the more we realize our sinfulness and unworthiness. “In one way only can a true knowledge of self be obtained. We must behold Christ. It is ignorance of Him that makes men so uplifted in their own righteousness.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 159.

So, what does God think of the proud? First Peter 5:5 tells us that “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” It couldn’t be clearer.

When did you last experience God’s grace in your life? (Indeed, we should experience this grace daily.) We should also show grace to others. Spend some time in prayer right now, asking God to humble you under His mighty hand, that He alone may exalt you in due time.

Moses, Humble Servant

The grand halls of the Egyptian palace boasted of opulence, pleasure, and ease. “ ‘Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds’ ” (*Acts 7:22, NKJV*). A life of power, riches, and popularity were his for the taking; yet, Moses chose something very different. “As historian, poet, philosopher, general of armies, and legislator, he stands without a peer. Yet with the world before him, he had the moral strength to refuse the flattering prospects of wealth and greatness and fame, ‘choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 246.

What does Hebrews 11:24–26 tell us about why Moses chose a different path and humbled himself?

Moses’ later humility is remarkable, considering the powerful man he was and where he had come from. Yet, through an impulsive sinful act (*Exod. 2:12*), he lost his self-confidence and self-sufficiency. With mountains as his classroom walls and with pride swept aside, for 40 years Moses was taught by God what he needed to know to lead a nation out of slavery into the Promised Land. The power and riches of what could have been another life in Egypt paled in significance when Moses considered eternity. God had called him very specifically, and Moses followed.

Perhaps most significantly in light of this topic, Numbers 12:3 tells us: “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (*NKJV*). Moses, one of the great patriarchs of the Bible, is known for his humility, his meekness. Consider how different his life and leadership would have been had pride crept into each of these big events in his life: the burning bush, the plagues in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, manna falling from heaven, talking directly to God, receiving the Ten Commandments, and hearing God’s words after he struck the rock.

Reflect back over your life. If someone were to describe you, would they include “humble” or “meek” in the list of adjectives? Why or why not? The truth is that we can’t be humble in and of ourselves. Sin is part of our lives, which is why we need Jesus so much. Listen to, read, or sing the words in the hymn “I’d Rather Have Jesus,” and consider these words in relation to Moses’ life and yours.

The Greatest Offense

Imagine being a disciple of Jesus. You travel with Him, eat with Him, sleep near Him, and learn from Him as He transforms countless lives, including yours. People clamor after Him, and you realize how special it is that He chose you to be one of the 12 closest to Him. Then you start to wonder: Who really is the greatest of all the disciples?

In Luke 22:24–27, read Jesus’ response to the disciples’ dispute about what greatness means. Which statement captures the heart of Jesus’ message in these verses?

One would have thought that after all this time of being close to Jesus, this kind of debate would have been the last thing on their minds. But that is not what happened.

Instead of these men being content with their calling, pride rose in their hearts to where each one thought he was better than the others. It’s easy to allow such thoughts to dominate our minds. But we are told that “there is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 154.

This is very serious for us. Our pride offends God more than *anything else*, and it’s a character trait that is difficult to overcome because we often don’t see it for what it is. In our state of self-sufficiency, we choose not to self-evaluate, for surely pride is king. We need to stop, self-diagnose, and ask that God will open our eyes to our true state, because pride may be the number-one factor that keeps us from having a close relationship with Him today.

If you realize that God alone can do the work to remove pride and selfishness from your soul, pause and pray this prayer right now: “Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 159.

Look at Him

Read Luke 22:27 again. What is the key message for all of Christ's followers here?

In stark contrast to the disciples' desire to be superior and their belief that they were better than the next guy, we see Jesus—the ultimate example of humility. Jesus, who said, “ ‘Yet I am among you as the One who serves’ ” (*Luke 22:27, NKJV*). Jesus, who every day gave to those in need around Him because He was filled with compassion and saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd. He knew that humanity needed Him more than anything else in life, though few realized this simple truth. Jesus, who gave up heaven to die for the human race in the hope that they would understand His act of grace and respond to His invitation to have a relationship with Him.

Read Philippians 2:3–8. What do these verses tell us about how we should live in light of the Cross?

Jesus did it *all*. He bore all. When we pause long enough to see Him—truly and purely—we can't help realizing our impurity, our filth, and our desperate need of Him in our lives today.

When we look to Him, everything else (especially ourselves and our own perceived greatness) pales into complete insignificance. Who Jesus is, what He has done, and how much He loves His creation becomes front and center. Self will surely disappear when we look at Him.

Jesus. What a beautiful, mighty name. He is the epitome of humility. When our open hearts learn about Him, when we understand what He has done for us, and when we allow His words of life to seep into our minds, we realize how proud and wretched we really are. If His own disciples, who lived and learned from Him, struggled with pride, we can't fool ourselves that we are any different. Ultimately, we can grow in our relationship with Jesus only when we are humble.

Spend some extra time with Him right now. Take your Bible, a pen, and a journal or some paper and find somewhere quiet—perhaps even outside. Invite God to soften and speak to your heart. Write out Psalm 138, word for word. As you write, what words especially stand out to you?

Further Thought: “The nearer we come to Jesus and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character, the more clearly we shall discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the less we shall feel like exalting ourselves. Those whom heaven recognizes as holy ones are the last to parade their own goodness.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 160.

“Before honor is humility. To fill a high place before men, Heaven chooses the worker who, like John the Baptist, takes a lowly place before God. The most childlike disciple is the most efficient in labor for God. The heavenly intelligences can co-operate with him who is seeking, not to exalt self, but to save souls. . . .

“When men exalt themselves, feeling that they are a necessity for the success of God’s great plan, the Lord causes them to be set aside. . . .

“It was not enough for the disciples of Jesus to be instructed as to the nature of His kingdom. What they needed was a change of heart that would bring them into harmony with its principles. . . . The simplicity, the self-forgetfulness, and the confiding love of a little child are the attributes that Heaven values. These are the characteristics of real greatness. . . .

“The sincere, contrite soul is precious in the sight of God. He places His own signet upon men, not by their rank, not by their wealth, not by their intellectual greatness, but by their oneness with Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 436, 437.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What additional insights do the following verses have about pride and humility: Matthew 23:12; Psalm 25:9; Psalm 149:4; and James 4:6, 10?
- 2 Think honestly: When did you last “parade your own goodness”? How did this impact your relationship with God or those before whom you paraded it?
- 3 What might you need to change in your life to humble yourself before God in order to strengthen your walk with Him?

Summary: Pride can be one of the greatest blocks to growing in a relationship with God. If we feel self-sufficient and don’t realize our need of this relationship, we simply won’t pursue it. In contrast, Jesus was the humblest Man on earth and the most perfect example of how to have a close relationship with God.

“We Like to Help”

A mother with three little girls walked up the path to Iolanda’s home in Belo Jaridin, a Brazilian city of 80,000 people.

Iolanda saw them coming. She was standing at the door, giving rice and beans to a stranger who had stopped by to ask for food. Her house was located on a busy street, and people regularly came to the door to ask for help. She was sure that the approaching visitors also needed a hand, so she waited after the stranger left.

When the mother and girls reached the door, Iolanda’s eyes fell on the children’s feet.

“Why are your children barefoot?” she asked.

The woman explained that her eight-year-old daughter’s sandals had broken, so she had asked her four- and six-year-old daughters to remove their sandals so their older sister wouldn’t feel ashamed.

“I’ll get a pair of sandals and some food,” Iolanda said.

She disappeared into the house and returned a moment later with sandals for the eight-year-old girl and a snack of plain crackers, plain cookies, and cold water.

The little girls beamed with joy. “Can we call you Grandma?” one asked.

The mother was surprised at Iolanda’s kindness.

“Why are you doing this?” she asked.

“I’m a Christian from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we like to help people,” Iolanda said. “I sew clothes for children, and church members bring me many donations. So, I have lots of sandals and clothes.”

“I want to be part of this church,” the mother said. “I want to study the Bible with you.”

A year later, the mother was baptized and joined the Adventist Church.

Iolanda Xavier, an 86-year-old great-grandmother, believes that nothing is more important than obeying Jesus’ command, “ ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you’ ” (*Matthew 28:19, 20; NKJV*).

“Mission is really important,” she said. “All of us were born of God to be missionaries.”



Part of last quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, went to open a church at Pernambuco Adventist Academy in Brazil’s state of Pernambuco, where Iolanda lives. Thank you for planning a generous offering for this quarter’s projects. Watch a YouTube video of Iolanda at [bit.ly /Iolanda-IS](https://bit.ly/Iolanda-IS).

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Luke 14:11*

Study Focus: *Gen. 11:5, Isa. 14:12–14, Num. 12:3, Luke 18:9–14, Ps. 20:7.*

Last week, we were confronted with the Lord’s diagnosis of Laodicea’s spiritual malady: “‘You say, ‘I am rich . . . and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked’ ” (*Rev. 3:17, NKJV*). John, the apocalyptic prophet, denounced the problem of spiritual pride, which is rooted in the focus on “I,” with its emphasis on the ego. The sobering reality is that apart from God, we can do nothing to overcome self. We may be thankful, therefore, that the message of the Bible is all about solving this problem of self, a problem that concerns each and every one of us.

This week we will analyze the sin of pride in order to understand its mechanism and apprehend its danger. To that end, we will proceed in three steps.

1. First, we will trace the inception of pride in heaven during the time in which Lucifer planned to usurp God’s place (*Isa. 14:13*).
2. We will then proceed to earth to examine the enterprise of the builders of Babel at the time they planned to make a name for themselves by endeavoring to build a tower that would reach to heaven (*Gen. 11:4*).
3. In the third step, we will study a number of examples of pride alongside contrasting models of humility: Pharaoh and Moses, Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, and the Pharisee and the tax collector in Jesus’ parable (*Luke 18:9–14*). This third section will offer a comparative reflection on pride and humility based on the teaching of biblical wisdom (*Prov. 11:2; Prov. 27:1, 2*).

Part II: Commentary

The Pride of Lucifer: The key text concerning the pride of Lucifer is found in Isaiah 14:12–15, framed within the context of Isaiah’s oracle against Babylon (*Isa. 14:3–23*). It is interesting to note that the language of the oracle against Babylon/Lucifer in this text is reminiscent of the language of the apocalyptic accusation against the church of Laodicea. Both charges concern claims of what “you [Lucifer/Laodicea] have said” (*Isa. 14:13, NKJV; compare with Rev. 3:17*). As in the letter to the Laodicean

church, the oracle of Isaiah against Lucifer emphasizes the first-person perspective (in this case, Lucifer's), which is repeated five times: "I will ascend," "I will exalt," "I will sit," "I will ascend," and "I will be like the Most High." As in the letter to the Laodicean church, the oracle of Isaiah marks an unexpected turning point when it predicts: "Yet you shall be brought down" (*Isa. 14:15, NKJV*). In both prophecies, the inspired authors describe a scenario of boasting (as indicated by the prideful "I"), which is unequivocally condemned.

With this background in mind, let us now turn our attention to the story of the fall of Lucifer. This story is full of spiritual lessons. We shall assess them point by point:

The name of Lucifer: The problem of Lucifer is implicit in his name. Lucifer, which is derived from the Latin *lux ferre*, "bearer of light," is the translation of the Hebrew name *heylal*, "light," which echoes the exclamation of divine adoration, *halleluiah*. Thus, as the semantics of his name suggest, Lucifer's profound intention (that is, what he sought in his heart [*Isa. 14:13*]) was to be worshiped.

His ascension: In order to be worshiped, Lucifer sought to go up from where he was to the place of God, which was above. The upward movement is repeated several times for emphasis. First, the key verb, which describes his move, '*alah*, "ascend," is used twice, as the first and last verb of the series of actions in the phrases "I will ascend into heaven" (*Isa. 14:13*) and "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds" (*Isa. 14:14*). This upward movement resonates again in the verb '*arim*, "I will exalt," which means literally to "carry upward," referring to Lucifer's throne. Thus, Lucifer audaciously intends to raise his throne "above the stars of God," meaning the highest stars.

The intended place of destination: Lucifer aimed at reaching "the mount of congregation." The parallel passage, in Ezekiel 28, refers to the holy "mountain of God" (*Ezek. 28:16*), which designates the place of God's temple, where God's people are gathered to worship God. Isaiah 14:13 specifies, indeed, that this place is located "on the farthest sides of the north" (*NKJV*), a superlative for the highest place, the place of God Himself, where God is worshiped in heaven. The same phrase is used in Psalm 48 to designate the place of the temple (*Ps. 48:2*).

The profound intention: The passage concludes with a disclosure of Lucifer's true intention: " 'I will be like the Most High' " (*Isa. 14:14, NKJV*). These are Lucifer's last recorded words in the passage (*Isa. 14:14*). This story reveals the daring blasphemy of pride in all its hubris: to become like God. The conclusion warns us of the result. Pride that aims at usurping the highest place in heaven, the place of God Himself, will cause its possessor to end up "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (*Rev. 3:17*), in "the lowest depths of the Pit" (*Isa. 14:15, NKJV*).

The pride of Babel. The language that is used to describe the work of the builders of Babel echoes that of the Creation account, clearly indicating the builders' intention to supplant and identify themselves as the Creator. Already this intention was anticipated in the preceding chapter in the table of nations, in which Nimrod's foundation of the kingdom of Babel is introduced with the technical word *re'shit*, "principal" (*Gen. 10:12*) or "beginning." This is the same word that introduces God's work of Creation (*Gen. 1:1*).

Likewise, the builders of the Tower of Babel display the same desire as Nimrod to take God's place. The word of God, *wayyomer 'Elohim*, rendered as "God said," which marks the rhythm of God's work of Creation, is also used here with the builders as its subject: *wayy'omeru*, "they said" (*Gen. 11:3, 4*). The divine fulfillment of Creation *wayehi*, "and there was" (*Gen. 1:3*), now describes Babel's achievement *wat-tehi*, "and they had" (*Gen. 11:3*). The same language referring to God's self-deliberation when He proposes to create humankind—*na'aseh*, "let us make" (*Gen. 1:26*)—reappears four times in reference to the builders' self-deliberation: "let us make bricks" (*Gen. 11:3, NKJV*), "let us . . . bake them" (*Gen. 11:3, NKJV*), "let us build" (*Gen. 11:4*), and "let us make" (*Gen. 11:4*). Even their intention to "make a name for ourselves" (*Gen. 11:4, NKJV*) is a usurpation of God's prerogatives, for God is the only One who makes a "name great" (*Gen. 12:2*) and the only One who can make a name for Himself (*Isa. 63:12, 14; Jer. 32:20*).

Thus, the builders of Babel possess the same ambition as Lucifer. As Lucifer before them, the builders wanted to go up to God's place, to the "door of God" (Bab-El). The story ends with an ironic play on the name of the tower: Bab-El ("the door of God"), the name of the presumptuous building endeavor, leads to *balal*, "confusion" (*see Gen. 11:9, NKJV*).

The proud and the humble. The Bible does not contain an abstract essay on pride and humility. Virtues and flaws are best apprehended in the action of individuals, in the course of events. Thus, in the Bible, the teaching of pride versus humility is exemplified by the contrast between humble and proud persons: Cain versus Abel, Jacob versus Esau, Joseph versus his brothers, Pharaoh versus Moses, and Daniel versus Nebuchadnezzar. In this lesson, only the contrast between Pharaoh and Moses will be presented.

Pharaoh versus Moses. In the beginning of the book of Exodus, both men are confronted with the strangeness of God. Yet, they react differently to God's presence. Moses reacts to God by responding to Him with two questions. The first question focuses on himself: "Who am I?" (*Exod. 3:11*). Moses feels insignificant before God and inadequate to the task of accomplishing the mission he is called to fulfill. Moses' second question concerns God Himself. Moses wants to know Him (*Exod. 3:13*) so that he may enter into relationship with Him.

On the other hand, when Pharaoh hears about God, he reacts by denying His existence. Unlike Moses, Pharaoh refuses to know Him (*Exod. 5:2*). Pharaoh cannot acknowledge the existence of God simply because he thinks of himself as God. Consequently, Pharaoh refuses to hear about another deity. Pharaoh reverses the divine injunction to let the Israelites go so that they may keep the Sabbath (*Exod. 5:6–9*) and, instead, commands Israel to do more work. Moreover, the Lord knew Moses face-to-face (*Deut. 34:10*), whereas Pharaoh kept rejecting God and refused to humble himself before Him (*Exod. 10:3*). While Moses was remembered as the humblest person on earth (*Num. 12:3*), Pharaoh was remembered as the proudest (*Exodus 7–10; compare with Neh. 9:10*).

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip 1: How do we die to self? Equally as important, how do we keep a humble spirit in service to our Maker? To further explore the answers to this topic, read the reflection below and discuss with your class the questions that follow.

For Reflection: The Lord endows each of us with gifts, both spiritual and natural, to bless His church. These gifts can include singing, preaching, teaching, helping, hospitality, evangelizing, storytelling, and so on. Unfortunately, it is all too easy for us to lose sight of the Giver of the gifts and to exalt the human vessel.

1. What are some things you can do to help yourself stay humble when serving the Lord with the gifts He has given you to glorify Him?
2. What are the dangers of pride and self-exaltation?
3. Why is humility so important when serving the Lord?
4. Talk about your answers to the questions above in light of Paul’s admission: “I die daily” (*1 Cor. 15:31*). How does Paul propose that we accomplish this “death”? Why is this “death” so critical to humility and successful service for the Lord?

Teacher’s Tip 2: Divide your class into small groups and assign each group one of the following contrasts in pride and humility: Cain versus Abel, Abraham versus Lot, Jacob versus Esau, Joseph versus his brothers, and Daniel versus Nebuchadnezzar. Give each group time to explore the contrasts and prepare a short presentation on the results of their study. Invite them to share their ideas with the class.

Cain versus Abel (*Genesis 4*): Contrast the meaning of the names of Cain and Abel, their choice of offering, and the dialogue between them.

Pride Versus Humility



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *1 John 2:15–17, Luke 18:9–14, 1 John 1:9, Heb. 11:24–26, Luke 22:24–27, Phil. 2:3–8.*

Memory Text: “‘For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted’ ” (*Luke 14:11, NKJV*).

We’ve all known people with big egos, those who think they are *never* wrong. Or perhaps you know someone who wants to be in control, who never is open to instruction or constructive criticism. Or someone who seems to be constantly in conflict or is a master of putting others down. Our minds might immediately think of others, but the real question is: *What about each one of us?* By pointing the finger at others and denying pride in our own life, we deceive ourselves.

We’ve all battled with pride. We’ve all experienced times we want to look, act, speak, or appear better than those around us because we believe that we *are* better than they are, at least in some way. Someone once said that pride emerges from the desire to show that our lives have value. Yet, we should already know that our lives have value because we were created by God, and we are those for whom Christ died.

This week we’ll explore the impact that pride can have on our relationships with God and with others, and we’ll look at what the Bible teaches us about humility before others and, of course, before God.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 18.

The Tight Fingers of Pride

Pride. When you think of this word, you might picture a proud politician, a rich or famous person, or a peacock. Pride is a feeling that you are more important or better than other people. Indeed, pride is a feeling—one that cannot, and should not, be relied upon.

Pride first began with Lucifer, the covering cherub, who was in close service to God. We don't know when or how those thoughts of selfishness crept into his heart, but we do know that these thoughts propelled the universe into what we know as the great controversy. We see that Satan is the opposite of God. (*Compare Isa. 14:12–14 and Phil. 2:5–11.*) As a result, our world has battled the consequences of sin ever since Satan planted doubt in Adam's and Eve's minds and then tempted them to love and trust self above God.

Read 1 John 2:15–17. What three main points does this passage teach you about pride and loving the world?

Can pride ever be positive? Perhaps not in the context that we know it, although we might use the word positively, when speaking about a person's achievements or in the context of a deep appreciation for something someone has done ("I'm so proud of you!"). It's important to understand that pursuing excellence and acknowledging and appreciating the gifts and abilities God has given us is not necessarily being proud. According to Scripture, there is a proper kind of self-love (think about Jesus' command in Mark 12:31, where He says to love others as we love ourselves), but this is always *unselfish* love. People are also not proud when they have God's presence in their lives and have a purposeful direction (*see 1 Tim. 3:1*). People are proud when they don't give God the glory for what He is doing in their lives.

We should be careful to remember that our possessions, abilities, and accomplishments don't determine our value. Instead, our value should always come from God, because everything that we have, even that which tempts us to pride, comes only from Him anyway. This is a point we must never forget.

Ask yourself: *How prideful am I, really? How might personal pride be impacting my relationship with God and others?*

Know Yourself

Two men go to church to pray. One is a respected elder who stands at the front before church begins, in front of the congregation so they can see him. He prays aloud, thanking God for his own perceived goodness. The other man, a fringe dweller of society, stands at the very back of the church. His eyes are blurry with tears because of the weight on his shoulders from his sins. In the back corner of the church, he falls to his knees, whispering in desperation, “Please, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

Read Luke 18:9–14. What do you think of these two men? What did Jesus think? What important lesson is here for us all?

It’s very easy for us to exalt ourselves. Sometimes it becomes second nature to let others know of our accomplishments and how good we are. But these things, in and of themselves, make no difference to our reputation in heaven’s eyes. In fact, it’s actually contrary to what we might think, because “ ‘everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted’ ” (*Luke 18:14, NKJV*). Jesus also counsels us to take the lowest seat and let the host elevate you if he or she so wishes (*Luke 14:8–10*). This upside-down kingdom that Jesus teaches is the opposite of what we expect. “It is only he who knows himself to be a sinner that Christ can save.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 158.

In first realizing our true state of sinfulness and our desperate need of Christ, we can come to Him knowing with confidence that if “we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (*1 John 1:9, NKJV*).

The closer we draw to Christ, the more we realize our sinfulness and unworthiness. “In one way only can a true knowledge of self be obtained. We must behold Christ. It is ignorance of Him that makes men so uplifted in their own righteousness.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 159.

So, what does God think of the proud? First Peter 5:5 tells us that “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” It couldn’t be clearer.

When did you last experience God’s grace in your life? (Indeed, we should experience this grace daily.) We should also show grace to others. Spend some time in prayer right now, asking God to humble you under His mighty hand, that He alone may exalt you in due time.

Moses, Humble Servant

The grand halls of the Egyptian palace boasted of opulence, pleasure, and ease. “ ‘Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds’ ” (*Acts 7:22, NKJV*). A life of power, riches, and popularity were his for the taking; yet, Moses chose something very different. “As historian, poet, philosopher, general of armies, and legislator, he stands without a peer. Yet with the world before him, he had the moral strength to refuse the flattering prospects of wealth and greatness and fame, ‘choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 246.

What does Hebrews 11:24–26 tell us about why Moses chose a different path and humbled himself?

Moses’ later humility is remarkable, considering the powerful man he was and where he had come from. Yet, through an impulsive sinful act (*Exod. 2:12*), he lost his self-confidence and self-sufficiency. With mountains as his classroom walls and with pride swept aside, for 40 years Moses was taught by God what he needed to know to lead a nation out of slavery into the Promised Land. The power and riches of what could have been another life in Egypt paled in significance when Moses considered eternity. God had called him very specifically, and Moses followed.

Perhaps most significantly in light of this topic, Numbers 12:3 tells us: “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (*NKJV*). Moses, one of the great patriarchs of the Bible, is known for his humility, his meekness. Consider how different his life and leadership would have been had pride crept into each of these big events in his life: the burning bush, the plagues in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, manna falling from heaven, talking directly to God, receiving the Ten Commandments, and hearing God’s words after he struck the rock.

Reflect back over your life. If someone were to describe you, would they include “humble” or “meek” in the list of adjectives? Why or why not? The truth is that we can’t be humble in and of ourselves. Sin is part of our lives, which is why we need Jesus so much. Listen to, read, or sing the words in the hymn “I’d Rather Have Jesus,” and consider these words in relation to Moses’ life and yours.

The Greatest Offense

Imagine being a disciple of Jesus. You travel with Him, eat with Him, sleep near Him, and learn from Him as He transforms countless lives, including yours. People clamor after Him, and you realize how special it is that He chose you to be one of the 12 closest to Him. Then you start to wonder: Who really is the greatest of all the disciples?

In Luke 22:24–27, read Jesus’ response to the disciples’ dispute about what greatness means. Which statement captures the heart of Jesus’ message in these verses?

One would have thought that after all this time of being close to Jesus, this kind of debate would have been the last thing on their minds. But that is not what happened.

Instead of these men being content with their calling, pride rose in their hearts to where each one thought he was better than the others. It’s easy to allow such thoughts to dominate our minds. But we are told that “there is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 154.

This is very serious for us. Our pride offends God more than *anything else*, and it’s a character trait that is difficult to overcome because we often don’t see it for what it is. In our state of self-sufficiency, we choose not to self-evaluate, for surely pride is king. We need to stop, self-diagnose, and ask that God will open our eyes to our true state, because pride may be the number-one factor that keeps us from having a close relationship with Him today.

If you realize that God alone can do the work to remove pride and selfishness from your soul, pause and pray this prayer right now: “Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 159.

Look at Him

Read Luke 22:27 again. What is the key message for all of Christ's followers here?

In stark contrast to the disciples' desire to be superior and their belief that they were better than the next guy, we see Jesus—the ultimate example of humility. Jesus, who said, “ ‘Yet I am among you as the One who serves’ ” (Luke 22:27, NKJV). Jesus, who every day gave to those in need around Him because He was filled with compassion and saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd. He knew that humanity needed Him more than anything else in life, though few realized this simple truth. Jesus, who gave up heaven to die for the human race in the hope that they would understand His act of grace and respond to His invitation to have a relationship with Him.

Read Philippians 2:3–8. What do these verses tell us about how we should live in light of the Cross?

Jesus did it *all*. He bore all. When we pause long enough to see Him—truly and purely—we can't help realizing our impurity, our filth, and our desperate need of Him in our lives today.

When we look to Him, everything else (especially ourselves and our own perceived greatness) pales into complete insignificance. Who Jesus is, what He has done, and how much He loves His creation becomes front and center. Self will surely disappear when we look at Him.

Jesus. What a beautiful, mighty name. He is the epitome of humility. When our open hearts learn about Him, when we understand what He has done for us, and when we allow His words of life to seep into our minds, we realize how proud and wretched we really are. If His own disciples, who lived and learned from Him, struggled with pride, we can't fool ourselves that we are any different. Ultimately, we can grow in our relationship with Jesus only when we are humble.

Spend some extra time with Him right now. Take your Bible, a pen, and a journal or some paper and find somewhere quiet—perhaps even outside. Invite God to soften and speak to your heart. Write out Psalm 138, word for word. As you write, what words especially stand out to you?

Further Thought: “The nearer we come to Jesus and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character, the more clearly we shall discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the less we shall feel like exalting ourselves. Those whom heaven recognizes as holy ones are the last to parade their own goodness.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 160.

“Before honor is humility. To fill a high place before men, Heaven chooses the worker who, like John the Baptist, takes a lowly place before God. The most childlike disciple is the most efficient in labor for God. The heavenly intelligences can co-operate with him who is seeking, not to exalt self, but to save souls. . . .

“When men exalt themselves, feeling that they are a necessity for the success of God’s great plan, the Lord causes them to be set aside. . . .

“It was not enough for the disciples of Jesus to be instructed as to the nature of His kingdom. What they needed was a change of heart that would bring them into harmony with its principles. . . . The simplicity, the self-forgetfulness, and the confiding love of a little child are the attributes that Heaven values. These are the characteristics of real greatness. . . .

“The sincere, contrite soul is precious in the sight of God. He places His own signet upon men, not by their rank, not by their wealth, not by their intellectual greatness, but by their oneness with Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 436, 437.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What additional insights do the following verses have about pride and humility: Matthew 23:12; Psalm 25:9; Psalm 149:4; and James 4:6, 10?
- 2 Think honestly: When did you last “parade your own goodness”? How did this impact your relationship with God or those before whom you paraded it?
- 3 What might you need to change in your life to humble yourself before God in order to strengthen your walk with Him?

Summary: Pride can be one of the greatest blocks to growing in a relationship with God. If we feel self-sufficient and don’t realize our need of this relationship, we simply won’t pursue it. In contrast, Jesus was the humblest Man on earth and the most perfect example of how to have a close relationship with God.

“We Like to Help”

A mother with three little girls walked up the path to Iolanda’s home in Belo Jaridin, a Brazilian city of 80,000 people.

Iolanda saw them coming. She was standing at the door, giving rice and beans to a stranger who had stopped by to ask for food. Her house was located on a busy street, and people regularly came to the door to ask for help. She was sure that the approaching visitors also needed a hand, so she waited after the stranger left.

When the mother and girls reached the door, Iolanda’s eyes fell on the children’s feet.

“Why are your children barefoot?” she asked.

The woman explained that her eight-year-old daughter’s sandals had broken, so she had asked her four- and six-year-old daughters to remove their sandals so their older sister wouldn’t feel ashamed.

“I’ll get a pair of sandals and some food,” Iolanda said.

She disappeared into the house and returned a moment later with sandals for the eight-year-old girl and a snack of plain crackers, plain cookies, and cold water.

The little girls beamed with joy. “Can we call you Grandma?” one asked.

The mother was surprised at Iolanda’s kindness.

“Why are you doing this?” she asked.

“I’m a Christian from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we like to help people,” Iolanda said. “I sew clothes for children, and church members bring me many donations. So, I have lots of sandals and clothes.”

“I want to be part of this church,” the mother said. “I want to study the Bible with you.”

A year later, the mother was baptized and joined the Adventist Church.

Iolanda Xavier, an 86-year-old great-grandmother, believes that nothing is more important than obeying Jesus’ command, “ ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you’ ” (*Matthew 28:19, 20; NKJV*).

“Mission is really important,” she said. “All of us were born of God to be missionaries.”



Part of last quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, went to open a church at Pernambuco Adventist Academy in Brazil’s state of Pernambuco, where Iolanda lives. Thank you for planning a generous offering for this quarter’s projects. Watch a YouTube video of Iolanda at [bit.ly /Iolanda-IS](https://bit.ly/Iolanda-IS).

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Luke 14:11*

Study Focus: *Gen. 11:5, Isa. 14:12–14, Num. 12:3, Luke 18:9–14, Ps. 20:7.*

Last week, we were confronted with the Lord’s diagnosis of Laodicea’s spiritual malady: “‘You say, ‘I am rich . . . and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked’ ” (*Rev. 3:17, NKJV*). John, the apocalyptic prophet, denounced the problem of spiritual pride, which is rooted in the focus on “I,” with its emphasis on the ego. The sobering reality is that apart from God, we can do nothing to overcome self. We may be thankful, therefore, that the message of the Bible is all about solving this problem of self, a problem that concerns each and every one of us.

This week we will analyze the sin of pride in order to understand its mechanism and apprehend its danger. To that end, we will proceed in three steps.

1. First, we will trace the inception of pride in heaven during the time in which Lucifer planned to usurp God’s place (*Isa. 14:13*).
2. We will then proceed to earth to examine the enterprise of the builders of Babel at the time they planned to make a name for themselves by endeavoring to build a tower that would reach to heaven (*Gen. 11:4*).
3. In the third step, we will study a number of examples of pride alongside contrasting models of humility: Pharaoh and Moses, Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, and the Pharisee and the tax collector in Jesus’ parable (*Luke 18:9–14*). This third section will offer a comparative reflection on pride and humility based on the teaching of biblical wisdom (*Prov. 11:2; Prov. 27:1, 2*).

Part II: Commentary

The Pride of Lucifer: The key text concerning the pride of Lucifer is found in Isaiah 14:12–15, framed within the context of Isaiah’s oracle against Babylon (*Isa. 14:3–23*). It is interesting to note that the language of the oracle against Babylon/Lucifer in this text is reminiscent of the language of the apocalyptic accusation against the church of Laodicea. Both charges concern claims of what “you [Lucifer/Laodicea] have said” (*Isa. 14:13, NKJV; compare with Rev. 3:17*). As in the letter to the Laodicean

church, the oracle of Isaiah against Lucifer emphasizes the first-person perspective (in this case, Lucifer's), which is repeated five times: "I will ascend," "I will exalt," "I will sit," "I will ascend," and "I will be like the Most High." As in the letter to the Laodicean church, the oracle of Isaiah marks an unexpected turning point when it predicts: "Yet you shall be brought down" (*Isa. 14:15, NKJV*). In both prophecies, the inspired authors describe a scenario of boasting (as indicated by the prideful "I"), which is unequivocally condemned.

With this background in mind, let us now turn our attention to the story of the fall of Lucifer. This story is full of spiritual lessons. We shall assess them point by point:

The name of Lucifer: The problem of Lucifer is implicit in his name. Lucifer, which is derived from the Latin *lux ferre*, "bearer of light," is the translation of the Hebrew name *heylal*, "light," which echoes the exclamation of divine adoration, *halleluiah*. Thus, as the semantics of his name suggest, Lucifer's profound intention (that is, what he sought in his heart [*Isa. 14:13*]) was to be worshiped.

His ascension: In order to be worshiped, Lucifer sought to go up from where he was to the place of God, which was above. The upward movement is repeated several times for emphasis. First, the key verb, which describes his move, '*alah*, "ascend," is used twice, as the first and last verb of the series of actions in the phrases "I will ascend into heaven" (*Isa. 14:13*) and "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds" (*Isa. 14:14*). This upward movement resonates again in the verb '*arim*, "I will exalt," which means literally to "carry upward," referring to Lucifer's throne. Thus, Lucifer audaciously intends to raise his throne "above the stars of God," meaning the highest stars.

The intended place of destination: Lucifer aimed at reaching "the mount of congregation." The parallel passage, in Ezekiel 28, refers to the holy "mountain of God" (*Ezek. 28:16*), which designates the place of God's temple, where God's people are gathered to worship God. Isaiah 14:13 specifies, indeed, that this place is located "on the farthest sides of the north" (*NKJV*), a superlative for the highest place, the place of God Himself, where God is worshiped in heaven. The same phrase is used in Psalm 48 to designate the place of the temple (*Ps. 48:2*).

The profound intention: The passage concludes with a disclosure of Lucifer's true intention: " 'I will be like the Most High' " (*Isa. 14:14, NKJV*). These are Lucifer's last recorded words in the passage (*Isa. 14:14*). This story reveals the daring blasphemy of pride in all its hubris: to become like God. The conclusion warns us of the result. Pride that aims at usurping the highest place in heaven, the place of God Himself, will cause its possessor to end up "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (*Rev. 3:17*), in "the lowest depths of the Pit" (*Isa. 14:15, NKJV*).

The pride of Babel. The language that is used to describe the work of the builders of Babel echoes that of the Creation account, clearly indicating the builders' intention to supplant and identify themselves as the Creator. Already this intention was anticipated in the preceding chapter in the table of nations, in which Nimrod's foundation of the kingdom of Babel is introduced with the technical word *re'shit*, "principal" (*Gen. 10:12*) or "beginning." This is the same word that introduces God's work of Creation (*Gen. 1:1*).

Likewise, the builders of the Tower of Babel display the same desire as Nimrod to take God's place. The word of God, *wayyomer 'Elohim*, rendered as "God said," which marks the rhythm of God's work of Creation, is also used here with the builders as its subject: *wayy'omeru*, "they said" (*Gen. 11:3, 4*). The divine fulfillment of Creation *wayehi*, "and there was" (*Gen. 1:3*), now describes Babel's achievement *wat-tehi*, "and they had" (*Gen. 11:3*). The same language referring to God's self-deliberation when He proposes to create humankind—*na'aseh*, "let us make" (*Gen. 1:26*)—reappears four times in reference to the builders' self-deliberation: "let us make bricks" (*Gen. 11:3, NKJV*), "let us . . . bake them" (*Gen. 11:3, NKJV*), "let us build" (*Gen. 11:4*), and "let us make" (*Gen. 11:4*). Even their intention to "make a name for ourselves" (*Gen. 11:4, NKJV*) is a usurpation of God's prerogatives, for God is the only One who makes a "name great" (*Gen. 12:2*) and the only One who can make a name for Himself (*Isa. 63:12, 14; Jer. 32:20*).

Thus, the builders of Babel possess the same ambition as Lucifer. As Lucifer before them, the builders wanted to go up to God's place, to the "door of God" (Bab-El). The story ends with an ironic play on the name of the tower: Bab-El ("the door of God"), the name of the presumptuous building endeavor, leads to *balal*, "confusion" (*see Gen. 11:9, NKJV*).

The proud and the humble. The Bible does not contain an abstract essay on pride and humility. Virtues and flaws are best apprehended in the action of individuals, in the course of events. Thus, in the Bible, the teaching of pride versus humility is exemplified by the contrast between humble and proud persons: Cain versus Abel, Jacob versus Esau, Joseph versus his brothers, Pharaoh versus Moses, and Daniel versus Nebuchadnezzar. In this lesson, only the contrast between Pharaoh and Moses will be presented.

Pharaoh versus Moses. In the beginning of the book of Exodus, both men are confronted with the strangeness of God. Yet, they react differently to God's presence. Moses reacts to God by responding to Him with two questions. The first question focuses on himself: "Who am I?" (*Exod. 3:11*). Moses feels insignificant before God and inadequate to the task of accomplishing the mission he is called to fulfill. Moses' second question concerns God Himself. Moses wants to know Him (*Exod. 3:13*) so that he may enter into relationship with Him.

On the other hand, when Pharaoh hears about God, he reacts by denying His existence. Unlike Moses, Pharaoh refuses to know Him (*Exod. 5:2*). Pharaoh cannot acknowledge the existence of God simply because he thinks of himself as God. Consequently, Pharaoh refuses to hear about another deity. Pharaoh reverses the divine injunction to let the Israelites go so that they may keep the Sabbath (*Exod. 5:6–9*) and, instead, commands Israel to do more work. Moreover, the Lord knew Moses face-to-face (*Deut. 34:10*), whereas Pharaoh kept rejecting God and refused to humble himself before Him (*Exod. 10:3*). While Moses was remembered as the humblest person on earth (*Num. 12:3*), Pharaoh was remembered as the proudest (*Exodus 7–10; compare with Neh. 9:10*).

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip 1: How do we die to self? Equally as important, how do we keep a humble spirit in service to our Maker? To further explore the answers to this topic, read the reflection below and discuss with your class the questions that follow.

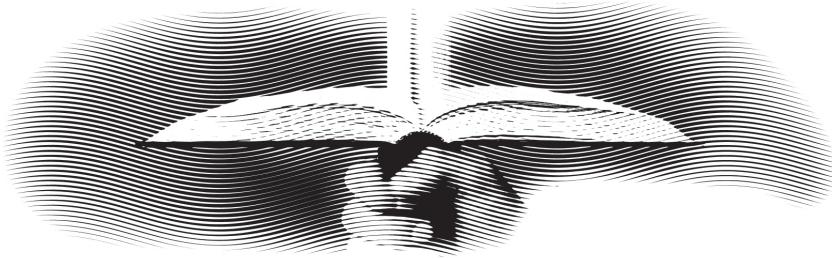
For Reflection: The Lord endows each of us with gifts, both spiritual and natural, to bless His church. These gifts can include singing, preaching, teaching, helping, hospitality, evangelizing, storytelling, and so on. Unfortunately, it is all too easy for us to lose sight of the Giver of the gifts and to exalt the human vessel.

1. What are some things you can do to help yourself stay humble when serving the Lord with the gifts He has given you to glorify Him?
2. What are the dangers of pride and self-exaltation?
3. Why is humility so important when serving the Lord?
4. Talk about your answers to the questions above in light of Paul’s admission: “I die daily” (*1 Cor. 15:31*). How does Paul propose that we accomplish this “death”? Why is this “death” so critical to humility and successful service for the Lord?

Teacher’s Tip 2: Divide your class into small groups and assign each group one of the following contrasts in pride and humility: Cain versus Abel, Abraham versus Lot, Jacob versus Esau, Joseph versus his brothers, and Daniel versus Nebuchadnezzar. Give each group time to explore the contrasts and prepare a short presentation on the results of their study. Invite them to share their ideas with the class.

Cain versus Abel (*Genesis 4*): Contrast the meaning of the names of Cain and Abel, their choice of offering, and the dialogue between them.

The Role of the Bible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Lam. 3:22, 23; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; John 17:17; Eph. 1:13; Ps. 119:11; 1 Cor. 2:14.*

Memory Text: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (*Hebrews 4:12, NJKV*).

The Bible. No doubt you own one copy or perhaps many. Throughout history, this precious book has been copied in secret, smuggled, and banned. It's the most published book in the world, in any language, and also one of the oldest. Some have died so that the Bible could be preserved.

Where is the Bible in your life? Do you read it or does it sit beside your bed or on a bookcase gathering dust? Is life too busy for you to find time to really study the Word of God or do you feel too tired to open its pages?

God's Word is living and powerful, and God is calling for you to let it speak to your heart, to encourage you, to challenge and change you, and to give you guidance and hope.

The Bible is not just an academic book or a collection of old stories. Instead, it is a beautiful, profound account of how the Creator of the universe seeks to draw us close to Him. If you have a desire to grow in your relationship with God, the best thing you can do is commit to spending quality time with Him daily, praying, reading His inspired Word, and surrendering your will to what it teaches.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 25.

The Most Powerful Weapon

Before we explore why the Bible is so valuable and how to dig deeper in our personal Bible study, we must understand something: one of the most significant attacks Satan can make on you is to stop you from spending time with God in His Word. Keeping people away from their Bibles through business, apathy, tiredness, or doubt is his number-one strategy. He knows that when we spend time with God in His Word, it revives our lives and nourishes our souls; so, of course, he would do everything to prevent this!

We are told that “Satan employs every possible device to prevent [people] from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its plain utterances reveal his deceptions.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 593. Satan knows that God’s powerful Word makes him powerless. Satan knows that prayer and Bible study are the most powerful weapons humanity can use against him (*Eph. 6:17, 18; Heb. 4:12*), so he does everything he can to stop us from reading and praying. He knows that God’s words are powerful and that they not only spoke this world into existence (*Ps. 33:6*), but they can raise the dead (*John 11:41–44*) and give us strength to overcome (*Matt. 4:1–11*).

By keeping God’s people away from their Bibles, Satan affects not only our relationship with God but our relationships with others. Our marriages become strained, we yell at our kids, and we don’t have patience with our friends or coworkers. Life seems too busy; we feel stressed and burdened, with no escape route. And surprisingly, we don’t often pause long enough to realize what’s happening. We might think we’re close to God, but in reality, when days and weeks pass by without our ever opening God’s Word, we’re weakened more every day.

Even when we have an up-and-down and very inconsistent relationship with God, He is wonderfully constant, as Lamentations 3:22, 23 tells us. What do you notice in these verses, and how do they compare with our human natures?

As the covering cherub before he fell (*Ezek. 28:14–17*), Lucifer heard God’s words and knew their incredible power. He now hates this truth, so it’s clear why our minds grow numb and our hearts grow dull when we don’t choose to hear and bring God’s words into our daily lives.

How wishy-washy or inconsistent are you in your devotional life? What should your answer tell you about making some changes, if needed?

Scripture, the Authority

The Bible's authority and function are clearly declared within its pages. Read and copy out 2 Timothy 3:15–17. Take note of what these verses tell you about the function of the Bible.

When it comes to personal Bible study, we must be careful not to expect the Bible to serve our purposes or perspectives, which are not always the same as God's. For example, we shouldn't use the "close my eyes and point to a text" method, because this isn't how God wants to communicate with us through His Word. God is not a puppet on a string, waiting to serve our needs and will. His ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours (*Isa. 55:9*), and so we should never try to control His words to us. Neither should we pick and choose only the parts of the Bible that feel comfortable to us. Instead, we should see the Bible as a whole package rather than reading the easy, familiar passages and leaving out the confronting or challenging ones. If we truly want God to speak into our lives, we must take the Bible as a whole and use sound methods when we engage in careful Bible study, trusting that God will reveal what we need to hear when we need to hear it.

Also, Jesus Himself tells us: " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind' " (*Matt. 22:37, NKJV*). That is, God doesn't want us to ignore our minds; rather, He wants to inform our minds with His vast reaches of knowledge and understanding, which are revealed, in part, through His Word. We can read many biblical narratives in which God had discussions with such people as Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and Job, in addition to many conversations that Jesus had with people. God doesn't bypass human reason but invites us to submit it to His Word and wisdom when "working out" our salvation.

Human reason, however, is still *human*—capable of error and deception. It's never infallible. It's possible for human reason to push God aside to try to work things out on our own, which places self as equal to, or above, God when it comes to thinking. People can approach Scripture with an arrogant and critical spirit, thinking they've heard it all before and that there is nothing new. It's when we feel important, confident, self-sufficient, and in need of nothing that we neglect our relationship with God and rely on our own limited knowledge and faulty reasoning.

Bible Truth

A trend among some liberal theologians in the 1960s was to write God out of the field of theology. In 2017, a cover story of *Time* magazine featured the headline “Is Truth Dead?” It’s interesting because this trend illustrates the position of our society today. The very idea of “truth” itself is decaying to such an extent that no one knows what truth is anymore. According to popular culture, there is no measuring stick, no foundation that remains constant that can be depended upon to endure the test of time. Contrary to this, Jesus said, “ ‘I am the . . . truth’ ” (*John 14:6*). His Word testifies about Him as truth in complete purity.

Read the following verses slowly, and then read them again a second time. What do you notice about these messages?

John 17:17 _____

Prov. 30:5, 6 _____

Ps. 12:6 _____

The Bible declares that basic truth, Jesus Himself, doesn’t change (*Heb. 13:8*). At the same time, as we read God’s Word, our understanding of God and His truth can grow. “There are mines of truth yet to be discovered by the earnest seeker.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 704. In speaking of “truth,” Ellen G. White always referred to truth as given by God through His Word. We can search for additional light in the Bible because God’s Word never contradicts past truths but instead builds on them.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Psalm 33:4, 5; and Ephesians 1:13. What is the message found in these texts?

In the end, the Bible, and the Bible alone, must be the foundational source of what we understand as truth. All other sources must be tried and tested by the Word of God. Even what we deem “reason” needs to be tested by God’s Word!

Some people want to argue that there is no truth. Why is that statement self-contradictory? That is, why is making the claim that there is no truth an attempt to proclaim truth, and thus self-refuting?

Bible Claims

What might change in your home if you turned to the Bible when faced with a big decision, relationship problem, or challenge? What might change in your workplace or church if the words of the Bible truly became the lens through which people viewed the world and chose to live by?

The Bible authors knew how valuable the words of the Bible were. No other book can speak to your life as these words can. The words can sit on the page in your Bible, but how can you keep them in your heart?

What is David's advice in Psalm 119:11, and how might you follow it?
(See also Heb. 4:12.)

One of the claims the Bible makes about itself can be found in Hebrews 4:12. A two-edged sword is powerful and sharp, but the Bible can do what human tools cannot for the human soul. The Bible describes itself as being alive. Perhaps you've wondered how this could be, given that it was written thousands of years ago, but Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (*John 6:63, NKJV*). If your heart is broken or your life is falling apart, God can speak His words into your world and change things around. The Old Testament also describes God's words as being very active and not at all stagnant or passive (*see Isa. 55:11*). When David reflected on the impact of God's words on his life, he wrote, "This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life" (*Ps. 119:50, NKJV*).

Perhaps you've experienced severe hunger at some point in your life, or maybe you've fasted or gone on a diet. Doesn't food taste good after you've been hungry? In a spiritual sense, the Bible is food for our souls.

If your soul is empty and hungry, open the Living Word. Read Jeremiah 15:16, 1 Peter 2:2, and Matthew 4:4.

God's words taste good to the mind and heart, and when we read them, they will fill us and sustain us as promised.

The messages in God's Word, the Bible, come from God Himself. God sent them specifically for us and for every other person who has sought Him. When we read them with a prayerful, open heart, those words won't be wasted.

How much time do you spend daily in the Bible, and how do you spend that time? What can you do to make that time the most spiritually profitable?

State of the Heart

Our ability to receive instruction from God's Word (*Job 22:22*) depends largely on what the state of our heart is like when we come to the Bible. How does 1 Corinthians 2:14 explain this?

To have spiritual discernment means to have spiritual insight and understanding. It makes sense, then, that a spiritually open-minded person will have very different takeaways when reading the Bible than a spiritually closed-minded person. Someone who thinks the Bible is foolish won't look for truth in its pages.

So, both our attitude toward the Bible and the way we approach reading it are very important when it comes to growing in a relationship with God. How does Paul explain this in 1 Thessalonians 2:13?

God's Word works in us when we believe. When you open your Bible and believe that God has something to say to you through the words on the pages, He will indeed speak to you and work in your life. But so much depends on your faith and your expectations. The good news is that if your faith is small, God can help it to grow (*Mark 9:24*), even if it's tiny like a mustard seed (*Luke 17:6*).

One of the great purposes of the Bible is to speak truth into our lives about the condition of our relationship with God and how to strengthen it. If your heart is open to the Holy Spirit and if you approach the Word with humility, you will always come away changed, even though you might not immediately recognize it day by day. Such change and growth are often incremental. But if we cling to our apathy and sin and are not willing to change, Bible reading can avail us little good. The Holy Spirit prompts us to move closer to Jesus Christ. Do we want to step closer? If so, we become "wise unto salvation" (*2 Tim. 3:15*), and we'll see things we never even imagined.

What is the state of my heart and mind as I approach the Bible? Am I just bringing my opinions to the Bible with the goal of trying to justify them, or am I coming with an open mind and heart, ready with childlike faith to see what God wants to tell me today? Why is that answer so important?

Further Thought: If you consider the words that you've spoken during the past 24 hours, how would you evaluate them? Were they loving, kind, joyful, uplifting, frustrated, tired, anxious, angry, gossipy, or malicious? The Bible says, " 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks' " (*Matt. 12:34, NKJV*). When we have junk in our hearts, it comes out in our words.

We've all experienced feeling frustrated, tired, or stressed, and that state of mind changes what comes out of our mouths (often words we later regret). In contrast, when our heart is bursting with love for someone, it flows through our words.

In the same way, God's Word speaks of His heart and His intentions toward us. It's amazing to think that these very words, straight from the heart of God, are in our possession in the Bible. It's truly incredible to see the power God's words have held throughout history.

"It is one thing to treat the Bible as a book of good moral instruction, to be heeded so far as is consistent with the spirit of the times and our position in the world; it is another thing to regard it as it really is—the word of the living God, the word that is our life, the word that is to mold our actions, our words, and our thoughts. To hold God's word as anything less than this is to reject it. And this rejection by those who profess to believe it, is foremost among the causes of skepticism and infidelity in the youth."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 260.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are all the logical and rational reasons you have for your faith? Probably a whole lot more than you realize.
- 2 How can you make sure that Bible study and prayer are the foundation of your relationship with God? How can you have a relationship with God without both prayer and Bible study?
- 3 If someone wanted to deepen their relationship with God, where would you advise them to start reading?
- 4 How can you live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord? (*Deut. 8:3*). What might that really look like in your life?
- 5 What do the following passages tell us about God's words? *Heb. 11:3; Ps. 33:6; Matt. 11:4, 5; 1 Thess. 4:16; Eph. 6:17; James 1:21.*

Summary: The Bible is living and powerful, and reading it is foundational to growing our relationship with God. Not only does it teach us about God's wonderful character and His interactions with humanity throughout earth's history—it also speaks to each of us today when we come to it in humility.

Jail Time

By CAROL DE OLIVEIRA

Can you imagine being thrust into a prison cell for sharing Jesus? This is a common occurrence for Global Mission pioneers serving in a veiled country in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. A country is called “veiled” to protect the lives and ministry of frontline workers. Global Mission pioneers are lay-people sent to start new groups of believers among unreached people groups.

Recently, Chong,* a pioneer, and Peter, the director of the local conference office, went to the northern part of this country to meet with members of a church plant.

While Chong and Peter had dinner with the members, they heard about three families who wanted to give their lives to Jesus. When Chong learned they were ready to burn their spirit-worship items, he decided to visit them that night.

As Chong, Peter, and some church members traveled to the three families’ homes, a church member said he wanted his family to hear about Jesus. So, before the group reached the families, they visited the member’s home to share the good news with his relatives.

Finally, the group arrived at the homes of the three families. It was late, but the people’s beaming faces warmed Chong’s heart, and their zeal energized his spirit. As they huddled around a fire, Peter introduced Chong and told the people he was there to help them make a full surrender to Jesus.

But the families didn’t seem to need Chong’s help. “We are ready to give our hearts to Jesus,” the family elder said. “We will walk in the light with Jesus taking the lead; not the worldly spirits.”

While Chong was talking with the families, a man burst into the room, demanding that Chong accompany him to the clan leader’s home.

Later that evening, Peter and the church members returned to their place of worship to await news about Chong. As the hours dragged on, they became concerned about how long the meeting with the clan leader was taking. Finally, they learned that Chong was locked up in the clan leader’s home.

During the night, the members prayed for Chong while the leaders tried to negotiate his release. But nothing they tried was successful. He was taken to a detention center where he was kept during the initial investigation of the case.

Provisionally, Chong was released four days later. Now, the village where he spent time in jail has more than 100 people who have become Seventh-day Adventist Christians! Rather than deterring Chong from sharing Jesus, jail time strengthened his resolve.

Despite fierce opposition, God’s work continues to flourish in this veiled country. Please pray for our Global Mission pioneers who risk their safety to establish new churches for Jesus.

Your faithfulness sustains their ministry.

*Names have been changed.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Hebrews 4:12*

Study Focus: *2 Tim. 3:15–17, John 17:17, Eph. 1:13, Ps. 119:11, 1 Cor. 2:14.*

The main role of the Word of God is to feed us spiritually to keep us alive. The Israelites learned this important spiritual lesson when they experienced physical hunger in the wilderness. Moses' interpretation of God's miracle of the manna reflects this notion: " 'That He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD' " (*Deut. 8:3, NKJV*). Jesus was famished in the wilderness when He uttered this principle to the devil (*Matt. 4:4*). We hear this same idea in Peter's epistle in which he compares the Word of God to the milk that feeds and nourishes hungry newborn babes: "That you may grow thereby" (*1 Pet. 2:2, NKJV; compare with Heb. 5:13*). These biblical examples make us aware of an important condition that we must have in order to partake of spiritual nourishment from the Word of God. We must come to the Word with an awareness of our need. We must come hungering and thirsting; otherwise, we will not appreciate the vital necessity of spiritual sustenance. Nor will we likely enjoy it or profit from it.

In this study, we will try to understand two crucial truths about spiritual nourishment: (1) why and (2) how the process of feeding on the Word of God sustains us. The basis of our study will be 2 Timothy 3:14–17, the foundational passage from Paul in his second letter to Timothy. The first question—"Why?"—will permit us to examine, from a biblical perspective, the special qualities and effects that make 2 Timothy so powerful and life-changing. The second question—"How?"—will propose methods for reading the Scriptures. Such methods will allow for the miracle of feeding on God's Word to happen in our own lives.

Part II: Commentary

The "Why" of the Scriptures. Why do the Scriptures possess the power to sustain life? Paul suggests two responses to this question. The first response has to do with Paul's high view of the Scriptures, as well as the nature, or sacred quality, of the Scriptures. The second response has to do with the effect of the Scriptures, namely, the transformative power of

the sacred writings in the life of Paul's reader, Timothy (*1 Tim. 3:15*), whom Paul also calls the "man of God" (*1 Tim. 6:11*).

1. The Quality of the Scriptures. The Scriptures that formed the Bible were first commonly identified as "holy." The phrase "holy Scriptures" (Greek: *hiera grammata*), which Paul uses, occurs only here in the New Testament. This phrase reflects the technical title *Torah seb-biktav*, "the written law," that designated in ancient Judaism the writings that were considered as inspired, in opposition to the *Torah sebbe'al pe*, "the oral Law," which was not considered inspired. By this term, Paul here refers to the Old Testament, a title that some Christians will use much later as a derogatory term to suggest a lower (or even invalid) inspiration.

For Paul, the so-called Old Testament was the only Holy Scripture. At that time, the New Testament did not exist and was not yet a part of the instruction that Timothy would have received. The reason these writings are called "holy" derives from the fact that they are considered to be *theopneustos*, "inspired"—literally, "God breathed" in the passive form, implying God as its subject. This same verb is used to describe the process of God's creation of man, in which God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (*Gen. 2:7, NKJV*). From this exalted view of Scripture, Paul infers not only lessons concerning the effect of the Scriptures upon us but also lessons concerning the way that we should approach God's Word.

2. The Effect of the Scriptures. The parallel between the inspiration of the Scriptures and the process of the creation of human beings is not accidental. This parallel is intended to suggest that the Word of God is *life*. As such, it brings life to its receiver, just as Adam received life from his Creator. Paul specifies that the Holy Scriptures "make you wise" (*2 Tim. 3:15, NKJV*). Paul does not mean that this effect is mechanical, that those who receive the Scriptures would immediately and magically become endowed with wisdom. Paul reminds us that the wisdom of which he speaks comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Then, in the next verse, Paul explains that this wisdom functions in four distinct ways in the life of the believer:

- The first function of the Scriptures is "doctrinal." Scripture guides us in finding and understanding the truth.
- The second function of the Scriptures is "reproof"; that is, it makes us aware of errors we have committed, not only in doctrine but also in the way we behave in our personal lives.
- The third function of the Holy Scriptures is "correction." It is not enough to realize our mistakes; we also must understand how to correct our course and determine the right direction to take.

- The fourth and final function of Scripture is for “righteousness.” The Scriptures ultimately lead us to repentance and obedience through the Holy Spirit. Paul then concludes that the goal of the Scriptures is the formation of the complete individual. Paul concludes his lesson on a practical level with the directive to take action. Thus, Scripture equips us “for every good work” (*2 Tim. 3:17, NKJV*), as well.

The Approach to the Scriptures. How do the Scriptures produce these extraordinary effects, taking us from where we are to a life of righteousness with all the “good works” it implies? To help us answer this question, four lessons, or principles, concerning our approach to the Scriptures may be drawn from Paul’s counsels to Timothy:

1. All Scripture. The first and most basic principle in our approach to biblical texts is the fact that their “holy” and inspired quality concerns the totality of Scripture. Paul insists that *all* Scripture is inspired (*2 Tim. 3:16*). This principle means that the whole corpus of the Bible is to be considered in our studies and in our quest for God’s revelation. Paul’s statement encourages us to read Scripture, trusting that its holy writings will guide us in our search for divine truth and for practical advice in our life. Not one book or single passage of the Bible is to be privileged over other books or other passages. All Scripture merits the same high degree of interest and attention. Paul suggests here an approach that has been defined in more recent biblical scholarship as the “canonical approach.” Thus, a particular text should be analyzed in light of other biblical passages that may refer to or allude to it (also called the intertextual principle).

2. Learn and Know. Paul values the effort of learning and knowing (*2 Tim. 3:14, 15*). For this reason, ignorance of the Scriptures, or a superficial reading of the Bible, may have a serious impact, not only on our present existence but also on our eternal salvation. Within this framework, Paul’s call to learn and know implies that we must give particular attention to the biblical text that is the object of our study. As Ellen G. White reminds us: “The importance of [seeking a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures] can hardly be overestimated. ‘Given by inspiration of God,’ ‘able to make us wise unto salvation,’ rendering ‘the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,’ the Book of books has the highest claim to our reverent attention. We must not be satisfied with superficial knowledge, but must seek to learn the full meaning of the words of truth, and to drink deep of the spirit of the holy oracles.”—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Oct. 9, 1883.

3. Faithfulness. Paul’s exhortation to Timothy to “continue” in the things he had learned (*2 Tim. 3:14*) echoes Jesus’ appeal to “abide” in His Word (*John 8:31, NKJV*). The same Greek verb *menō*, “continue,” appears in both verses. It is not enough to learn the biblical truth once; we should review it. There is a Hebrew proverb that says, “Someone who learns a lesson and does not review it is like a farmer who sows and does not reap.” For Timothy, and for many Christians, this training is not a one-time event; the work begins “from childhood” (*2 Tim. 3:15, NKJV*) and continues throughout life. Paul’s exhortation to continue in the Word is not just engaging in an intellectual recollection of abstract truths and doctrines. Nor is it a temporary sentimental remembrance. Paul calls Timothy to abide in the Word and practice it at all times. James thinks along these lines when he discusses the connection between faith and works (*James 2:14–26*).

4. Impact of Teachers. We cannot have access to the divine truth by ourselves. Because truth is given through revelation, as the Bible teaches, the testimony of human witnesses who have accepted that revelation as true is also needed. For this reason, we need teachers. From the very beginning of Israel’s history, God has urged His people to teach their children (*Deut. 6:7*). Paul alludes to that principle when he writes to Timothy about those “from whom” he had learned (*2 Tim. 3:14, NKJV*). Paul particularly has in mind Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, but also himself among the “many witnesses” of the Christian community (*2 Tim. 2:2*). Paul’s appeal, then, concerns not only the students or the children who are indebted to their parents and their teachers but also the parents and teachers themselves who have the responsibility to share what they have learned.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip: How do we successfully apply the Scriptures to our lives? The following activities are intended to help us do just that. Ask for a volunteer to read the section below titled “For Reflection.” Then encourage class members to put into practice during the week one or more of the activities that follow and then report on their experience in class next Sabbath. Ask them to relate specifically how the activity strengthened their understanding of Scripture and how it deepened their relationship with the Lord.

For Reflection: There is the potential for misunderstanding how to apply the Scriptures in our own lives. The application of the Scriptures to our lives does

not mean we are at liberty to manipulate God's Word to accommodate our inclinations. Rather, to apply the Scriptures to our lives means that we should conform our lives to the teachings of Scripture.

Activity 1: Daily meditation: For a week or so, use a short text (one verse or one biblical passage) every morning for your devotional. Learn what this passage means in light of its context. Be creative. Look for new insights and lessons with each reading.

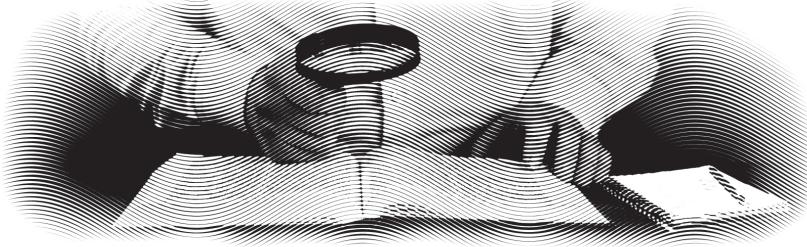
Activity 2: Learn a verse by heart: Every month, choose a Bible verse from your meditation texts and repeat it each morning until you have memorized it.

Activity 3: Teach: The best way to learn is to share with your spouse or a friend what you have learned and discovered in the Scriptures. Find someone with whom you may share and discuss your newfound knowledge and insights about the Bible.

Activity 4: Obey: It is not enough to know a verse by heart. The most important thing is to apply it to your life and obey its counsel. As Jesus said: " 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them' " (*John 13:17, NKJV*). As you read and study the Word, ask for the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom to know how to apply its truth in practical ways to your life.

Notes

How to Study *the Bible*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 15:1–8, Mark 1:35, 1 Chron. 16:11, Ps. 119:105, Isa. 50:4, Isa 55:1–13.*

Memory Text: “ ‘So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it’ ” (*Isaiah 55:11, NKJV*).

Think back to when you received your first Bible. Perhaps you were a child, and it was given to you by a Christian relative. Or perhaps you purchased it yourself as an adult. However long you've had your Bible for (perhaps you have more than one copy), consider the value that you place on this Book. Is it one of your most precious, treasured possessions, or do you take for granted that you have the Living Word of God at your very fingertips? Do you struggle to be consistent in reading it? Have you ever wondered: *Where do I start? How do I read this Book to grow closer to God?*

Martin Luther said, “For a number of years I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree and all its words were little branches, I would have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what was there and what it had to offer.”

Whether you experience a thriving, daily Bible study time, or whether your Bible mostly sits closed on a bookshelf, the reality is that we can all develop stronger Bible study times with God. This week we'll explore some practical ways to study the Word of God better.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 2.

Time

Have you ever set your alarm a little earlier than usual in order to wake and read your Bible? Have you ever struggled to drag yourself out of bed and then looked at the clock and thought, *I have 15 minutes before I need to begin the day. I better hurry!* Have you ever gone through the motions of having a brief prayer or skimming a chapter, only to find your conscience appeased but your heart unsatisfied with the result before you rushed into the day?

“There is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the whole Bible through and yet fail to see its beauty or comprehend its deep and hidden meaning.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 90.

While there are indeed blessings that come from reading the Bible—like drinking from a fire hydrant (lots and fast)—it is possible to read the Bible through quickly and miss so much. God gave us His inspired, precious Word so that we would come to know more about Him (and, in the process, more about ourselves, too). When we take time to see the indescribable, beautiful character of God and the ways He has interacted with humanity throughout history, we can only love Him more. The record of His interactions is right there in our hands—but we must find time, and take time, to know God through reading His Word (*Acts 17:11*). Consider the following suggestions:

Ask God to place a desire in your heart for Him. Claim the promises in Jeremiah 29:13 and Psalm 37:4. Invite Him to wake you up earlier than usual or to free up some time in your day to do so.

Surrender your time to God. Yes, you’re busy, and there are so many urgent things to do. But time with God is invaluable. Go to a quiet place by yourself and read Psalm 46:10. Read the words or sing to God the hymn “I Surrender All.” Think about the areas of your life that may not be surrendered and offer them to God.

Spend time with God even when you may not feel like it. Just as it takes a conscious choice and an action plan to be healthy (exercise, eat well), it takes a conscious choice to have a close relationship with God. Remember that new habits can take at least 21 days to form, and we can never succeed without the Holy Spirit’s help.

Read again John 15:1–8. What is Jesus telling us about abiding in Him, and why is this so crucial to our faith?

A Place

Jesus is our perfect example in all things, and when it comes to personal devotions, it is no different. What does Mark 1:35 tell us about Jesus’ time with His Father?

Although Mark 1:35 is just one verse, we can learn so much here from Jesus’ example. Long before the sun came up, He removed Himself to a solitary place of quiet so He could be with His Father. Can you imagine the scene—Jesus, sitting by the Sea of Galilee or on the side of a hill, praying and communing with His Father before the world around Him woke up? Although this verse describes Jesus’ commitment to prayer, we clearly see that it was a priority for Him. No doubt this time was what gave Him strength to face all that He endured. If Jesus needed this to start every day, how much more do we?

God tells us, “ ‘Seek My face,’ ” and He hopes our response will be “ ‘Your face, LORD, I will seek’ ” (*Psa. 27:8, NKJV*).

What does 1 Chronicles 16:11 say about how we should seek His face?

Do you have a place you can go each morning to be with God? Perhaps you can find a chair by a window, a quiet spot outside, or even the kitchen table, where you can come daily to sit at the feet of Jesus to learn from God’s Word. Sitting at the feet of Jesus is the best place to be (*Luke 10:39–42*). By forming a daily habit of going to a certain place to spend time with God, you’ll be more likely to return there each day. Don’t become discouraged when you miss a day here or there, because emergencies arise, and you may not be able to spend time with God. But try not to let too much time pass without spending time with God. Remember that having an abiding relationship with God is a daily decision, one that you can start again, today, if you choose to.

During the past week, how much time have you spent in prayer and Bible reading? What does your answer tell you about changes you might have to make in your priorities?

Deep Bible Study

Even if you don't have to be a scholar to study the Bible, how can you study the Bible deeply?

Pray: It's impossible to overstate the importance of prayer as book-ends to (and bookmarks throughout) your Bible study time. Ellen G. White tells us that when we come to read the Bible, we are not alone. By inviting the Holy Spirit to be our guide, we reject all other distractions, and the enemy flees. "The Bible should never be studied without prayer. The Holy Spirit alone can cause us to feel the importance of those things easy to be understood, or prevent us from wrestling truths difficult of comprehension."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 599, 600.

Read and Write: It could be said that a main difference between merely reading the Bible and studying it comes down to one key act: writing. Writing helps us slow down our thoughts, reflect on God's Word, and work through it at a pace where observation, interpretation, application, and commitment can occur. It also helps our initial scattered ideas to work themselves out—from our head, to our pen, and then into our hearts for the day. We are also more likely to remember something that we've written down (*Ps. 119:15, 16*). If you're unable to write your thoughts down, try reading the Bible aloud (or listening to it), followed by your thoughts as a prayer to God.

Share: Tell someone what you've learned. This will solidify it in your mind and encourage someone else.

Select a short book of the Bible to begin with (such as Jonah, Mark, Philippians, or 1 John), and slowly work your way through it. Here is a simple approach you can apply to one verse (the verse-by-verse method), a passage, or an entire chapter:

- 1. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide your mind and soften your heart as you read.**
- 2. Choose a Bible verse or passage.**
- 3. Write the passage in a journal or portions of the passage that stand out as you read.**
- 4. Prayerfully read the passage again and underline the key ideas.**
- 5. Write down what the underlined ideas tell you.**
- 6. Pray over these ideas and how they impact your relationship with God.**
- 7. Consider whom you might share this with today.**

"Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp. 38, 39.

In what ways have you found the message in the quote above to be true for you? See also Psalm 119:105.

A Double Blessing

There are many ways we can study our Bibles, such as the verse-by-verse method (mentioned already), a chapter study, a theme study, a word study, or a book study. We can study with a concordance and Bible dictionary, and we can read the Bible alongside the Conflict of the Ages series for additional insight. We can go for a walk outside in nature and listen to the Bible being read to us, or meet with a friend or small group to study together.

In the same way that we keep our friendships alive with variety and new adventures, we should keep our daily appointment with God fresh and vibrant by using different methods as we study the Bible. There is always more to learn!

Something that will help keep your Bible study time vibrant is sharing with others what you've discovered. When we explain what we've learned, the summarizing, synthesizing process consolidates our thoughts. This helps us retain knowledge. The double blessing is that when we share and discuss with others, the spiritual conversation will often challenge and strengthen both of you. It's often when we share or teach others that the deepest learning occurs in our own minds.

You also will come to see that what you study each day is not only God's message for you but a message for others.

Read Isaiah 50:4. What is this verse telling us about having a relationship with God and how it can impact our relationships with others?

Our personal Bible study time not only strengthens us, but it enables us to encourage others we may meet during the day. It can become a double blessing.

Our spiritual lives are a marathon. Ask the Lord to keep you running your race with constancy, keeping your eyes on the goal (*Phil. 3:14*). Don't feel discouraged if you've gone a bit slack for a while, but make any necessary changes in your life to keep your relationship, and specifically your Bible study and prayer time, vibrant. For truly, this is eternal life, that we may know God today (*John 17:3*). Our daily commitment to abide in Him and in His Word is life-changing.

Read this week's memory text and consider its meaning. What are you studying at the moment? With whom could you share this?

'Tis So Sweet!

Think about your favorite dessert. Is it good for your health? Perhaps you use honey as a sweetener, or you may even use Manuka honey for its purported medicinal benefits. If you've ever tried honeycomb, you'll know how sweet the soft texture is as it melts onto your tongue.

In Psalm 119:103, 104, the psalmist describes the Bible as a honeycomb—a metaphor for delight: “How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding” (NKJV).

What does it mean that “through your precepts I get understanding”? (Ps. 119:104). **Why** is this idea important in grasping what Bible study does for us?

Yes, God's words are indeed sweet to our souls and unlike anything else the world offers us. Unlike many desserts, the sweetness of God's Word is healing to our souls and life-changing for our characters. If you've been distant from God, you can fall on your knees, open His Word, and drink from the living water that alone will satisfy.

In Isaiah 55:1–13, the prophet expands on the message mentioned above. Spend some time reading this chapter now, and then answer these questions:

- What does the Lord give to those who come to Him, to “eat” from His Word?
 - What is His invitation to you here?
 - What is His challenge?
 - What is His promise?
-
-

God's living and powerful Word cuts straight to our hearts, minds, and souls as it challenges us to grow in Christ. But it can do this for us only to the degree that we take the time and effort (and yes, it takes effort) to delve into the Word with an attitude of submission and humility and a willingness to follow what it teaches.

What are concrete ways you can “seek the LORD while He may be found” (Isa. 55:6, NKJV)?

Further Thought: The purpose of Bible study is to know God and to grow in your relationship with Him, for this is what life eternal is—to be forever with the God we love (*John 5:39, John 17:3*).

Part of any relationship is mutual engagement. We read in Revelation 3:20 that Jesus seeks to have this with us, yet we must realize that, as created beings, we can always learn more about our Creator. Like a miner digging for precious jewels, we should be constantly searching in the Bible. There is always more to glean, no matter how many times we've read certain stories or Bible passages. "Whatever may be man's intellectual advancement, let him not for a moment think that there is no need of thorough and continuous searching of the Scriptures for greater light. As a people, we are called individually to be students of prophecy."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 41.

We also should not try to make the Bible fit into our own human opinions or thoughts. "How shall we search the Scriptures? Shall we drive our stakes of doctrine one after another, and then try to make all Scripture meet our established opinions? or shall we take our ideas and views to the Scriptures, and measure our theories on every side by the Scriptures of truth? Many who read and even teach the Bible, do not comprehend the precious truth they are teaching or studying. . . . Many give the words of Scripture a meaning that suits their own opinions."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 36.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What attitude do you usually come to the Bible with? Is there anything that needs to shift? Why is an attitude of humility and surrender to the Word so crucial?
- 2 Are there any established opinions that you might need to lay aside to allow Scripture to speak for itself? If so, how can you start praying about them right now?
- 3 How might originality become a stumbling block in a person's outward relationship with God? That is, how might the desire to find something new and innovative lead someone astray, especially if they are doing it for selfish purposes?

Summary: Personal Bible study is at the heart of having a vibrant and enduring relationship with God. God's Word speaks into our twenty-first-century lives in meaningful ways, just as it has during past centuries. In a similar way to keeping any friendship alive, we should look for ways to keep our devotional lives vivid as we abide in Jesus, trusting His promise that His Word "shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (*Isa. 55:11, NKJV*).

Cows Lead Boy to the Sabbath

Rompas was born into a Maasai tribal family of one father and nine mothers in Kenya. He has 82 siblings. He is number 62.

When he was 13, he was tending his father's cattle in the bush when he noticed that the animals seemed to have a mind of their own. They kept moving in a single direction. He followed the cattle and found himself at an outdoor religious meeting led by a missionary from the United States.

Rompas was intrigued. He had never been to school, so he could not read the Bible. But he liked to listen to sermons on the radio on Sundays. He enjoyed memorizing what he heard and preaching the sermons to his family. His love for preaching had earned him the nickname "Pastor."

But the missionary was preaching a message that he had never heard. He said the Bible teaches that Saturday, not Sunday, is God's holy day.

Rompas ran off to find a friend who knew how to read and write. He asked the boy to copy down the Bible verses from the sermon. The boy jotted down 33 verses about the holiness of the seventh-day Sabbath.

That evening, Rompas took the cattle home. But he didn't stay. He then walked four miles (six kilometers) to the home of a pastor and handed him the list of 33 verses. "Does our Bible contain these verses?" he asked.

The pastor looked up the verses in his Bible and said ominously, "You have gone to a meeting of devil worshippers."

Fear seized Rompas. He began shaking. "Oh Lord, save me," he said.

The pastor struck the boy repeatedly on the cheeks with his Bible. "In the name of Jesus, I rebuke the devil who has possessed this boy," he said.

It was late when Rompas returned home. After falling asleep, he had a dream. He saw the missionary preaching about the Sabbath again. Waking up, he was afraid that he had been possessed, and he rebuked the devil.

For the next three years, Rompas had the same dream every night. He saw the missionary preaching about the Sabbath. For three years, he lived in fear that he had been possessed. For three years, he kept rebuking the devil.

Then he thought, *I wonder if this might be a message from the Lord. Let me find out if what the pastor said is true.*



With that, the boy nicknamed "Pastor" took a first step toward becoming an Adventist pastor. Today, he knows the truth and is teaching it to others in Kenya.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, will support projects in Kenya and elsewhere in the East-Central Africa Division. Read more about Rompas next week, and watch a YouTube video of him at bit.ly/Rompas-IS.

Part I: Overview

Key Texts: *Isaiah 55:11, Psalm 119:105*

Study Focus: *Psalm 119.*

In the midst of his prayer, the psalmist compares the Word of God to a lamp, which gives light to his feet (*Ps. 119:105*). The psalm opens with blessings conferred upon the undefiled who choose to walk in the law of the Lord and who keep His testimonies (*Ps. 119:1–3*). The psalm also ends with the image of a walker, albeit one who has gone astray and prays for God to find Him (*Ps. 119:176*).

In this lesson, we shall endeavor to walk with the psalmist in his search for a deeper understanding of the Word of God. Our sojourn is a continuation of our study from last week, in which we discussed the importance of studying the Scriptures.

As we move forward in our sojourn, we shall reflect upon principles for best approaching the Scriptures. The image of the lamp lighting a dark path at night suggests a slow, cautious walk in which we cannot see much beyond the single step we are taking. Such a walk takes time, for it is a step-by-step progression. At the same time, such a walk is also an adventure, containing an element of the unknown: we do not know exactly where we may end up or to what exalted heights our journey may take us.

To get the most out of our study, any text under consideration should be read candidly, with no presuppositions or biases. Rather, we must read with an open mind; and to continue the metaphor of walking, we need to step out in faith and go wherever the Spirit may take us. A candid reading of the biblical text will help us to hear and receive the voice of God speaking to us from His Word. In this way, we will encounter Scripture as meaningful, beautiful, inspired, engaging, and moral.

Part II: Commentary

Introduction. Six principles of reading the Scriptures are suggested for our consideration in the commentary that follows. The first few (1–3) concern the reader’s attention to the text. The final three (4–6) relate to the reader’s response.

Section 1: Attention to the Text

The Text as Meaningful. Over the course of Psalm 119, it could be said that the psalmist meditates on God’s Word (*Ps. 119:15, 48*) only twice: “all the day” (*Ps. 119:97*) and through the night (*Ps. 119:148*), which is

to say, the psalmist is continually meditating upon the Scriptures because they are his delight (*Ps. 119:44, 47*). Love for God's Word is the motivation for the psalmist's study (*Ps. 119:97, 113, 127*). Indeed, God's holy words are like a love letter to be read and reread, inspiring the psalmist to search for its deepest thoughts and intentions.

The psalmist is practicing the method that recent scholarship identifies as the close reading approach. This method consists of reading the text carefully, word by word, with the assumption that every word, every syntactical feature, and every grammatical form is meaningful. In this approach, one reads the text several times. Such a reading is always meaningful and enjoyable, as the psalmist testifies (*Ps. 119:14, 111*). This approach ensures that there are always more riches to be found.

The Text as Beautiful. Before being meaningful, however, the biblical text is beautiful. Its music and imagery often are appreciated before its meaning is fully comprehended by the mind. For this reason, the first exercise of the reader is to pay close attention to the text's poetic expression. The literary structure that organizes the whole passage will orient the reader in its meaning, enabling him or her to grasp the general intention of the biblical author. The parallelisms and linguistic echoes that relate words and phrases with one another will help the reader to better understand their respective meanings.

Components of Beauty. Psalm 119 is an alphabetic psalm (acrostic). This psalm has 22 stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the 22 stanzas has eight verses, which make for a total of 176 verses. The intention of this literary device is to instruct us in the perfection of the Word of God, which is referred to everywhere in the psalm.

In the stanza of the letter *NUN* (*Ps. 119:105–112*), every verse refers to the law of God with a different term: “Your word” (*Ps. 119:105, 107, NKJV*), “Your judgments” (*Ps. 119:108, NKJV*), “Your Law” (*Ps. 119:109, NKJV*), “Your precepts” (*Ps. 119:110, NKJV*), “Your testimonies” (*Ps. 119:111, NKJV*), and “Your statutes” (*Ps. 119:112, NKJV*). This literary feature points to all the various aspects of the Law of God, thereby suggesting its perfection.

The Text as Scriptural. We will focus here only on the literary context of stanza *NUN* (*Ps. 119:105–112*). The *NUN* stanza is preceded by stanza *MEM* (*Ps. 119:97–104*) and is followed by stanza *SAMEK* (*Ps. 119:113–120*). The main motif of stanza *MEM* is the love of the law, the right way that God has taught (*Ps. 119:102*), in contrast to hatred of the false way (*Ps. 119:101, 104*). The same line of thinking reappears in stanza *SAMEK*, which reconnects with the same motifs that we saw in the *MEM*

stanza (*Ps. 119:113, 119*). Stanza *NUN* should, therefore, be analyzed in light of this context.

The contextual consideration of stanza *NUN* also includes the larger framework of the Scriptures (inter-textual connection), as well as the immediate and narrow context of Psalm 119 (intra-textual connection), insofar as allusions can be established. It is this approach to the biblical text that Ellen G. White promotes when she says, “The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole and to see the relation of its parts.”—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, p. 462. “Scripture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages.”—*Evangelism*, p. 581.

Section 2: The Reader’s Response

The Text as Inspired. The biblical text is different from any other literary work. That is because the Holy Scriptures are “God-breathed” and thus inspired. It is, therefore, imperative that we use a spiritual approach in our study (*1 Cor. 2:13, 14*). As students of Scripture, we should approach the biblical text with prayer and continuous self-checking to make sure we are guided objectively from above and not influenced subjectively by our personal agendas and biases.

Because we are not prophets, we should not expect that the meaning of the text will be revealed to us through a dream or a vision. On the other hand, we are advised to pray for understanding from the God who has inspired these writings. God will then send His Spirit to guide us in our study of the text as we diligently and sincerely search for its meaning. Often, the divine response to our request for understanding may come unexpectedly in ways that we do not anticipate or perhaps even desire (*see the prophet Jeremiah’s response to the false prophet Hananiah, in Jeremiah 28*).

Another important way to cooperate with God’s Spirit in our search for understanding of the biblical text is to consult with our brothers or sisters in the faith. This “corporate” reading also will test our humility; the back-and-forth exchange of ideas will allow for the Spirit of God to blow “where it wishes” (*John 3:8, NKJV*), thus cultivating and expanding our perspectives.

The Text as Engaging. As you read and study the biblical text, apply it to your present life. Read the biblical text as if it is speaking to you personally and directly (which it does).

Additionally, ponder how the Word of God may illuminate your various paths in life: your job; your problems; and your relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. Commit yourself to keeping God’s

commandments (*Ps. 119:106*). Pray that God will help you to receive, and understand, His teachings (*Ps. 119:108*). Continue to remain faithful to God’s laws (*Ps. 119:109, 110*). Enjoy God’s commandments as you observe them. Do not just do the commandments; make sure your obedience flows from your heart (*Ps. 119:111*). Put your entire life in touch with eternity as you practice and obey each commandment (*Ps. 119:112*).

The Text as Moral. The inspired words of God contain potential “explosives.” That is, Scripture contains teachings that may detonate or trigger resistance or certain negative responses within the human heart, as it calls for the sacrifice of our idols or long-cherished errors. Thus, we must handle these truths with care, wisdom, and love in our dealings with others.

Sad to say, the biblical Word often has been used by people to brutalize and batter instead of to redeem and uplift. The list of these abuses is long and painful. Many crimes have been committed in the name of the Bible, and that is tragic. Prophecy points to more coming, too (*see Revelation 13, 14*). Thus, instead of being a word of comfort and the good news of salvation, the Bible has been used as a pretext to judge, put down, and harm people.

Thus, humility and a teachable heart are necessary when we read Scripture, lest we turn the divine words of life into words of death. Ethical awareness should also be present, as when we read the *NUN* stanza of Psalm 119. God’s Word of light (*Ps. 119:105*) should restrain and shape our words and actions toward others. The word “righteous” (*tsedeq*) is a technical term that carries the notion of ethical behavior. As such, Psalm 119, in its entirety, could, therefore, be heard as an appeal for moral sensitivity and responsibility, not only in life but also in our reading of the Holy Scriptures.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip: The following activities are designed to build your students’ Bible study skills and increase their joy in reading the Bible. Activities 3–5 can be done outside of class. Assign one or more of these activities to class members for the coming week and ask them to come prepared to discuss the results of their research the following Sabbath.

Activity 1 (in class): Select a stanza from Psalm 119:

1. Apply the six principles of “how to study the Bible” to the stanza of your choice in Psalm 119 (except for stanza *NUN*, Psalm 119:105–112, which we just covered).

2. Divide your class into small groups. Invite each group to focus on a stanza of their choice, applying the six principles of study.
3. After 10 minutes, ask each group to share and discuss their respective findings.

Activity 2 (in class): The challenge of studying the Bible:

1. Discuss with the class the importance, the relevance, and the difficulty of Bible study.
2. Why should we study the Bible? Is studying the Bible really necessary? Explain.
3. Address the arguments that oppose studying the Bible.
4. Find biblical texts that promote the study of Scripture itself.
5. Also, find in the Old Testament (see wisdom texts) and New Testament (see Jesus' method) material and guidelines for studying the Bible.

Activity 3: Adaptation:

1. Ask your students how they would adapt the principles of Bible study in this lesson to audiences other than their Sabbath School class.
2. How would you present a Bible study to intellectuals (academics), atheistic-secular people, Muslims, Jews, those who are poor, and wealthy individuals?

Activity 4: Stories:

Encourage your students to find extrabiblical stories that help illuminate the lessons and teachings of your selected text for study (for example: biographies, humorous accounts, personal experiences, etc.).

Activity 5 (Just for Teachers): Technical tools:

1. Research additional tools and study aids for the Bible.
2. Present your class with a list of these resources for Bible study, such as textbooks and videos.

Notes

Prayer Warriors



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 2:20–23; Dan. 6:10, 11; Acts 20:36; Gen. 5:22–24; Exod. 33:15–23; Exod. 32:31, 32.*

Memory Text: “I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live” (*Psalms 116:1, 2, NKJV*).

Imagine if you rarely spoke to your best friend or your spouse. Very soon the relationship would break down, and there would be a problem. In the same way, prayer is an essential part of having a close relationship with God. It is a crucial devotional habit, one that each of us needs and can strengthen. If we don't pray often and continually, we will wander from the Lord sooner or later.

In the Bible, we learn about the lives of different individuals who prayed in different ways. We can step back and catch a glimpse into how their communion with God impacted their relationship with Him, how and for what we might also pray, and how their prayers changed the lives of others. It is true: our prayer life impacts not only ourselves but others as well.

Just like Bible study, this topic of prayer is both huge and important and much broader than what can be covered in just two weeks. This week we'll learn lessons from some of those in the Bible who prayed and showed us just how central prayer is to having a strong relationship with God. Let's learn from their examples.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 9.

Faithful Daniel

Daniel is one of the great heroes of the Bible. We know the first story too (see *Daniel 1*): “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies” (*Dan. 1:8, NKJV*). Also, to Daniel and his three friends, “God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (*Dan. 1:17, NKJV*). The Bible describes Daniel as wise (*Dan. 1:20; Dan. 2:14, 21, 23, 48*) because the Spirit of God was in him (*Dan. 4:9, 18; Dan. 5:14; Dan. 6:3*), and he was greatly beloved by Heaven (*Dan. 9:23, Dan. 10:11*). These are some descriptors of a man who had a strong, abiding connection with God.

In *Daniel 2*, when King Nebuchadnezzar issued a death decree to all wise men in Babylon, Daniel sought God’s mercy concerning the secret of the king’s dream (*Dan. 2:18*). When God revealed the king’s dream to Daniel, he immediately prayed.

Read *Daniel 2:20–23*. Why did Daniel pray, and what can we learn from this prayer?

As the years passed by and kings rose and fell, Daniel remained an adviser to the kings and was described as distinguished “because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm” (*Dan. 6:3, NKJV*). “He was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him” (*Dan. 6:4, NKJV*). Despite fierce jealousy and evil plotting (*Dan. 6:5–9*) from his peers, Daniel remained ever constant and fearless in his prayer life.

Read *Daniel 6:10, 11*. What do these verses tell us about Daniel?

When faced with difficulty, Daniel prayed. Although the threat was against his life, he was consistent and persistent in prayer (three times every day, as was his custom), and predictable (at his open window three times a day as he prayed toward Jerusalem). His prayer was a physical act (he knelt) and focused on thanksgiving and supplication.

In light of a story like this, how weak are your excuses for not praying?

The Posture of Prayer

When something goes wrong in our lives, most of us call a close friend to talk about it. When we have good news, we find someone to share it with. We can do the same with God. “Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.

Prayer not only keeps us connected to God but tells the devil whose we are. When we kneel to pray in the morning, it’s like a physical declaration to the powers of darkness that we choose God this day. Not only that, but God sends angels to our side when we pray, and we are fortified and covered from the enemy of darkness (*Psalms 91*).

The physical act of kneeling in submission shows a humble posture. It’s somehow different from sitting in a chair or lying in a bed while we pray, although we can pray in these positions too. However, when we kneel before God, we show that we are ready to serve God with all our hearts, and our words declare that He is sovereign and that we are merely His created children.

Read the following Bible passages and consider the lives of these individuals who knelt when they prayed: *Dan. 6:10, Luke 22:41, Acts 7:60, Acts 9:40, Acts 20:36.*

Standing in prayer was a common practice in Bible times (*2 Chron. 20:5, 6, 13; 1 Sam. 1:26; Job 30:20; Luke 18:11, 13*). The Bible also shares examples of people who sat when they prayed (*2 Sam. 7:18*). Others prostrated themselves before God, with their face on the earth—although this posture was less commonly associated with prayer, but rather submission before a superior (*1 Kings 1:47, Mark 14:35*).

What is your usual posture when you pray? The Bible doesn’t require us to pray in any particular posture, but postures are important, as they reflect our reverence, our inner feelings, and our desire to surrender to God. Some people are unable to kneel; so, ultimately, it’s the heart condition that matters most. If you can kneel but usually don’t, why not try kneeling next time you pray and see how it affects your time with God?

The Bible invites us to “pray without ceasing” (*1 Thess. 5:17*), implying constancy (*Col. 4:2*) and perseverance (*Rom. 12:12*). Today, as you stand, sit, lie, or walk, turn your thoughts to God and talk to Him as your Friend. Begin right now.

Enoch Walked and Talked

Read Genesis 5:22–24. What, exactly, do we know about Enoch?

The Bible doesn't share a lot about Enoch's life, but it does tell us that he walked with God for 300 years until God took him to heaven. How beautiful that a person's consistent devotion to God is what defines their life!

One thing we know is that Enoch must have been "continuing steadfastly in prayer" (*Rom. 12:12, NKJV*), persevering and growing closer to God in faith through his daily experiences. The earth was becoming increasingly evil in the time in which he was living, and Enoch kept busy serving God, but he couldn't do this well without abiding in Him.

"In the midst of a life of active labor, Enoch steadfastly maintained his communion with God. The greater and more pressing his labors, the more constant and earnest were his prayers. . . . After remaining for a time among the people, laboring to benefit them by instruction and example, he would withdraw, to spend a season in solitude, hungering and thirsting for that divine knowledge which God alone can impart. Communing thus with God, Enoch came more and more to reflect the divine image. . . . Even the ungodly beheld with awe the impress of heaven upon his countenance."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 86, 87.

God doesn't ask us to live like hermits or monks, so separate from the world that we are of no earthly use. Like Enoch, we can be productive and aware of the needs around us, but it's only by walking and talking with God through a steady, abiding relationship that He can reflect His wonderful character through us.

We can pray anytime, anywhere. There is nowhere on earth that God doesn't see or hear us (*Ps. 139:7–12*); He always hears the cries of our hearts, no matter where we are (*read Lam. 3:55–57*). Yet, there is something to be said for praying out loud instead of just in our minds. When we pray silently, we might become distracted or not even finish our train of thought or our sentence, and it can be harder for our thoughts to remain focused. But when we pray aloud, whether in a whisper or in our usual tone, it's a reminder to ourselves that God is real, that He's listening, and that we have something specific to talk about with Him.

As you go about your day today, where or how will you whisper a prayer in communion with Jesus?

Moses, Godly Leader

Although Enoch clearly had a very close relationship with God, we have more insight into Moses' relationship with God and can even read numerous accounts of Moses' conversations with Him. As we journey with Moses through the ups and downs of this humble leader's life, we see time and time again that the single most important part of his life and the secret to his success as a godly leader was his constant communication and abiding relationship with God.

Read Exodus 33:15–23. What is the content and the manner of the conversation between Moses and the Lord?

Imagine what it would have been like to speak with God and hear His voice so plainly. It's a wonder the Israelites didn't seek this kind of communion with God themselves instead of begging Moses to speak to them on God's behalf (*Exod. 20:18–21*). Yet, God had prepared Moses for this, beginning with their interaction at the burning bush, on this very same mountain. Although we read of other personal prayers of Moses, we see that he's almost continually in God's presence, asking for guidance and interceding for the people he is leading.

On two occasions, Moses intercedes for family members. What situations surrounded his intercession, and what would have happened had he not stepped in to bridge the gap?

- **Aaron:** *Exod. 32:1–14, 31–34; Deut. 9:20*
 - **Miriam:** *Num. 12:13*
-
-

What is particularly amazing about the interaction with Miriam is that Moses was the recipient of her poor treatment and jealousy. He could easily have stood back and let God deliver the punishment Miriam and Aaron deserved. Instead, he was quick to forgive and intercede for his sister's healing. What a powerful reflection of God's forgiving grace for sinners is seen here in the actions of Moses.

Read Matthew 5:44 and Colossians 3:13. How can you learn to do what you're told here? Why is it important that you do?

Moses Intercedes for a Nation

Read Exodus 32:31, 32. What does this teach us about Moses and prayer?

Moses boldly interceded for God's people time and time again. Moses turned to God when the people were thirsty (*Exod. 15:25, Exod. 17:2–6*), when the people were hungry (*Num. 11:21, 22*), and in sheer desperation (*Num. 11:11–15*).

When the Israelites built the golden calf immediately after God had covenanted with them, Moses recalled, “ ‘For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me at that time also’ ” (*Deut. 9:19, NKJV*).

When the spies returned from the Promised Land, Moses recalled, “ ‘Thus I prostrated myself before the LORD; forty days and forty nights I kept prostrating myself, because the LORD had said He would destroy you’ ” (*Deut. 9:25, NKJV*).

When Levi was separated from the other tribes to serve in the sanctuary, Moses recalled, “ ‘As at the first time, I stayed in the mountain forty days and forty nights; the LORD also heard me at that time, and the LORD chose not to destroy you’ ” (*Deut. 10:10, NKJV*). God heard Moses' plea.

We can learn much from Moses' life when it comes to prayer and holding fast to God:

- **Moses had a deep love for God and a clear picture of His character.** God described Himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6: “ ‘the LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth’ ” (*NKJV*).
- **Moses was both bold and faithful as he held on to God through the ups and downs** of the weary journey to the Promised Land. Though struggling as we all do, Moses trusted God's power, presence, and leading in his own life (*Exod. 33:13*).
- **Moses reminded God of His covenant** (*Exod. 32:13*), **claimed God's promises on behalf of His people** (*Deut. 7:8*), and **remembered God's leading in the past** (*Deut. 8:2*).
- **Moses accepted God's answers to his prayers, whether they were a yes or a no.** Being in a close relationship with God doesn't automatically mean we'll always get what we want (*Deut. 3:23–29*), but we should pray with persistence anyway (*Luke 18:1–8*).

Who needs your intercessory prayers right now? What is stopping you from praying right now?

Further Thought: Ultimately, we should pray because we love God so much, and we just can't help sharing everything in our lives with Him: our joys and life's "wins," our burdens and worries, our requests and daily needs. "We may keep so near to God that in every unexpected trial our thoughts will turn to Him as naturally as the flower turns to the sun. Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. . . . His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them. Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. . . . The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 99, 100.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Would you describe prayer as beautiful or burdensome? What has contributed to your perspective?
- 2 There are so many insightful messages in the quote above. Which thought particularly resonates with you?
- 3 Of the three Bible characters studied this week (Daniel, Enoch, and Moses), whose prayer life do you most relate to, and why?

Summary: As we read about the prayer giants of the Bible, it can be easy to think that we can't have a relationship that close to God or be quite as committed. But we can. Like Daniel, we can be steadfast and faithful in kneeling every day, despite opposition. Like Enoch, we can choose to walk and talk with God, turning to Him before we do the work He's called us to do. Like Moses, we can lead those within our sphere of influence, interceding for our families and those in our communities when we choose to abide under the shadow of the Almighty, our Leader and Friend.

Changing a Shuka for Pants

The pastor told Rompas, a Maasai boy in Kenya, that Seventh-day Adventists were devil worshipers. He also said Adventists entered church backward on Saturdays and worshiped without wearing any clothes.

When he was 16, Rompas decided to find out if the pastor had told the truth. Early Saturday, he walked from his village home to an Adventist church several miles away. He hid in the hills near the church and watched.

Before long, the first person arrived. The man was not walking backward, and he wasn't naked. Rompas was impressed that the man was wearing a nice suit and tie. The boy wished that he had a suit and tie. He was half-naked, wearing only a traditional Maasai shuka, a red cloth with black strips.

Then the pastor and other church members arrived. They also did not enter the church backward, and they were nicely dressed.

Then the church choir began singing. As the words of the song "Oh Happy Day" drifted to Rompas's ears, he couldn't resist. Walking to the church, he sat in the back row and listened with great interest.

After the sermon, a young white man approached him. He was a missionary from the United States whom he had never seen before and never saw again. The man spoke with the help of an interpreter. "These are your pants," he said, handing Rompas a pair of pants with many pockets.

Rompas was excited! He had never owned a pair of pants. He put them on and tore his shuka to make a belt to hold them up.

Back at home, his 82 brothers and sisters were surprised to see the Maasai boy wearing pants. They surrounded him and asked, "What happened?"

Rompas placed the prized pants under his bed that night. He only wore them again when he returned to church the next Sabbath. Putting on the pants attracted the attention of the children and women of his village every Sabbath. Some of them began to follow him to church.

Several months passed, and Rompas and his mother gave their hearts to Jesus in baptism on the same day. The first two members of a family of nearly 100 people had become Seventh-day Adventists. Rompas felt free for the first time in his life. Jesus told His disciples, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"



(John 8:32, NKJV).

"The truth has set me free," Rompas said in an interview.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, will support projects in Kenya and elsewhere in the East-Central Africa Division. Read more about Rompas next week, and watch a YouTube video of him at bit.ly/Rompas-IS.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Psalm 116:1, 2*

Study Focus: *Dan. 2:20–23; Dan. 6:10, 11.*

We pray because we know that God hears our voice, and because we also know that He will respond to our prayers (*Ps. 116:1, 2*). Our prayers are, therefore, essentially a response to God, who took the initiative to bring us back to Himself. How significant, then, that worship in the book of Psalms, which contains the prayers of ancient Israel, is described as a response to God the Creator, who is the Giver of life (*Ps. 95:1–6, Ps. 100:1–3*). It is through prayer that our spiritual life survives. As Ellen G. White puts it: “Prayer is the breath of the soul.”—*Prayer*, p. 12.

To understand better the meaning and function of prayer, we have chosen two instances of prayer from the book of Daniel, a book in which prayer plays an important role. The two instances of prayer, which are particularly representative of Daniel’s personality, are found in chapters 2 and 6.

In chapter 2, Daniel and his three friends entreat the Lord to reveal the meaning of the king’s prophetic dream that concerns the future destiny of the world (*Dan. 2:20–23*). Daniel’s subsequent prayer of thanksgiving to God for His gracious answer is given in poetry.

In chapter 6, Daniel, who serves as the highest governor in the kingdom of Persia, supplicates and thanks God, even though doing so imperils his own life (*Dan. 6:10, 11*). This particular prayer is not recorded in the book of Daniel, but the chapter situates this prayer within the context of Daniel’s struggles in the royal court.

Part II: Commentary

The Apocalyptic Prayer (*Dan. 2:20–23*). This humble invocation of praise is the first prayer of the book. The prayer is provoked by an external event. The Babylonian king had dreams that gave him insomnia. Worse, he can’t recall the substance of the dreams. No one among his magicians is capable of responding to the king’s request to reveal his dream and, therefore, to interpret it. Nebuchadnezzar realizes, at this moment, that the Chaldeans are a pack of deceptive charlatans. The king is furious and

decides, then, to kill all the wise men in Babylon (*Dan. 2:14*), including Daniel and his three friends, who respond with prayer to the threat. Though their words of supplication are not recorded, the biblical text tells us that Daniel enlists the help of his three friends to “seek mercies from the God of heaven” (*Dan. 2:18, NKJV*). In answer to their prayer, God reveals the dream and its interpretation to Daniel in a night vision (*Dan. 2:19*). Afterward, Daniel blesses the God of heaven in a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving. These prayers of supplication and gratitude share a number of characteristic features, including:

A. Uniqueness. The prayer of Daniel and his friends is a specific prayer, a unique prayer, in response to an unexpected event that threatens them with certain death. This first instance of prayer in the book of Daniel concerns a “secret” that no one can reveal, a secret whose revelation will save the lives of Daniel and his friends (*Dan. 2:18*). Thus, Daniel and his friends do not pray simply because it is their habit to do so or because prayer is a natural part of their culture. And because their prayer is unique to their specific situation and experience, it is a genuine, heartfelt prayer.

B. An Encounter. The prayer of Daniel and his friends is not a mystical experience, a mere moment of spiritual meditation in the hopes of producing relaxation and peace. Daniel desires to meet with Someone he cannot control or foresee, Someone outside of himself, “the God of heaven” (*Dan. 2:18*). This God is the true God precisely because He hides Himself. As Isaiah acknowledges: “Truly You are God, who hide Yourself” (*Isa. 45:15, NKJV*). Because God hides His face (unlike the idols), Daniel doesn’t presume his petition will be automatically answered. Thus, Daniel and his friends approach God humbly, seeking mercies from Him. Their request is a supplication, just as the prayer of the tenacious widow in Jesus’ parable is also a supplication (*Luke 18:1–8*). Her persistence, as well as that of Daniel and his friends, recalls Jacob’s prayer in which he wrestled with God: “I will not let You go unless You bless me” (*Gen. 32:26, NKJV*).

C. An Up-Down Movement. Although human prayer moves the soul upward to God, the process of God’s response implies God’s move downward toward us. Herein lies the main difference between the prayer of Daniel and his friends and the prayer of the Chaldeans, whose religion comprises the practice of magic. For the Chaldeans, the whole process of fulfilling the king’s command takes place below, in the realm of their existence on this earth. Thus, the process of fulfilling the king’s command centered on their technical skills and magic formulas. For them, access to the divine realm was impossible because the gods “do not live among humans” (*Dan. 2:11, NIV*).

For Daniel, on the other hand, the God of heaven comes down and reveals the “secrets” of the dream (*Dan. 2:28*). If God responds to our

prayers, it is not because of our merits or because of the quality of our prayer. God's response depends not on us but on Him and His merits. This idea of total dependence on the merits of God is the meaning of the Levitical sacrifice, which points to the sacrifice of Christ. For this reason, Jesus, the fulfillment of the Levitical sacrifice, recommended that we pray to the Father in His name (*John 16:23*).

D. Gratitude. Because God responded to Daniel's supplication, thanking Him is an important part of Daniel's prayer (*Dan. 2:20–23*). Daniel blesses God because He has given him "wisdom and power," which belong to Him (*Dan. 2:20, NIV*). Thus, Daniel acknowledges his dependence on God. More important, Daniel recognizes the merciful grace of God. What we receive from God is something that God gives us for free, a grace that has nothing to do with our own wisdom (*Dan. 2:30*).

E. Prophecy. Even though God's answer to Daniel's prayer saves his life and the lives of the other wise men, what is important is the future salvation of the world and the salvation of the king. Daniel blesses God for more than the preservation of his own life. More important, Daniel gives thanks for God's presence in history and His control over world events. Daniel also thanks God for His power to change times, remove kings, and set up his eternal kingdom (*Dan. 2:44*). Likewise, Christ's prayer in the Sermon on the Mount is focused on the same hope: " 'Your kingdom come' " (*Matt. 6:10, NKJV*).

The Wisdom Prayer (*Dan. 6:10, 11*). In Daniel 6, Daniel's prayer does not depend on the impact of events but takes place in spite of them. Although he knew about the signing of the decree, which forbade anyone to petition any god or human except the king, Daniel continued to pray (*Dan. 6:10*). Such prayer belongs to the daily course of life. This prayer displays a number of distinctive characteristics, including:

A. Privacy. Daniel went to his upper room to pray. As Jesus counseled: " 'When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father' " (*Matt. 6:6, NKJV*). Daniel's prayer is both private and personal, a prayer "in the secret place" (*Matt. 6:6, NKJV*) that no one except God Himself hears. If we pray with "being heard" in mind, thinking of what others may think of our words and our reputation, prayer becomes a public-relations exercise or a parade of words and pride. Worse, it becomes an opportunity for boasting instead of a place to meet with the Lord. A boastful prayer may be appreciated by others, but it never reaches God.

B. A Refuge. Daniel prays in a room that he set aside for this particular spiritual moment. The upper room was located on the roof, far from busy and noisy activity. Prayer is thus associated with a place that is separated

from the ordinary concerns of life, a place where the worries and distractions of existence are left at the threshold. Such a place is a refuge where our attention cannot be diverted, a quiet place that is far from the chaos of the world.

C. Regularity. Daniel maintained the habit of praying three times daily, thus marking the rhythm of the day: in the morning when he woke up and prepared for the work of the day; in the middle of the day, in the midst of his work; and at the end of the day, after the completion of his work and before he prepared to sleep. Thus, Daniel maintained his prayer life through discipline and habit. This example teaches us the value of integrating prayer into the rhythm of life itself. Prayer should not depend on our mood or our emotions. Prayer must be part of our daily regimen, like our meals, work, or other regular routines and appointments.

D. Humility. Although the Bible records various physical positions of prayer (standing with outstretched hands, head bowed, etc.), the most favored one is kneeling down, which expresses humility. Bowing before the Lord is an acknowledgment of our finiteness and unworthiness, as well as our reverence and our commitment to serving God.

E. Hope. Daniel's routine of prayer three times daily coincided with the schedule of sacrifices in the temple of Jerusalem (*1 Chron 23:30, 31*). In Babylon, Daniel faced west; that is, in the direction of the Jerusalem temple. During his inaugural prayer for the Jerusalem temple, Solomon alluded to the crucial need for prayer during the exilic time, when the Israelites would not have access to the temple of Jerusalem (*1 Kings 8:47–49*). The association of the exilic prayer with the temple of Jerusalem was also a gesture of hope that expressed the exile's longing to return to the Jerusalem on this earth, as well as to inhabit the New Jerusalem of heaven.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: Share with your class members the following personal activities to help them enrich their prayer life. Encourage members to incorporate these attitudes and habits in their prayer life in the coming week. Ask them to come ready to share next Sabbath how these activities grew their faith and drew them closer to Jesus.

Activity 1: A unique prayer: Habitual prayer, such as saying grace at mealtimes, runs the risk of becoming mechanical, so much so that we sometimes forget that we prayed!

1. Challenge yourself to utter a unique prayer at mealtime in seeking God's blessing.

2. Alternately, read a prayer from the Psalms in place of your usual mealtime prayer.

Activity 2: A prayer of gratitude:

1. When you thank God, avoid generalizations in your prayer. Refer specifically to the reason for your gratitude.
2. Every morning when you wake up, thank God because you are alive, because God resurrected you from spiritual death.
3. Every evening before going to bed, thank Him for the good things you received and experienced.

Activity 3: A prayer of hope:

1. Reflect on the early Christians' greeting *Mara' na' tha*: "O Lord, come!" (*1 Cor. 16:22, NKJV*).
2. When you pray, make it a habit to think of Jesus' second coming. Ask the Lord to come.

Activity 4: A secret and special place:

1. Designate a special room or place in your home where you can pray.
2. Arrange this special place to inspire quietness and meditation.

Activity 5: A time of humility (read *Lam. 3:29*):

1. Make it a habit to kneel down when you pray.
2. Think of your spiritual lifelessness apart from God. Ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and give you new life.

Notes

Practical Prayer



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 19:1–18; Matt. 6:5–8; Luke 11:2–4; Matt. 6:5–15; Dan. 9:4–19; Rom. 8:26, 27.*

Memory Text: “Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us” (*Psalms 62:8, NKJV*).

What is your prayer life like? How often do you pray? How fervently? How expectantly? Do you pray daily or only in emergencies? Are your prayers always asking for something, or do you praise God in your prayers, as well?

Also, do you find yourself offering a prayer in the morning before you eat and perhaps partway through your busy day? Perhaps you've been part of a regular prayer group or even experienced what it's like to pray around the clock. Have you experienced the power and presence of God through prayer that changes everything in your life?

Prayer is the constant connection between us (the branches) and Jesus (the Vine). “If we would grow and flourish, we must continually draw sap and nourishment from the Living Vine; for separated from the Vine we have no strength.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 73. This is the blessing of abiding prayer. God hears us, and He always answers in His time and in His perfect way—though not always in the way we might expect.

This week let's study other praying individuals in the Bible and consider practical ways to strengthen prayer in our daily lives.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 16.

Elijah—Praying in Crisis

Faithful Elijah lived in evil times, with King Ahab doing more “to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (*1 Kings 16:33, NKJV*). By far the most dramatic moments in Elijah’s life came with the confrontation at Mount Carmel (see *1 Kings 18*). At the climax of this incredible story, Ahab and his kingdom saw with their own eyes the truth that God answers prayer. This was an unforgettable moment in Israel’s history and is why the sudden change of events in this story catches us by surprise.

Read 1 Kings 19:1–18, specifically noting Elijah’s prayers and God’s interaction with him. What is at the heart of Elijah’s dejection here? How is God’s response different from what happened at Mount Carmel?

Throughout the course of one day, although God answered every one of Elijah’s prayers, the prophet’s emotional, mental, and physical state soon shifted. Although Elijah had experienced a great victory with God that day, he had, in a moment of weariness, allowed the fear of death to overcome his faith in God. What is so striking about this story is that, although Elijah gave in to despondency and discouragement, God came to him in tenderness and care, providing food and water again (*1 Kings 19:5, 6*)—so much so that he lasted for 40 days and 40 nights (*1 Kings 19:8*). And when God finally revealed Himself, it was in a very different manner than He had before.

Sometimes in our lives, God answers in very direct, powerful, and undeniable ways. This strengthens our faith, and we feel the closeness of God in our lives.

Other times we waver and give in to temptation, thinking that it’s too hard to follow God with unswerving faith. We look for God’s answers in ways we expect Him to respond, not realizing that His thoughts and ways are far higher and wiser than our own (*Isa. 55:8, 9*). Just as there is much about God’s creation that we don’t understand, we shouldn’t be surprised that there is much about God’s ways that we don’t understand either.

God, our good and kind Father, knows exactly what you need. How can you be still enough to trust Him and keep your eyes steadfast on Him through it all? Talk to Him about this now.

When Prayers Seem Unanswered

Perhaps you've prayed about something for a long time, maybe even years, and it feels as if God hasn't heard your prayers. The Bible tells us to "ask, and it shall be given you" (*Matt. 7:7*), "if we ask anything according to His will" (*1 John 5:14, NKJV*). What is your understanding of these promises?

Hannah is an example of a devoted woman who prayed for something very specific (*1 Sam. 1:10–17*). At first it seemed that God did not answer her prayers, but she persisted, and God did answer, in His perfect time and according to His will. Sometimes the waiting deepens our walk with God, as we learn to trust Him more.

Psalms 62:8 says, "Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (*NKJV*). Trust. Do we trust that He really does know what's best, even when we don't see an immediate answer to our prayers? Do we trust that eventually He *will* answer in His perfect time and way?

Sometimes our prayers may not be answered as quickly as we want or in the manner that we hope they will be. What counsel does the Bible give us about this?

- **Seek God's will, not your own** (*Matt. 6:10; 1 John 5:14, 15*).
- **Consider your motives** (*Prov. 16:2, James 4:3*).
- **Think about whether you have a cherished sin** (*Ps. 66:18, 1 Pet. 3:12, Prov. 15:29*).
- **Abide in God and in His Word** (*John 15:7*).
- **Have faith when you pray** (*Heb. 11:6, James 1:6, Mark 11:24, Matt. 21:22*).
- **Consider the state of your heart (humble or proud)** (*James 4:6, 1 Pet. 5:6*).
- **Persevere** (*1 Thess. 5:17, 18*).
- **Forgive others** (*Mark 11:25, 26*).
- **Ultimately, God sees the big picture and knows what is best for us** (*Rom. 8:28, Eph. 3:20, Jer. 29:11–13*). **Sometimes His answer merely is as it was for Paul:** " 'My grace is sufficient for you' " (*2 Cor. 12:9, NKJV*).

A key fact that determines our response to what seems like unanswered prayers is our picture of God. If we see God as distant and disinterested, our relationship with Him weakens. In such times, search the Bible for evidence of His love and care for you, and pray that your distorted picture of Him will become clearer.

Jesus Teaches Us How to Pray

In the time of Jesus, prayers that were long and carefully crafted like a performance—using complex words and often memorized—were highly esteemed. Jesus had nothing good to say about these kinds of prayers (*see Matt. 6:5–8*). He revealed them to be what they were: ostentatious shows of “piety.”

The disciples saw Jesus pray, and they knew that prayer was a vital part of His life (*see Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12, Luke 9:18, Luke 22:41, Luke 24:30, Mark 1:35, Mark 6:46*). As they watched Jesus, they saw a contrast from the religious leaders and realized that there was so much more to prayer than they had ever considered. So, the disciples came to Jesus, asking, “ ‘Lord, teach us to pray’ ” (*Luke 11:1*).

Jesus modeled to His disciples (and to us) that we can pray simply in everyday language. He showed us that our prayers should be sincere and from our hearts.

Read *Luke 11:2–4* and *Matthew 6:5–15* and notice the following aspects of the prayer Jesus taught:

- **Our Father in heaven:** acknowledging your personal relationship with the Father of all.
- **Hallowed be Your name:** recognizing God’s holiness makes us come in reverence and respect.
- **Your kingdom come:** longing for God’s return and an indwelling of the Holy Spirit until He does so.
- **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven:** surrendering and praying for God’s will to be done in our lives, trusting that He knows best, rather than merely praying for what we want.
- **Give us this day our daily bread:** asking for what we need to live, both physically (food and water) and spiritually (Jesus and His living Word).
- **Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us:** repenting, seeking forgiveness, and remembering to pardon those who have hurt us as freely as God forgives us.
- **Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:** asking for protection and shelter from the evil in this world (*Psalms 91*).
- **For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen:** acknowledging that all we are, all we have, and all we do belongs to God. He alone deserves our glory and praise (*1 Chron. 29:11*).

Why not pray more and turn your face to God each morning to talk to the One who loves you more than any other? What is stopping you from doing this as you know you should? Pray right now, as Jesus has invited us to.

Praise, Confession, Requests, Thanksgiving

In the same way that Jesus taught us how to pray in Matthew 6:5–15, we can follow this simple model when we come to God privately, with our families, or as a church, remembering that prayer is speaking to God as a friend. Too often our prayers are full of requests when Jesus has taught us to pray for so much more!

Read Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9:4–19 and look for different parts of his prayer.

Consider how you might include the following components in your prayers:

Praise: Praise is expressed adoration for who God is and what He is like. Read Psalm 100, the beautiful praise song to God. Consider God's many names and His magnificent character. Praise Him for being your Redeemer, Savior, Comforter, Healer, Good Shepherd, Alpha and Omega, and Rock, to mention just a few.

Confession and Forgiveness: When we find ourselves talking with and abiding in God, we can't help letting go of whatever might be holding us back or separating us from Him. The closer we are to Him, the more we see our unworthiness and wretchedness. This makes us beg Him to remove our sins and shape our character in His likeness. If we expect God to forgive us, we need to be ready to forgive others as well. "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (*James 5:16, NKJV*).

Requests: What challenges are you facing, perhaps with your family, friends, health, finances, work, or study? Where, specifically, do you need God's leading hand to guide? Who needs your support, and how can you best give it? Pray specifically about these areas and people, asking for God's will to be done.

Thanksgiving: Read Philippians 4:6 and think about the blessings in your life. Significant things might come to mind, but what about the small things that we so often take for granted? We are the constant recipients of God's mercies; yet, how little gratitude we express, how little we praise Him for what He has done for us.

What things do you need to praise God for, confess to Him, request from Him, and to thank Him for? Why not do it right now?

Other Questions About Prayer

Why pray when God already knows? Why should we pray when God is all-knowing? Ellen G. White explains it like this: “Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 93. Indeed, God knows our desires and our needs, and He reads every intent of our hearts. Yet, praying is good for *us*. It invites us to stop amid the rush in our lives, to pause and acknowledge that God is sovereign over all, and to place ourselves at His feet. Avenues might also be opened for God to act when we invite Him to do so. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we don’t know how to pray as we should (*Rom. 8:26, 27*).

Why pray when all is well? Self-sufficiency and pride (see Lesson 3) can be one of the greatest barriers to a strong prayer life. If we’d only realize how much we need God, we’d come to Him much more! If perfect angels adore and worship Him, why should we, as sinful humans, think we’re in less need? What do Matthew 5:6 and Isaiah 44:3 say about this truth?

What is the role of faith in prayer? Read Hebrews 11:6 and ponder these words: “Prayer and faith are closely allied, and they need to be studied together. In the prayer of faith there is a divine science; it is a science that everyone who would make his lifework a success must understand. Christ says, ‘What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.’ Mark 11:24. He makes it plain that our asking must be according to God’s will; we must ask for the things that He has promised, and whatever we receive must be used in doing His will. The conditions met, the promise is unequivocal. . . . We need look for no outward evidence of the blessing.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 257, 258.

With whom should I pray? We should pray most of all privately (just God and you), as prayer and Bible study are the lifeblood of your relationship with God. Set aside time to search your heart as you talk and listen to God (*Matt. 6:6*). We should also pray with our families or in small groups (*Acts 12:12*), for where two or three are gathered, God is there (*Matt. 18:20*). Finally, we should pray with our church communities (*James 5:13–16*). All three types of prayer are important.

How should I listen? Prayer is more than just talking to God; we also need to allow Him to “prune” us and speak into our lives. The clearest and safest way to do this is to read the Bible and combine prayer and Bible study in your devotional time. Beware of emptying your mind or listening to your own thoughts rather than searching the Bible.

What do you find most challenging from the points above?

Further Thought: “If we thought and talked more of Jesus, and less of self, we should have far more of His presence.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 102.

“If we take counsel with our doubts and fears, or try to solve everything that we cannot see clearly, before we have faith, perplexities will only increase and deepen. But if we come to God, feeling helpless and dependent, as we really are, and in humble, trusting faith make known our wants to Him whose knowledge is infinite, who sees everything in creation, and who governs everything by His will and word, He can and will attend to our cry, and will let light shine into our hearts.”—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 96, 97.

“The soul may ascend nearer heaven on the wings of praise. God is worshiped with song and music in the courts above, and as we express our gratitude we are approximating to the worship of the heavenly hosts. . . . Let us with reverent joy come before our Creator, with ‘thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.’ Isaiah 51:3.”—*Steps to Christ*. p. 104.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Which concept in the quotes above inspires you the most? Which concept challenges you the most?
- 2 What other lessons can we learn from the prayer lives of others in the Bible? (See *Ezra 10:1*; *2 Kings 13:4*; *Jon. 4:2, 3*; *Hab. 3:1*; *2 Kings 19:14–19*; *Jer. 32:16–25*; *Neh. 1:4–11*; *1 Kings 8:22–54*; to list just a few.)
- 3 What is the role of fasting alongside prayer?
- 4 Is there anything new that you would like to change or implement in your prayer life as a result of this week’s lesson? Why not make the changes?

Summary: The Bible shares accounts of individuals who had vibrant, abiding prayer lives and others who didn’t. As we search its pages, we’ll always find someone we can relate to, regardless of the state of our relationship with God. We’ll also find many, many promises that will encourage and guide us in our devotional lives. Spiritual growth should be our goal—our eyes fixed on Jesus, the ultimate Example in all things and the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Giving Hope to Maasai People

Rompas, a 16-year-old Maasai boy in Kenya, decided to go to school after being baptized. More than anything, he wanted to read the Bible for himself.

He faced opposition from his father and many of his 82 siblings, who didn't see any need for a Maasai boy to obtain an education. But Rompas became the first person in his family to complete grade school and then high school. After that, he decided to study theology at Bugema University, a Seventh-day Adventist university in Uganda. But he needed money.

One evening, he summoned his brothers and sisters who, like him, kept the Sabbath, and he asked them to pray for him to receive 7,000 Kenyan shillings to be able to travel to Uganda and apply for admission at Bugema University. The siblings prayed as Rompas knelt on the floor. After the last "amen," a knock sounded on the door. It was a politician named Alex who had come to see Rompas's father. Politicians liked to visit because Rompas's large family represented many votes at election time. This politician was not an Adventist, and he asked an unusual question: "Does this big family have a pastor?"

Rompas was introduced to Alex as the boy nicknamed "Pastor" as a child. "What's your biggest need?" Alex asked.

"I need to earn a university degree at Bugema University in Uganda."

Alex pulled out 15,000 Kenyan shillings from his pocket and gave it to Rompas. It was more than double the amount that Rompas had sought in prayer.

Rompas traveled to Uganda and was accepted into the theology program. Then he returned home to wait for the start of classes. On the same day that he arrived home, Alex came for another visit. Hearing that Rompas had been admitted, he handed over a wad of US dollars. Rompas had never held US dollars before. It was enough to pay for three years at the university.

Today, Rompas Josphat Lekishon is an Adventist pastor with a heart for mission. Through his efforts, six churches have become Seventh-day Adventist. He has also opened a church on a plot of his father's land that he donated to the Adventist Church. Thirty-three family members worship there every Sabbath. He especially likes sharing the good news of Jesus' coming with the Maasai people. He has distributed more than 500 Bibles in the Maasai language.



"The thing I love the most is giving the Bible to the Maasai people," he said. "It is giving hope to the hopeless."

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, will support projects in Kenya and elsewhere in the East-Central Africa Division. Watch a YouTube video of Rompas at bit.ly/Rompas-IS.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Psalm 62:8*

Study Focus: *1 Kings 18, 1 Sam. 1:10–17, Matt. 6:5–15, Dan. 9:3–19.*

Prayer is a universal human need. But our cries to God often seem to disappear into a void, unanswered. The book of Psalms is a powerful collection of prayers predicated upon the human hope and longing for divine answers. The prayer of Psalm 62, for instance, begins with human silence, which waits for God’s response (*Ps. 62:1, 5*), then continues with an appeal to all people to still trust God and pray “at all times” (*Ps. 62:8*). Finally, the psalm ends with the assurance that God will respond (*Ps. 62:11*).

Last week, we studied the theology of prayer and reflected on its spiritual significance. This week, we will contemplate the actual experience of prayer, as practiced in the life of diverse biblical characters whose cries to God were heard and answered.

Part II: Commentary

Introduction. Three biblical characters have been selected to inspire us to pray. The first character is Hannah (*1 Sam. 1:6–17*), whose prayers begin in anguish and end in joy (*1 Sam. 2:1–11*). The second is Elijah, whose dramatic prayer of proclamation and silence is a powerful testament to those witnessing the contest between God and Baal on Mount Carmel (*1 Kings 18–19:18*). The third is Daniel, who entreats the Lord with a prayer of supplication and hope (*Dan. 9:3–19*).

Prayers of Bitterness and Joy: Hannah (*1 Sam. 1:6–2:11*). Hannah’s story begins with the record of a pious man (*1 Sam. 1:3*) who has an impressive genealogy (*1 Sam. 1:1*). The text also refers to the two sons of the priest Eli, who are present at the tabernacle in Shiloh (*1 Sam. 1:3*). Eli himself sits in a chair at the entrance of the tabernacle (*1 Sam. 1:9*). Yet, the unexpected hero of the story is Hannah, who is barren (*1 Sam. 1:6*). The biblical text reports that she prays twice (*1 Sam. 1:10, 11; 1 Sam. 2:1–10*). The first time, she offers a prayer that wells up from the “bitterness of [her] soul” (*1 Sam. 1:10*). In her anguish, she begs the Lord for a response. The second time she prays, Hannah’s prayer is an outpouring

of joy in response to God's gracious answer. The biblical text is saturated with the theme of prayer: the word "prayer" and other prayer-related terms, such as "petition" and "asked," appear seven times in the passage (*1 Sam. 1:10, 12, 17, 20, 26, 27; 2 Sam. 2:1*).

The Bitter Prayer. Hannah's first prayer originates in hopelessness. She is miserable, does not eat, and weeps in anguish. Hannah's desire for a child is not fulfilled, for the Lord shut up her womb. Her barrenness makes her the object of ridicule in her household; each year that she goes up to the house of the Lord, Hannah is provoked by her rival (*1 Sam. 1:7*). To make matters worse, the priest Eli despises her prayer. He thinks that she is drunk because only her lips move when she prays, and her voice is not audible (*1 Sam. 1:13*). And yet, Hannah's bitterness suddenly transforms into hope. As a result, she eats and is no longer sad (*1 Sam. 1:18*).

The story of Hannah's miraculous conception and subsequent birthing of Samuel is told in terms that recall the matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel: "The Lord remembered"; "Hannah conceived" (*1 Sam. 1:19, 20, NKJV; compare with Gen. 21:1, Gen. 30:22*).

The Joyful Prayer. Hannah's story culminates in a new and joyous prayer. This time, Hannah is no longer miserable and alone. She is now worshiping at the house of the Lord with her husband and her child, whom she presents to Eli the priest as the fulfillment of her earlier prayer (*1 Sam. 1:26, 27*). Hannah's second prayer of joy contrasts with her first prayer of anguish. Whereas in the preceding prayer she was miserable and lamented, in her new prayer Hannah rejoices and glorifies the Lord. This prayer, both prophetic and Messianic, finds an echo in Mary's prayer of annunciation (*Luke 1:46–55*).

Prayers of Proclamation and Silence: Elijah (*1 Kings 18–19:18*). Israel has gone more than three years without rain. The prophet Elijah then challenges King Ahab to a contest (*1 Kings 18:19*). The confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal takes place on Mount Carmel. Elijah proposes that the priests of Baal call on their god to set fire to the sacrifice on the altar they've built him. Likewise, Elijah will ask the Lord to do the same to the sacrifice on the altar he built (*1 Kings 18:24*).

The Prayer of Baal's Prophets Is Not Answered. The prophets of Baal pray. They call on their god several times—"O Baal, hear us!"—but there is no answer. They leap on the altar, cry aloud, and cut themselves in vain. They receive no response (*1 Kings 18:26, 29*).

Elijah's Prayer Is Heard. Then Elijah pours water on and around his sacrifice to God and prays (*1 Kings 18:33–35*). In answer, fire falls from heaven and consumes the sacrifice, despite the fact that it is saturated with water. Elijah does not hear any audible voice in response to his prayer. The outpouring of fire is the only indication that God has heard his prayer.

Elijah invites the king to get up and eat and drink because rain is coming (*1 Kings 18:41*). Elijah sends his servant seven times to check on the status of the coming rain. When the rain finally falls, it is so heavy that Elijah has to accompany the king to prevent the rain from hindering him. Again, Elijah does not hear God's audible voice in revelation of His will; the rain is the evidence that tells him that God has heard his prayer.

Despite the miracle of the fire from heaven, as well as the demonstration of God's presence, Jezebel, to whom Ahab reported God's miracle at Mount Carmel, still refuses to acknowledge His sovereignty. She pursues Elijah, who, for the first time, fears for his life. Elijah prays to God and complains bitterly that everyone has forsaken the Lord except for him (*1 Kings 19:10; compare with 1 Kings 18:22*). Compounding his bitterness with dread, Elijah fears for his life in the face of Jezebel's death threats (*1 Kings 19:3*).

The Silent Voice. Elijah flees from Jezebel and hides in a cave. It is at this juncture that God's voice is heard for the first time in the narrative. But the divine voice is suffused with an ironic tone: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (*1 Kings 19:9, NKJV*). To justify his air of despondency, Elijah claims that he alone is the only one left among the loyal in Israel to defend the Lord (*1 Kings 19:10*). God does not respond to this claim. When God finally does respond to Elijah, His voice is not heard in the loud and powerful wind; nor is it heard in the earthquake or the fire (*1 Kings 19:11, 12*). Unexpectedly, Elijah hears only "a still small voice" (*1 Kings 19:12*). The Hebrew phrase *qol demamah daqah* means literally: "the voice of a thin silence." Only then does Elijah understand that he is in God's presence (*1 Kings 19:13*). The sensational sound of fire and rain were miracles that demonstrated God's power. But even more than these sonorous phenomena, the voice of God's silence is heard as the most obvious manifestation of His presence and as a resounding proclamation of divine revelation.

An Earnest Prayer of Supplication and Hope: Daniel (Dan. 9:3–19). Daniel's prayer is not a mere literary exercise or theological treatise; it is the expression of a close connection with God, who is both far and near. God's proximity is implied in Daniel's address to God as his personal God. The title *'adonai*, "my Lord," which expresses God's closeness, is the most frequent divine title in the prayer (*Dan. 9:4, 7, 9, 15–17, 19 [3x]*). God's distance is signified through His other name, *ha'elohim*, "the God." Yet, as pointed out, Daniel, who qualifies God as the "great and awesome God" (*Dan. 9:4, NKJV*), identifies Him also as his personal God, or "my God." The contrast between the faithful God (*Dan. 9:4*) and the sinful and unfaithful people (*Dan. 9:5, 6*) reinforces the distance between them, through the gravity of the people's sin and their need to draw near to the Lord.

The prayer concludes with a final entreaty: *'adonai*, "O Lord," which is

repeated three times. Each repetition is followed by a verb to engage God's attention:

“O Lord, hear!

O Lord, forgive!

O Lord, listen and act!” (*Dan. 9:19, NKJV*).

Daniel's prayer concerns the salvation of God's people. Daniel, with single-minded intensity, hungers for a divine response: “Act! Do not delay!” This earnest prayer, to which the 70-weeks' prophecy is the response (*Dan. 9:24–27*), leads to the first coming of Christ. The same earnest longing resonates in the angel's question “ ‘How long?’ ” (*Dan. 8:13*). This question will be answered in the vision of the 2,300 evening-mornings, leading to the eschatological day of judgment prior to Jesus' second coming (*Dan. 8:14*).

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: For this applied section, the class will focus on the prayer model that Jesus proposed in Matthew 6:9–13. Ask for a volunteer to read this passage. Invite your class members to draw from the Savior's prayer practical counsel or principles for everyday life, as outlined below. Ask students to be ready to share next Sabbath how putting these principles into practice enriched their prayer life.

Principle 1: Our Father in heaven: When you pray, realize that God is your close Father, and yet, He is in heaven.

Principle 2: Your kingdom come: When you pray, think of the future kingdom of God as a place of peace, justice, and love. Apply this hope to your relationship with people when you eat, drink, work, and play.

Principle 3: Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven: Apply this principle of prayer to the decisions in your life. Lay everything you wish for on the altar of God. Bring this attitude of perfect submission, which is a foretaste of heaven, into your relationship with others, humbly deferring to their needs and esteeming others more highly than yourself.

Principle 4: Give us this day our daily bread: Engage in a charity project to bless and benefit others. When you eat, be moderate in your intake, thanking God for what He has provided and not overindulging your appetite.

Principle 5: Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors: Ask God to forgive someone who has harmed you, and then ask God to give you the grace to forgive him or her. Go visit this person and invite him or her to lunch. (You

Having Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 8:11, 12; Matt. 15:21–28; Luke 7:1–10; Eph. 2:8; Hebrews 11; Rev. 14:12.*

Memory Text: “Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see” (*Hebrews 11:1, NLT*).

Someone once said, “Faith is like WiFi. It’s invisible, but it has the power to connect you to what you need.” No doubt: without faith, there would be no relationship with God.

What is your faith like today? Has your faith in God ever been shaky? Perhaps you’ve experienced something that has challenged you to the point where you’ve not known how to move forward with your relationship with God. Or is your faith like a rose that grows from a green stem into a tiny bud that eventually opens into a bold, colorful flower and fills the room with an unforgettable scent? For truly, “faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see” (*Heb. 11:1, NLT*). It’s not something we can generate by ourselves, for “God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (*Rom. 12:3, NKJV*). Faith is a gift of God (*Eph. 2:8, 9*), and even then, our faith in God is possible only because of what God is already doing in and for us.

This week let’s explore the topic of faith: what to do with doubt and unbelief; what, according to Jesus, strong faith looks like; and what it means to have “the faith of Jesus.”

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 23.

Just Give Me a Sign!

Maybe you’ve heard it said, “If I could just see the Red Sea parted, or manna on the ground, or Jesus heal a blind man, I’d believe.” Or perhaps you have had those same kinds of thoughts yourself.

Why should it be easier for us now to have faith than it was for those in ancient Bible times? The Israelites didn’t own a whole Bible, nor did they have such a long history to look back on as we do. Moses reinforced the importance of looking back in order to remember God’s leading and goodness (see *Deut. 4:7–10; Deut. 8:2, 3*). Unlike the Israelites, we have 6,000 years of Bible history to draw from (see *John 20:30, 31*).

Every generation wants a sign, and ours is no different. But signs are all around us. If you read Matthew 24, you will see how many things have been and are being fulfilled even now.

People even in Jesus’ time wanted a sign that Jesus was really God’s Son, even though they had received many signs. How did Jesus respond? (See *Mark 8:11, 12*.)

Do we argue with Jesus and test Him as did the Pharisees? Do we make Him “[sigh] deeply in His Spirit” (*Mark 8:12, NKJV*) because of our lack of faith, when He has already given us all we need to believe?

“These signs were not what the Jews needed. No mere external evidence could benefit them. What they needed was not intellectual enlightenment, but spiritual renovation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 406. Could it be that we, too, need spiritual renovation—a genuine, real, moment-by-moment walk with God? Perhaps we actually don’t need a sign, because we have a lot of knowledge at our fingertips, especially from our own Bibles.

So, instead of making Jesus “[sigh] deeply” because of our lack of faith, may we remember the words Jesus spoke to Thomas: “ ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!’ ” (*John 20:29; see also Heb. 11:1*). God does not ask us to have blind faith—He has already given us so many reasons to believe. And yet, even with all these reasons, there is always room for doubt. The key is to focus on what affirms faith, not on what brings doubt.

In just 60 seconds, how would you describe your faith in God? What does your answer tell you about your walk with God?

Jesus Sees Our Faith

Compare how Jesus describes His disciples' faith in Mark 4:40 with the faith of the woman in Matthew 15:21–28.

Just because we call ourselves followers of Jesus doesn't automatically mean our faith is strong. In fact, some people claimed to believe, but Jesus discerned what was really in their hearts (*John 2:23–25*).

Read Luke 7:1–10. What do we learn about faith from this account?

In Mark 9, we read about the man who came to Jesus so that Jesus would cast the demon out of his son, but who could only muster up enough faith to say, “ ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’ ” (*Mark 9:24, NKJV*).

In each of these interactions, Jesus noticed people's faith, or lack thereof, and performed miracles as a result of that faith or in order to strengthen it.

Though the Holy Spirit prompts us to believe, the enemy of souls wants us to doubt or dismiss God's involvement in our lives. “The unbelief which is cherished in the soul has a bewitching power. The seeds of doubt that they have been sowing will produce their harvest but they must continue to dig up every root of unbelief. When these poisonous plants are pulled up, they cease to grow for want of nourishment in word and action. The soul must have the precious plants of faith and love put in the soil of the heart and enthroned there.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 17.

When we have doubts about God, His character, or His Word, what should we do with them? God does not ignore or bypass human reason, for He created us in His image and invites us to dialogue with Him, as He did with Abraham, Moses, and Job. God invites us to learn to work within His large, infinite patterns of reason, even if at some point we must surrender to what we don't fully understand.

Think of all the logical reasons you have for faith. At the same time, at what point does logic stop and faith, solid and reasonable faith, need to be exerted?

Faith Is Not a Feeling

Jesus said that if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you'll move mountains (*Matt. 17:20*). If you've ever seen a mustard seed, you know how tiny it is. Yet, having faith this small can effect such huge change. Faith must, therefore, be very important and must also be powerful and strong enough to do something superhuman. However, just as a mustard seed can grow into a large tree (*Matt. 13:31, 32*), our faith should grow and not remain static.

Indeed, we need a measure of faith in order to have a relationship with God in the first place (*see Rom. 12:3*).

What does Ephesians 2:8 tell us about the role of faith in being saved? Why can't a person justly say, "I don't have faith because God hasn't given me any"?

We must first understand that faith is not a material thing; it's a human response prompted by the Holy Spirit. God is the gracious initiator, who, through the Holy Spirit, draws us to Himself when we allow Him to do so (*Jer. 31:3*). We're saved by grace, through faith, which is a response to God's grace given to us through Jesus' death. We are saved because we believe in God as a result of His grace. This lies at the heart of having a relationship with Him.

Next, we must remember that faith is not a feeling. "Many do not exercise that faith which it is their privilege and duty to exercise, often waiting for that feeling which faith alone can bring. Feeling is not faith. . . . Faith is ours to exercise, but joyful feeling and the blessing are God's to give."—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 72.

Some people might feel as though they don't have faith because they don't feel close to God or are not what they should be as a Christian. But faith is about believing and trusting God, not only in the good times but in darkness or in a storm, or even when you can't fully understand what is going on in your life.

Feelings should never dominate our religious experience or our relationship with God. It's precisely when we think we're distant from God that we need to exercise our faith and call on Him (as did the father in *Mark 9:24*).

Look up the following Bible verses and claim them as an act of faith to strengthen your relationship with God today: *Heb. 12:1, 2; 2 Chron. 15:7; Rom. 3:23–26; Luke 7:50*. Speak them out loud as part of your prayer to God.

Examples of Faith

Spend some time today studying Hebrews 11, the great faith chapter. Read it aloud first, without stopping. Then read it a second time, and write down your thoughts to the following questions:

- Reread verse 1. What do you hope for today that you cannot yet see? (Think of immediate needs and eternal dreams.)
- What role does faith play in your personal testimony and in your conversion?
- Read verse 3 again, about God and Creation. Why, in many ways, should the existence of the Creator God be the easiest thing to accept on faith?
- Read verse 6 and write the message of this verse in your own words.
- Verses 7–40 unpack the lives of various biblical personages. Why is faith the central factor that defines the strength of these people’s relationship with God?

Knowing God and having a living, strong relationship with Him requires faith. How can you strengthen your faith or encourage someone whose faith is wavering? Here are just a few ideas:

A tiny faith (like a mustard seed) is powerful and is all you need in order to grow a relationship with God (*Matt. 17:20*). As long as you’re willing to work with Him, God will help your faith grow.

Faith comes from hearing God speak to us in His Word, the Bible (*Rom. 10:17*). Commit to daily Bible study and prayer.

Ask God to increase your faith (*Luke 17:5*). As did the father who came to Jesus with a possessed child and who “cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’ ” (*Mark 9:24, NKJV*), we can recognize our unbelief and ask for God to increase our faith.

Faith and doubt can exist together (*Mark 9:24*). Don’t walk away from God simply because you have questions. In fact, it’s important to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (*Phil. 2:12–16*) and to “own” your faith rather than borrow it from another, as five of the virgins tried to do (*Matt. 25:8*).

Respond to the Holy Spirit and ask for more of Him in your life.

Exercise your faith. Remember that faith is not a feeling but a decision to believe. Remember that even in darkness, when you can’t see Him, God is there (*2 Cor. 5:7*).

As a personal **prayer of thanks to God for His faithfulness**, consider the words from the hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”

The Faith of Jesus

As this world comes to a close, part of the three angels' messages describes God's people keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus.

Read Revelation 14:12. What does “the faith of Jesus” mean?

If you study how Seventh-day Adventists have understood justification by faith, you'll see that in the 1890s, an understanding of the faith of Jesus and the three angels' messages was greatly emphasized in the church. Up until then, the church had put a great deal of emphasis on the law, and it needed more of a gospel emphasis. Ellen G. White summarized it well: “The commandments of God have been proclaimed, but the faith of Jesus Christ has not been proclaimed by Seventh-day Adventists as of equal importance, the law and the gospel going hand in hand.”—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 172.

Although Hebrews 11 lists godly men and women who had strong faith, no one has had faith that is comparable to Jesus' faith.

Read Matthew 26:36–42. What does this tell us about the faith of Jesus at this crucial moment?

When we have the faith of Jesus, this means not only that by obedience to Him and His Word we will emulate the faith that He had in God, but also that we will have an active and living daily experience with Jesus. It's knowing and acting on the fact that without making Jesus the center of our daily lives, we can't have a saving relationship with God.

Having the faith of Jesus means to have Jesus abiding in us, and thus His faith in our hearts, for Jesus is the true foundation of our faith. At times our faith might be weak and feeble. But Jesus is worthy (*Rev. 5:9*), and we can have His faith, both reflected in our own experience and being credited to us, by His gift of grace to all who believe.

How much do you want the faith of Jesus? Humbly ask God to give it to you and claim Hebrews 11:6 as your personal prayer, saying, “Lord, without faith it's impossible to please You. I come to You and believe that You are, and that You will reward me when I diligently seek You. I do so now.”

Further Thought: We are justified (pardoned and set right with God) by faith (*Rom. 5:1*). We are then also sanctified (given power to be like Jesus) by faith (*Acts 26:18*). When we invite Jesus into our lives, we also become God’s children by faith (*John 1:12*). We live by faith in the Son of God (*Gal. 2:20*).

“Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakness of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 182.

“Their faith must be strengthened by fervent prayer and fasting, and humiliation of heart. They must be emptied of self, and be filled with the Spirit and power of God. Earnest, persevering supplication to God in faith—faith that leads to entire dependence upon God, and unreserved consecration to His work—can alone avail to bring men to the Holy Spirit’s aid in the battle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in high places.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 431.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What five main points are highlighted in the quote immediately above when it comes to collaborating with the Holy Spirit against the enemy?
- 2 What role does faith play in the battle against evil?
- 3 How do you see this battle right now in your own life?
- 4 Read Hebrews 10:23. Why is it important to hold fast to our confession of faith?
- 5 How often do you consider this truth that when you feel helpless, it’s an opportunity for you to rely more wholly upon Jesus?

Summary: God gives each person a measure of faith as a foundation for a relationship with Him. As the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus modeled the power of faith for us all. When our faith is small, when we come with weeping and supplication and have a surrendered heart, God will work miracles in our lives (*see Jer. 31:2–4, 9, 11, 12*). He will lead us in His straight ways so that we do not stumble any longer, and we will have peace. Jesus is the perfect example in all things, and having His faith will identify us as His people in the end times.

Going to Solusi to Hide

Lindsay didn't go to Solusi University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution in Zimbabwe, because of her faith. She wasn't Adventist. She didn't go because she had friends there. She didn't know anyone on the campus. She went to Solusi because she didn't want to be caught in a falsehood.

As Lindsay completed high school, she dreamed about studying at a university. But then her parents broke the news that they didn't have the money.

"You have to understand," Mother said. "I promise that you will go to the university, even if it takes time."

Mother was a tailor, and Father sold the dresses, curtains, and sofa covers that she made. But the business wasn't doing well when Lindsay finished high school, and her parents decided to move to Botswana.

Father tried to encourage her. "Things will get better," he said.

Lindsay helped with the family business for the next five years. Old friends called from Zimbabwe to see how she was doing.

"What's happening in your life?" they asked.

"I'm studying just like you," she replied.

As time passed, she nearly gave up on her dream of going to a university.

Mother's business gradually improved. She got more customers and opened a shop. One day, she and Father called Lindsay over and, with smiles, announced that she could choose a university to continue her studies.

Lindsay was thrilled, but she was unsure where to go. She considered the University of Zimbabwe, but friends were studying there, and she didn't want them to know that she hadn't been studying. She looked at Midlands State University, but friends also were studying there. She had friends at every university except one: Solusi. So, she decided to go there.

When Lindsay arrived, she was unfamiliar with the Adventist Church. But she went to church every Sabbath and, eight months later, was baptized. Her parents celebrated her decision to live for Jesus.

Today, Lindsay Chikanda is 24 and finishing her first year of studies. She is ready to tell her high-school friends the truth, saying, "I'm so sorry, but I didn't tell you the truth. I wasn't studying. I actually was in



Botswana because my parents couldn't afford to pay my tuition, and I was working with them. But then I came to Solusi, and I found God. Would you like to know God, too?"

Your Sabbath School mission offerings support Seventh-day Adventist education around the world. Thank you for giving for mission. Watch a short YouTube video of Lindsay at bit.ly/Lindsay-IS.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Hebrews 11:1*

Study Focus: *Hebrews 11, Gen. 15:6, Rev. 14:6.*

A story is told of a king who had everything he needed to be happy. Yet, he was anything but happy. So, he decided to travel around the world to search for happiness.

One day, as he was walking through the woods, depressed and discouraged, he heard a man singing. The singing filled the king's heart with joy. He reasoned to himself that if the song filled him with joy, then the singer's own heart must be filled with joy, too. Quietly, the king moved toward the singing man and then hid behind a bush to watch him, unobserved. Indeed, the man seemed to be happy. The king was intrigued by the man's happiness and wondered what made him so happy. The king decided to approach the man to find out.

The king asked, "What do you have?"

The man was startled and did not know how to respond. He stuttered, "What do I have?"

"Yes, what do you have?" repeated the king. "What do you have that makes you so happy?"

The man responded: "This shirt is the only thing I have."

The king proposed a deal: "Give me your shirt, and in exchange I will make you rich."

The man agreed. He gave his shirt to the king in exchange for a pouch of gold and then left.

The king wore the shirt and walked a few steps, touching his new shirt again and again. Nothing had changed. He still was not happy.

The moral of this story is that happiness is not based on what we have or anything intrinsically within us. As we will learn from the testimony of God's people, as recorded in Hebrews 11 and in the time of the end (*Rev. 14:12*), faith is not based on anything within us either.

Part II: Commentary

Introduction: How does the process of faith work? To answer, we will consult three fundamental texts on faith. The first text provides the only biblical definition of "faith" (*Heb. 11:1*), a definition that will be confirmed by the patriarchs and heroes of faith in the Old Testament (*Heb.*

11:4–40). The second text provides an explanation of the mechanism of faith through the testimony of Abraham, who is the father of righteousness by faith (*Gen. 15:6*). The third text is the testimony of “faith” by God’s people (the “saints”) at the time of the end (*Rev. 14:12*).

The Definition of Faith (*Heb. 11:1*). Hebrews 11:1 is the only biblical text that defines what faith is (*Heb. 11:1*). For Paul, the author of Hebrews, faith is made of two components. The first component, “the substance of things hoped for” (*Heb. 11:1*), refers to the last event of human history, the “Advent,” or the coming of God’s kingdom at the end of time, which is also “the promise” that the “elders” of the Old Testament “did not receive” (*Heb. 11:39, NKJV*).

The second component of faith is “the evidence of things not seen” (*Heb. 11:1*). This aspect refers to the first event in human history, the Creation of the world. Note that the word “seen,” *blepomenon* of Hebrews 11:1, points to the “seen,” *blepomenon* of Hebrews 11:3, which refers to the Creation of the world. In other words, the foundation of faith concerns two events that are fully under divine control: God’s Creation of the world and the Second Coming. Faith calls us to believe in the nonvisible process of Creation and to hope in the nonvisible, not-yet event of Christ’s second coming. Thus, the fundamental understanding of faith is based upon these two events: Creation and the hope of the Second Advent. It certainly is no accident that this pattern of events is clearly visible in the canonical structure of Scripture itself. The Bible begins with Creation (*Gen. 1:1–2:1*) and ends with the coming of the Lord (*Rev. 22:20*). The Old Testament Scriptures attest to this same canonical structure, beginning with Creation and ending with either the coming of the day of the Lord (*Mal. 4:5*) or the hope of the return from Babylonian exile during the Sabbatical year (*2 Chron. 36:21–23*).

It is worth noting that this structural pattern is attested to elsewhere in Scripture, as shown in the following examples. (1) The book of Genesis begins with Creation and ends with the perspective of the Promised Land, and, ultimately, the hope in the resurrection, as implied by Joseph’s request to have his bones carried out of Egypt at the time of Israel’s deliverance (*Gen. 50:24–26*). (2) Likewise, the Pentateuch begins with Creation and ends with the same perspective of the Promised Land and the hope of the resurrection (*Deut. 34:4–6*). (3) The book of Isaiah begins with God’s call to the heavens and the earth to witness His grievance against His people and ends with the creation of new heavens and a new earth and with the prospect of redeemed humanity’s eternal worship of the Lord from Sabbath to Sabbath (*Isa. 66:22, 23*). (4) The book of Ecclesiastes begins with Creation (*Eccles. 1:1–11*) and ends with eschatological judgment (*Eccles. 12:14*). (5) The book of Daniel begins with the food test, which

alludes to the dietary principles given at Creation (*Dan. 1:12; compare with Gen. 1:29*) and ends with the Second Coming, the day of resurrection “at the end of the days” (*Dan. 12:13*). (6) The Gospel of John begins with Creation (*John 1:1–10*) and ends with the promise of the Second Coming (*John 21:22, 23*).

The Faith of Abram. A Messianic vision of God inspires Abram with faith in his future. Having seen the stars in the sky as an illustration of the divine promise, Abram believed. The Hebrew verb *he’emin*, “believed,” describes more than a sentimental or intellectual process, as expressed in our English verb “to believe.” Equally, “believed” means more than a mere assent to a creed or religious “belief.” In Hebrew, “to believe” is historical and relational, as implied by the root *’aman*, “firm,” or “reliable,” especially with the use of the preposition *be* (“in,” “on”) with the object. Relying on God, Abram “believed” that he would have descendants. This kind of belief—this faith—God “accounted” as “righteousness.” God is the subject of the verb “accounted” as its most immediate antecedent. This reading is confirmed by the use of the divine passive (*niphal*) of the same verb *yekhasheb*, “accounted,” “imputed,” in the same idiom elsewhere (*Lev. 7:18; compare with Ps. 106:31*), which also have God as the subject. This use means that God “counted” (*Ps. 106:31, ESV*) Abram’s faith as having the same quality as righteousness.

Such faith *is* righteousness. Human effort and works do not produce righteousness; instead, righteousness is a gift from God. Genesis 15:6 makes sense against the backdrop of the ancient Egyptian beliefs prevalent in Abram’s day. In both systems, “counting” and “righteousness” belong to judicial language, and counting is used for the evaluation of righteousness. Yet, the two perspectives are fundamentally different. In ancient Egypt, the weight of human righteousness was evaluated on the basis of the counting of human works against the weight of the Maat, the divine righteousness. In this system, divine righteousness was demanded of humans, and the possession, or lack thereof, was counted for or against them. By contrast, Abram’s righteousness is evaluated on the basis of the divine works for him. In the biblical perspective, “righteousness” (*tsedaqah*) is a specific divine quality (*Isa. 45:24, Dan. 9:7*), and, as such, righteousness can only be God’s gift to humanity (*Deut. 6:25, Deut. 24:13, Isa. 45:24, Ps. 24:5*). What makes Abram righteous is not the sum of his deeds but his willingness to rely on God’s deeds for him (*Rom. 4:2–4*).

The Faith of the Saints of the End. The most immediate application of the canonical integration of the Old and New Testaments is the association of “the law and the gospel,” which Ellen G. White uses to explain our

“distinctive” name (*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 385). It is also significant that it is on the basis of this association that the name “Seventh-day Adventist” has been legally adopted to found the historical creation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: “We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ” (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Oct. 8, 1861).

Obviously, this confession of faith is also found in the apocalyptic text of Revelation, interpreted as a prophetic reference to the last-day witnesses of biblical truth (*Rev. 14:12*). In this verse, “the saints” are identified as “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*NKJV*). The law and “the faith of Jesus” mean more than just the concrete action of obedience, along with abstract and spiritual faith. The syntax of the phrase suggests, in fact, that the two actions belong to the same truth, with two possible nuances: the obedience to the law *is* the faith of Jesus; that is, Jesus’ faith. For, in biblical thought, faith *is* righteousness (*see Gen. 15:6*). This reconciliation between “the law of Moses” with the faith in Jesus’ coming characterizes the message of the eschatological Elijah (*Mal. 4:4–6*) and constitutes the mission of the two witnesses who represent the testimony of the Old and New Testaments (*Rev. 11:3–6*).

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip: Below are some strategies to share with your students for building their faith and nurturing their prayer life. Ask for a volunteer to read the Scripture and the principles that follow. Then discuss the principles and questions with your class.

Faith Training (*read Matt. 15:21–28*)

Principle 1: Pray and behave as if God has heard your prayer and has responded or will respond.

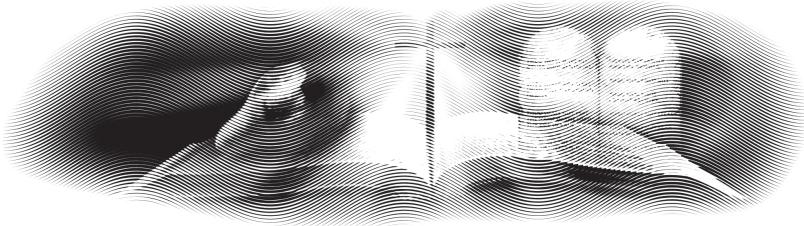
Principle 2: Stop worrying about the “status” of your faith or about your current situation. Just move forward, trusting in God.

Principle 3: Learn to walk with God and obey His commandments, even (especially) if this obedience creates troubles (loss of position, friends, etc.).

Questions for Discussion:

1. What does it mean to have true, humble faith in God?
2. What does such humble faith look like?

Sin, *the Gospel*, and *the Law*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Judges 14; Mark 9:42–48; Rom. 3:20; Matt. 5:17, 18; Rom 3:28; Matt. 7:24–29.*

Memory Text: “I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life. I am Yours, save me; for I have sought Your precepts” (*Psalm 119:93, 94, NKJV*).

Without a doubt, sin is the greatest obstructor to a close relationship with God. Not only does sin separate us from God now (*Isa. 59:2*), but it also deceives, hurts, consumes, and eventually destroys us. Our battle against sin and self is the greatest battle we'll ever face, with tremendous, even eternal, implications.

Some dismiss sin as just a regular part of life. After all, it's human nature to indulge in pleasure. But do we make light of sin because society has become so comfortable with it? We can tiptoe around the topic of sin, afraid that we'll offend someone if we call it what it is, but in the end, the more we choose to live comfortably with it, the further we'll slip from a healthy relationship with God.

Yes, every person has sinned, and our thoughts, motives, actions, and words hurt others, ourselves, and God. Ultimately, sin destroys our relationship with God, but God has revealed Himself to us through the knowledge of His law, which shines light on the sin in our lives.

This week let's explore the reason God gave us His law and, when someone transgresses God's law and consequently sins, what or who can help to restore their relationship with God.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 30.

Distractions and Temptations

Read about Samson's temptations in Judges 14 and Judges 16:1, 4, 16, 17. Although called by God for a specific purpose, Samson served God while giving in to temptation. What does the outcome of his life teach us?

The great controversy is real, and we are all involved in it. The cosmic battle that began in heaven is now being played out in each of our own lives, as well.

Satan knows that he has to pull out everything he's got in the times that we're living in, right before Jesus comes, to keep us from having a close relationship with God. Perhaps you've been distracted with something that may not necessarily be wrong in itself but takes so much time and energy that there's very little left for God. Maybe it's work, social media, shopping, sports, or food. When we take a good hard look at ourselves, we'll see that overconsumption and an imbalance of any of these things can allow for little time for God and others. The enemy knows each of our weaknesses and the kinds of things that distract us from spending time with God. We should remember to seek God first (*Matt. 6:33*) before rushing into our day and all that may come our way.

Jesus understands our condition, but He rebukes our apathy (*Rev. 3:14–22*). Although He is God, He was also a human being who felt tired, as we do (*John 4:6*). He knew the pressures of life, as we do, but He often got relief by going away alone to pray to His Father (*Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12, Mark 1:35, Matt. 14:23*). He knew that time with His Father was the best thing He could do to regain strength to battle temptations. It's the best and surest way for us too.

Samson fell because he thought he was strong. He depended on his own strength to overcome temptations. Every day, each of us faces battles with sin as the enemy of souls tries to weaken and destroy our relationship with God. He knows our weaknesses and zeroes in on them in order to dull our relationship with God and to bring guilt and a sense of unworthiness upon us, all of which tend to drive us away from God. The devil works to shift our thinking, our intentions, and our actions in order to gain a stronghold in some part of our lives. But remember: our faith will help us to stand, and faith comes by hearing the Word of God.

What are you struggling with now? How can the Word of God help you right now?

Strongholds in My Relationship With God

There are many messages in the Bible that speak about our relationship with God and the barriers that prevent us from growing in Christ. Consider these words from Paul and Jesus:

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (*1 Cor. 10:12, NKJV*). Like Samson, self-reliance will bring you down.

“Do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do . . . , that they may have glory from men” (*Matt. 6:2, NKJV*). Stop telling everyone how good you are! Be humble, as Jesus was humble.

“But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you” (*Matt. 5:28, 29, NKJV*). Do anything to remove the lust from your heart, because this is a barrier to your relationship with God.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged” (*Matt. 7:1, 2, NKJV*). Stop being so critical and judgmental of others. God is the Judge, so let Him be so (*1 Cor. 4:5*).

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (*Matt. 5:44, NKJV*). Stop hating your enemies. When you feel negatively toward those who treat you badly, it instantly places a barrier in your relationship with God. Instead, start praying for your enemies and see how this changes not just your walk with God but also your relationship with others.

“But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (*Matt. 5:22, NKJV*). Perhaps you’ve been justifying why you yell at those close to you. How is your anger impacting your relationship with God, not to mention those you’re angry at? These are just a few areas that make us stumble.

Jesus warned about what we should do when our hands, feet, and eyes cause us to sin. What was Jesus warning us about? Read Mark 9:42–48.

To cut off your hand or foot or to pluck out your eye because it’s causing you to sin is extreme. It was supposed to be. But this is how seriously Jesus sees sin and its impact in our lives. How seriously are you taking it?

The Law

How would you define and describe sin to a non-Christian? How does the Bible describe sin? Read Romans 3:20 and 1 John 3:4.

Sin is a transgression of God's law (*1 John 3:4*), and sin also is wrapped up in our natures (*Ps. 51:5, Jer. 17:9*). So, it's the law that brings to light what sin really is. The law is like putting on a pair of glasses so we can clearly see what's really around us, or using a mirror to see what we really look like. It brings clarity and conviction to our lives and our characters while at the same time telling us about God's character and what's important to Him.

The Ten Commandments (*Exod. 20:3–17*) were written by God's own finger. Jesus echoed their importance: “ ‘And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these’ ” (*Mark 12:30, 31, NKJV*). He added: “ ‘On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets’ ” (*Matt. 22:40, NKJV*).

God's words to the Israelites at Mount Sinai and to us today (*Heb. 1:1, 2*) tell us that the law is all about relationships. God gave the law as a safeguard to protect our relationship with Him and with others. However, Satan has distorted the beauty of God's law so that some see it as a burden. Legalism rather than love and freedom is often attached to the law, even though the Bible tells us, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (*1 John 5:3, NKJV*).

1. On a scale of one to five, how precious is the Living Word (and the law, as a part of it) to me?
2. When I keep God's law, is it restricting me or strengthening me? How can I better understand the law if I think it is restricting me?
3. What might happen if God's law of love for Him and others was brought into the center of my life, my family, and my church? What might change in my life and my relationships?

The Law and the Gospel

Jesus Himself explained very powerfully and succinctly what His relationship to the law was.

In Matthew 5:17, 18, what did Jesus say about the law?

In a similar way to how parents' boundaries for their child reveal what they value, God's law tells us about His character and what is important to Him. God gave us His law to protect our relationship with Him and with one another, knowing that His law would guide every aspect of our lives as we grow in Him. After all, who hasn't suffered the terrible consequences of what sin, a violation of the law, has caused to each of us?

Love for Jesus is at the very center of the law. Jesus said, " 'If you love me, you will obey my commandments' " (*John 14:15, NET*). When we genuinely love Jesus, we will be naturally compelled to keep His law. When we see His law clearly, we will feel compelled to love Jesus more. And, even more important, always keeping before our eyes a vision of the Cross and Christ's substitutionary death for us is the best way to foster our love for God.

That's why the gospel goes hand in hand with the law. That is, however much we believe in the law and in the importance of keeping it, we must always remember that in terms of our legal standing before God, the law only condemns. The law never forgives, never justifies, and never atones. On the contrary, it points out why we need to be forgiven, why we need to be justified, and why we need atonement. That's why along with the law—even foundational to our understanding of the law—is the gospel, Christ's death on our behalf, which does for us what the law can never do: justify us before God.

Read the following verses: Romans 3:28, Romans 4:13–16, Galatians 2:16, Galatians 3:13, and Philippians 3:9. What do these verses teach us that can help us, as believers, to keep the law, without becoming legalistic?

Knowing and Doing

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks a lot about relationships—with Him and with one another. He says something very poignant toward the end of His message:

“ ‘Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven’ ” (*Matt. 7:21, NKJV*).

Jesus explains that some will call out to Him and clearly know *about* Him without really *knowing* Him. Of course, seeking knowledge is important, and the Bible tells us that God’s people could be destroyed because of a lack of knowledge of God and because they have rejected their knowledge of Him (*Hos. 4:1, 6, 10*). We should never downplay the importance of timeless biblical truth. But if such knowledge doesn’t change us and deepen our commitment and our walk with God, it’s of no use.

“ ‘And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’ ” (*John 17:3, NKJV*). Jesus stated that the prerequisite of entering heaven is to do the will of God and ultimately to know God—for we can’t do His will without knowing Him. This is the defining factor and a very reasonable expectation. If your children say they love you and usually do what you ask, their actions reveal the depth of their love and respect for you. In the same way, when we love God, we’ll want to do His will, because we know there is nothing better for us to do! Our response to Him, and, ultimately, our obedience to Him as an overflow of our love, show the true nature of our relationship with Him.

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by leaving His listeners with a poignant final challenge. What was it? Read Matthew 7:24–29.

When we really hear Jesus’ messages, we can’t help being challenged and changed. But, first of all, our ears must be opened and our hearts receptive so that the blueprint for living in a close relationship with God can be etched upon our very souls with every breath we take. Our lives can be built upon the Rock and God’s perfect plan for us.

This blueprint of a close relationship is no secret. It’s revealed in the pages of God’s inspired Word, and He offers it to every person. It’s each one’s personal choice to accept it by faith, to claim the perfect righteousness of Christ, and then to live out that righteousness.

Further Thought: It shouldn't surprise us that the topic of the law can be such a twisted and misunderstood one, given that Satan's ultimate challenge against God was about His law.

Some in Jesus' day thought that He had come to do away with the law, but that couldn't have been further from the truth. Jesus shone light on the law and God's beautiful character, and He came to fulfill the law (*Matt. 5:17, 18*) to show us what God is like.

"Only as a reverence for God's Holy Word was cherished in the hearts of the people, could they hope to fulfill the divine purpose. It was regard for the law of God that gave Israel strength during the reign of David and the earlier years of Solomon's rule; it was through faith in the living word that reformation was wrought in the days of Elijah and of Josiah. And it was to these same Scriptures of truth, Israel's richest heritage, that Jeremiah appealed in his efforts toward reform."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 465, 466.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How does popular culture view sin? How should our church respond?
- ② When have you seen firsthand how sin destroys relationships with God and with others?
- ③ Has obedience to God's law been easy or hard in your life? What factors have contributed to this?
- ④ How can we as Seventh-day Adventists, whose very name shows how seriously we take the law, avoid the trap of legalism, of depending on our law-keeping to save us? (Do a thought experiment: On the day of judgment, what are you going to rely on as your every sin is brought before a holy and perfect God in judgment? Your law-keeping? Or Jesus' perfect righteousness in your stead?)
- ⑤ How can knowledge (or the lack of knowledge) impact someone's relationship with God? (Read *Prov. 24:3, 13, 14*.)

Summary: Our lives are infected with sin, which separates us from God. However, God invites us to know and love Him with all of our mind, heart, soul, and strength. When we do this, we'll naturally have more love for others. Such love for God and others is captured in God's law, which was given to protect and preserve our relationships with Him and those around us. God's law is a beautiful reflection of His character, and when we understand His law, our relationship with Him will grow stronger.

Miracle Money in Brazil

Tarsis Gomes, a 19-year-old student, received a monthly allowance of 50 Brazilian real (worth US\$50 at the time) from his father. After giving 5 real for tithe and 5 real for offering, he had 40 real left for university expenses.

One Sabbath, after giving tithe and offering in church, a friend named Nivaldo asked Tarsis for help buying new tires for his wheelchair. Tarsis didn't hesitate. "Sure, I'll give you twenty real," he said.

Then a second friend, Jairo, also asked for help. He sang with an a cappella group called Communion that was touring churches in Brazil, and they needed money for lodging. "Sure, I'll give you twenty real," Tarsis said.

He forgot that he needed 23 real to cover university fees that month.

A few days later, Tarsis got in line at an ATM to withdraw money for his university fees. His sister, who also was a student, stood with him. It was then that he remembered that he had promised the 40 real that remained after tithe and offering to his two friends. He began to talk to God. "Why did You allow me to make those promises?" he asked, bowing his head sadly. "How can I help people if I don't study? What will Father say to me?"

At that moment, he sensed God was saying, *Look up at the ATM*. He raised his eyes and saw money sticking out of the ATM's cash dispenser slot. Then someone approached the ATM and withdrew money, but the banknote remained in the slot. He couldn't believe it. He prayed, "Lord, if three people use the ATM and don't see that money, then I'll know that it's for me."

The next three people in line withdrew money, but the banknote remained.

With a prayer, Tarsis boldly cut in line and walked up to the ATM. Reaching out his hand, he pulled a 50-real banknote out of the slot. All eyes fell on him. His sister later said it looked like he pulled the money out of thin air. One moment there was no money in the slot, and the next it was in his hand.

Tarsis couldn't believe it. He was shaking. The next second, his sister was beside him, asking, "Where did you find that money?"

"Right here," he said. "It was just sticking out of the ATM."

"No way," she said. "If it had been there, I would have taken it myself."

Tarsis, now a 42-year-old military police officer in Recife, Brazil, has been asked why God provided 50 real and not more. He replies, "Because I didn't help more people. If I had offered to help more people, God would have given me more." To him, the 50 real made perfect sense: 5 real for tithe, 5 real for offering, and 40 real for his friends. "We do not become poor when we help people," he said. "God is the One who sustains us. Be faithful."



Watch a YouTube video of Tarsis at: bit.ly/Tarsis-IS.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Matthew 5:17, 18*

Study Focus: *Ps. 119:93, 94; Eccles. 7:29; Matt. 7:24–29; Rom. 3:20.*

A story is told of twin boys who learned from early childhood that all pleasure was sin. All their actions were restricted by stringent rules: do not read this book, for it is sin; do not eat that food, for it is sin; do not laugh, for it is sin; do not go to that place, for it is sin.

When these two boys grew up, their paths in life diverged. One brother developed a great fear of the forbidden and hardly dared to venture outside of his house for fear of coming into contact with morally, and physically, contaminating influences. He even was afraid to open the windows of his room and dared not eat widely of the produce sold in the market. He finally died young from being overly abstemious.

The other brother, however, suffered from the opposite problem. He developed a strong attraction for the forbidden. He experimented with drugs, binged on alcohol, and frequented all sorts of casinos and seedy dives. He developed a gustatory relish for certain proscribed foods. It was not too long before the young man got sick and died from overindulgence.

Was the education the boys received so very wrong? After all, shouldn't we do our best to avoid sin? What was essentially wrong with their education is that they never learned what sin really was. Nor did they understand why sin was evil; thus, they weren't equipped to fight against it. In this lesson, we will address what sin is and how to overcome it.

Part II: Commentary

What Is Sin, and Why Is Sin Evil?

Failing to Identify Sin. When we fail to call sin by its name, we add to the problem of sin. For instance, if we fail to call adultery a sin, we run the risk of minimizing its threat and, worse, of normalizing it.

The problem of failing to call sin by its name is particularly rampant in many cultures today. In secular society, we may avoid using the term “sin” for a number of reasons. First, secularized society may avoid the term “sin” because it has religious connotations. For most people, sin does not exist; it implies something that is forbidden by God or by religion. For most people who do not believe in God and do not adhere to

the moral standards of religion, there is no such thing as sin. They speak of mistakes, crimes, ethical or social misbehaviors, but not of “sins.” From their perspective, a discussion of sin is, therefore, irrelevant or even is perceived as an attack on their liberties. However, one of the dire consequences of our refusing to acknowledge sin is remaining ignorant of evil. Thus, for the secular mind, the motivation for refraining from making a “mistake” is not because it is bad or evil; rather, refraining is simply a matter of social, or civic, consideration. The secular mind doesn’t know that it sins, because it has no knowledge of what the Bible calls the “fear of God.”

When Abraham traveled to a foreign land, he worried that he would be mistreated because the people there did not have the fear of God (*Gen. 20:11*) presiding over their hearts. Thus, the concept of “sin” was foreign to them. Just because the concept was foreign to them does not mean, however, that those who ignore sin are not responsible for their sins. Even if those who are ignorant of their sins do not believe in the God of Israel, this same God will judge them, just as surely as He will judge His people (*Amos 1, 2*). As for those who know that they “sin” and yet refuse to recognize it as such, but say that they have not sinned, God promises that He will make His case against them (*Jer. 2:35*).

Sin as a Distortion. The Hebrew word for sin *kht*’ means literally “missing the mark.” “Sin” is understood as a “deviation,” or a “distortion,” from the original “straight” way. Ecclesiastes describes the human condition as tragically “crooked”; it is irreparable: “What is crooked cannot be made straight” (*Eccles. 1:15, NKJV*). For this reason, the act of committing “sin” is connected with the problem of “forgetting,” referring to a past situation that is irredeemable, lost as it is to the passage of time. Hence, the existence of numerous biblical passages wherein the prophet urges God’s people not to forget, lest they fall into sin unawares (*Deut. 6:12, Deut. 32:18; compare with James 1:24*).

Sin Against God. In ancient Israel, sin was a religious act that concerned God directly, as, for instance, idolatry (*Deut. 9:16*) or disobedience to God (*Deut. 1:41*). Injustice, or ethical misbehavior against people, was also considered sin against God.

When Joseph resisted the lustful overtures of Potiphar’s wife, who tried to entice him to sleep with her, he identified her proposition not only as a crime against her husband but as a sin against the Lord (*Gen. 39:9*). When David committed adultery against Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, killed, he later understood that by doing so, he had sinned against the Lord (*2 Sam. 12:13*).

Later in Old Testament history, the prophets confronted nations and

Israel for committing violent crimes and unethical acts that harmed others (*Amos 1:11, Amos 2:6–8*). Micah even goes so far as to emphasize the superiority of the ethical duty over the religious ritual (*Mic. 6:6–8*).

The New Testament continues in the same line. For Jesus, if we sin against our neighbors or fail to take care of them, it is as if we sinned against or neglected Him (*Matt. 25:45*). For Paul, when you sin against the brothers, “you sin against Christ” (*1 Cor. 8:12, NKJV*). Even when we sin against ourselves in our own body, we sin against God. The reverse is also true: the first sin committed by Adam against God had an impact on his life and on his environment (*Gen. 3:17–19*). Sin is the cause of death for all humans (*Gen. 2:17*), a principle that will be repeated again and again in the Bible (*Prov. 8:36, Ezek. 18:4, Rom. 5:12*). Because our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, to sin against our body is to sin against God (*1 Cor. 6:18, 19*).

How Can We Fight Sin?

Knowledge of Sin. We can do nothing against sin in our own strength. Thus, the first solution to the problem is simply to recognize sin and to acknowledge that its very nature is evil. For that purpose, we need the law of God. For only “by the law is the knowledge of sin” made manifest (*Rom. 3:20*). The law is thus compared to a “tutor” who will bring us to Christ (*Gal. 3:24, NKJV*). Just as the tutor in ancient Greek society was to lead the child to his master, the law of God will lead us to Christ. As we strive in that struggle with the law of righteousness, we will realize how difficult it is and how hopeless we are. We will then realize that our only hope is to embrace God’s grace.

The Way of Adam and Eve. Let us consider Adam and Eve’s confession of sin. On one hand, we may infer that they realized they had broken God’s law because they hid themselves from the presence of a righteous God (*Gen. 3:6–10*). On the other hand, when God asked them to present themselves and then commenced to conduct His investigation as to what happened, they both responded by charging God with their wrongdoing. Adam referred to his nakedness, which was the original state in which God created him to exist (*Gen. 2:25*), and then to the woman, who had been given to him by God (*Gen. 3:12*). Eve blamed the serpent, who had been created by God (*Gen. 3:1, 13*).

The only passage that discloses the effect of sin on the nature of Adam and Eve is found in Genesis 3:22, 23, in which God notices that Adam and Eve were originally like God. (Note that the Hebrew verb *hayah*, translated “has become” in Genesis 3:22 [*NKJV*], should be translated as “was” in the past tense, just as in Genesis 3:1). The common translation “has become” wrongly suggests that the sin marked an improvement in

their condition and status. In addition, such translation gives the impression that the serpent was right when he warned Eve that God did not want her and Adam to become like Him (*Gen. 3:5*). In reality, God deplores the tragic reality that, after sin, Adam and Eve have lost their likeness to Him. Only God acknowledges, then, the real negative effect of sin on them. Adam and Eve were unable to make a confession of sin because they had lost their connection with God. As long as Adam and Eve had not sinned, their connection with God allowed them to discern the reality of sin. As soon as they departed from God's presence, they lost their capacity to discern between good and evil. As Ellen G. White comments: "By the mingling of evil with good, his [Adam's] mind had become confused, his mental and spiritual powers benumbed. No longer could he appreciate the good God had so freely bestowed."—*Education*, p. 25.

The basic lesson we learn from the fall of humanity is simply this: because humans have sinned, they have lost their innate sense of discernment, the capacity to distinguish between good and evil. So, apart from God, we are unable to exercise that judgment successfully. For this reason, God gave us the law and the gospel. We need the law to guide us in the right direction. Likewise, we need the grace of Christ to help us walk with hope and love in that direction.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: Ask for a volunteer to read the reflections on sin below. Permit time for discussion of the related questions that follow or for the sharing of testimonies as indicated below.

For Reflection: Is Sin Ever Not Sin?

A Christian man committed adultery. When his friends confronted him with his infidelity, he insisted that it was not sin because he loved the woman. Because God is love, the man argued that what he did was approved by God. Later, this man got involved with another woman, and then subsequent women after that. When his friends confronted him again on these latest developments and asked him whether God was still approving, the man responded that he did not believe in God anymore.

For Discussion:

1. Think of cases in your life, and in the lives of friends or in the news, in which sin is justified and even portrayed as a good action. What is the effect of such attitudes on the moral fabric of society? Why is this thinking so dangerous?

2. Think of cases from the Bible, history, and current events in which the dismissal or decriminalization of a person's sin led to an increase in his or her misery.

3. What arguments would you use to help someone face the reality of his or her sin?

For Reflection: Sin and Happiness. On the basis of his work on the connection between ethics and happiness, psychiatrist Henri Baruk concluded, "One finds happiness in doing good to others. We are not happy when seeking our own happiness. The man who seeks happiness will never find it" (Henri Baruk, in *Shabbat Shalom*, December 1996).

1. Ask class members to give testimonies about the happiness they achieved from doing good to others.
2. Resolve to help someone in physical, financial, or spiritual need this week.

Notes

Repentance *and* Forgiveness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 61:10; Hosea 6; Acts 3:18, 19; Exod. 34:1–10; Rom. 6:23; Matt. 22:1–14.*

Memory Text: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (*1 John 1:9, NKJV*).

The Promised Land seemed so far away to the Israelites, who camped beneath the pillar of cloud on the plain. Moses had ascended into the thick darkness, which had covered the top of the mountain many days earlier. Surely their leader had died by now, they reasoned, if not from starvation then perhaps from the consuming fire on its peak. This mixed multitude (the Israelites along with those who left Egypt with them on the Exodus) felt restless and impatient, ready to move on to the land flowing with milk and honey. Although these same people had, just a few days earlier, made a solemn covenant with God to obey Him, they wanted an image they could see. And so, they rallied around Aaron's tent and demanded that he create an idol for them. Fearing for his own safety, Aaron agreed. In Exodus 32–34, we read how this sad story unravels.

This account is just one story from Scripture that teaches us about repentance and forgiveness, the theme of this week's lesson study. Keep the theme of this week's memory verse in your mind as you go through each day's study. Yes, we sin, but thanks to Jesus' death on the cross, forgiveness is there for the sincere confessing and repentant sinner.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 6.

The Rush of Life

It had been a very busy week. Although she knew there was a lot to be done before Sabbath, the urgent seemed to consume the important, and before she knew it, the sun had gone down. The family shared a special Friday night meal and worship together.

But when Sabbath morning came and she woke up early, she couldn't help noticing the dirty bathroom, which she wiped down. Then she saw that her young son had wet the bed, so she threw his sheets into the washer with other clothes. As she prepared breakfast for her family, she realized there was no dessert for lunch, so she quickly baked some banana bread. She saw that her husband needed a shirt ironed for church, so she did that, too, then folded some clothes and took out the trash.

And then it hit her. *It's Sabbath—a day I love more than any other! Yet here I am, doing all these chores and allowing these things to distract me from what Sabbath is really about—drawing near to God.*

For just a moment, her mind started justifying her actions—these were all things that needed doing. Were they really? She realized that she was acting like Martha, “distracted with much serving” (*Luke 10:40, NKJV*), but the words of Jesus echoed in her mind: “‘You are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her’ ” (*Luke 10:41, 42, NKJV*). *That good part.* Sitting at Jesus' feet out of a deep love for Him—not just on Sabbath, but every day. She hadn't chosen that this morning.

She loved God, yet it was easy to forget that He had given her the Sabbath as a gift in time to make their relationship stronger. Silent tears fell from her eyes as she stood there in the kitchen.

The purpose of this example is not to focus on what we should or shouldn't do on Sabbath; rather it is a reminder of why it's important for us to notice the things that weaken or break down our relationship with God. When our hearts feel the pain of sin and separation and we call out to Him, Jesus is very close (*Ps. 53:2*). In His bloodstained hands, He holds a white robe. He sees our tears of repentance and takes away our dirty clothes. He then wraps His pure robe of righteousness all the way around us. His purity covers our confessed sin—completely and perfectly. We can wash our robe in His blood (*Rev. 7:14*).

How do Isaiah 64:6, Zechariah 3:4, and Isaiah 61:10 reveal the important truth of Christ's righteousness to us? Why must we always cling fervently to what God promises us in these verses?

Holy Spirit Promptings

As he thought about the distance between himself and his wife, he knew that he had been wrong. He'd been unkind and harsh and had said some things he'd regretted. Yet, his next thought was, *Didn't she deserve it, even a little bit?*

Is this thought process familiar to you? It's easy to flip from a sense of remorse to a justification of our thoughts and actions. It's not always easy to say, "I'm sorry . . ." when we have done wrong, yet this is so essential to rebuilding or strengthening any relationship.

The same is true of us and God. The Holy Spirit often prompts our minds to think about the sins that we commit. Our hearts are moved because of these promptings, but it can be easy to push away that still, small voice as we justify why we acted a certain way. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to " 'convict the world of sin' " (*John 16:8, NKJV*). What an incredible gift from God (*Luke 11:13*), for we need such convictions to repair the distance that can creep into our walk with Him!

Read Hosea 6. What specifically do you notice here about how God describes Himself in His appeal for repentance?

Consider the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of grafting us back onto the Vine (*John 15:4*). "We often sorrow because our evil deeds bring unpleasant consequences to ourselves; but this is not repentance. Real sorrow for sin is the result of the working of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit reveals the ingratitude of the heart that has slighted and grieved the Saviour, and brings us in contrition to the foot of the cross. By every sin Jesus is wounded afresh; . . . we mourn for the sins that have brought anguish upon Him. Such mourning will lead to the renunciation of sin."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 300.

The truth is, we can't grow in our relationship with God when chosen and cherished sins stand between us and Him. We've all fallen short of the glory of God, but we can—and should—repent of our sins when the Holy Spirit brings them into our minds (*Eph. 4:30*).

When did you last hear a rebuke or a call to repentance? How did you respond? Spend some time right now in prayer, asking God to soften your heart and open your ears to His voice in His Word this week.

Real Repentance

The secular world bombards us with messages of independence, indulgence, and self-promotion—the opposite of the principles of God’s kingdom. Interestingly, the first words recorded in the Bible by John the Baptist and Jesus were similar. John said, “ ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ ” (*Matt. 3:1, 2, NKJV*). Jesus said, “ ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’ ” (*Mark 1:14, 15, NKJV*; see also *Luke 24:46, 47*). Both Jesus and John called those listening to repentance because the kingdom of heaven was near. Could it be that this same message is equally as relevant to us today?

Read Acts 3:18, 19. Why is repentance so important in the process of spiritual growth? What is a time of “refreshing”?

The kindness and goodness of God leads us to repentance (*Rom. 2:4*). Repentance involves two steps: (1) sincere pain and sorrow for our sins; and (2) the honest decision to abandon sin. In the Bible, repentance is almost always connected to forgiveness. We genuinely repent; God forgives. It’s that simple (*1 John 1:9, Rev. 3:19*). “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (*2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV*). As we personally prepare our souls for the Second Coming, God is giving us time to make things right with Him.

Jesus suffered, died, and rose so that when we repent, His grace can work a miracle in our lives. Contrary to the world, which tells us we are fine just the way we are, God asks that we turn to Him in repentance and faith (*Acts 20:21*), placing ourselves fully in His hands so that He can prune and beautifully shape our characters into His likeness, to testify of Him (*John 15:2, 8*). We then grow and produce fruit in keeping with repentance (*Matt. 3:8*).

“No repentance is genuine that does not work reformation. The righteousness of Christ is not a cloak to cover unconfessed and unforsaken sin; it is a principle of life that transforms the character and controls the conduct.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 555, 556.

Repentance leads to life (*Acts 11:18*) and is a vital part of growing in a relationship with God. In the process of surrender, repentance, and allowing God to prune you, what step is most challenging for you?

Sufficient Grace

When we feel the weight of our sin and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to the foot of the cross, we should ask for God’s forgiveness, knowing that “the LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy” (*Ps. 103:8, NKJV*). This same verse was spoken by God Himself (*Exod. 34:6*) after His chosen nation had grieved Him.

Read Exodus 34:1–10. What crucial truth is found here?

The fact that the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy is also the very reason Jesus died on the cross—so that our relationship with God could be made right again.

It’s when we are willing to acknowledge and confess our sin; when we say, *O, Lord, here I am again . . . “Be merciful to me a sinner!”* (*Luke 18:13, NKJV*), that Jesus—who has already been working in us and for us with the Holy Spirit before we even call out to Him—sees the weight and takes it from us. Our burdens are lifted at Calvary, and Jesus is surely very near when we come to Him and, even before, seeks us as the Good Shepherd and stands at the door and knocks (*Rev. 3:20*). Let’s not stay away from the Cross, looking at God from a distance. Let’s run to Jesus and exchange our sins and burdens for His righteousness (*Zech. 3:4*).

Slowly read the following verses. Write in your own words what they tell you about God’s grace toward you:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 6:23, NKJV*).

“But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (*Rom. 5:20, 21, NKJV*).

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*).

The Most Expensive Robe

Nice clothing too often defines the rich by worldly standards. Some people say, “I dress this way to express who I am.” But in heaven, everything other than our relationships will fade away (*Matt. 6:19–21, NKJV*). Our personal identity should be wrapped up in Jesus and His perfect robe of righteousness.

Read the parable in Matthew 22:1–14 that Jesus told to explain this. What messages can you find in this parable?

Jesus called the man without a robe “friend,” and despite his lack of response, they must have had a relationship. The man must have known about the robe but had chosen not to wear it. Jesus’ character is perfect and spotless, and He offers it to us that His church “should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white” (*Rev. 19:8*), “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (*Eph. 5:27*).

The white linen “is the righteousness of Christ, His own unblemished character, that through faith is imparted to all who receive Him as their personal Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 310.

Adam and Eve wore a white robe of soft light before they sinned; after they sinned, they realized they were naked (*Gen. 3:7*) and made clothing of fig leaves. Then God replaced their fig leaves with clothing made of animal skins. There was a sacrifice that produced their garment. In a similar way, we accept Jesus’ sacrifice by accepting His robe of righteousness. “Naked and ashamed, they tried to supply the place of the heavenly garments by sewing together fig leaves for covering. . . . Nothing can man devise to supply the place of his lost robe of innocence. No fig-leaf garment, no worldly citizen dress, can be worn by those who sit down with Christ and angels at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God’s presence. This covering, the robe of His own righteousness, Christ will put upon every repenting, believing soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 311.

Reflect: We should daily choose to be clothed with Jesus’ robe of righteousness. What does this really mean, and how do we do this?

Further Thought: The Bible often uses agricultural metaphors to describe our spiritual condition. Hosea 10:12 is one example that captures what we have discussed this week:

“Sow for yourselves righteousness;
Reap in mercy;
Break up your fallow ground,
For it is time to seek the LORD,
Till He comes and rains righteousness on you” (NKJV).

We sow, reap, break up the hard soil, and seek God to come close to us. The hard soil of our hearts must be prepared and ready for the rain (Holy Spirit) to fall on it. God can give us the desire to prepare the soil, but, ultimately, a relationship with Him is a partnership (see *Phil. 2:12, 13*). We have to turn our heads toward Him, reach out to Him, and cling onto Him. Then He works in us to do the rest.

One great example of what clinging to God means can be found in these verses: “Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day” (*Deut. 4:3, 4*).

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (*Matt. 6:13*). Jesus specifically taught His disciples to pray this way, but do we keep this line of thought in our daily prayers? How regularly do you pray for protection against temptation and sin?
- ❷ How would you explain the precious gift of Christ’s robe of righteousness to a non-Christian or a new believer?
- ❸ How does Christ’s robe of righteousness connect to the message of the sanctuary, which is all about God forgiving and cleansing the repentant sinner? How well do you understand the beauty and richness of this message?

Summary: Identifying our sins in response to the Holy Spirit’s promptings and surrendering self in repentance are vital parts of having a thriving relationship with God. Knowing that we are completely forgiven and covered by Jesus’ robe of righteousness is the most transformative experience for a human being. Not only do we feel the weight of sin lifted, but we feel the love of God surround us as we are drawn closer to Him. This binds us to God, strengthens us spiritually, and compels us to love Him with every fiber of our being.

Voice Speaks at a Cooking Pot

Miriam, a 41-year-old mother in Zambia, didn't feel well. Her head pounded. Her body ached. Dark sadness filled her mind.

With a heavy heart, she went to the opening night of a weeklong evangelistic meeting in Livingston. At the meeting, she was befriended by a Seventh-day Adventist woman named Majorie. Miriam poured out the pain of her heart and asked for prayer. Majorie prayed for her.

Then something unusual happened. The next day, Miriam was stirring a pot of maize porridge on a fire outside her house at 11 A.M. Like many Zambians, she did her cooking outdoors because a national power shortage had left many homes without electricity. As she stirred, she sensed a voice say, *Go and read the Bible right now. Leave your pot and read the Bible.*

Miriam didn't know what to read in the Bible. She went inside the house, opened her Bible, and read the first chapter that she saw. She was amazed. She felt like God was talking directly to her.

She closed the Bible and finished cooking the porridge outside. Then she returned and read another chapter. It seemed like God was telling her, "Do you know that I still love you? Live how I want you to live."

Joy flooded her heart. Her body aches disappeared, and her headache went away. She knelt down and prayed, "Forgive me, God."

Miriam returned to the evangelistic meeting in the evening. She darted over to Majorie and told her about what had happened.

Tears came to Majorie's eyes when she learned that Miriam had heard the voice telling her to read the Bible at 11 A.M. At that exact time, she had felt an urge to pray for Miriam at home.

"Find time to read the Bible every day, and don't forget to pray all the time," Majorie said. "The Bible and prayer are the key for everything."

Months have passed since Miriam began reading the Bible and praying regularly. Her head has stopped pounding. Her body has stopped aching. The dark sadness that once filled her heart has been replaced with sunny joy and a fervent desire to live for God.

"The Bible has encouraged me," she said. "God is working through the Bible. If the devil wants to bring confusion, I just claim the promises of the Bible and pray."



This mission story illustrates the "Mission For All" objective of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan, which says in part, "Christ mingled, showed sympathy, ministered to needs, won confidence, then invited people to follow Him. The goal is to take a genuine interest in people, leading them to Christ and inviting them to unite with the Seventh-day Adventist Church as disciples of Christ who make disciples." Read more at IWillGo.org. Watch a short YouTube video of Miriam at bit.ly/Miriam-IS.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *1 John 1:9*

Study Focus: *Gen. 3:7, 21; Exod. 34:1–10; 1 John 1:5–10; Isa. 61:10; Hosea 6.*

This week's lesson responds to last week's examination of the nature of sin. Last week, we considered the hopelessness that our sinful condition generates. This week we will consider God's response to the human problem of sin.

After humanity fell, God did not remain at a distance in heaven, indifferent to our misery. At the appointed time, Jesus, the Son of God, came down in the likeness of human flesh to undertake a rescue operation. God, in the person of His Son, died for our sins. At the cross, Christ paid the high price of justice for our salvation. Since that time, the Lord Jesus has interceded in heaven for us to secure our place with Him in His kingdom. And now, at the time of the end, Christ pleads with us through His Spirit to change our sinful ways, which lead to death, and to accept instead His gift of eternal life. The only solution to the problem of sin is to hear God's call to repent (*Hosea 6*).

Last week, we learned that, as sinners, we are in a lost condition apart from Christ and, thus, are walking in darkness (*1 John 1:6*). This week, we will learn how to walk out of darkness into God's marvelous light (*1 John 1:7*). Without the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, our sin is unforgivable, and we are slaves to sin and death (*Gen. 2:17, Rom. 5:12*). In this week's lesson, we will explore how we stand alive in Christ, amazed at God's wonderful gift of grace (*Exod. 34:1–10*). Without this gift, we are like Adam and Eve at the Fall, ashamed of our nakedness (*Gen. 3:7*). This week, we also will see how God's grace covers us as it covered a penitent Adam and Eve (*Gen. 3:21, Rev. 7:13–17, Matt. 22:12*).

Part II: Commentary

God's Call to Repentance (*Hosea 6*). The Hebrew word *shub* refers to the physical action to "return." This verb also expresses the spiritual concept of "repentance."

The verb *shub* is a keyword in the book of Hosea. Repentance is a major theme throughout the book. The verb *shub* refers to the return of the prophet Hosea's wife, Gomer, who has become a prostitute and has strayed

from her husband (*Hos. 2:7*). Gomer's unfaithfulness to her marriage vow symbolizes Israel's unfaithfulness to God. So, *shub* also is used to refer to the return (repentance) of Israel to God (*Hos. 3:5*).

In Hosea 6, the verb *shub*, "return," appears in the beginning of the chapter (*Hos. 6:1*), where it refers to the repentance of Israel toward God, and then again at the end of the chapter (*Hos. 6:11*). This "inclusio" is a literary device that connects the repentance of Israel to the promise of her return from the exile. Again, the actual situation of the prophet with his adulterous wife is used as a visible metaphor to represent the similar situation of Israel toward God. In this passage, the prophet reminds Israel of her present "torn" condition because of God's tearing Israel apart (*Hos. 6:1*), just as a lion would do to its prey (*Hos. 5:14*). Then the prophet promises that God will revive Israel on the third day, which is an allusion to God's spiritual resurrection of Israel.

In the ancient Near East, it was believed that a deceased person could be declared dead only after three days of corruption. The reference to the "three days" implies that the revival was, indeed, a resurrection, as it were, from the dead. The same analogy is applied in the New Testament to the resurrection of Jesus Christ on "the third day according to the Scriptures" (*1 Cor. 15:4, NKJV*). (Note that in ancient Jewish counting, three days are counted as if the third day has been engaged in full.) The parallel between the two resurrections, Israel's and Christ's, does not just allow for a typological reading of the passage relating the resurrection of Israel (returning from captivity) to the resurrection of Christ. From the New Testament perspective, the parallel also contains the spiritual lesson that repentance would ensure the promise that God would "revive" His people, just as God resurrected His Son (*1 Cor. 15:20; compare with 1 Cor. 15:23*).

Walk in God's Light (*1 John 1:5–10*). In Hosea, we heard God's call to repent, to walk back to God. In John's letter, we hear God's call to walk in God's light. John's letter begins with a reference to the "beginning" (*1 John 1:1*), an allusion to the event of Creation, "concerning the Word of life" (*1 John 1:1, NKJV*). The same association of thoughts is found in the prologue of John's Gospel, in which the beloved disciple uses the phrase "in the beginning" (*John 1:1*), thus alluding to the first word of Genesis, *bereshit*, "in the beginning" (*John 1:1; compare with Gen. 1:1*). In John's Gospel, light and life are connected: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (*John 1:4, NKJV*). Likewise, in his letter, John speaks about the God of life (*1 John 1:1, 2*) as being the God of light (*1 John 1:5*). John uses the cosmic event of Creation as an argument to convince us to walk in

God's light. Because God, the Creator and Source of life, is "light," we must walk in His light (*1 John 1:7*). Another reason this principle is important is predicated upon the fact that outside of God's light, we are not only in darkness, unable to see the right way; we are also sinful, and, therefore, in absolute need of Christ's cleansing and forgiveness (*1 John 1:9*). John insists, then, on the fact that we all sin. No one can claim anything to the contrary (*1 John 1:10*).

In the book of Ecclesiastes, we find the same warning. After having shown the state of confusion that characterizes the search for wisdom (*Eccles. 7:10–18*), the wise man warns that it is impossible for men to find wisdom by themselves (*Eccles. 7:23*). The only certainty that he has found in this life is that "God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes" (*Eccles. 7:29, NKJV*). Therefore, Ecclesiastes emphasizes that no one on earth can merit salvation, because we are all sinners (*Eccles. 7:20*). Solomon, therefore, concludes that the only way out of this trouble is through God (*Eccles. 7:18*).

God's Character (*Exod. 34:1–10*). God is the One who initiates the first move in reconciling us to Himself. He is the One who extends the offer of forgiveness to us. Israel experienced this reality after they worshiped the golden calf (*Exod. 32:1–6*). This "great sin" separated them from God. No human action or merit could bridge the chasm between heaven and earth. To symbolize this separation, Moses broke the tablets of the law, which he had just gotten from God's hands (*Exod. 32:15, 16*). Moses then stood before God and pleaded with Him to forgive the people for their "great sin" (*Exod. 32:31–35*). To Moses, who asked God to reveal Himself in His glory (*Exod. 33:18*), God responded by revealing the grace of His forgiveness (*Exod. 33:19*). The text under consideration, Exodus 34:1–10, is the fulfillment of that promise. The focus and emphasis of God's declaration in these verses are based on His grace, which is expressed through five words:

- "Merciful," from the Hebrew word *rekhem*, "womb," evokes the intimacy of the bond of an expectant mother with the baby in her womb.
- "Gracious" relates to the idea of something that is given "for free" (*khinam*).
- "Longsuffering" (lit. "long of nose") refers to the immense span of God's patience.
- "Goodness and truth" together refer to the tension between love and justice.

On the day of judgment (*Dan. 7:9–15, Dan. 8:14*), God's grace ensures His forgiveness and mercy to His people.

New Robe (*Gen. 3:21, Rev. 7:13–17*). The reason Adam and Eve felt the

vulnerability of their nakedness is that they lost the original garment of light that clothed them. This garment of light reflected the divine appearance (*see Ps. 8:5; compare with Ps. 104:1, 2*).

Adam and Eve’s solution to the problem of their nakedness was to cover themselves, an error that Paul will denounce as righteousness by works (*Gal. 2:16*). By doing so, the human couple was, in fact, taking God’s place. This usurpation was repaired later when God came to clothe them (*Gen. 3:21*). Indeed, the event of God’s clothing Adam and Eve is told in Genesis 3:7, in terms that recall the human manufacture of garments. The same verb in the same form, *wayya ‘asu/waya ‘as*, “they made”/ “He made,” is used in both passages. The echo of this verb in both verses means that only God has the right and the capacity to cover sinners. God inculcated this lesson through the institution of sacrifice, pointing to the future sacrifice of Christ. God’s use of the skin of an animal implied that the animal was killed or that it was sacrificed (*Lev. 5:5–10, Lev. 7:8*). Thus, the sacrificial garment, loaded with its Messianic promise, replaced the human-made garments.

The story in Genesis of the change of garments made by God has typological significance. Figuratively, it points to the future robe of righteousness that God will grant to the saved ones (*Rev. 3:5, Rev. 3:18, Rev. 19:8*), who will attend the marriage supper of the lamb (*Rev. 19:9; compare with Matt. 22:12*).

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip: What is the relationship between love and justice? To begin an exploration of this profound question with your class, ask for a volunteer to read the short reflection on this topic below. Then discuss the following questions.

For Reflection: Love and Justice. In Hebrew, the word *tsedeq* means “love” or “justice,” depending on the context.

1. Why is justice without love not justice, and love without justice not love?
2. Ask your students to find examples from the Bible, history, or current events that illustrate this truth. Invite them to present their findings to the class.

Setbacks



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 4:35–41; Mark 5:21–34; Rom. 5:3–5; Job 19:23–27; Job 23:8–12; Luke 24:13–27; Rom. 8:18, 28.*

Memory Text: “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (*Romans 5:3–5, NKJV*).

One evening, as the sun dipped over the horizon, a girl was walking home when a dark storm blew in. She quickened her pace, knowing there was still a way to go. A lone raindrop fell on her cheek, then another, and, before she knew it, she was drenched. She started to run toward the front door of her home, where her father rushed to meet her. He had been watching her from the front window. As he wrapped a blanket around her shoulders, he asked her, “I saw you just now, in the rain. Why, with every bolt of lightning, did you stop running to look up and smile?”

“Oh, I stopped to look up,” she said, “because God was taking my picture!”

What is our response when the storms of life come or when we have certain setbacks in our relationship with God? Do we put our head down as the rain pelts upon our backs or do we look up, knowing and trusting that God is there as we turn our face toward Him?

This week, we'll explore some responses we often have when life is challenging. We'll consider how we might use life's setbacks to strengthen, not weaken, our most important relationship.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 13.

Life's Storms

Jesus had spent the day speaking to large crowds of people on the shores of Galilee. Jesus' words would echo in the people's minds for a long time and down throughout eternity.

As evening fell, Jesus spoke to His disciples, inviting them on a journey with Him. "Let us cross over to the other side" (*Mark 4:35, NKJV*). Jesus knew a storm would come but suggested they go anyway. He had an important life lesson to teach His closest followers.

You likely know what happened next.

Read about this storm again in **Mark 4:35–41**. What lessons on faith can you take from these verses?

Consider these points:

1. Jesus falls asleep on what was likely the only pillow in the boat. The fishing boats usually had one pillow, which the driver of the boat, at the stern, sat on. The person at the stern guided the boat to the destination. So here, Jesus is in the position of the boat's "driver," but He falls asleep at the wheel.
2. Not all the disciples were new to sailing. Peter, James, and John were experienced fishermen. They knew the Sea of Galilee, and they would have known how to navigate a storm.
3. This is the only recorded Gospel account of Jesus sleeping. During one of the worst storms in their lives, when the disciples are terrified and think they're going to die, Jesus is asleep at the stern.
4. The disciples' response in their time of crisis is "Do You not care?" They questioned Jesus' character and His love for them. Too often, this is also our response when we face hard times.

It's in the midst of hopelessness that we might try to save ourselves (like the disciples), or sometimes it's when we feel pain or loss that we start to question or doubt God's love and care for us. We presume that He should act in a certain way based on what we think and see from our human perspective. But, as with the disciples, it's in life's storms that God can work the greatest miracles. God is *always* faithful, even when His apparent lack of involvement doesn't make sense to us. He's in our storms with us and can calm the storm when we cannot.

What is your usual response when you face a storm in your life? How do such moments impact your relationship with God? When have you lived out 2 Corinthians 5:7?

Be Made Well

Imagine the throng of people on the shore of Galilee. They've been waiting for Jesus' return since early morning, and as He steps from the boat, they press close around Him, following Him into the village of Capernaum. Suddenly, Jairus, ruler of the synagogue, appears and begs Jesus to come to make his daughter well.

One of the people in the crowd is a woman who has been unwell for many years. She's spent all her money on doctors, but she "was no better, but rather grew worse" (*Mark 5:26, NKJV*). She's heard about this great Man of Galilee and, with hope in her heart, gathers what little strength she had to leave her house that morning to join the crowd. The press of the people feels almost suffocating as she inches closer to Jesus. And then, through the pushing and shoving, she sees Him. She encourages herself: " 'If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well' " (*Mark 5:28, NKJV*).

Read Mark 5:21–34. What happened, and what can we learn?

This incident shows Jesus' care and compassion for the sick and lonely, and those usually lost in the crowd. Many that day were pressing close to Jesus' side as they drifted along with the crowd, but only one intentionally reached out to touch Jesus to receive the blessing she so desperately needed. However, it wasn't her touch that healed her; it was her faith that made her well (*Mark 5:34*). "The Saviour could distinguish the touch of faith from the casual contact of the careless throng."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 344. Jesus' garment held no special power; rather, it was the woman's faith and her choice to reach out to touch Him that healed her.

That frail woman, in her suffering and distress, could have stayed in bed at home on that morning, but instead, she deliberately sought Jesus out in the hope of healing. Seeing Him at a distance wasn't enough; she drew close to Him.

Jesus beckons us to do the same today. He says, " 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls' " (*Matt. 11:28, 29, NLT*).

How did this woman in such great need demonstrate the ideas in Romans 5:3–5? What might this look like in your life?

Job

When we think of setbacks in the Bible, Job is perhaps the person who first comes to mind. Not only did he lose all his wealth (*Job 1:14–17*), but he also lost his children (*Job 1:18, 19*) and his health (*Job 2:7*). His wife then tried to convince him to curse God and die (*Job 2:9*).

After some time, three friends came to sit with Job. They were so shocked at his appearance that they sat with him, speechless, for seven days (*Job 2:13*). Eventually, when they spoke, they tried to offer human reasons for why such misfortune had come to Job, but in doing so, they unintentionally increased his suffering. Three friends blamed him, saying he must have some hidden sin in his life to repent of (*Job 8, 11, 15*), even saying, “ ‘Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him who does not know God’ ” (*Job 18:21, NKJV*).

How did Job respond? Read *Job 19:23–27* and *Job 23:8–12*.

No matter the tragic events that surrounded him, and the fact that he didn't understand them, Job remained faithful. He held fast. He didn't blame God or curse Him. Instead, when tempted to blame God, he declared: “ ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD’ ” (*Job 1:21, NKJV*).

We, too, live in the middle of this same battle. Satan afflicts us with pain, suffering, loss, and hardship as part of his plan to distort our picture of a loving God. In such times, we can respond in one of two ways: blame and reject God, or cling to Him with all our might. Although the battle rages around us, we must remember that, in light of eternity, our momentary troubles are but temporary trials (*2 Cor. 4:16–18*). There is so much more to the picture than what we see here and now, and one of the great challenges for a believer is to trust God even in the darkest times. God has, in many ways, revealed to us the reality of His love. We must cling to this crucial truth—that of God's love—even when we might not sense it at the moment.

If you are in the middle of a difficult time right now, run to God. Take your Bible and a notebook, and go outside to be with God in nature. Copy down Romans 5:3–5, and reflect on the different messages in this passage, believing that God's love and care for you is the surest and most stable factor in your life.

The Road to Emmaus

It had been an intense few weeks for the two disciples as they replayed in their minds some of the events and conversations they had experienced. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the clearing of the temple. The Passover in the upper room. Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane. Judas's ugly betrayal. The trial, the mocking, the beating. Jesus' bruised body hanging on a cross and His final words before He breathed His last as the afternoon sky turned black. The loud rip of the temple curtain. The open graves of the righteous. Gently taking Jesus' body off the cross and laying Him in the tomb before Sabbath. And then the confusion, discouragement, and questions in the disciples' minds. How had they gotten it so wrong?

Jesus' followers were disappointed, discouraged, and confused. This was the greatest setback of their lives. What they didn't see was that this was merely a moment in the greatest story of all time. As two of them walked on the road to Emmaus, Jesus appeared and walked with them.

Read the conversation in **Luke 24:13–27** and think about the two different perspectives: the two followers, and Jesus.

Once their eyes were opened, the two followers rushed to Jerusalem to share the things that had happened to them on the road (*Luke 24:33–35*). As Jesus came and stood in their midst, they were terrified. Notice His questions to them: “ ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?’ ” (*Luke 24:38, NKJV*).

This is also Jesus' message for us today. Too often, we forget that He walks beside us in our valleys. Too often we don't recognize Him. Too often we forget that there's much more to the story. Too often we feel troubled and allow doubts to arise in our hearts, forgetting that Jesus holds our lives securely in His hands. And too often we think we know better than Jesus does about what's really happening in our lives (*Luke 24:18*).

The Bible gives such good counsel about how we as Christians can respond to challenges and setbacks. Take some time to study these short passages: Rom. 8:28; Phil. 4:4–13; James 1:2–4, 12; and 2 Cor. 12:9, 10. As part of your study, write down three key messages you can share with someone who is facing setbacks right now. Keep 2 Corinthians 1:4 in mind.

See Jesus

Have you ever wished you could see Jesus when you feel discouraged? Picture yourself in this dream.

“I seemed to be sitting in abject despair, with my face in my hands, reflecting like this: If Jesus were upon earth, I would go to Him, throw myself at His feet, and tell Him all my sufferings. He would not turn away from me, He would have mercy upon me, and I should love and serve Him always. Just then the door opened, and a person of beautiful form and countenance entered. He looked upon me pityingly and said: ‘Do you wish to see Jesus? He is here and you can see Him if you desire to do so. Take everything you possess and follow me.’

“I heard this with unspeakable joy, and gladly gathered up all my little possessions, every treasured trinket, and followed my guide. He led me to a steep and apparently frail stairway. As I commenced to ascend the steps, he cautioned me to keep my eyes fixed upward, lest I should grow dizzy and fall. Many others who were climbing up the steep ascent fell before gaining the top.

“Finally we reached the last step and stood before the door. Here my guide directed me to leave all the things that I had brought with me. I cheerfully laid them down; he then opened the door and bade me enter. In a moment I stood before Jesus. There was no mistaking that beautiful countenance. Such a radiant expression of benevolence and majesty could belong to no other. As His gaze rested upon me, I knew at once that He was acquainted with every circumstance of my life and all my inner thoughts and feelings.

“I tried to shield myself from His gaze, feeling unable to endure His searching eyes, but He drew near with a smile, and, laying His hand upon my head, said: ‘Fear not.’ The sound of His sweet voice thrilled my heart with a happiness it had never before experienced. I was too joyful to utter a word, but, overcome with ineffable happiness, sank prostrate at His feet. While I was lying helpless there, scenes of beauty and glory passed before me, and I seemed to have reached the safety and peace of heaven. At length my strength returned, and I arose. The loving eyes of Jesus were still upon me, and His smile filled my soul with gladness. His presence filled me with holy reverence and an inexpressible love. . . .

“This dream gave me hope . . . [and] faith. . . . And the beauty and simplicity of trusting in God began to dawn upon my benighted soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 79–81.

Amid life’s setbacks, we need to focus on Jesus and what He reveals about God’s love for us.

What hope can you take for yourself, right now, from what is written in Romans 8:18, 28?

Further Thought: It's when we face life's challenges that we most need to cling to God. The topics we've explored throughout this quarter all contribute to keeping or refreshing a strong walk with God. When you face a setback such as a health challenge, financial difficulties, a marriage breakdown, the death of someone close to you, or another burden that robs you of joy, consider the following questions and reflect on the lessons studied thus far.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How has whatever setback you are facing, or have faced, impacted your picture of God? How can you more clearly see God's true character?
- ❷ When did you last pray for God's voice in your life to be stronger than the enemy's? Remember that the thief (Satan) comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but God gives abundant life (*John 10:10*).
- ❸ Is your heart humble? Do you trust that God is still sovereign and leading in your life, despite hardship? If not, how can you learn this humble trust in the goodness and love of God for you personally?
- ❹ Are you keeping yourself grounded in God's Word daily? Ask God to reignite your first love for Him as you pass through challenging times.
- ❺ When did you last turn to God as your Comforter and Counselor in prayer, trusting that He has kept His promise never to leave you nor forsake you (*Heb. 13:5*)?
- ❻ If your faith is weak, pray, " 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!' " (*Mark 9:24, NKJV*). Surround yourself with people who can encourage rather than discourage you.
- ❼ The world doesn't always care for the weak, ignorant, wounded, and broken. God's message of "When you are weak, my power is strong" (*2 Cor. 12:9, WE*) is a message that can radically transform people's lives. Think of someone you might encourage with this message today.

Summary: We still live in a sinful world full of pain and suffering, and each of us faces hardships at some point in our lives, things that can cause us to question God's love. As we look back on how various individuals in the Bible responded to life's setbacks, we can take courage that our response in such times can strengthen our walk with God, who does not change (*Mal. 3:6*) and whose love remains constant.

Life's Most Important Work

Zeth Louis Lekatompessy put together a plan to bring his seven siblings and their families to Christ the same year that he was baptized in Indonesia.

The plan went like this: Zeth asked his wife, whom he married shortly before his baptism, to join him in praying daily for his relatives. He and his wife also visited the relatives and studied the Bible with them. Then he invited them to evangelistic meetings at a Seventh-day Adventist church on Ambon Island, where they lived. At the end of the meetings, 13 people were baptized, including his older sister and two other relatives. Later, five more brothers and sisters were baptized. Zeth was overjoyed! He decided that leading people to Christ was life's most important work.

For the next two years, he worked as a literature evangelist, sailing between islands to sell books. The COVID-19 pandemic ended his work.

As he contemplated the future, he felt impressed to volunteer as a Bible worker. His wife agreed, and he returned to the plan that he had made for the salvation of his siblings. He and his wife made a list of every person whom they knew and prayed over it daily. With their two small children, they used their motorcycle to visit people on the list.

On arriving at a new house, Zeth introduced himself and his family and said, "We are Seventh-day Adventists."

Houseowners asked curiously, "What's an Adventist?"

"An Adventist is someone who worships on the Sabbath," Zeth replied.

The next question inevitably was: "What is the Sabbath?"

Zeth suggested that the houseowners look up the answer online.

When houseowners saw that the Sabbath was Saturday, they were surprised and asked, "Is it true that Saturday is the true day of worship?"

Then Zeth opened his Bible and offered Bible studies.

The prayer list grew to 50 names over three years. Zeth and his family usually visited three families a day. Four people on the list had been baptized by the time Zeth left to study theology at Klabat University. Three more were baptized as he studied at Klabat, and others continued Bible studies in his absence.

"Fourteen percent of my list has been baptized," he said.



Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, that is helping people like Zeth prepare for gospel ministry. Klabat University, located near Manado, Indonesia, is a previous offering recipient. This quarter's offering will help similar schools in the East-Central Africa Division. Watch a YouTube video of Zeth at bit.ly/Zeth-IS.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Job 42:5, 6*

Study Focus: *Gen. 50:20, Rom. 8:28, Job 10:9, Job 13:15, Job 19:23–27, Luke 24:13–35.*

As faithful Christians, we may confidently expect God to protect us from evil and harm, and we certainly have good reason to think He will. After all, God has promised to keep us and bless us (*Num. 6:24*). And we strive to honor Him in all that we do, so that we do not forfeit this blessing or lay claim to it presumptuously. Yet, we may still get sick and suffer injustice and oppression in this life. At such times, we cry out to God for help.

We are not unique in our supplications to God during the dark times of life. The Bible is full of men and women of God who suffered and cried out for help. The book of Psalms is suffused with the entreaties of pious people who call on God to deliver them from evil (*Ps. 71:4, Ps. 97:10*). The book of Job, in particular, illustrates this phenomenon. Job is a pious man; and yet, in spite of all his faithfulness, he suffers much tribulation and sorrow. Job does not understand the reason for his suffering. In anguish, he cries out to God in the face of what appears to be great injustice. The case of Job merits our attention for this very reason. Job experiences God’s grace through opposite extremes of happiness and pain. Within the bounds of these two extremes that delineate his challenging conflict, Job learns to hope.

Part II: Commentary

The Experience of Grace. The book of Job begins with an emphatic note about Job’s great virtues. According to the biblical author, Job is “blameless and upright” (*Job 1:1, NKJV*). Job also was considered “the greatest of all the people of the East” (*Job 1:3, NKJV*). Even God testifies to Job’s singularity and uniqueness, saying, “There is none like him on the earth” (*Job 1:8, NKJV*). According to all the assessments of Job, he is a perfect man. And yet, at the end of the book, Job, responding to God, confesses that at the time when he was judged as “perfect,” his relationship with God was only at a primitive stage: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear” (*Job 42:5, NKJV*). Job then adds that “now,” after his experience of suffering, “my eye sees You” (*Job 42:5, NKJV*). Thus, Job recognizes that there was something important that kept him from seeing God initially.

What was it?

An attentive reading of the biblical text, and particularly the use of the repeated *khinam*, meaning “for nothing” or “for free,” will help us resolve this question. The word *khinam* appears for the first time in the book of Job in the form of a question when Satan responds to God, who has just praised Job for his piety: Does Job serve God “for nothing [*khinam*]?” (*Job 1:9, NKJV*). Satan’s argument is that God is overly protective of Job. To prove his point, Satan then proposes a challenge to God: let me touch Job’s belongings; that is, strike “all that he has” (*Job 1:11, NKJV*). Satan bets that Job will then sin. God permits all of Job’s substance to be within the devastating reach of Satan’s power. A raid by the Sabaeans, a fire from heaven, and a great wind ravage his properties (*Job 1:13–19*). In the aftermath of the destruction, Job loses all that he has. Although Job mourns, he does not sin (*Job 1:22*).

In response to Satan’s accusation, God uses the same word, *khinam*, that Satan used when he charged Him with putting a protective hedge around Job. The Lord says, “ ‘You incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause [*khinam*]’ ” (*Job 2:3, NKJV*). Job confirms this notion when he uses the same word later in his outcry to God about his wounds, which are multiplied *khinam*, “without cause” (*Job 9:17*).

The word *khinam*, which derives from the word *khen*, “grace,” is, therefore, a significant keyword that marks Job’s destiny. On one hand, Job suffers “without cause” (*khinam*). On the other hand, Job is accused of serving God from self-serving motives and out of a desire for prosperity. This accusation from Satan is also echoed in the suspicions of Job’s friends (*Job 34:9, Job 35:3*). In fact, Job himself seemingly espouses this idea when he enumerates his good deeds (*Job 29:12–17, Job 31:1*) and announces his expectation to be rewarded for them (*Job 29:18*). What was missing in Job’s relationship with God, however, was the experience of grace. Job had to pass through the experience of suffering “without cause,” “for free”; that is, without hope of any benefit, in order to understand God’s unmerited gift of grace.

The Problem of Suffering. The book of Job emphasizes that it is Satan who initiates suffering in the human race (*Job 1:12*). God Himself affirms Satan’s responsibility for Job’s suffering (*Job 2:6*). Ellen G. White is very clear about whom to blame for Job’s suffering: “The history of Job had shown that suffering is inflicted by Satan.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 471. Jesus also attributes suffering to the enemy (*Matt. 13:28*). Is Job, then, wrong when he suggests that God is responsible for his pain?

Throughout the book, Job attributes agency to God as the One who is responsible for his oppression (*Job 10:3*) and who shakes him to pieces (*Job 16:12*). Job even argues, “If it is not He, who else could it be?” (*Job 9:24, NKJV*). However, at the end of the book, God responds to Job’s assertions by enumerating His works of Creation (*Job 38, 39*). God’s

defense against Job's assertion that He is the destroyer is that He is the Creator. So, when Job places God at the origin of suffering, he really is voicing the monotheistic affirmation that there is only one God, one power, who is ultimately responsible for what happens to humanity. The Lord, through Moses, expresses this idea in the following words: " 'I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal' " (*Deut. 32:39, NKJV*). This paradox informs the very substance and quality of Job's faith.

As Job famously says of the Lord, " 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him' " (*Job 13:15, NKJV*). The Hebrew person of faith has the conviction that the good, as well as the bad, comes from God's hand (*Prov. 16:4*) because the person knows the reality of God's goodness and grace, and trusts, regardless of life's evil circumstances and situations (*Gen. 50:20, Rom. 8:28*).

The Vision of Resurrection. To Job's friend Bildad, who all but accuses him of being a wicked man (*Job 18*) who does not know God, and, as such, deserves to go down into the grave (*Job 18:21*), Job responds: "I know that my Redeemer is alive" (*Job 19:25, CEB*). "This I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (*Job 19:26, NKJV*). In these two verses, Job affirms his faith in his resurrection, which will take place at the end of time, when "my Redeemer" [who presently lives] "will stand at last on the earth" (*Job 19:25, MEV*). Thus, from within his tormented flesh, Job draws the following paradox of hope: "After my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (*Job 19:26, NKJV*).

In this verse, Job does not refer to an existential experience happening in his present life. Nor does he refer to his personal immortality after death. The event he speaks about belongs to a cosmic event that concerns "the earth," an eschatological event that is situated in the far future—'akharon, "last," or the last day. This event is none other than the resurrection of the dead, at which time he, in his "flesh" (*Job 19:26*), will see God (his Redeemer) with his own eyes (*Job 19:27*).

Echoing again Bildad's last words (*Job 18:21*), Job ironically concludes his speech with this warning: "That you may know there is a judgment" (*Job 19:29, NKJV*). Job's hope in his resurrection is thus connected with the day of judgment, just as in the book of Daniel (*Dan. 12:1–3*). Jesus brings this hope to Martha's mind on the day of Lazarus's resurrection (*John 11:23*). And Paul preaches about the blessed hope to those who denied it (*1 Cor. 15:12–19*). This hope is the last message of the Bible: the only solution to the problem of the world is God's creation of "a new heaven and a new earth," wherein "there shall be no more death, nor sorrow" (*Rev. 21:1, 4, NKJV*).

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip: The following questions may be discussed by the class as a whole or in small groups. If you choose to divide the class into small groups, allow enough time to discuss the question, reserving enough time for a presentation of their ideas at the end of class.

Also, encourage class members in the coming week to engage in one or more of the exercises listed in the activities section that follows. Then invite class members to share their experience with the class the following Sabbath. How did the activity strengthen their faith? How did it draw them closer to Jesus?

Questions for Discussion:

1. How would you comfort people who suffer for no apparent reason, as did Job?
2. How would you respond to those who would question the piety and religious devotion of people who are sick or ill?
3. Ask class members to answer the following questions: Would your faith remain unshakable if God did not grant healing in answer to your prayer on behalf of your beloved?
4. Are you ready to thank God for your misery (illness, failure of an exam, etc.), although you did your best? Discuss.
5. Do you blame poor individuals for their condition? Explain.
6. What are your arguments against those who claim that you deserve your failures? What do you think of the idea that God will answer all your prayers according to your expectations and that success will always crown the lives of God’s people?
7. Why is God’s cosmic response of a new creation the only solution to our personal problems and to the problems of a hurting world?

Activities:

1. Write a sermon or eulogy to be delivered at the graveside of a departed loved one or friend. Send it to the family of the bereaved to comfort them.
2. Share stories from your own life in which you experienced God’s grace during a painful time. Learn to thank God for the bad *and* the good things in life.
3. Visit a sick friend in the hospital or a person who is terminally ill. What words of comfort will you share with him or her?

Share Him



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 28:18–20, 2 Pet. 3:18, 1 Pet. 3:8–15, Hosea 7, Zechariah 10.*

Memory Text: “The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.” (*Isaiah 50:4, NKJV*).

It was a busy Sabbath morning for Pastor G. He had awakened early, preparing for both Sabbath School and the sermon, and he was also leading an evangelistic series in the afternoon. He grabbed his keys, ran out the door, and sped away.

He drove through the city traffic, annoyed that so many people were out on a Saturday morning and could make him late for church. *Where were they all going?* Then, out of nowhere, one car cut in front of him. He slammed on the brakes and held up his fist in frustration and anger, yelling at the driver.

Finally, Pastor G. arrived at the church. As he stood up to teach the lesson, his eyes scanned his class and came to rest on a familiar face: the driver of the car he was angry at just 20 minutes earlier.

Later, when a church member introduced the driver as a non-Adventist who was visiting relatives, Pastor G. realized once again how every interaction, to both acquaintances and strangers, should be bathed in love that flows from an abiding relationship with God. You never know how your actions, especially as a believer, can impact others.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 20.

Out of the Overflow

Read the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20. Write down the different messages of Jesus when He says “all” or “always” (which in Greek is the same word *pas*).

Jesus gave us a mandate to share His message with the world: “Go therefore and make disciples.” The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to make disciples, who can then make other disciples. That way we are all proclaiming the everlasting gospel and the three angels’ messages (*Rev. 14:6–12*) to prepare our world for Jesus’ soon return.

Anyone who has received a new life in Christ is called to witness. Yet, too often, people think about witnessing as something that they can’t do or don’t want to do. You might picture yourself preaching on a street corner or giving a complex Bible study, and so you shake your head. “Not me! No way! I’m an introvert; witnessing isn’t my comfort zone.”

However, true witnessing is often the result of being an eyewitness to what God is doing in your life, of noticing what He is teaching you as you grow in Him, and then simply sharing your experience with others. God is so good, and what He has done for us is the best news that this world can hear. We cannot and should not be silent! He has redeemed you; He has called you by name—you are His. Could there be any better news for anyone anywhere?

Although the disciples in the early church weren’t educated in the Rabbinical schools or eloquent in the oral traditions, we can still learn from them.

Read Acts 1:8 and Acts 4:13. What was witnessing like for the early church? What impact did Peter and John have on those who heard them witness?

Peter and John went on to declare, “ ‘For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard’ ” (*Acts 4:20, NKJV*). “They had been with Jesus” (*Acts 4:13*) and were compelled to share. The Holy Spirit gave them boldness and a convincing power in their words.

Spend some time in prayer right now. Ask God for courage to share Him with people He puts in your life. Ask Him for wisdom to know when to share and what to say. Read 1 John 4:7–11 and pray for this kind of love.

Unforced but With Power

Have you ever wondered how Jesus maintained the motivation to labor, heal, comfort, preach, and teach so many people day after day? We're told that "when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (*Matt. 9:36, NKJV*). It was Jesus' love and compassion toward humanity that drove His labor. In a similar way, God's love in us should compel us to feel the burden of leading souls to Him and to His truth (*2 Cor. 5:14*).

Have you ever looked at the faces of strangers in a crowd and thought ahead to eternity, to wonder if they know Jesus? Have you ever felt what can only be the love of God in you toward a stranger in need? God's love in us compels us to feel the burden of leading souls to Him. Jeremiah expressed this when he said, "His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (*Jer. 20:9, NKJV*).

However, when we share God with others, we should never try to force someone to accept God or His Bible truth. Coercion goes against the very heart of God's character. God didn't force Adam and Eve to stay away from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (*Gen. 2:16, 17*). He didn't force people into the ark to be saved from the Flood (*Gen. 7:1*). He didn't force the Israelites to remain in their covenant with Him (*Deut. 4:29–31*). Instead, He met their needs (*Matt. 4:23–25*) and then invited them to follow Him. Jesus never forced anyone to follow Him or His truth, but He never gives up on us (*Matt. 23:37*).

As we witness, our approach should always mirror Jesus' approach. Ellen G. White says, "It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, that seek to compel the conscience. . . . There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work, or who act contrary to our ideas."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 487.

We must allow ourselves to be a conduit for God's service. We live in a world that hates the truth, but that reality shouldn't prevent us from sharing it in thoughtful, loving ways. Remember that it's often our own personal testimony that will carry the most weight, particularly in the early stages of witnessing (*Rev. 12:11*).

Read 2 Peter 3:18. In what ways are you growing in grace and knowledge? How is this evident in your interactions with those around you?

Tips for Sharing Jesus

The question for each of us is: With whom are you sharing Jesus—the postal carrier, a store clerk, someone you see daily when you're out walking? God calls every believer to help Him with this work, and He promises to give you “ ‘the tongue of the learned, that [you] should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary’ ” (*Isa. 50:4, NKJV*). It is also the duty of the Christian to always be prepared to give a defense (*apologia*) for the faith and hope that is in us (*1 Pet. 3:15*).

Read 1 Peter 3:8–15. What is the Word of God telling us in these verses?

Here are some simple tips to keep in mind as you consider how to be more intentional about sharing Jesus with others:

- Get to know someone and build a friendship over time. Your warmth, kindness, and genuine interest in them (being “lovable”) will help draw them to God. (Some call this “friendship evangelism.”)
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to work on the person’s heart. Pray for the right opportunities to interact with them.
- Look for natural ways to talk about your own faith experiences or offer a prayer for them. Ask God to give you boldness but gentleness in your approach.
- Find ways to connect your new friend with others from your church, so that they can experience the embrace of your church community. A social or small group Bible study is a good next step.
- Pray about the specific needs or questions your new friend might have and look for an opportunity to show them how the Bible offers comfort, advice, and guidance in our lives. You might simply share one Bible promise at first or answer one question, which will open the door for deeper discussions. Pray for those too.
- There will come a time you’ll want to ask if your friend would like to take a next step (Bible study and, eventually, baptism). Don’t rush these steps but also don’t lag. Pray about this.
- Our actions should reveal whose we are. How we treat others in our lives will speak volumes. As our characters are shaped in His likeness (sanctification), we will live to draw all people to Him.

A Wandering Child

Many know firsthand the pain and heartache of having a child who—despite the strong, spiritual home they were raised in—has chosen to walk away from a relationship with the Lord.

Ephraim, as part of God’s chosen nation, strayed from the Lord. What do Hosea 4:17 and Hosea 7 tell us about the sins of Ephraim?

Furthermore, we read that Rachel, the grandmother of Ephraim, metaphorically weeps because Ephraim has walked away from a relationship with the Lord (*Jer. 31:15*). The Lord responds to her great sadness with these words in Jeremiah 31:16, 17: “Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the LORD, that your children shall come back to their own border’ ” (*NKJV*).

Instead of weeping over her wayward child, Rachel is told to have hope. What else does Jeremiah tell us? Read Jeremiah 31:18, 19.

Through Ephraim's story, we learn that there is always hope, because God doesn't give up. Although He rebukes His wayward people time and time again, God's compassion never fails, and His message in this chapter continues (*see Jer. 31:20*).

We might feel great pain, frustration, and discouragement, or even speak negatively of those who are close to us who have walked away from a relationship with God. Yet, God reminds us that He has not forgotten the wayward child—not at all! God's thoughts for such a person are not fleeting but instead are heartfelt and sincere. In fact, God says that His heart yearns for such individuals. He longs for them to return to Him, and His mercy is great.

How does knowing that this is God’s response to Rachel’s pain over Ephraim’s waywardness make you feel about those you know who have walked away from a relationship with the Lord? How does this challenge or encourage you?

Bring Them Back

We've all had weak or wavering moments in our walk with God—the valleys where our heart has been unfaithful or where we've merely been lukewarm for too long. What was it that brought you back into an abiding relationship with Him?

Zechariah 10 shares some beautiful messages about God bringing His people back to Him. Read this chapter now slowly and take note of the main messages.

In a practical sense, knowing how to relate to, and interact with, a loved one who has walked away from a relationship with the Lord can be challenging. You might wonder how things could have evolved for a different outcome; you might wonder how to interact with them now that they have a different worldview; and you might feel frustrated and helpless about the poor decisions they may still be making. These thoughts will always impact how you treat your loved one, and it's therefore so important to live and speak from the overflow of your personal time with your Savior.

The testimony of your life, your actions, your words, and your prayers for your spouse or child who has walked away from God can radically change their lives and future. (Read in Luke 22:31, 32 and John 21:15–17 how Jesus' prayers for Peter changed his future.) Surrender any sadness, judgment, or condemnation you might feel toward them, and instead ask God to replace these feelings with love that only He can give. Ask God to cover you with His character so that you can model a loving, unselfish attitude. Remember that “no other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470.

Through our example of a consistent life that points others to Christ, those who have rejected Christ will see in us something that can come only from God. They will see a peace that passes understanding, love that will never let go, and hope that believes against all odds. God's love for us and our loved ones never wavers. We can give this love, which we receive every day, to those around us.

What does Ephesians 3:17–19 encourage us to do?

Further Thought: “Whatever the profession, no man has pure love to God unless he has unselfish love for his brother. But we can never come into possession of this spirit by *trying* to love others. What is needed is the love of Christ in the heart. When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 384.

“Those who are most actively employed in doing with interested fidelity their work to win souls to Jesus Christ, are the best developed in spirituality and devotion.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 356.

“Strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 105.

“In order to enter into His joy—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice—we must participate in His labors for their redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

“Those who reject the privilege of fellowship with Christ in service, reject the only training that imparts a fitness for participation with Him in His glory.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 264.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is love so foundational and essential for any kind of effective witnessing?
- ❷ When have you found this to be true: that soul winning is linked to a personal and vibrant walk with God?
- ❸ Is there a baseline or basic understanding that is needed to share God with others? If so, what might this be?
- ❹ When it comes to giving a Bible study to a nonbeliever, where would you begin? What is your initial focus: proving certain doctrines or inviting someone to know Jesus?
- ❺ Sing or listen to the words from the hymn “Redeemed!” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 338) and reflect on the ways you are proclaiming it.

Summary: When God’s love and His living, powerful Word fill our daily lives, we will be compelled to love and share Him with those around us. We should be prayerful, thoughtful, and intentional about witnessing, believing that His Word, which goes forth from His mouth, shall not return to Him void, but it shall accomplish what He pleases, and it shall prosper in the things for which He sent it (*see Isa. 55:11*).

Stranger in the Parking Lot

People ask Zeth Louis Lekatompessy how he supports his wife and three children without a salaried job in Indonesia. He says it is God's providence.

Zeth decided to volunteer as a Bible worker after feeling convicted that he needed to trust more in God and less on himself during the COVID-19 pandemic. He had a heart for souls, and he put into motion a plan that he had used to lead many of his siblings to Christ.

He and his wife put together a list of every person whom they knew on Ambon Island, where they lived. Then they prayed for the names daily. They also got on their motorcycle every morning and visited the people on the list. The visits prompted Bible studies, and the Bible studies led to baptisms.

Zeth and his wife visited about three families a day, and the discussions sometimes lasted until late at night.

Many people couldn't understand how the family was making ends meet.

"How do you survive with no job or savings or property that you can sell to help with your financial needs?" someone asked.

"It's impossible to live without a paying job," said another. "I can't believe it. Please prove it."

Zeth acknowledges that his family has faced challenges. One Friday, the money ran out, and he and his wife prayed for God to intervene. Their prayers stretched into Sabbath. "We don't have anything but You," they prayed. "We can only trust in You." That Sabbath, a stranger approached Zeth in the church parking lot and handed him an envelope. "This is for you so you can cheerfully continue your ministry," he said.

At home, Zeth and his wife thanked God and opened the envelope. Inside they found enough money to cover their needs for several months.

To those who seek evidence, Zeth recounts the experience, saying, "Out of hundreds of experiences of God's providence, this is just one of them."

Today, Zeth is studying theology at Klabat University in hope of learning how to give better Bible studies. He said God is still covering his family's expenses. When he graduates, he is ready to serve as a pastor, a Bible worker, or in another position from God.

"Pray for me and my family," he said. "Pray that when I finish my studies, I can bring more souls to God's kingdom."



Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, that is helping people like Zeth prepare for gospel ministry. Klabat University, located near Manado, Indonesia, is a previous offering recipient. This quarter's offering will help similar schools in the East-Central Africa Division. Watch a YouTube video of Zeth at bit.ly/Zeth-IS.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Isaiah 50:4*

Study Focus: *Matt. 28:16–20; 1 Pet. 3:8–15, 21, 22.*

We ended last week with Job’s vision of the Redeemer, who “shall stand at the latter day upon the earth” (*Job 19:25*). This week, we will learn how to share this extraordinary vision with the people on this earth. For that purpose, we will focus on two important biblical passages.

The first passage is Matthew 28:16–20, in which Jesus charges His disciples—and us—with the Great Commission. This passage, which reports Jesus’ last words, marks the climax of the whole gospel. It is an important text that confronts us with our responsibility to share the hope of Jesus Christ with all the nations. This mission, which is based on the divine authority of Jesus, has a universal scope and ensures God’s presence on our side till the end of time (*Matt. 28:20*).

The second passage is 1 Peter 3:8–18, 21, 22. Here, the apostle urges us to work on the formation of our personal character. He also exhorts us to work within our communities and to learn to love one another, thus preparing ourselves spiritually to share the good news of the gospel with the world. This work aims to foster unity in the church, as well as encourages the resilience of its members in times of persecution. This work also confronts us with our responsibility to Jesus Christ, who died for us and saves us through His resurrection and His intercession in the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 7:25*).

Part II: Commentary

The Great Commission (*Matt. 28:16–18*). The resurrection of Jesus (*Matt. 28:1–7*) constitutes the immediate backdrop to the Great Commission. In this context, three events are reported. The first event is the worship of Jesus by the women (*Matt. 28:9*) and then the 11 disciples (*Matt. 28:16, 17*). The second event is when the Roman soldiers who had been guarding Christ’s tomb visit the chief priests (*Matt. 28:11–15*). The third event is Jesus’ presence throughout the course of the previous two incidents. These three events prepare for and justify the Great Commission. The worship of Jesus anticipates His reference to His divine authority “‘in heaven and on earth’ ” (*Matt. 28:18, NKJV*). The deceptive report to the chief priest by the guards of the tomb prepares for the shift from the exclusive covenant, with Israel as the only recipient, to the universal covenant with “all the

nations” (*Matt. 28:19, NKJV*) of the earth. The actual presence of Jesus, with the women and the disciples, prepares His church for the fulfillment of His promise to be with them “to the end” (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*).

The Authority of Jesus. As soon as the 11 disciples see the resurrected Christ, they worship Him. They understand that He has triumphed over death (*see Rev. 1:18*) and that He is God. In fact, the phrase “spoke to them, saying” (*Matt. 28:18, NKJV*), which introduces Jesus’ words, is a replica of the key phrase that regularly introduces the word of God in the book of Exodus (*Exod. 6:10; compare with Exod. 6:29, Exod. 7:8, etc.*). Jesus’ words confirm the disciples’ understanding of His identity and of His divine authority “in heaven and on earth” (*Matt. 28:18, NKJV*). The domain, or reach, of His authority encompasses all of creation, granting Him the universal sovereignty of Creator (*Gen. 1:1*). The word “all” is repeated three times (*Matt. 28:18, 19, 20*), just as in the conclusion of the Creation story (*Gen. 2:1–3*). The word “all,” which applies to His authority, occurs twice in His commission (*Matt. 28:19, 20*). It is precisely because of “all” of His divine authority that Jesus is entitled to charge His disciples with the commission to reach “all” nations and to teach “all” that He has commanded.

The Universal Covenant. In light of this discussion, it is also important to remember that we are bringing disciples to Jesus, not to ourselves. That is, we, as pastors, teachers, evangelists, or even as a particular church, must not gather our own personal following or clique. Rather, we must baptize disciples for Christ, who is above all nations and will come to gather His own in the future.

Baptism signals the shift to a new life. The ritual of baptism recalls the very act of the divine Creation out of the chaos of the primal waters, thus pointing to the generative work of the Lord in the beginning chapters of Genesis. At the same time, baptism is a ritual that points to the future creation of a new heaven and a new earth after the coming of the Son of man. Baptism is not only a sign of God’s presence and a symbol of spiritual regeneration; it is also an eschatological sign that Jesus’ presence is guaranteed, “‘even to the end of the age’” (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*). Before coming as the Son of man in the clouds of heaven, Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us.” Thus, the Great Commission ends with the hope of Jesus’ presence here and now (*compare with Matt. 1:23*).

Preparation for Sharing the Good News (1 Pet. 3:8–15, 21, 22). Peter introduces 1 Peter 3:8–15, 21, 22 with the word “finally” (*telos*), thus indicating the conclusion of the previous section dealing with the testimony of the church to the world (*1 Pet. 2:11–3:7*). The passage in 1 Peter 3:8–15, 21, 22 is, therefore, particularly relevant to the mission of the church. Yet, whereas the text of the Great Commission is concerned with *why* we must reach out to the nations, Peter’s letter focuses on *how* to prepare ourselves for that mission. First, he addresses the problem of relationships

within the community of believers (*1 Pet. 3:8, 9*). Next, he addresses the challenge of relationships with unbelievers, who do not share with us the same spiritual goals and values in life (*1 Pet. 3:13–17*). To encourage his brothers and sisters to endure suffering in doing good, Peter refers to the example of Jesus (*1 Pet. 3:18*).

Appeal for Unity and Love. Peter begins with the most important, and probably the most challenging, aspect of our preparation for sharing the gospel. He invites “all of you” (*1 Pet. 3:8, NKJV*)—that is, all the members of the church—to work on how we relate to one another. To that end, Peter emphasizes the need for unity and love. Peter has in mind the disputes that divide groups within the church. For Peter, the solution to this problem is brotherly love, which he does not define as mere sentimental emotion. Five adjectives are used in his description of what it means to be united in a spirit of love:

First, we must be “of one mind” (*1 Pet. 3:8*), a term that refers to the need to be in harmony with one another.

Second, believers should also be sympathetic toward one another. That is, we must be sensitive to one another’s needs and concerns.

Third, the phrase “love as brothers” (*1 Pet. 3:8, NKJV*) implies the kindness that exists between siblings in the same family. Based on our common connection with Christ, we are part of the family of God. As such, we are enjoined to love one another.

Fourth, church members should be “compassionate”; that is, they should be merciful and willing to forgive one another, just as Christ has forgiven them.

Last but not least, they should be “humble” (*NIV*), the fifth and final criterion on Peter’s list. Humility consists in deference. Being deferential involves the willingness to esteem one’s brother more highly than oneself.

The next lines elaborate on the practical application of these qualities. Concretely speaking, this ideal of love means that we should not return evil for evil to the brother or sister who harmed us (*1 Pet. 3:9*). On the contrary, we should bless them in response, as Jesus urged us to do (*Luke 6:29*). To support his argument, Peter quotes from Psalm 34, which focuses on the potential harm of the tongue when we gossip or insult (*Ps. 34:13*). Peter contrasts this potential harm with the blessing that accompanies those who seek peace (*1 Pet. 3:11, 12*). The *shalom*, or peace, that unites the members of the church will bring a blessing from God, so that the world may know that He sent Jesus and has loved us as He has loved the Son (*John 17:22, 23*).

Suffering Persecution. Continuing in the same line of thought, Peter considers the case of the one who suffers persecution for his or her faith at the hands of the wicked unbeliever (*1 Pet. 3:13, 14*). Even then, argues Peter, if you are innocent and you suffer unjustly, you should not return

evil for evil for two reasons. First, because the suffering of the righteous is a blessing, God is on your side. Second, because affliction affords you a great opportunity to witness and to defend your faith (*1 Pet. 3:15*). Peter reasons that it is better to suffer for doing good than to suffer for doing evil (*1 Pet. 3:17*). The underlying ethical principle of these recommendations is that it is better to suffer as a victim than to cause suffering as an oppressor. To support his argument about the positiveness of suffering, Peter refers to Christ, the Just One, who suffered for the unjust and, through His suffering, brought salvation to the unjust (*1 Pet. 3:18*). As a result, Christ is exalted and now sits at the right hand of God.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip: Divide the class into small groups and assign them one of the following activities. Give them time, as a group, to discuss the activities and questions, and then present their insights to the class. Encourage class members to incorporate the principles of these activities in their own spiritual walk throughout the week. (Please note that some of the following activities are better suited for personal reflection than for group participation and are marked as such.)

Activity 1: A Contemplation of Worship (*read Lam. 3:29*).

1. (For personal reflection outside of class.) When you pray, kneel down or prostrate yourself; realize that you are dust (*Ps. 103:14*). Out of this dust, God will resurrect you if you should die before He comes. With this humbling and wondrous thought in mind, ask God to change your character and turn it into a living reflection of His own.
2. (For small group[s] or class.) Ask yourselves the following question: Why should worship motivate me to reach out to other people? Think of possible answers, including, for instance: because the God you serve is also the God who created them in His image and longs to save them.

Activity 2: “Go!” (*Matt. 28:19*).

1. What does the word “Go!” suggest to you?
2. Compare Jesus’ command “Go” to God’s command to Abraham to “go.” Make a list of similarities and differences. For instance, Abraham goes to a *place* he does not know, whereas you go to *people* you do not know, et cetera.
3. How does your list of comparisons deepen your appreciation for, and understanding of, the Great Commission?

Activity 3: “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*).

1. List the “things” that Jesus has commanded you to do. For example, love, show grace, remember His truths. What other “things” can you add to this list?
2. Think of ways to put these commands into practice this week.

Activity 4: “I am with you” (Matt. 28:20). (Please note that this activity can be done as a group, or someone may be selected to sing the hymn as a solo.)

1. Sing the hymn “No, Never Alone” (for lyrics and MIDI recording, see www.Hymnary.org).
2. How does this hymn make you feel?
3. What comfort and hope does it give you?

Activity 5: Read Psalm 141:3 and Psalm 19:14. (Please note that this activity may be assigned for personal reflection outside of class.)

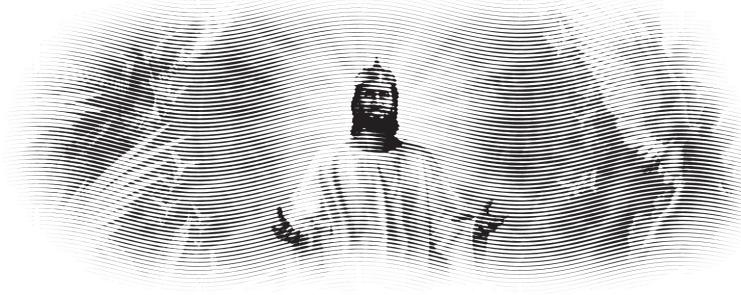
1. At the end of the day, ask yourself these questions: How did God help me guard my tongue today? Were there particular words that I said for which I need to repent?
2. Resolve to ask the Lord to help you to do better with your words and in all forms of communications with others. Pray: “Lord, guard my tongue. Inspire my thinking. With the help of Your Spirit, may the words that issue from my heart and mind glorify You. Amen.”

Activity 6: Read 1 Peter 3:15 and answer the questions below.

1. Why do you believe in God?
2. Why are you a Seventh-day Adventist?
3. Why do you not believe in the immortality of the soul?
4. Prepare arguments to defend your faith in areas where your knowledge is weak. (This last exercise also may be assigned as a project to be accomplished outside of class.)

Notes

Into Eternity



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 80, 1 Thess. 4:17, Rev. 21:9–27, Isa. 25:8, Rev. 7:17, Rev. 21:4, John 6:44.*

Memory Text: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2, NKJV).

What does the future hold for you? What lies ahead? It might seem daunting, exciting, scary, and wonderful all at once. Know that Jesus is faithful and that His words are true (*Rev. 3:14*). There will yet be turbulent times ahead (*Matt. 24:21, 22*), but He has promised that He will never leave nor forsake you (*Heb. 13:5*). He will do exactly what He says He will do—He always has and always will (*Heb. 10:23*). And “he who endures to the end shall be saved” (*Matt. 24:13, NKJV*).

Regardless of the number of days left for us on earth, we should fix our eyes on Jesus, looking steadfastly to Him. This is not always easy in a world that clamors for our attention, but may we, like David, say, “My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net” (*Ps. 25:15, NKJV*).

This week, let's learn about the reward of heaven (*Matt. 5:12, Rev. 22:12*); what heaven will be like; and ultimately, how incredible it will be to finally be with the One who created us, loved us unto death, has redeemed us from our sin, and is coming back soon. We need to just hold on in faith until then.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 27.

Living Today

When we look around, we see the world heaving and groaning, and the signs that Jesus told us about are playing out before our eyes. Wars and rumors of wars, nations rising against other nations, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and persecution (*Matt. 24:6–11*) are happening all around us and seem only to be intensifying as time rolls on. Yes, we live in serious times—times when we need an abiding relationship with God.

We are told, “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers” (*1 Pet. 4:7, NKJV*). If so then, even more so now is the time to fortify and strengthen your personal relationship with God. And regardless of how long time lasts, our individual lives are always short, no matter how long we live. “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (*James 4:13, 14, NKJV*). We know how true that warning is. Some of you who are reading these words right now might not be alive when the day ends. This is part of the sad reality of living in a fallen world. How crucial, then, is it to make sure of our relationship with God and always to live in awareness of our need of Him and His saving grace?

Psalm 80 offers a beautiful appeal to God. Read the chapter and, in particular, consider verses 1–3, 14–17, 18, 19, and put the word “me” in place of “us.” Regardless of how different the time, place, and context of this psalm, in what ways can you personally relate to it?

We all need revival in our lives. It’s so easy to get complacent or even to be forgetful of what God has done and is doing for us. What faithful believer, even if struggling, could not pray something like this: “Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!” (*Ps. 80:19, NKJV*)? When you accept what Jesus has done for you, when you know that your sins have been forgiven and that you are covered by His perfect righteousness, credited to you by faith, you can know that you are saved in Him.

How do you understand what it means for God “to shine” His face on you, especially in the context of knowing that His righteousness alone saves you?

Finally, Face-to-Face

We were made to be close to God (*Gen. 2:7*). Ever since He created humanity, God has given everything to restore our broken relationship with Him (*John 3:16*). He has placed eternity in our hearts, yet human beings cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end (*Eccles. 3:11*). We're part of the great controversy raging around us—even in us—yet, too often, we don't pause long enough to consider the great cost of what has been given in order for us to be restored to the relationship God intends for us to have with Him. Too often, we find ourselves wrapped up in our earthly battles and trials, forgetting that "our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (*Phil. 3:20, 21, NKJV*).

As the world plummets closer to the end, we know that a small black cloud will one day appear in the eastern sky. As it comes closer and closer, we'll see that on that cloud sits "One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle" (*Rev. 14:14, NKJV*). Jesus will be accompanied by thousands upon thousands of angels (*Matt. 25:31*), and every eye will see Him (*Rev. 1:7*). As He descends, we'll hear His shout, a trumpet call of God, and the tombs of those who fell asleep in Christ will open as they rise first (*1 Thess. 4:16*). They will know the voice of the One who calls them (*John 5:28*).

What will happen next? Read **1 Thessalonians 4:17**. Ultimately, what Paul writes about in **Philippians 2:10, 11** will echo throughout the universe.

What an utterly incredible, magnificent thought! One day we will see Jesus—really, truly see Him. We will hear His voice, and we will confess that He is Lord. The One whom we've read about, prayed to, spoken of with others; the One whom our hearts have longed for . . . we will actually see Him face-to-face. We can be certain and sure of this, for God is faithful, and His promises are true (*Rev. 22:6*).

In that moment, when the trumpets sound and every human eye sees Jesus, we'll know that it's been worth the wait. Every persevering prayer, every moment we've prioritized time with Him, every time we've spoken boldly for Him, every trial—will be culminated in seeing His face (*Rev. 22:4*).

The Bride

While exiled on the island of Patmos, the disciple John was given a vision of what it will be like when we are reunited with God for eternity.

Read Revelation 21:9–11. What analogy was given, and why do you think it was used?

The bride is beautiful, and on her wedding day, everyone wants to see her. A wedding day is a turning point of a new life together for the bride and groom, and this will also be true of our relationship with God upon His return.

Jesus has been preparing a place for us (*John 14:1–3*), a beautiful place that is too amazing to describe. In fact, “human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 675.

Although we cannot really comprehend what the new heaven and new earth will be like, God shows John a vision of this place so that we look forward to the “wedding” that will soon happen. Indeed, we’re invited to “set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (*Col. 3:2, NKJV*).

God is carefully preparing for this event, and He doesn’t want this “wedding” to catch us by surprise (*see Matt. 22:1–14, Matt. 25:1–13*).

The universe is the congregation that will see this event take place, and we are some of the central figures in this story. We will join with the “bride,” this city that Jesus will take us to at His second coming. Interestingly, God’s people (the saints) are also called the bride (*see Rev. 19:7, NASB*), perhaps because they are in “the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (*Rev. 21:2, NKJV*).

This beautiful description of the Holy City shows that there is an intimate connection between God’s people and the city, because both are called “the bride.” The Bible reveals a detailed description of “the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, which is the capital and representative of the kingdom, [and] is called ‘the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 426.

Read Revelation 21:9–27. Why is this so hard for us to imagine now? How do we even begin to wrap our minds around what is promised to us in these verses?

Follow the Lamb

Have you ever been asked what you're most looking forward to in eternity? A child might say, "Riding a tiger," "Sliding down a giraffe's neck," or "Flying to different planets." If you were to ask a teenager, they might say, "Not having to do any more schoolwork," or "Exploring heaven with my friends without getting hurt." And if you were to ask a group of adults, they might say, "Being in a place where there's no more pain, suffering, or death," or "Being reunited with loved ones." All of these responses are good and true, and there is so much to look forward to in the new heaven and the new earth. Eternity burns within our hearts, and, intrinsically, we know there must be something more to life than the here and now.

What other blessings might we look forward to in eternity? Read Isaiah 25:8, Revelation 7:17, and Revelation 21:4.

Surely the greatest blessing of heaven will be to finally see Jesus and to thank Him, in person, for what He has done for us on this fallen earth. We will want to lavish our adoration and worship to Him for saving us, by His own suffering on the cross, from eternal death.

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12, NKJV).

John the Baptist introduced Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:36). Two of John's disciples heard this statement and followed Jesus (John 1:37), and Revelation 14:4 tells us we should do the same. "These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14:4, NKJV). However, if we want to follow Him in heaven, we must first follow Him here on earth.

Jesus, the Lamb, is also our Shepherd, guiding our paths as no other can. This is so reassuring for us as we struggle through the hard times that we find ourselves in, but Jesus will never stop leading us, even in heaven. Revelation 7:17 says, "For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters" (NKJV). As His people, His sheep, we will follow Jesus in heaven, forever wanting to be in His presence. One defining characteristic of God's people is that "His name shall be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4, NKJV). That is, we always will be thinking of Him.

Listen to the Adventist gospel song "Follow the Lamb" at <https://vimeo.com/1067821589> and make the words your personal prayer today.

“Come!”

The invitation is offered to us again, today: “Come.”

Read the following passages and notice His invitation for you to come to Him: *Matt. 11:28–30, Isa. 55:1–3, John 6:44.*

The Holy Spirit wants to draw you to Jesus today. Jesus invites you to come to Him, to abide in Him today, and every day, until He comes. When you respond and come to Him, when your heart is soft and your mind surrendered, you will feel peace because you know that He will raise you up, no matter how unworthy you may feel, on the last day of this earth. Jesus said, “Who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (*John 6:37, NKJV*).

We should sense the urgency to work with the Holy Spirit to call others to come into a saving relationship with Jesus. “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (*Rev. 22:17, NKJV*).

The invitation is free, offered as a gift of grace. When we accept Him into our life and love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength (*Deut. 6:5*), our life here and in the future will be changed forever.

Even as Jesus invites us to come to Him, the last words in the Bible promise this: “‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, *come, Lord Jesus*” (*Rev. 22:20, NKJV, emphasis added*).

How quickly? From our perspective, as soon as we close our eyes in death, the next thing we know will be the return of Christ. Considering how quickly our lives pass, that’s how quickly Jesus is coming back for us. Perhaps our first thought at the resurrection will be *Wow, Lord, Your coming was soon after all!*

Truly, now we see but faintly, as in a mirror. But then we’ll see Him face-to-face. Don’t grow weary in waiting. Keep this desire alive, ever before you, in faith and in trust in the love and goodness of God. Lord Jesus, please come soon!

Pray right now for the faith to endure, for the faith to allow you to surrender wholly and completely to the One who died for you and is coming back quickly for you, too.

Further Thought: “If we do not receive the religion of Christ by feeding upon the Word of God, we shall not be entitled to an entrance into the city of God. Having lived on earthly food, having educated our tastes to love worldly things, we would not be fitted for the heavenly courts; we could not appreciate the pure, heavenly current that circulates in heaven. The voices of the angels and the music of their harps would not satisfy us. The science of heaven would be as an enigma to our minds. We need to hunger and thirst for the righteousness of Christ; we need to be molded and fashioned by the transforming influence of His grace, that we may be fitted for the society of heavenly angels. . . .

“Then the nations will own no other law than the law of heaven. All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving. . . . Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, ‘There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.’

“We want to get in the habit of talking of heaven, beautiful heaven. Talk of that life which will continue as long as God shall live, and then you will forget your little trials and difficulties. Let the mind be attracted to God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 363.

Discussion Question:

- 1 If available, listen to or read Ellen G. White’s vision of heaven found in *Early Writings*, pp. 14–20. What is most striking to you in this description?
- 2 What aspect of this quarter’s lessons do you most want to remember in order to keep your relationship with God strong until you see Jesus face-to-face?
- 3 Who in your life needs to hear about the hope of heaven? Commit to sharing with them as soon as possible. Remember: you can’t share with them a hope that you yourself don’t personally have.

Summary: As we keep our eyes on the goal, may we be “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (*Phil. 1:6, NKJV*). God initiated the relationship He has with you, and He will complete it. May we grow in love and in faith as we wait for that day, while always resting only in the righteousness of Christ, which is credited to us by faith.

Amelia's Promise to God

By MWAMBA MPUNDU

Amelia couldn't envision a future worth living for. She had struggled with mental health for years and carried deep pain from the harsh words and actions of others. One day, she considered ending her life.

Then she recalled a conversation with a friend. He had encouraged her to pray for the people who hurt her. Amelia was desperate for change, so she decided to try. "I remembered Psalm 37:5, that says, 'Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass,' " Amelia said. "I was crying, and I claimed that promise. I told God I wanted to serve Him and become all He wanted me to be. 'I will work for you, Lord,' I promised, 'if You help me out of this problem.' "

Amelia's prayer opened doors for God to change her life. Free from the resentment that kept her focused on herself, she now wanted to share His love with others. One day, Amelia's friend told her about an opportunity to serve as a Global Mission pioneer, teaching at an Adventist school in the mountains. The travel to the area sounded daunting, but she was determined to go.

Amelia's days at the school were long and demanding. After teaching, she would visit the students and their families and lead worship services—not only for the Adventist members but for the animists, who made up most of the community.

Not everyone supported Amelia's mission. The local village leader demanded that the locals stay away from her. He started attending and disrupting her evangelistic meetings. Amelia had heard that the man used witchcraft and cursed those who upset him, so she made his opposition a constant matter of prayer.

One evening, she held a parent-teacher meeting to discuss the students' performances and share her plans for the school. She hadn't gotten very far when the leader caused a scene. Amelia tried to ignore him, but his shouting drowned out her voice.

Amelia rushed to the church and knelt at the altar. "Please, God, help me," she pled. "Please, make me strong and guide our meeting." Feeling God's presence, she returned to the meeting with newfound courage.

The village leader's hostility didn't subside, but Amelia kept her composure and answered his questions respectfully. He demanded that the parents take his side, but they stood firm in their support of Amelia.

In the end, the meeting was inconclusive. Amelia didn't know what the future held, but she was determined to remain faithful to her promise, trusting Him to guide her through every challenge.

Global Mission pioneers such as Amelia often serve in difficult and even dangerous conditions. Please pray for Amelia and for the hundreds of pioneers who are sharing God's love. To learn more about Global Mission pioneers, visit GMSda.org/Give.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *1 John 3:2*

Study Focus: *Psalm 80, Rev. 21:4, Eccles. 3:11.*

This week, we conclude our quarter-long reflection on our relationship with God. Our study culminates with the following question: What did we achieve as we studied, pondered, discussed, and diligently sought to develop a right relationship with the Creator, our Savior? Furthermore, what knowledge did we acquire this quarter over those individuals who never knew Him?

To the Pharisees who asked their question about the coming of the kingdom of God, Jesus answered in the present tense: “ ‘The kingdom of God is within you’ ” (*Luke 17:21, NKJV*). But to His disciples who were concerned with the same question, Jesus used the future tense: “ ‘You will desire to see’ ” (*Luke 17:22, NKJV; compare with Luke 17:37*). That is, only those who have an intimate relationship with Christ will long to see His face.

Yet, we must acknowledge the great, albeit frustrating, paradox at the heart of our longing for God: the more our relationship with God develops, the more our longing for Him is intensified. We may experience, at times, this frustration at the delay in the fulfillment of our desire to see Him face-to-face. In this final lesson, we will embrace both our longing for a more personal knowledge of God and our longing for a deeper intimacy with Him. Specifically, we will seek to understand, as did Jacob, what it means to see God’s face. We also will pray with the Levite Asaph, through Psalm 80, out of this longing to see God face-to-face.

Part II: Commentary

To See the Face of God: The Experience of Jacob (*Gen. 32:22–33:10*).

When Jacob wrestled with God and saw His face, he did not know His name (*Gen. 32:29*). But Jacob could at least name the place where God had appeared to him: “Peniel,” which means “the face of God” (*Gen. 32:30*). Of course, the name “Peniel” does not mean that Jacob identified the *place* as the literal “face of God.” Rather, for Jacob, the name “Peniel” referred to his personal experience with God.

Moreover, the use of the Hebrew expression *panim ’el panim*, “face to face,” does not mean that Jacob actually saw the physical face of God. This expression is equivalent to seeing “the form of the LORD” (*Num. 12:8, NKJV*) and, instead, describes the experience of a direct encounter with

God (*Deut. 5:4*). Jacob associates his salvation with this encounter: “And my life has been preserved” (*Gen. 32:30, MEV*). The Hebrew verb *natsal*, “preserve,” refers to divine deliverance from enemies and troubles (*1 Sam. 12:21, Prov. 19:19*) but also may carry the connotation of spiritual salvation from sin and guilt (*Ps. 39:9, Ps. 119:170*).

From his encounter with God (*Gen. 32:22–32*), Jacob moves to his encounter with his brother (*Gen. 33:1–16*). Thus, Jacob’s preceding encounter with God prepares him for his encounter with Esau.

Jacob’s encounter with Esau in Genesis 33:5–15 connects the face of God in Peniel (*Gen. 32:30*) with the face of Esau (*Gen. 33:10*). Genesis 33:5–15 also connects God’s grace to Jacob (*Gen. 33:5, 11*) with Esau’s grace to Jacob (*Gen. 33:8, 10, 15*). The phrase “Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there” (*Gen. 33:1, NKJV; compare with Gen. 33:5*), which introduces Jacob’s sighting of Esau, is typical usage for introducing the appearance of God, and thus anticipates the association of Esau with God. Esau’s approach is, therefore, loaded with hopeful prospects. When Jacob finally meets Esau, he explicitly connects his relationship with his brother to his relationship with God: “‘I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God’ ” (*Gen. 33:10, NKJV*). It is this argument that induces Esau to accept Jacob’s gift (*Gen. 33:11*), a sign that he is willing to forgive his brother. Jacob has seen “the face of God” (Peniel) in the face of Esau. Jacob’s experience with Esau is a second Peniel, the first Peniel preparing for the second one. This evocation of God is reinforced by the use of the verb *ratsah* (“pleased” [*Gen. 33:10*]), a technical verb that belongs to offertory language, referring to the sacrifice or worship that is “pleasing” to or “accepted” by God (*Lev. 22:27, Amos 5:22*).

Jacob’s encounter with God has helped him during his encounter with his brother. Likewise, his reconciliation with his brother will affect his relationship with God. Indeed, the chapter ends with the report that Jacob erected an altar, which he called “El Elohe Israel” (*Gen. 33:20, NKJV*), meaning “God, the God of Israel” or “Israel’s God.” Here, for the first time, Jacob acknowledges El as his personal God. Previously, Jacob referred to God only as the God of his fathers but never as his own personal God. Jacob has come to understand that his love for God and his love for his brother are dependent upon each other. Jesus infers this unique theological lesson from the Scriptures: “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets’ ” (*Matt. 22:37–40, NKJV*).

For Jesus, the two loves, love for God and love for one another, are related: unless we love our neighbor, we are unable to love God. To see the face of God, we need to learn to see the face of God in our brother or

sister. And, on the other hand, to see the face of God in people, we need to have experienced a personal, intimate relationship with God.

To See the Face of God: Asaph's Prayer (Psalm 80). As we read this lament, let us appropriate its meditation and message to our own experience with God.

Prayer to the Silent God. Asaph, the author of Psalm 80 (*see also Psalm 50 and Psalms 73–83*), is one of the Levites whom David assigned as worship leader in the tabernacle.

Asaph's prayer, which takes place inside the house of God, resonates with profound longing for God and even frustration or bitterness at His silence. The God to whom Asaph addresses his prayer is in the Most Holy Place, "between the cherubim" (*Ps. 80:1, NKJV*); and yet, He is seemingly reticent and absent.

Application: As did Asaph, God's people of the time of the end pray to Christ, who stands in the Most Holy Place, preparing His people for the kingdom of God. As did Asaph, God's people are waiting for their Savior, who is seemingly delayed in His coming and does not appear to respond to their supplication. They experience a "time of trouble" (*Dan. 12:1*) during God's silence. Yet, they keep waiting (*Dan. 12:12*) and praying for His coming, just as the early Christians did, as their greeting suggests: *Mara' na' thah* ["O Lord, come!" Or, the Lord cometh or will come] (*1 Cor. 16:22, NKJV*).

A Longing. Asaph's prayer begins with a longing for God's presence. The poet begs God to come and save His people (*Ps. 80:1, 2, 7*), who are weeping all the time (*Ps. 80:5*). Asaph's longing also is heard in his question '*ad matay* ["How long?"] (*Ps. 80:4*), the same shout that is uttered from the mouth of the oppressed in many psalms (*Ps. 13:2, Ps. 62:3, Ps. 74:10, Ps. 94:3, etc.*). The angel in Daniel's vision also asks this same question to express the longing for God's eschatological judgment (*Dan. 8:13*).

Restore and Return. The refrain of Psalm 80 marks its rhythm three times: in the beginning (*Ps. 80:3*), in the middle (*Ps. 80:7*), and at the end (*Ps. 80:19*). The refrain is as follows: "*Restore us . . . ; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!*" (*Ps. 80:19, NKJV*). The call to restore (*shub*) God's people echoes the call to God to return (*shub*).

Application: As did Asaph, God's people long for God and wait for God's response of judgment and redemption. Also, as did Asaph, they promote repentance (a return to God), which is connected indissolubly to God's return.

Priestly Blessing. The refrain of Psalm 80 resonates with the priestly blessing: "The LORD make His face shine upon you" (*see Num. 6:24–26, NKJV*). The parallel of the refrain with the priestly blessing helps us see that God's salvation is promised in terms of grace (*Num. 6:25*) and peace (*Num. 6:26*).

Application: As Asaph did, we must ask God to “restore” us and shine His face upon us that we may be saved (*Ps. 80:19, NKJV*).

Application: As Asaph did, God’s people should seek to be a blessing to others, bringing salvation to the world through their testimony.

Conclusion: An important connection exists between Jacob’s experience with the face of God and Asaph’s prayer in which he longs to see the face of God. Our vertical relationship with God depends on the quality of our horizontal relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The religion that makes us long for heaven will not succeed if we fail in our ethical duties and in our relationships with our neighbors. At the same time, we must ever bear in mind that apart from God’s grace, we will not be able to love our neighbor, who is made in the image of God.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher’s Tip: Discuss the following activities with your class. Encourage class members to implement one or more of these activities in their spiritual walk in the coming week. Ask class members to be prepared to share with the class on the following Sabbath how their experiences drew them closer to Jesus.

Activity 1: See the face of God in your brother or sister (read Matt. 25:35–45).

Train yourself to see the best in someone you struggle to get along with or like. Ask God to help you in this endeavor. As soon as you witness something negative in his or her words or behavior, counter it with the memory of something positive about this person. In this way, work to change your enemy into a friend. Here are some other things you can do in this person’s company or for him or her:

- Smile.
- Converse.
- Associate.
- Share something positive.
- Pray for or with this person.
- Bring this person a gift.
- Refrain from speaking badly about him or her. Instead, praise this person without exaggerating.
- Invite him or her to lunch. Find some opinion or taste you share in common and discuss or share it.
- If he or she has done harm to you, forgive.

