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For Better or for Worse:

Lessons From Old Testament Couples

EQ
2007

A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



<http://cq.adventist.org>

For Better or for Worse: Lessons From Old Testament Couples

July—September 2007



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This Quarter's Illustrator



Melita Pujic

I love God. I love life. I love my family. I love to laugh. I love to see people laugh. My passion is photography. I collect postcards. My dream is to see the world. I love to learn languages. I speak three: Serbian, English, and Spanish. Born in Serbia, live in England, studied in the U.S. Looking for a job that involves connecting with people, not the computer. I like optimists and honest people. I love food. I love to cook—Thai, Lebanese, Italian. Avocados I can't live without; mushrooms I can't live with. Raspberries make me smile. Ferrero Rocher chocolate is a girl's best friend. A quote I love, "There is nothing more truly artistic than to love people" (author unknown). Favorite verses, Proverbs 3:5, 6.

Getting the most Out of *CQ*

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflect the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson is based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
 - "**Introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "**Logos**" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
 - "**Testimony**" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "**Evidence**" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "**How-To**" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "**Opinion**" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
 - "**Exploration**" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

Adam and Eve: The Intended Ideal



**“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”
(Gen. 2:24, NIV).**

It Could Have Been Happily Ever After

INTRODUCTION

Genesis 2; 3

When I reported back to work after my honeymoon, my colleagues asked me, "What do you think of married life?" They were happy to hear my reply—"Absolutely wonderful!" Because good marriages are becoming rare nowadays, it gives us a sense of joy whenever we hear about happy and lasting marriages; those that have stood the test of time, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health. In fact, at wedding receptions I have attended lately, it was popular to honor the longest married couple among the guests.

With the growing statistics of couples getting divorced or separated, usually due to alleged "irreconcilable differences," it is alarming that marriage seems to be a commodity or commonplace. There are those who change partners as easily as they change their clothes. Some people are not giving marriage much thought before they stand at the altar.

True marriage is not disposable. It requires a willingness on the part of both partners to make it work. In the final analysis, God's approval must be sought before making this lifelong commitment. When married couples determine to recognize and obey divine principles in their relationship, they stand a much better chance of remaining married. Thus, the families of earth may represent the family of heaven.

**How sad, . . . that through
the first couple, Paradise
was lost.**

Going back to the account of Creation, we see that God furnished Adam with almost everything he could desire. But nothing among all of His creation was a suitable help meet for Adam. And so the first wedding took place. When the Lord presented Eve to Adam, angels of God witnessed the ceremony.*

Through their marriage, Adam and Eve represent the union of humanity to divinity. How sad, then, that through the first couple, Paradise was lost. What could have been a happily-ever-after story instead became a tragedy.

The consequences of Adam and Eve's story resulted in more than failed marriages. Their wrong act gave birth to bloodshed, agony, anxiety, misery, murder, suicide, torture, greed, and so on. In fact, their downfall is a powerful example of what a life in variance from God's will brings. Ultimately, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ restores all things. This will be the focus of study this week.

* *In Heavenly Places*, p. 203.

Sunday
July 1

Exempli Gratia ... By Way of Example

LOGOS

Gen. 1:26; 2:18–3:16

When I was in high school, I encountered a quotation about marriage that said, “(1) Marriage is love; (2) marriage is an institution; (3) love is blind. Therefore, marriage is an institution for the blind.” Nowadays, marriage is often the topic of many crude jokes. Marriage, however, is no laughing matter. God instituted marriage along with the Sabbath in the Garden of Eden. There, its true essence was exemplified by our first parents, Adam and Eve.

Magnum Opus

On the sixth day of Creation, God made man in His own image and gave him dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26). God brought to Adam all creatures so that he could name them. In doing so, Adam noticed that the creatures had companions and that he did not. So God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs, from which He created Eve (Gen. 2:21).

**This love story did not have
a desirable ending.**

“Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self, showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation.” This togetherness was further reinforced when the Lord said that a “man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24, NIV).

And so we learn that once united by the bond of marriage, these two lives symbolically became one flesh. Each body does not belong to the husband or wife alone but belongs also to the other half (1 Cor. 7:4). The inviolability of marriage was emphasized by Jesus Christ when He preached that the man and woman are no longer two individuals but have become one. Because God has joined them together, no one should separate them (Matt. 19:6).

Of all the creatures, God personally handcrafted Adam and Eve. This makes them all the more special. He formed the man from the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. The rest was created through His powerful Word. That is why the man and woman are considered the crowning glory of Creation, a masterpiece of God and a reflection of His glory.

Mea Culpa

Adam and Eve were privileged for being perfectly made and for living in a perfect environment. They were naked; but they were not ashamed, for they were covered by God's light and glory. Communion with their Maker was open, and they could see Him face to face. As they were charged with taking care of the Garden, they were given freedom to eat from any tree with only one caveat: They must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for if they did, they would surely die (Gen. 2:16, 17).

Unfortunately, this love story did not have a desirable ending. As Eve wandered alone, Satan disguised himself as a beautiful serpent in order to lure her into his destructive plot. He rephrased God's statement by asking Eve, " 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?' " (Gen. 3:1, NIV).

Eve correctly responded by saying that they were only prohibited to eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the Garden. The serpent countered that they would not die, but that they would become like God, knowing good and evil.

Eve was tempted. The fruit was pleasing to the eye, and perhaps forgetting that she had been created in the image of God, she ate the fruit, then shared it with her husband. Adam knew that his wife had transgressed God's command. But the thought of being separated from Eve overpowered him, so that he also chose not to do the right thing.²

When their eyes were opened, they realized they were naked, because their covering of light and glory was gone. Little did they know about the other disastrous consequences their disobedience would cause.

When God asked Adam if they had eaten from the prohibited tree, he blamed Eve. Eve, in turn, blamed the serpent. Neither human wanted to take responsibility for their actions. The Lord cursed the serpent above all the animals. The woman would now experience great pain in childbearing and would be subject to the rule of her husband. The ground was then cursed so that Adam would labor for his food all the days of his life.

Dei Gratia

One single mistake brought guilt, shame, disobedience, and death to God's magnificent creation. One single mistake separated humankind from God. The ideal marriage, which had represented the relationship of God with His people, was destroyed due to Satan's persistent efforts.

By His grace, God sent His only Son to redeem His children. The plan of redemption and restoration is ours for the taking. Victory is at hand. Adam and Eve's example teaches us that disobedience comes with a great price. But their example also can save us a lot of trouble.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 57.

Monday
July 2

A Woman for Man

TESTIMONY

Gen. 2:18

“Man was not made to dwell in solitude; he was to be a social being. Without companionship, the beautiful scenes and delightful employments of Eden would have failed to yield perfect happiness. Even communion with angels could not have satisfied his desire for sympathy and companionship. There was none of the same nature to love and to be loved.”¹

God warned the couple about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. “The angels had cautioned Eve to beware of separating herself from her husband while occupied in their daily labor in the garden; with him she would be in less danger from temptation than if she were alone. But absorbed in her pleasing task, she unconsciously wandered from his side. On perceiving that she was alone, she felt an apprehension of danger, but dismissed her fears, deciding that she had sufficient wisdom and strength to discern evil and to withstand it.”²

But then, “after Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, they were filled with a sense of shame and terror.”³

“They were filled with a sense of shame and terror.”

“Adam and Eve persuaded themselves that in so small a matter as eating of the forbidden fruit there could not result such terrible consequences as God had declared. But

this small matter was the transgression of God’s immutable and holy law, and it separated man from God and opened the floodgates of death and untold woe upon our world.”⁴

“In the creation God had made her the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other. Eve had been the first in transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction.”⁵

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 54.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 40.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 58.

Wanted: The Perfect Partner

EVIDENCE

Gen. 2:18

Genesis 2 records the first love story in the history of humankind. It started with God creating a man from the dust of the ground and breathing into the man's nostrils the breath of life, thereby making him a living being (Gen. 2:7). Then God gave this man the privilege of naming His other creatures. As the man named each creature, he realized that while they all had partners, he did not. He was alone. In this way, God awakened in his heart a desire for a companion. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18, NIV). God knew exactly what Adam needed—a companion, a partner, an equal. A wife.

"God had made Adam from the ground. Adam is simply a shortened form of the Hebrew word *adamah*, which means 'ground.'" Instead of using soil to create Eve, God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, took a rib from him, and made Eve from that rib (Gen. 2:21, 22). "The Hebrew word for 'made' is *banah* and is translated 'build.' God literally built Eve. Ever loving, kind, and merciful, God took great delight in forming Eve, physically and mentally, to be the perfect complement for Adam."²

Because God made Eve from one of Adam's ribs, an undeniable bond existed between them. This point was undoubtedly significant to Adam, for his first words regarding Eve were, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man" (Gen. 2:23, NIV). Adam recognized his link to this creature named Eve. She was part of him, and he was part of her.

The account of Genesis 2 not only shows what Adam and Eve felt or thought when they saw each other for the first time, it outlines the basis of marriage as established by God. It also takes note of the principles of a happy, successful married life. These principles include (a) gaining independence from each other's families by separating themselves as a new family unit, (b) binding together to create a loving, lasting relationship, and, most important, (c) becoming one flesh.

Marriage is one of God's greatest gifts to humankind. It is something to treasure and sustain. The guidelines God gave regarding marriage are just as important now as they ever were. To follow them is to make the principled, godly choice. Only rewards result from a pure and righteous marriage.

God knew exactly what
Adam needed.

1. David Treybig, "Lessons From the First Marriage," *The Good News*, May/June 1997, <http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn10/firstmarriage.htm>

2. Ibid.

Wednesday
July 4

Secrets of an Ideal Marriage

HOW-TO

Gen. 2:24

It was part of God's plan to create beings made in His image who would in turn procreate and live together in purity, harmony, and happiness. Thus, He brought forth Eve from the side of Adam to be his wife, part of himself, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, an equal, to be loved and protected by him. Their close union is a perfect pattern of mutual love between a husband and a wife. It is the ideal for all couples to follow . . . a perfect representation of God's relationship with His people.

However, "like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin." The relationship that was purposed to be a blessing turned into something that led many souls to ruin.

How can we then achieve the kind of marriage God intended us to have based on the first husband and wife relationship? Here are a few steps:

1. *Mutually submit to each other.* The first couple was co-equal; but after the

Fall, Eve would submit to Adam. In this regard, the husband should be the leader of the family. This, however, does not imply that he should be authoritarian and manipulative. Neither should the wife control her

Make God first, last, and best in everything.

husband. Each partner should make the happiness of the other his or her ultimate goal.

2. *Stick to each other.* When Eve left Adam for a brief period of time while she was working in the Garden, she became more open to temptation. This caused her to be ensnared by the enemy. Likewise, couples today who are physically distant from each other are more susceptible to temptation.

3. *Fulfill each other's needs.* As "one flesh," the husband and wife should strive to learn how to meet each other's physical, mental, and emotional needs.

4. *Make God first, last, and best in everything.* In any successful marriage, God should be at the center of everything. Selfishness and pride should be replaced with love and humility, which leads to a harmonious and blissful union. When Adam chose Eve over God due to his fear of losing her,² he forgot that God was the One who had given her to him in the first place.

1. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 253.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 56, 57.

Choosing to Become Ideal

OPINION

Gen. 2:15–25; 3:1–12

Every marriage is a fresh new start. When a man and a woman say “I do” before God and each other, they create a new beginning. Just like that day when God ordained the marriage of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God is giving them and everyone else after them a chance to be “ideal”—a new start to journey on as married individuals.

We may never have the perfect start, the perfect place to live, the perfect partner (that our first parents were given) because of sin, but like Adam and Eve, we are given the freedom of choice. Choosing is an act of the will. We make choices every day as we deal with the daily complexities in life. Our decisions will affect our human relationships. Eve may have chosen not to leave the side of Adam. She may have chosen not to listen to the serpent nor to doubt God’s instructions. Adam may have chosen not to eat of the fruit. He may have chosen not to blame Eve for tempting him to eat. They may have chosen not to hide from God after they sinned.

We, too, must make choices. We can choose to stay beside our partners and not stray toward the many temptations of this world. We can choose to obey God’s instructions on marital fidelity. We can choose to

**Choosing is an act of the
will.**

understand our spouses’ imperfections. We can choose not to be angry when he or she does some petty thing we don’t like. We can choose not to blame our spouses when things go wrong with our plans. Most important, we can choose to go to God when things go wrong. We can choose to receive His grace by accepting His Son who died on the cross so that the lost Eden will be restored and imperfect human relationships will be made whole.

As we make such choices, we must remember that only God can help us become the ideal. Let us learn from our first parents. Only when we choose to receive Him can the “fresh new start” He longs to give us have its “happily-ever-after” ending.

REACT

1. What are the choices we make day by day that greatly affect our relationship with our friends, loved ones, and God? Do we make them in regard to how our friends, loved ones, and God would feel?
2. In our world today, what makes choosing to be ideal so hard?

Friday
July 6

An Edenic Institution

EXPLORATION

Gen. 2:18–24

CONCLUDE

God made two institutions in Eden—marriage and the Sabbath. It is of some note that marriage shares equal billing with the Sabbath, a memorial of Creation and liberation. Perhaps God knew that healthy families and healthy societies require healthy marriages and a weekly reminder of who God is and what He did at Creation. Adam and Eve went astray when they forgot the God who created them and gave them the joys of marital bliss. We all are paying for that error. But through Jesus' sacrifice, we can receive forgiveness for sin and see a clear example of how to love in marriage.

CONSIDER

- Reflecting upon the following Scripture: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25, NIV). How much sacrifice is God requiring of husbands in marriage?
- Preparing a dish for a married couple you know may be experiencing challenges in their relationship. Give the dish to them with a note expressing your love for them.
- Researching which creatures in the animal kingdom are monogamous.
- Finding out the national percentage of first marriages and second marriages that end in divorce. Then ask the Family Life director of your local conference if these numbers are different from divorce statistics in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- Praying for married couples in your church. You may also suggest developing a marriage enrichment club for married and soon-to-be married couples in your church.

CONNECT

Read Ephesians 5 to see the apostle Paul's marital counsel in context.

The Adventist Home, chaps. 6–10.

Joe Beam, *Becoming One: Emotionally, Spiritually, and Sexually*.

Abraham and Sarah: Faith Tested and Tried



“By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise” (Heb. 11:11, NIV).

Where Was Their Faith?

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 11:11

The boy swung the sling over his head. It whistled through the air, the force of the small stone pulling hard against his arm. He focused on a larger rock on the other side of the small valley where his family's tents were pitched. It was far, but he had been practicing. He knew he could hit it. He set his feet a little firmer in the soft grass, spun the sling a little faster, and at just the right moment, he released one of the straps in his hand. The stone left the sling at an incredible speed and zinged through the air, striking the boulder with a crack.

His father, Abraham, clapped him on the back, grinning.

"Well done," he laughed.

Ishmael grinned. Then he glanced toward the tent he shared with his mother and caught her smiling.

Meanwhile, Sarah gazed at Hagar's tent, where Hagar sat weaving, keeping a watchful eye on her son. The feelings of jealousy began to well up inside of Sarah

Sarah almost dropped the shuttle as the baby kicked in her belly.

again, but she quickly pushed them aside. Her own lack of faith had caused her to give Hagar to Abraham, and now, her lack of faith bothered her most. God had promised Abraham he would have a son by which he would father a great

nation. She, however, had become impatient. Impatient? Yes, maybe at first; but as she grew older, the seed of doubt had turned that impatience into disbelief.

Sarah sat on the stool in front of her own loom and picked up the red yarn she was weaving into a rug. Her thoughts went to the time when God had spoken to Abraham and told him she would bear a son in her old age. Oh, how she had laughed. Sarah blushed, remembering that God had asked her why she had laughed. Her face darkened further when she remembered her reply. After all He had done for them, why had she not believed?

But despite her lack of faith, God still had been faithful. He still had kept His promises to them. Sarah began to hum as she passed the shuttle back and forth through the loom. God had forgiven her unbelief, and now she knew without a doubt that she and Abraham would have a son. Now she had faith that God would keep His promise to make of him a great nation.

Sarah almost dropped the shuttle as the baby kicked in her belly.

The Lord Will Provide

EVIDENCE

Gen. 17:19; 22

When Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, God finally gave them their long-promised son. But years later, God tested Abraham's love, faith, and obedience by asking him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. This had to have been extremely hard for Abraham to do. Yet Abraham's love for God was so strong, he didn't even question Him.

Abraham and Isaac traveled for three days before they arrived at Mount Moriah. Abraham built an altar as God had instructed him to do. Then he bound Isaac and laid him on it. Abraham raised the knife to slay his son; but the angel of the Lord stopped him. God provided a ram for the sacrifice instead of Isaac, and Abraham called the name of the place The-Lord-Will-Provide (Gen. 22:14).

Since then, Mount Moriah has become one of the most important religious sites of the world. Here, on the threshing floor of Oran, the Jebusite, David saw the angel of death hovering with drawn sword, ready to strike Jerusalem in punishment of David's great sin of counting the people (2 Sam. 24:10–25). God had promised to make Abraham's descendents as countless as the stars, and in counting the people, David showed a lack of faith.

Abraham's love for God was so strong, he didn't even question Him.

God listened to David's prayer of repentance. He told David to build an altar, and He stopped the disaster that already had killed 70,000 people. David bought the site and later told his son Solomon to build the temple there. Solomon placed the altar of burnt sacrifices on the same place where Abraham had built his altar.

This site also has long been contended. The Samaritans, unable to join in the Jewish worship because of their mixed blood, argued that Abraham had actually offered Isaac on Mount Gerizim, where Abraham had built his first altar in Canaan (Gen. 12:6, 7). This is where they built their temple. And after Jerusalem eventually fell to the Romans, Emperor Hadrian built a new city at that location, which included plans to build a temple on this spot to his personal god. Presently, a Moslem building, the Dome of the Rock, stands on this site.

REACT

1. Do you have a place in your life where battles of faith are often fought?
2. What things are you withholding from God that He wants you to give up to Him?

Monday
July 9

Learning Faith Together

LOGOS

Gen. 12:2, 3; 15:4; 16:1-5; 22; James 2:20-26

The Promise (Gen. 12:2, 3)

When God called Abram out of his native country to wander a strange land for the rest of his life, He gave Abram a promise: “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing” (NIV).

Abram was 75, and his wife, Sarai, was 65 and barren. But on the basis of this promise, this calling, Abram set out for the wild and wicked country of Canaan.

The Promise Renewed (Gen. 15:4)

Time was passing. Abram and his family were having many adventures in Canaan. To escape a drought, the family traveled to Egypt and had a serious scrape with Pharaoh over Sarai, still a beautiful woman. Neither Abram nor Sarai had the courage to say they were married! They were afraid it would cost Abram's life. So they

said they were sister and brother, and Pharaoh took Sarai into his own household. When Pharaoh found out about the deception, he threw the family out of Egypt, and they made their way back to Canaan. The great patriarch, caught as a liar! It's a hum-

Sarah and Abraham are the only couple listed in the faith chapter.

bling story. But in the next story, we see the great patriarch as a warrior.

Abram's nephew Lot headed off to the valley of Sodom and Gomorrah, where the grass was greener, and got hauled off as booty during a battle of nine kings from around the region. With 318 men, Abram rescued Lot, his family, and the rest of the lootings.

During these ten years, Sarai still had no child. Abram suggested to God that Eliezer be his heir, but God repeated His promise, stipulating that the promised child would come from Abram's own body.

Trying to Fulfill the Promise (Genesis 16)

At this point, Sarai figured she had to take things into her own hands. After all, it was her body that wasn't producing! So she offered her servant Hagar as a wife. Provisions for this kind of arrangement were in the legal code of Hammurabi. It was a common practice of the day, and Abram complied.

Yet what consequences resulted from this anxiety to work things out them-

selves, without relying on God's provision! Blood is still being shed over this oldest of rivalries! Notice how God related to this lack of faith, however. He dealt kindly with Hagar and Ishmael.

Running Scared (Genesis 20)

God fully intended for Sarai to have Abram's child. He told Abram so, calling him Abraham, and He told him to call her Sarah, saying nations would come from her. Yet within a year of this promise, they both ran scared of a local king, this time, Abimelech. Again, Abraham, to save his own skin, called Sarah his sister, and Sarah called Abraham her brother. Abimelech took Sarah into his household and just about lost his life over it. Again, God saved Abraham and Sarah through a crisis caused by their lack of faith.

Finally! The Promise Arrives! (Genesis 21)

Abraham had laughed at the idea that he would have a son (Gen. 17:17). Sarah had laughed too. Then she denied having done so when her heavenly visitor questioned her laughter. But Isaac was born and, fittingly, was named Laughter at God's request! Though Abraham and Sarah had fallen short so many times in their faith, God didn't give up on them.

Faith in Action (Genesis 22; Heb. 11:8–19; James 2:20–26)

It was the greatest test of all. God asked Abraham to offer up this long-awaited boy, this son of promise, as a burnt sacrifice. Could Abraham at last take God at His word? He had failed so many times. But God gave him this chance to demonstrate to the universe that at last, Abraham not only believed God but would act on His word.

Abraham did as God asked. He was in the very act of bringing the knife down on his precious boy when God stayed his hand. This act of faith was as amazing a testament to the angels and other worlds as it has been to the rest of us. Not only does God keep faith, He is more than able to help His children learn to have faith in Him.

Sarah and Abraham are the only couple listed in the faith chapter, Hebrews 11. By faith, Abraham said Yes to God's call. By faith, Sarah was able to become pregnant. By faith, Abraham gave his longed-for and prayed-for boy back to God. And through this faith, God has been able to teach the students of the universe about His own love and crowning sacrifice for our world.

REACT

1. What have you been learning about faith? How long has it taken you to learn what you have learned so far?
2. How has God been teaching you? What evidence do you have of His patience?

Tuesday
July 10

The Sanctity of Marriage

TESTIMONY

Gen. 16:4-6; 21:9-11

"The birth of Isaac, bringing, after a lifelong waiting, the fulfillment of their dearest hopes, filled the tents of Abraham and Sarah with gladness. But to Hagar this event was the overthrow of her fondly cherished ambitions. Ishmael, now a youth, had been regarded by all in the encampment as the heir of Abraham's wealth and the inheritor of the blessings promised to his descendants. Now he was suddenly set aside; and in their disappointment, mother and son hated the child of Sarah. The general rejoicing increased their jealousy, until Ishmael dared openly to mock the heir of God's promise. Sarah saw in Ishmael's turbulent disposition a perpetual source of discord, and she appealed to Abraham, urging that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away from the encampment. The patriarch was thrown into great distress. How could he banish Ishmael his son, still dearly beloved? In his perplexity he pleaded for divine guidance. The Lord, through a holy angel, directed him to grant Sarah's desire; his love for Ishmael or Hagar ought not to stand in the way, for only

thus could he restore harmony and happiness to his family. And the angel gave him the consoling promise that though separated from his father's home, Ishmael should not be forsaken by God; his life should be

"The patriarch was thrown into great distress."

preserved, and he should become the father of a great nation. Abraham obeyed the angel's word, but it was not without keen suffering. The father's heart was heavy with unspoken grief as he sent away Hagar and his son.

"The instruction given to Abraham touching the sacredness of the marriage relation was to be a lesson for all ages. It declares that the rights and happiness of this relation are to be carefully guarded, even at a great sacrifice. Sarah was the only true wife of Abraham. Her rights as a wife and mother no other person was entitled to share. She revered her husband, and in this she is presented in the New Testament as a worthy example. But she was unwilling that Abraham's affections should be given to another, and the Lord did not reprove her for requiring the banishment of her rival. Both Abraham and Sarah distrusted the power of God, and it was this error that led to the marriage with Hagar."*

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 146, 147.

How to Receive God's Blessings

HOW-TO

1 Pet. 2:9

Just as with Abraham and Sarah, God wants to give us the best. But, to receive the full benefits He has to offer us, we have to be willing to put all of our trust in Him. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. He won't force us to love Him. Rather, He is a forgiving, loving Creator who stands with His arms open wide. It's our choice whether we choose to follow His path.

The key is to keep your faith and trust in Him. When you find yourself beginning to dwell on the hard times in your life, turn your mind to God your Creator and thank Him for the many blessings you have in your life. God has a perfect plan for each of us. It's a challenge to keep turning to Him, but God allows hardships and challenges to come along so we may gain a closer relationship with Him.

These are the choices He allows. We may choose to trust in His love or turn our backs on Him. Do you choose to listen and confide in the Savior, to do what He knows is in your best interest?

"They trip and fall because they refuse to obey, just as predicted.

"But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy

people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you; from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted" (1 Pet. 2:8, 9, *The Message*). Abraham and Sarah knew God had a special plan for their lives, but they had difficulty with the timing and felt they had to give God a hand. Remember, the right plan forced to happen at the wrong time could turn out to be a disaster. God has perfect timing, and we can always trust Him to know what that is.

Even if you've fallen short in faith, it's never too late to change your ways and receive God's love. Abraham and Sarah often fell short in faith, but they also kept turning back to God and trusting Him again. He'll always put you back on your feet, and these lessons will help your heart grow stronger in faith.

**The key is to keep your
faith and trust in Him.**

REACT

1. If God has the power to do anything, why does He allow bad things to happen in our lives?
2. Is there something in our lives that we could give up to gain a closer relationship with Christ?

Thursday
July 12

Trust His Heart

OPINION

Genesis 16

Abraham and Sarah stumbled into thinking that God needs a little help to carry out His divine scheme for their lives. God is an intrinsic part of their lives, yet they lacked trust.

Trusting God isn't easy, especially when the reality you are living is difficult. Trust in God isn't something you just decide upon. It comes through hard experience when we learn to see how God works in our lives.

My uncle Mark called one evening. He said he had prostate cancer and six months to a year to live. Uncle Mark was in his early forties. He had never been seriously sick before, and he lived a healthful lifestyle.

How could God let my favorite uncle, who loved Him dearly, come down with cancer? I decided it must be that God wanted to touch people by the testimony of healing and a present-day miracle. I was sure Uncle Mark was going to be healed!

Time passed. Uncle Mark had many treatments, and he suffered immensely.

How could God let my favorite uncle . . . come down with cancer?

But he had faith. In one of my last visits with him, he told me how he felt honored to suffer, that the work that the cancer had done in his life and in the lives touched by his sickness made it worth all the pain. He trusted God's will.

One day, as I struggled with the reality of Uncle Mark not always being here, a song came floating across the radio. Bobby Mason was singing "Trust His Heart." God knows too much to make a mistake, the lyrics declared. He is too good to be careless with us. When we can't figure out why He's doing what He's doing, we can trust His heart to do the right thing, to take care of our future. This song of trust helped me keep my faith in God's plan.

Are you facing hard times? Does it seem hard to trust the future to God? Remember Abraham and Sarah's story of faith. Remember the story of my uncle Mark. Your faith can pierce the dark clouds of reality and see with God's vision the plan He has for you. Just trust His heart!

REACT

1. What songs or psalms help you keep your trust in God strong?
2. What can you do to encourage others to have faith in God's plan for their lives?

Faith for a Lifetime

EXPLORATION

Heb. 11:8–19; James 2:21–23

CONCLUDE

Abraham was the father not only of many nations but also of three major world religions. Called a friend of God, Abraham and his family set an example of remarkable faith in leaving the only land and gods they knew to follow the One True God wherever He led them. What is perhaps most remarkable about biblical heroes of faith is that we are also allowed to see the mistakes they made, and so better learn what it is to have a living and ever-growing faith in a merciful God.

CONSIDER

- Enacting the major faith milestones of Abraham and Sarah's life, from the time they left Ur to the experience on Mount Moriah.
- Discussing how each experience in Abraham and Sarah's life may have developed their faith walk with God. How would you have acted in each situation?
- Meditating on the faith milestones in your own life. How can remembering how God delivered you in the past help your future faith walk?
- Interviewing others in your church about significant faith milestones in their life. Compare/contrast their experiences with the experiences of Abraham and Sarah.
- Constructing an altar like the ones Abraham erected wherever he camped. How can a physical reminder of God's faithfulness be helpful as you move into another phase of your walk with God?
- Identifying goals you have for your life. Differentiate between those that are of your own making and those that are of God's. How can you follow God's plans for your life when—as with Abraham and Sarah—He rarely tells you where you're going or how you're getting there?

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chaps. 11–13.

Bruce S. Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths*.

Michael Gold, *The Ten Journeys of Life: Walking the Path of Abraham—A Guide to Being Human*.

Isaac and Rebekah: Rearing Rivals



“ ‘May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples’ ” (Gen. 28:3, NIV).

Marriage, Deception, and the Painful Consequences

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 27:6–13

While residing in Gerar, Isaac feared the locals would covet Rebekah and kill him in order that they might take her for themselves. Therefore, he told the locals that Rebekah was his sister. A generation before, his father told a similar story to Abimelech, king of Gerar. Isaac's lie was uncovered when Abimelech looked out his window and saw Isaac and Rebekah making love. Isaac was then summoned before Abimelech to explain. He apologized for his lies. Abimelech guaranteed that no one would harm him or Rebekah while they lived in Gerar.

Unfortunately, however, the lies did not end in Gerar. When Isaac was old and blind, he instructed his favorite son, Esau, to hunt for wild game and cook his favorite dish before receiving the blessing of his birthright. Rebekah, remembering that the Lord told her "two nations are in your womb, and the two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23, NIV), decided to help fulfill this prophecy. She instructed Jacob to bring her two young goats so she could cook Isaac's favorite dish in order for Jacob to receive his father's blessing. Jacob replied that Esau was hairy, and he was smooth

skinned. Rebekah assured Jacob not to worry; if Jacob received a curse, it would be her curse, not his. Jacob, wearing Esau's clothing and goat skins, visited his father's quarters carrying food. He lied to his father and received his brother's blessing.

When Esau visited his father and learned that Jacob deceived both him and Isaac, he vowed to kill Jacob. To save Jacob's life, Isaac sent him away to Laban's home in Haran.

Although Isaac and Rebekah loved each other, they both had problems being honest with each other and with other people regarding their marriage. Both had problems favoring a certain son, which brought about unnecessary sibling rivalry. Were the decisions that Isaac and Rebekah made the right ones? Or were there other choices they could have made but chose to ignore?

As you study this week's lesson, monitor the types of decisions you are making. Are they the right ones? Might there be some choices you are choosing to ignore?

**The lies did not end in
Gerar.**

The Most Faithful God Ever!

LOGOS

Deut. 7:9; Jer. 29:11; Heb. 13:8

In Genesis, we find a myriad of valiant, faithful, and illustrious superheroes, but as we grew up and read the stories ourselves, we discovered those heroes weren't so perfect after all. And because we realize they made mistakes, we might try to skip over those parts of their stories. Yet God inspired His people to write those accounts for a purpose. When we leave behind our childlike ideas of "perfect heroes" (besides Jesus Christ, of course), we will be able to see beyond the surface of the story and read the messages of encouragement God has for us in His Holy Word. As we keep studying the Word, let us also realize that it is not about superheroes. It is about a Super God.

Beyond Trusting: Obeying

When God makes a promise, He will keep it because He is faithful. In Genesis 26–28, we read two instances in which God made a promise to His people. In the first instance, Jacob is the recipient of God's promise. The Lord said to him, "Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham" (Gen. 26:3, NIV). Christians today are part of this promise, as we are invited to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:14–16).

"Through nature and revelation, through His providence, and by the influence of His Spirit, God speaks to us." Through these channels, we can learn how our heavenly Father and Friend speaks to us. He will never contradict Himself. He is God; therefore, He is perfect, and a perfect God makes perfect sense. So when He has promised us His blessing, the natural result is the fulfilling of His Word. As we see in the story of Isaac, "the Lord blessed him" (Gen. 26:12, NIV). As a friend, God can be trusted with our lives; as a father, He must be obeyed, even when we don't understand at the moment. What we do know is that He has our best interest at heart.

In the second instance, God told Rebekah that Jacob should receive the birthright (Gen. 25:23). Yet how easy it was for her to forget that promise. Jacob and Rebekah deceived Isaac in order for Jacob to get the birthright, and consequently

Many people today are rejecting the blessing of salvation in order to indulge in "little things."

the blessing of his father. They decided to trust themselves on this matter, just like many of us do when God doesn't seem to be doing anything.

Esau: Rejecting the Blessing

After the deception had taken place in chapter 27 of Genesis, Esau came into his father's tent to claim his blessing. Yet long ago he had forsaken it to gratify his appetite. Esau "represents those who lightly value the redemption purchased for them by Christ."²

Many people today are rejecting the blessing of salvation in order to indulge in "little things." They are forsaking heaven for money and the things it can buy; forsaking heaven for their girlfriend/boyfriend and temporary pleasures; for TV, the Internet, or things they know are not right for the people of God to watch or listen to.

Salvation is a blood-bought blessing, and even though we cannot see heaven, let us "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18, NIV).

The Vision: The Savior

Despite the fact that his own wrongdoing had brought upon himself guilt and distress, Jacob departed from home with the blessing of his parents. "He was so utterly lonely that he felt the need of protection from God as he had never felt it before. . . .

"But God did not forsake Jacob. His mercy was still extended to his erring, distrustful servant. The Lord compassionately revealed just what Jacob needed—a Saviour."³

Through the story of Jacob, we witness a dysfunctional family and an incredibly faithful God who is not willing to leave His servant, not willing to leave us until He has done what He has promised (Gen. 28:15). In Jacob's dream, we clearly see a picture of the plan of redemption. Jesus, the ladder, reconnects the world to the source of every blessing.

REACT

1. How would you respond to the question Are you saved?
2. How might you be distrustful of God?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 181.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

Monday
July 16

God, Save Me From Myself!

TESTIMONY

John 8:1–11

“Is there someone new?” My voice cracked with tears.

“What makes you say that?” Nick tried to say casually.

“It’s really over this time, isn’t it?” My heart broke into a thousand pieces.

When we first met, Nick and I had been instantly attracted to each other. So we dove headlong into a serious relationship. Although we tried to keep Christ in the center of our relationship, we soon pushed Him out as we decided to seek our own selfish desires. But now here I was—angry with God, and hating Him.

It took me some time, but gradually I realized it wasn’t God’s fault at all. My own poor choices had led me to despair. Yet without the God-given blessing of choice, where and what would we be? “Without freedom of choice, [man’s] obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced. There could have been no development of character. Such a course would have been contrary to God’s plan in dealing with the inhabitants of other worlds. It would have been unworthy of man as an intelligent being, and would have sustained Satan’s charge of God’s arbitrary rule.”¹

**“It’s really over this time,
isn’t it?”**

However, what recourse do we have when we make bad choices? “Man was not abandoned to the results of the evil he had chosen. In the sentence pronounced upon Satan was given an intimation of

redemption. ‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman,’ God said, ‘and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.’ Genesis 3:15. This sentence, spoken in the hearing of our first parents, was to them a promise. Before they heard of . . . the toil and sorrow that must be their portion, or of the dust to which they must return, they listened to words that could not fail of giving them hope. All that had been lost by yielding to Satan could be regained through Christ.”²

The next time you realize you’ve made a bad choice and need saving from yourself, claim this promise. While there might be consequences you will live with because of that choice, what a blessing it is to know that at Jesus’ feet we find forgiveness.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 49.

2. *Education*, p. 27.

Something About Trust and Honesty

EVIDENCE

Gen. 17:26–28

Trust and honesty are two principles that people have struggled with throughout the ages. Today, people constantly question whether they can trust one another, let alone God. There is infidelity in marriage and betrayal in the family and among friends. Are these issues passed from generation to generation genetically, or is it by example that these faults are learned? However we come by these traits, at least one family in the Bible shared these faults almost to the letter.

Abraham struggles with his faith in God. He has lied to the king in the land of Gerar by saying that Sarah is his sister (which is partially true) instead of his wife. He lies out of fear for his life. Granted, Abraham already has taken God's promises into his own hands, or rather the hands of Sarah, by taking a second wife to give him a son (Genesis 16). He later had such disbelief that he dared laugh at God when He promised to give him a son (Isaac) through his aging wife Sarah. The results of Abraham's lie almost wiped out an entire nation. Talk about influence!

Years later, in ironically the same way, Abraham's son, Isaac, tells the same people that his wife, Rebekah, is his sister. Once again, the people feared for their lives and found out the truth of the deception. Because of the power of influence and example, Isaac set the standard for his family to follow, and later his own wife and son deceived him in order to get what they wanted (something the Lord already had promised them He would give). And what a price they paid for their deceit.

Imagine how this family would have turned out had they decided to trust God to follow through with His promises. Fortunately for them, the Lord still upholds His end of a bargain, regardless of how we fail. Abraham's seed did end up being numbered like the stars, but how many of his spiritual descendants today follow his example of distrust and dishonesty?

Whether the world believes it or not, Christians need to understand that their actions have lasting consequences, some that affect many generations after them. Families can be raised based on principles of truth and honesty . . . or the deceptive principles that stem from the great deceiver, principles that can lead the family to its destruction.

Christians need to understand that their actions have lasting consequences.

Wednesday
July 18

Arranging for a Happy Ending

HOW-TO

Genesis 26–28

Rebekah came to Isaac in faith that God had chosen her to be his wife, and Isaac waited for her, trusting the wisdom of his father in sending his servant to select an appropriate bride. How could such a great beginning turn out so sour?

Perhaps the word *entitlement* best describes what happened. Isaac and Rebekah both knew they were heirs of God's promise to Abraham. Could this knowledge have made them too comfortable in their privileged position, aiding their decision to meddle with God's mysterious way of bringing His promises to fruition?

We, too, inhabit a special place in God's heart. But this favor does not give us license to become lenient in our dealings with others, ourselves, or our God.

God calls us to speak the truth in love. Who knows what went on in Isaac and Rebekah's household to create such a division between the brothers. Careless words from people we respect can have far-reaching effects. Regardless of our personal affinities, regardless of whether or not the individual to whom we're speaking

is a believer, our words should "always be with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6, NKJV). And who better to teach us what to say than the Spirit, the One who so lovingly interprets our human prayers to the Father (Rom. 8:26).

Our words should "always be with grace, seasoned with salt."

God calls us to run a race worthy of winning. Just because Isaac was a link in the chain of God's generation-spanning promise didn't mean he should stop bethering himself for the beauty of God's kingdom. Keeping open channels of communication between God and our hearts enables us not only to rest in our salvation but to become sanctified as well. And that sanctifying journey can prove to be just as fulfilling as the first one we took—the one where we first met Jesus at the Cross.

God calls us to uphold His name, even at the expense of our own. Many Christians live a one-sided faith—reveling (and rightly so!) in their saved, forgiven status—but using this forgiveness as license to forget that God is still a jealous God. He will not give His praise to another, even if that "other" is one of His precious, chosen children. Forgetting which came first, the potter or the clay, can bring disastrous results. Isaac and Rebekah reaped some of these results when they discontinued their tradition of trusting in (and waiting on) God to fulfill His promises. Let us learn from their sorrow and remember that we are each a part of a vast and God-honoring picture—not the complete and finished product.

And . . . and . . . and

OPINION

Gen. 26:12

Isaac and Rebekah's love story began with Isaac trusting in his father and with God guiding Abraham and his servant to find the right woman to fulfill God's oath. Our relationships also must be God-leading experiences. Does this mean that no mistakes or faulty characters will bring conflict to a relationship God has put together?

Preferences bring painful consequences to a home, and this family was no exception. Esau was Isaac's favorite son because both of them had a taste for wild game, and Rebekah loved Jacob because of his calm and peaceful character. The result was a divided home. By honestly reviewing our lives, we'll find that favoritism also hurts our lives and our connection with God. Our sinful desire to fulfill our selfish needs by relating lovingly and intimately only with those who "fit" our checklist puts our eternal lives in danger by bringing division into the family of God.

When a famine came to Isaac's land, God told him to stay in Gerar and that He would bless him. However, right after this encounter with God, he doubted. Read Genesis 26:7. Isaac had just talked with God, and now he was afraid again. Since he feared for his life, he denied his commitment to Rebekah.

This is the kind of love and forgiveness we humans can't understand.

What did God do with this conflicting couple that divided their own family and doubted God's guaranteed guidance? The Lord continued to bless him (see Gen. 26:12). This is the kind of love and forgiveness we humans can't understand.

You might have a long list like the following: I did this . . . and this . . . and this . . . but we must remember "not to be discouraged. . . [Christ] desires to restore you to Himself, to see His own purity and holiness reflected in you. And if you will but yield yourself to Him, He that hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward to the day of Jesus Christ."*

*Steps to Christ, p. 64.

Good News; Bad News

EXPLORATION

Rom. 3:23

CONCLUDE

The Bible gives the bad news as well as the good. In a sense, the “good news” in this week’s study is that even the people everybody is waiting to shake hands with when we get to heaven committed grievous errors and needed a Savior as much as we do. So we need not feel too bad. The bad news, though, is that even they bore the consequences of their actions, so we shouldn’t expect to escape unscathed from our own errors and indiscretions.

With repentance comes the assurance of eternal life. Sometimes, however, the earthly consequences are inescapable not only for ourselves but for our offspring.

CONSIDER

- Writing a paragraph on the relevance of Romans 3:23–26 for the story of Isaac’s family.
- Drawing a poster titled “Turning Bad News Into Good News” based on the story of Esau and Jacob.
- Spending an hour observing nature, preferably in a place where you can see both plants and animals, and reflecting on the often expressed thought that of all God’s creation, humanity “alone is void.”
- Reflecting on how Isaac fell into the same sin as his father, Abraham, and thinking of ways you can import into your own life the strengths rather than the weaknesses of your parents.
- Using what you have learned this week to make it easier to forgive yourself and those who, by their errors, may have caused you pain.
- Sitting down with a parent, grandparent, or other older relative and learning about some of the errors they made in rearing their children and what they would do differently if given a chance.

CONNECT

Heal the World: Begin With Yourself (A special youth edition of *The Ministry of Healing*), especially chapters 5, 11, 22, 23, and 29.

Jacob and Rachel: Labor of Love



“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 5:25

Liz sat, staring at the suitcase as Warren packed it. This wasn't happen. "Warren, why are you leaving?" Her husband looked up at her.

"You know why, Liz. If you won't trust me with your heart, I don't know how this can work," Warren stated plainly.

"I do love you. But do you think I feel safe giving my heart to a man who berates me to his friends? I don't need that kind of embarrassment. It hurts, Warren," Liz stated. Warren looked offended.

"Yeah? Well it hurts me when you tell your concerns to your parents or to your friends at church, but not to me. I'm your husband." Warren sighed. "Perhaps we'd better just drop it for now and talk about it later. We need time apart." Liz turned and closed her eyes, hoping to change what was going on. She prayed! It was what felt right. She asked God to help them. They had made mistakes and had hurt each other, but they loved one another.

**She prayed! It was what
felt right.**

"Warren, I know you're angry; but I think you're making a mistake in leaving." Liz turned and saw the rigid stance of her husband. "Please listen to me. I made a promise to you to be your wife, and I intend to keep it. I love you too much to let you walk away. I know I'm difficult at times, just like you are." Warren looked disgruntled, but he didn't interrupt. "I know you love me and are the one for me. I know that although you love me, it's difficult to live with me; but it's your labor of love. Just like I have labored with you; but we can change. We can fix what we have. I vowed in church to love you, and I want to keep that vow. We're worth more, or God wouldn't have put us together," Liz stated, moving toward Warren. She wrapped her arms around his neck. "Don't go. I want us to work this through." She waited with a prayer, and it was answered as Warren wrapped his arms around her.

"I prayed we wouldn't end, but I didn't see how to fix it. I still don't," Warren confessed as he pulled back and looked at Liz.

"I think we'll work at it. You, me, and God. We'll be all right," Liz said. Warren nodded.

Our labors of love are sometimes our truest testament to God's love for us and to those we are with. Unfortunately, marriages often are plagued with worldliness, but if we live and love with God in our unions, we can face the world in God's strength.

God's Rules for Marriage

EVIDENCE

Leviticus 18

It is odd to many of us today how closely related Jacob and Rachel were. Laban was Jacob's mother's brother, so Jacob and Rachel were . . . cousins!!! But in those days, it was somewhat encouraged, because the main concern was not to inter-marry outside one's faith.

While we may scrunch our noses at the idea of cousins marrying each other, we find in Leviticus that God was concerned about this as well. Leviticus gives us clear guidelines regarding godly marriages. Some of the things prohibited include sexual relations with a mother or sister (Leviticus 16). One reason the early believers needed instructions such as this was because these types of things were practiced in neighboring Canaanite communities, and God wanted His people to be set apart from them.*

These same issues seem much less prominent today, so what can we learn from them? One issue is that God cares about our individual lives. He cares about our everyday practices, and He cares about life-changing decisions, such as whom we marry. Often, we leave these important issues out of our conversations with God. We say things like "follow your heart," and then when we no longer feel as though we are "in love," we leave to start new relationships. The Bible, however, makes it clear that God cares about the decisions we make.

Sometimes we are so caught up in relationships, we do not want to let God in. But when we look at how carefully He guided the Israelites, we realize He had only their best interests in mind. Only God knows what is best for us, so don't just "follow your heart." Follow what God knows is best. The pain of leaving someone you know to be wrong for you may seem unbearable. But turn to God and know that He will guide you to the best way to live your life.

Don't just "follow your heart."

REACT

1. What can we learn from Jacob and Rachel about how to trust God?
2. What mistakes happen when we don't allow God to guide us?
3. What do you see in Leviticus 18 that is different from today? What parts of this chapter could we benefit from?

*Jim West, Th.D., "Ancient Israelite Marriage Customs," Quartz Hill School of Theology, <http://www.theology.edu/marriage.htm>.

Monday
July 23

When Love Hurts

LOGOS

Genesis 29–31; 33:1–3; 48:1–7

Love Awakened (Gen. 29:14–19)

After deceiving his father and stealing Esau's birthright, Jacob fled from his brother's wrath. The trip to Haran was more than five hundred miles. And on the way, he encountered God at Bethel, where God announced that He would indeed fulfill His promises to Abraham and Isaac through Jacob—the promise that the world would be blessed through their offspring (Gen. 28:13–15).

Upon arriving in Haran, Jacob met his cousin Rachel at a well, where he helped Rachel water her sheep. For Jacob, it was almost love at first sight. And Genesis 29 gives us some insight into the nature of love through the love Jacob had for Rachel. First, Jacob was hungry for companionship. He had fled home and family and had treasured in his heart the promise that God would bring him back to his home. Upon seeing Rachel, he kissed her and began sobbing (Gen. 29:11, 12).

He had come to Haran to find a wife.

And surely the lonely days and nights along the way had heightened his need for companionship. He quickly "fell" for Rachel, asking for

Jacob's family was in trouble.

her hand in marriage after just one month (Gen. 29:14–18).

Second, he was physically attracted to Rachel (Gen. 29:17). The description of her beauty includes both her appearance and her form. One version states that "Leah had pretty eyes, but Rachel was beautiful in every way, with a lovely face and shapely figure" (Gen. 29:18, NLT).

And third, he valued her. He loved her so much, he was willing to work for her for seven years. His love was so great that the seven years seemed like a few days (Gen. 29:18–20).

The Family Feud(s) (Gen. 29:21–31)

One of the most obvious lessons from Jacob and Rachel's marriage is the dangers and hurt created by polygamy and adultery. Straying from God's original plan for marriage inevitably leads to jealousy, deception, hurt, bitterness, favoritism, and distrust—certainly not the building blocks for a healthy marriage. And the dysfunction affects the entire family!

From the very beginning, Jacob's family was in trouble. Soon Leah became pregnant and the feeling, if not the stated sentiment, is that her pregnancy is God's

response to Jacob's love for Rachel and his displeasure with Leah. And Rachel's barrenness is her punishment.

Woven throughout the story is the feud between Jacob and Laban. And there is an interesting theme of the sower reaping what he has sown. In Laban's treatment regarding his son-in-law, we see the deceiver becoming the deceived and the thief becoming the "victim." The second in line was being reminded of the rights of the first in line. And above all, there is the reminder that humans can't fulfill God's promises through their own methods (Gen. 30:1, 2).

Another feud occurs when Jacob, slow to learn his lesson, used trickery and deceit to gain wealth so he could return home. At the same time, Laban and his sons used stealth and deception to try to keep him from prospering so he would have to stay in Haran in order to increase Laban's wealth. Distrust and fear grew to the point where Jacob used deceit and stole out of town. In the process, we witness one other unresolved family issue—Rachel stealing her father's idols. The differences in religion seem never to have been addressed, or at least never resolved, and Rachel deceived both her husband and her father.

Love Sustained (Gen. 33:1–3; 48:1–7)

That Jacob always loved Rachel deeply is seen in two events. The first occurred when Jacob was about to meet Esau. In preparation, he sent his servants first, then the maidservants and their children, then Leah and her children, and finally Rachel and Joseph (Gen. 33:1–3). The second took place in Egypt when Jacob was on his deathbed. In recounting the promises of God and God's involvement in his life, Jacob expressed the sorrow he experienced at the death of his beloved Rachel and over the fact that she was buried alone (Gen. 48:1–7).

REACT

1. How did Rachel's hope of producing children prevent her from accepting Jacob's love? How can we apply this lesson today?
2. What does this story teach us about the positive and negative impacts of our families upon our own marriages?
3. How can we prevent the mistakes of previous generations from being made by future generations?
4. How do God's interactions with families give us hope for our families?

Tuesday
July 24

“Love at First Sight”

TESTIMONY

Ps. 20:4; Prov. 16:9; Eph. 5:25

“Seven years of faithful service Jacob gave for Rachel, and the years that he served ‘seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.’ But the selfish and grasping Laban, desiring to retain so valuable a helper, practiced a cruel deception in substituting Leah for Rachel. The fact that Leah herself was a party to the cheat, caused Jacob to feel that he could not love her. His indignant rebuke to Laban was met with the offer of Rachel for another seven years’ service. But the father insisted that Leah should not be discarded, since this would bring disgrace upon the family. Jacob was thus placed in a most painful and trying position; he finally decided to retain Leah and marry Rachel. Rachel was ever the one best loved; but his preference for her excited envy and jealousy, and his life was embittered by the rivalry between the sister-wives.”¹ Once the sister-wives had children, there was jealousy even among them. Even after Rachel died, Jacob loved Rachel’s children more than the others. “But even this affection was to become a

“Rachel was ever the one
best loved. . . .”

cause of trouble and sorrow. Jacob unwisely manifested his preference for Joseph, and this excited the jealousy of his other sons.”² His brothers sold Joseph into slavery and told their father that he had been killed

by a wild animal. But God watched over him, and years later, Joseph became a powerful man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. He ended up saving his whole family from a terrible famine.

Many years passed, and Jacob remembered how “twice seven years’ service he had rendered for [Rachel’s] sake, and his love had made the toil but light. How deep and abiding that love had been, was shown when long afterward, as Jacob in Egypt lay near his death, Joseph came to visit his father, and the aged patriarch, glancing back upon his own life, said, ‘As for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath.’ Genesis 48:7. In the family history of his long and troubled life the loss of Rachel was alone recalled.”³

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 189, 190.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

How to Be More Like Him

HOW-TO

1 Chron. 7:35; 28:9

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines *dedication* as “selfless devotion.” Jacob’s love for Rachel is a good example of this definition. It is said in the story of Jacob that he truly loved Rachel. The Bible says that the long, arduous years Jacob worked in order to be with Rachel seemed but a few days. It was true love Jacob felt for Rachel, just like the love God has for us. The ultimate act of God’s selfless devotion to us is seen in the sacrifice of His only Son. As God gave His only Son, and as Jacob worked so arduously to be with Rachel, so we must dedicate ourselves to draw close to the Lord. But God does not leave us to our own devices to do so. Here are ways He has given us to help us come close to Him.

Prayer. Talk to God about your everyday situations. Through prayer, God allows us to connect with Him. Many times we rush through the day, forgetting to pray. In Matthew 6 Jesus explains what prayer is.

Trust. Trust the Lord and the plans He has for you. Before you and me, before the invention of the wheel, before the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, God was there. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Rev. 1:8). He is all knowing and all powerful. So let us trust Him. God has shown throughout the ages just how much He loves us. We need to learn to let things work out the way He planned them.

Thankfulness. Many times we just complain about all we have to do or about all that is going wrong in our lives. Instead, let us try to thank the Lord for the little ways He helps us to succeed. Psalm 147 begins with “praise the Lord.” In reading this psalm, one can come to terms with the truth that all things happen for a reason.

It was true love Jacob felt for Rachel, just like the love God has for us.

REACT

1. In what ways are the three items above related?
2. Because they are related, it seems that it would be easy for us to apply them to our lives. So why is it often hard to do just that?
3. Jacob’s love for Rachel helps us understand God’s love for us. What other stories in the Bible help us understand God’s relationship to us?

“What’s Love Got to Do With It . . . ?”

OPINION

Gen. 29:20

Many times I’ve heard that love doesn’t pay the bills or put food on the table; that love cannot and should not be the only reason to get married. However, love is what caused Jacob and Rachel to get married. It was what gave Jacob hope and determination. It is true that Jacob made provisions for showing that he was worthy of providing for Rachel. In fact, the Spirit of Prophecy even tells us about the type of provision to be made: “But provision was made to test those who had nothing to pay for a wife. They were permitted to labor for the father whose daughter they loved, the length of time being regulated by the value of the dowry required.”¹

What Jacob and Rachel did not think through was what happens after the “I dos.” We see later that they did many selfish things to get what they wanted and what they thought they needed. They based their love on things rather than on the Lord. Yes, Jacob was blessed because of his earlier covenant with God; but when it came to his household, we see little or no control over what occurred.

God sanctioned marriage. It is not a step to be taken lightly. “It is a blessing wherever marriage is entered into in the fear of God and with due consideration for its responsibilities.”² When couples keep God at the center of their lives individually and collectively, they work harder at developing their physical, mental, and spiritual

What Jacob and Rachel did not think through was what happens after the “I dos.”

well-being. “It is only in Christ that a marriage can be safely formed. Human love should draw its closest bonds from divine love.”³ When we put God in the center of our life, love has everything to do with it.

REACT

What elements should two people consider when contemplating becoming a couple?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 189.

2. *Heal the World: Begin With Yourself*, p. 129 (the youth version of *The Ministry of Healing*).

3. *Ibid.*

Jacob and Rachel: A Labor of Love

EXPLORATION

Rom. 12:3; Eph. 5:28–31; Phil. 2:6–8

CONCLUDE

This is not the place to be logical; this is not a topic to intellectualize. This is a place to dig deeply into your heart, deeper than ever before. “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34, NIV). Your marriage relationship (whether potential or existing) has eternity riding on it—your eternity, your spouse’s, your children’s. This is way too huge to trivialize, to relegate to the common, ordinary, everyday life you live.

CONSIDER

- Exploring washes with black and white paint. How much (or little) black paint does it take to make a visible change in white paint? What about the union of a husband and wife in marriage? How much (or little) sin does it take to harm the relationship?
- Playing two notes an octave apart on a keyboard. One half-step at a time, play one note toward the other until the notes are in unison. Where do the notes stop sounding harmonious and start sounding dissonant? Consider the role of distance and unity in relationships.
- Finding a Christian professional therapist and booking a session (or more) to explore who you are as you look toward marriage (if you are single) or to improve the marriage you have.
- Exploring how you feel about marriage, and then in your journal, writing at least two pages of your thoughts and feelings. For married people, think back to when you “knew” this was “the one” you would marry. How did you know? What were your feelings?

CONNECT

J. Keith Miller, *Compelled to Control: Recovering Intimacy in Broken Relationships*; Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker, *Every Man’s Marriage: Every Man’s Guide to Winning the Heart of a Woman*; Willard F. Harley Jr., *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*.

Recordings: Twila Paris, “Bonded Together”; Michael Card, “Arise, My Love.”

Moses and Zipporah: Relating With Relations



**“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time”
(Heb. 11:24, 25, NIV).**

First-Class Worthiness

INTRODUCTION

Exod. 2:17, 21, 22; Ps. 40:1-3

On an airplane, there are stereotypical “first-class” people. They are the well-dressed, the perfectly done-up people and the professional, suited business executives. However, there are also those who defy the stereotypes. Recently, on a flight from Taipei to the United States, there was one such exception. This exception was a girl who usually flew economy. She was a “second-class” flyer. But there she was in first class. She was well aware of the stereotypes about who sat where, and she was certain that she stuck out like a sore thumb. After all, she didn’t know the first thing about plush seats, the fancy glasses of water, the warm cloths to wipe away traveling grime, and the multicourse meals that were set before her by the flight attendants. It was all so foreign.

She felt out of place and was convinced that at any moment the flight attendant would notice the mistake that had been made and request that she move to a seat better suited to her. Yet no such request came. Instead, the superb service continued. It was as though the flight attendants didn’t recognize that she was out of place.

Both marriage and this flight experience portray God’s love. Like the passenger who was certain she didn’t belong and who struggled

She felt out of place.

with first-class service, God’s love is often similarly received. He blesses us abundantly in ways we don’t deserve or understand. We look at how He so humbly serves us, and we are positive that we are not worthy of such grandeur. In a way, we say, “I know what I deserve. I’m second class. It’s too good to be true. I’m bound to be disappointed. Tell me, and I’ll return to where I belong.” Yet God doesn’t hear our plea to return to our comfort zone. He continues to bless us, to serve us. It’s uncomfortable, undeserved, yet a worthy task in His eyes.

This week, we will study Moses and Zipporah’s relationship. The Bible says little about Moses’ mysterious spouse. Her actions show that she recognized Moses’ strengths—strengths that made him worthy to be called by God as a leader. Like marriage and flying, sometimes others recognize first-class worthiness when all we’ve ever seen in ourselves is second-class packaging.

Sunday
July 29

Changing the Course of Your Life

LOGOS

Exodus 2-4; 18:1-27; Num. 12:1-4

The Same Starting Point (Exod. 2:1-10)

In Exodus 2:1-10, Moses is in the same state each one of us is in when we enter the world—that of a helpless infant. And this helpless baby is doomed to a terrible fate unless someone intervenes. His mother hides him for as long as she can before she sets him in a basket, places the basket in the Nile, and instructs her daughter to watch. Her hope takes root in the mercy of Pharaoh's daughter, who recognizes that this is a Hebrew child who will be killed unless she intervenes. Moses' sister approaches her and offers to help. Through a series of actions—all done by others—Moses is spared.

When we consider that this is a fallen world in which opportunities for sin abound, and when we consider that “all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:22-24, NIV), then we realize that without God's grace, we all would be in jeopardy the same as the Hebrew infant boys. But like Moses, God has come to us in our helplessness, to give us another chance. Like the slave child who became a member of the royal family, we too were once slaves to sin but were given the rights to God's kingdom.

A Choice to Make (Exod. 2:11-25)

Unlike the kingdom of heaven, Pharaoh's kingdom was not a holy one. Moses' own people were Pharaoh's slaves. Moses was so angered by the abuse they suffered that he killed a man (Exod. 2:11, 12). The sentiment came from a desire to see justice, but it became a cause for great trouble. Moses had to flee to avoid being killed by Pharaoh, who discovered what he had done.

But once again, God's providence saved Moses. Upon arriving in Midian, he sat by a well, where the daughters of a priest came to draw water. The women were chased away by other shepherds, so Moses came to their rescue. The father of these young women was so impressed by his actions that he offered his daughter Zipporah to Moses. They were married and had a son.

Somewhere in his journey, Moses made a conscious decision to pursue justice over pleasure. That choice took him down a very different path. If he had not made that journey, he never would have met Zipporah.

The Call of God (Exodus 3:1–4:17)

God first appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Exod. 3:5). God wants us to realize that He is not like this world, which enslaves some people while elevating others. God is holy, which means “separate, other worldly.” From His first encounter with Moses, God’s intent was to demonstrate that He was a God of justice and compassion (Exodus 3:7, 8, 10).

God’s call on Moses’ life is not without danger. Moses fled the king to spare his own life, and now God is asking him to return. Even though there is a new king (Exod. 2:23), the danger is still the same, and Moses knows it. He offers up excuse after excuse and question after question, until finally God becomes angry with Moses. For every one of Moses’ excuses, God has a solution to remind him that He is God and that He will be with Moses. God wants Moses to see that He can make a way even when things seem impossible.

A Different Path (Exod. 4:18–31)

The few times we see Zipporah, we see that her faith is strong and that her devotion to Moses keeps him and his legacy alive. When she first appears, we learn that she is the daughter of a priest (Exod. 2:16). So we know she has been raised in a godly home. We first see her deep understanding of God’s ways when she spares her husband’s life from God’s hand. For reasons unknown to us, God had decided to take Moses’ life. But

God’s call on Moses’ life is not without danger.

Zipporah took the foreskin of her son and touched it to Moses’ feet, saying, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me” (NIV). Verse 26 explains that this expression refers to circumcision. Throughout the Old Testament, circumcision depicts the idea of holiness. In effect, Zipporah was saying that Moses had come to her only through the providence of God. In saying that he was a “bridegroom of blood” to her, she was saying that their marriage was holy and unlike the marriages of the world. It would have never happened except that Moses made a choice to follow the way of justice rather than the way of pleasure.

Moses goes to the Israelites, and the course of his life is forever changed. Through one act of faith after another, he leads the Israelites out of slavery under God’s direction, and eventually he follows God far enough to see the Promised Land (Exod. 3:8; Deut. 34:4).

REACT

Who are some of the godly people in your life that you have met as a result of God’s providence? How have those people helped or guided you?

Monday
July 30

Lessons in Leadership

TESTIMONY

Exodus 18

Moses' relationship with Zipporah and her father provided two essential lessons for his ministry. The first—during his time in Midian—was how to lead relying on God's strength alone.

"The Lord directed [Moses'] course, and he found a home with Jethro, the priest and prince of Midian, who was also a worshiper of God. After a time Moses married one of the daughters of Jethro; and here, in the service of his father-in-law, as keeper of his flocks, he remained forty years.

"... Moses was not prepared for his great work. He had yet to learn . . . not to rely upon human strength or wisdom, but upon the power of God for the fulfillment of His promises. And there were other lessons that, amid the solitude of the mountains, Moses was to receive. In the school of self-denial and hardship he was to learn patience, to temper his passions. Before he could govern wisely, he must be trained to obey. His own heart must be fully in harmony with God before he could teach the knowledge of His will to Israel. By his own experience he must be prepared to exercise a fatherly care over all who needed his help.

**"Moses was not prepared
for his great work."**

"Man would have dispensed with that long period of toil and obscurity, deeming it a great loss of time. But Infinite Wisdom called him who was

to become the leader of his people to spend forty years in the humble work of a shepherd. The habits of caretaking, of self-forgetfulness and tender solicitude for his flock, thus developed, would prepare him to become the compassionate, long-suffering shepherd of Israel. No advantage that human training or culture could bestow, could be a substitute for this experience."¹

The second lesson Zipporah and Jethro provided Moses was that the burden of leadership should not be carried alone: "When Zipporah rejoined her husband in the wilderness, she saw that his burdens were wearing away his strength, and she made known her fears to Jethro, who suggested measures for his relief."²

This relief was the suggestion to share the responsibility of leadership (see Exod. 18:13–23), thus enabling Moses to better fulfill his ministry by having a clearer picture of God's purpose.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 247, 248.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

Severed Relations

EVIDENCE

Exod. 4:24–26

When two people marry each other, they must blend their expectations of what is normal for everyday life. They may differ on ways to celebrate holidays or where to put things in the bathroom. We don't know whether Moses and Zipporah experienced these smaller issues, but the Bible does record how they dealt with the larger ones they faced.

Moses came from a Hebrew and Egyptian background. He was schooled in the worldly wisdom of the ruling class, as well as in the faith of those who were enslaved. Zipporah, however, came from a priestly, God-fearing desert family whose lives were simple and down-to-earth. They did worship the one true God, but they did not necessarily share the same customs as the Israelites.

When Moses and Zipporah's first child was born, Moses, as an Israelite, believed firmly in circumcision as the mark of the covenant promise (Gen. 17:10). Zipporah thought the custom barbaric. However, as new parents they wanted to "do it right," and Moses was resolute about the importance of this act. Thus, Zipporah acquiesced.

**Zipporah thought the
custom barbaric.**

It was a different story when Eliezer was born. Zipporah, remembering her first son's pain from what she saw as a needless ritual, resisted. Moses, caught between his belief from a faraway people he might never see again and the strong feelings of his wife, chose not to circumcise his second child.* Thus he kept peace and happiness in his marriage.

That Moses would go against one of his beliefs to make her happy must have made quite an impact on Zipporah. When she and their sons were traveling back to Egypt with Moses, the angel of the Lord tried to kill Moses. Zipporah immediately knew why. The custom she had thought so barbaric was, in reality, quite important to the God they both worshiped. She realized that Moses' compromise for her sake was now endangering his life. So she seized a knife and performed the delayed circumcision.

Zipporah's quick action saved her husband's life and cemented their relationship. Moses had compromised when it was important to his wife, and Zipporah put aside her prejudices when it was important to her husband.

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 256.

Respect Goes Both Ways

HOW-TO

Exod. 4:18, 19; Num. 12:1-4

When Moses had to flee the life he knew, he found himself in Midian. While there, Jethro's family gave him shelter, a job, and a wife. By the time God called Moses to return to Egypt, he had lived in Midian for 40 years. Before leaving, he sought Jethro's permission to return to Egypt—even when Moses was 80 years old, he still respected his father-in-law.

In the Western world, you seldom see signs of respect as people saw 100 or even 50 years ago. In Asia, respect is much more visible. In Thailand, the respectful way to greet someone is to say "Wai" (pronounced *why*). While putting one's palms together about mouth level, a person will give a slight bow to the other person. It is also a sign of respect to say "Wai" back.

The story of Moses and Zipporah can teach us how to become more respectful to neighbors, family, and strangers.

Really listen. Rarely do we like to be told we are doing something the wrong way. We are sure our way is the right way. We are so caught up in our own lives

that we don't take the time to listen. Moses, who had the utmost respect for Jethro, listened when Jethro said to delegate the judging to others. Moses was willing to listen. Are you?

Accept a person's cultural and religious differences. Most countries

are fairly mixed when it comes to religions and cultures. Even in countries where everyone has the same skin color, there are differences in how a person is built or in how they worship. Miriam and Aaron complained about Moses' leadership using Zipporah as an excuse, because she was different and not of their "world" (Num. 12:1, 2). Thus, she was a scapegoat for their complaints. They chose to be disrespectful to Zipporah by not accepting her, but in doing so, they also were disrespectful to Moses. How accepting are you of your neighbor?

Compromise. Each person brings to a relationship their own ideas and customs. Sometimes these ideas and customs clash with those of the other person in the relationship. But each person has to be willing to compromise to make the relationship work. Zipporah was willing to compromise on her belief about circumcision in order to save her husband. What are you willing to give up to make your relationships work?

Nobody Told Him Whom to Marry

OPINION

Exod. 18:24; Num. 12:1–15

Given today's standard advice to marry someone from the same religion, race, culture, and social status, we are amazed that Moses chose a partner who scarcely fit in any of those categories.

In an ironic twist of fate, Moses, prince of Egypt, came through the desert with nothing. On the merits that Moses was a gentleman and hard worker, Jethro permitted him to marry Zipporah, accepting Moses as a son-in-law apparently without reservations. Likewise, it was inconsequential to Moses that Zipporah, while a descendant of Abraham through his wife Keturah, was not a child of the covenant that God renewed with Isaac and Jacob. Neither was he concerned that her skin was darker or that she was culturally unlike him. Apparently, no significant problems arose for the couple until the issue of circumcision came along—an issue God helped Zipporah to view differently.

The worst lay ahead when Moses' family objected to Zipporah. She was not descended from Isaac and Jacob. She didn't know the culture of the enslaved Hebrews. She didn't look the same. And worse, Moses was no longer the brother they had known. Twenty-eight years as a prince and 40 years as a shepherd had changed him. He had an adopted family and had accepted Jethro's advice without consulting his own brother and sister.

It appears that Zipporah made an effort not to offend them. She and Moses stayed together despite the animosity they faced from his siblings. Zipporah respected Miriam and Aaron, even though they did not reciprocate. Moses and Zipporah remained a stellar couple until death parted them.

**It appears that Zipporah
made an effort not to
offend them.**

REACT

1. How would you react to a family member marrying someone you thought was an unacceptable partner?
2. Knowing the difficulties that Moses and Zipporah faced, would you condone or condemn a couple based on differing religions, skin tones, social status, or culture? Why or why not?

Relationships That Work

EXPLORATION

Exod. 2:15–25

CONCLUDE

We live on relationships. We crave relationships. We need relationships. People who don't have friends have a huge void of emptiness within, leaving them nowhere to turn for advice, help, and joy and for many other relational needs we all have as humans.

In any relationship, there needs to be respect, trust, support, honesty, accountability, unselfishness, and communication. Look at the relationships you have with your friends or your spouse, and you'll find that these characteristics are essential to create, maintain, and keep a relationship strong.

CONSIDER

- Creating an image through a visual medium (drawing, painting, photography, etc.) that would illustrate the effects of a working relationship. Perhaps work with two colors, getting them to blend and transition from one to the other.
- Analyzing relationships in the Bible, making a list of the characteristics that reflect strengths and weaknesses of those relationships.
- Dramatizing with a friend for one of the younger division Sabbath Schools in your church the qualities of a good relationship.
- Talking with your best friend about why your relationship has lasted as long as it has. Then pray with that person, thanking God for him or her.
- Writing a journal about the day-to-day relationships you have and what you can do through Christ to grow those relationships into soul-winning relationships.
- Studying the relationships that animals have with one another to see what we can learn from them.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chaps. 1–7.

Philip G. Samaan, *Christ's Way of Reaching People*.

Eddie L. Long, *What a Man Wants, What a Woman Needs*.

Samson and His Women: The Folly of Passion



“For all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:16, NRSV).

Samson and His Women: The Folly of Passion

INTRODUCTION

Judges 14–16

I can recall many late nights in college spent with dear girlfriends, talking each other through struggles and temptations regarding the opposite sex. I imagine that even my guy friends occasionally talked to each other after experiencing the confusion of female mixed messages or the icy sting of rejection.

The ups and downs of romantic passions threaten to capsize us as we navigate the stormy seas of our lovesick culture. At times, it's easy to feel out of control amid the crashing emotional waves and the torrential raging of our hormones. What makes it so hard to stay pure? Could it be that we've adjusted ourselves to the storm around us and that we've accepted our sex-crazed society as normal?

Christian limits on lifestyle seem harsh in comparison to the relativism that dominates most of the world's thinking. Even in Samson's time, the standards God called His people to were so completely opposite

The boundaries God has set for us really are there to set us free.

to those of the hedonistic Philistine majority that any mix between the two cultures was bound to cause an explosion. Samson was that explosion. The only problem is, he *had* an opportunity, a high calling, to live his life as God's explosion. But his choices allowed him to fulfill his calling

only through his death. It may seem ironic to our human sensibilities, but the boundaries God has set for us really are there to set us free.

Samson, though unrivaled in physical prowess and stamina, lacked the fortitude for purity that could have served as a bridle on his sex drive. His brute strength enabled him to uproot heavy gates and carry them out of town, yet he remained a prisoner behind the walls of lust and pride. How often do we settle for lives lived in bondage to our crazed sexual appetites when we have access to a strength the same as Samson's—the power of God's Spirit?

As we study the tragedy of Samson's life, we can observe his mistakes and can learn how to use his self-ordained enslavement as a mirror for our own experience. Do we, like Samson, seek fulfillment and affirmation in sexual intimacy—affirmation and fulfillment only God can provide? In what ways do we give sin license to control us?

As you study this week's lesson, pray for the courage to turn away from sin now, while you are still young and free to live an explosive life for God.

The "Not Quite" Nazirite

EVIDENCE

Judges 13–16

Although specific archaeological evidence for the existence of Samson has not yet been unearthed, there are sufficient parameters to establish his account as believable. The regions where his exploits took place make sense geographically. Additionally, much of the activity of the period of the judges can be established outside of the Bible from the records of surrounding events and neighboring tribes. Studies regarding the Nazirite vow further establish the account of Samson as fact. The cultural contributions of the Nazirites are consistent with what many view as a key to substantiating the facts of Samson's infamous legacy.

The Nazirite vow that provides the backdrop for the adventures of Samson finds its root in the Hebrew word *nazar*, meaning "called out." Samson's strength was first rooted in his peculiarity. Although there are no other accounts of Nazirites who could do such things as slay a lion barehanded (Judges 14:16), their lifestyle was a lesson in consistent witness. The Nazirite choices of what to eat and how they looked were signal efforts in turning the eyes of the waning faithful to the eternal God. This was an important mission that deeply contrasted with a morality that was governed by the gods of neighboring powers. Samson's efforts to circumvent his vow revealed a compartmentalization that appears even in our times. Samson could have chimed in with a popular screen star in early Hollywood who is attributed with the notion that "when I'm good, I'm very good, and when I'm bad, I'm very bad." Samson believed that his heroics to spearhead a people in need of an effective judge demanded reward. No one was able to convince him that his reward was his success as a judge and that his success as a judge did not warrant reward.

**Our church's calling as a
remnant reaps its own
reward.**

The *nazar* experience bears a literary proximity to the ecclesia that provides the context for our church. Our church's calling as a remnant reaps its own reward, both immediate and eternal. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9, NIV).

Monday
August 6

Samson and His Lusts: O Foolish, Foolish Heart!

LOGOS

Judges 14–16

Samson's story unfolds from the pages of biblical history as the stuff of poems and plays. But beyond making for great drama, his experience looms as a warning for us to guard our hearts as well as our physical purity when dating, and to choose carefully the person we will marry.

Samson, a Man of Contrasts (Judges 14–16)

God chose Samson from before his birth to "begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines" (Judg. 13:5, NIV). Yet, the opening verse of Judges 14 would indicate that instead of positioning himself as a deliverer, Samson proposes to deliver himself up to the enemy by insisting on marrying a Philistine woman. He ignores God's instruction to the Israelites when He brought them into the Promised

Land—not to intermarry with the tribes of people in the land nor to mix themselves up in their pagan lifestyles (see Deut. 7:3). In his pursuit to appease his lusts, Samson stretches his Nazirite vow beyond its limits.

The saying goes, "Love is blind." And in Samson's case it surely must have been.

The Nazirite vow involved three requirements: (1) Don't eat grapes or drink wine; (2) don't go near a corpse, not even the corpse of a relative; and (3) don't cut your hair. The importance of this vow was its physical demonstration of consecration to God and shunning worldliness.

The Philistines had ruled the Israelites for 40 years, and to ensure peaceful relations with them, the Israelites were dangerously close to immersing themselves in Philistine culture and philosophy. God chose Samson to drive a wedge between the Israelites and the Philistines. Marrying a Philistine woman, then, would certainly seem at cross-purposes with his calling!

The Lion, the Wench, and the Wardrobe (Judges 14; 15)

Before the wedding, Samson is attacked by a lion and kills it with his bare hands. That encounter sets the stage for the tragedy in the first of Samson's love affairs. On his way to his wedding, he passes the carcass of that lion and finds a honeycomb inside it. He scoops out the honey and eats some, breaking his Nazirite vow. During the festivities, Samson offers a riddle with a wager to the 30

male guests. Since the riddle is about his private encounter, there is no way the men could guess the answer (Judg. 14:14). The wager guarantees him a new wardrobe—one garment from each of the men. If he loses, he must give each of them a garment. The stakes are high, but a sure bet for Samson. Thanks to his bride, the answer to his riddle is revealed, and he loses his wager.

Ironically, Samson never fulfills his sexual desire for his bride. He becomes angry and set on revenge. He kills 30 Philistines for their garments in order to honor the bet. After that, he returns to his parents' home without his wife (Judg. 14:19, 20). When he cools off and returns for her, it's too late. She has been married to the best man at his wedding. Samson's response is revenge—destruction of an entire wheat harvest and the death of 1,000 Philistine men. God's Spirit came upon Samson, giving him supernatural courage and strength to fight the Philistines single-handedly. God did not abandon Samson despite his spiritual failures.

Samson's Philandering and God's Faithfulness (Judges 16)

As if Samson's first experience with forbidden love wasn't enough, what follows is even more dramatic. First Samson hooks up with a prostitute and nearly gets himself captured by the Philistines in the middle of the night. But filled with spiritual insight and power, Samson sneaks out of the city, taking with him the gates of Gaza, carrying them up to the top of Mount Hebron (Israelite territory)!

The coupling of Samson and Delilah is perhaps the most reckless love affair recorded in Scripture. Though he fell in love with her, her interest in him was mainly for the financial reward she would reap once she turned a powerless Samson over to the Philistines. The saying goes, "Love is blind." And in Samson's case it surely must have been. She lied to him three times to get the secret of his power. After the first time, he should have run from her, because she reenacted the scenario exactly as he suggested when he answered her question about what would strip him of his supernatural power. Why Samson expected to fall asleep in Delilah's presence and wake up with his hair is beyond comprehension.

And so the "deliverer" is delivered into the hands of his enemies. The greatest irony of all is that this man who was blinded by women actually had his eyes gouged out so that he would never again be able to look at them.

The good news in this sad saga is that when Samson reached the end of himself, God did not fail to strengthen him. Judges 16 records that in his death, Samson killed more Philistines than during his whole lifetime. Samson's tragic ending was one of his own making. But God was still gracious to him.

REACT

1. Why is it important for us to date people of our own faith? (See 2 Cor. 6:14.)
2. What about the way you live might be at cross-purposes with God's will?
3. Beyond following a healthful Adventist lifestyle (similar to Nazirite vows), how can our conduct in our relationships testify to God's grace and power?

Saying "I Do" to an Unbeliever?

TESTIMONY

Rom. 12:2

Instead of marrying a fellow believer and enjoying a pure marriage ordained by God, Samson married a lass from a heathen nation. "Marriage between believers and unbelievers is forbidden by God. But too often the unconverted heart follows its own desires, and marriages unsanctioned by God are formed. . . . Those who are ruled by passion and impulse will have a bitter harvest to reap in this life, and their course may result in the loss of their souls."¹ Sounds like Samson's relationship, doesn't it?

"Those who profess the truth trample on the will of God in marrying unbelievers; they lose His favor and make bitter work for repentance. The unbelieving may possess an excellent moral character, but the fact that he or she has not answered to the claims of God and has neglected so great salvation is sufficient reason why such a union should not be consummated. The character of the unbelieving may be similar to that of the young man to whom Jesus addressed the words, 'One

thing thou lackest'; that was the one thing needful."²

**God wants much better for
us.**

Even when we are in a relationship that is ungodly, God does not abandon us. Instead, he provides a way of escape from the situation.

"Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. Your spirit will be braced for endurance. The way will be open for you to disentangle yourself from embarrassment and difficulty. The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon your Burden Bearer."³

God wants much better for us. "Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children."⁴

1. *The Adventist Home*, p. 63.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 72.

4. *Education*, p. 18.

How to Follow God's Will

HOW-TO

Rom. 12:2; James 4:7, 8

God gave Samson great physical strength and courage and made a covenant with him. But Samson turned to his own powers to defeat his enemies; he gave in to his passion for women; and he did not keep his promise to God.

Samson knew God's will, yet he chose not to follow it. Today we are going to look at how God has a plan for each of us and how we can stay close to Him so we will know His will for our lives.

Remember that God does indeed have a plan for you. God has a plan for you, and He wants to share it with you. He will take care of you and help you to succeed (Jer. 29:11).

Submit your will to God. When you let God take control of your life, He will show you step by step what He has in store for you. If you dedicate your life to the Lord, He will lead you (James 4:7, 8).

Trust that God will lead. God knows everything from the beginning to the end. You must trust Him to lead and take care of you. You must also trust Him through all of your trials (Prov. 3:5, 6; Rev. 22:13).

Know that God will be there to help when you make mistakes. Following the will of God will not

always be easy. But God will help you to persevere through the tough times, and your faith will be stronger in the end (James 1:2, 3).

Remember that God will give you eternal life if you have a relationship with Him and serve Him. God sent His Son to die for you. If you accept Him as your Savior and give your life to Him, He will give you eternal life. Then you will spend eternity with Him, the God whom you love and serve (Matt. 7:21; John 3:16).

God knows what is best for you, and He has a purpose for your life. He longs to be in a relationship with you and to save you. He sent His Son to die for you. Accept that sacrifice, and give your life to God. It will be the best decision you ever make.

**God will help you to
persevere through the
tough times.**

The Other Side of the Fence

OPINION

1 Cor. 10:13

I believe Samson had a clear understanding of God, and that he was God's servant. For 20 years, he served as a judge of the people of Israel. And every time he fought against the Philistines, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (e.g., Judg. 15:14, 15). But when it came to his love affairs, he relinquished all common sense.

It is apparent that this man knew God's power. He boldly claimed it and never doubted it! That being the case, why did he not claim that same power when it came to his sexual desires, knowing that his choices were not according to God's will for him? I can only conclude that Samson had no intention of giving God dominion over his lust.

The truth is, our lustful passion is one chamber of the heart we often *do not* want God to have access to. And no amount of godly service or manner of truth can persuade us to walk away from that which is not beneficial to us. The notion that our private actions or personal choices have no repercussions is a lie we've bought into.

**It is apparent that this man
knew God's power.**

It's a lie that staves off accountability, keeping us in denial and sin. Samson's choices resulted in consequences that were suffered by many. I can't help but wonder how differently his life would have turned out if

he had allowed God dominion over *all* of him. Perhaps many lives would have been saved. And what's more, the history of the Israelites may have been quite different.

I'm curious to know what would have happened if, at the moment Samson was tempted to act on lust, he would have said, "Lord, I am about to engage in wrong that I want to do. I know it's against Your will, but I'm not interested in having You interfere. So if You want me to stop, You're going to have to take this from me! For You have promised Your faithfulness to me, that You will not let me be tempted beyond what I can bear and that You will provide a way for me to stand firm." (See 1 Cor. 10:13.)

I guess I'll never know the answer to that question. But perhaps we can find out for ourselves the next time our "Delilahs" traipse into our lives and tempt us with greener grass on the other side of the fence.

REACT

What are you afraid of losing if you give God dominion over all of the temptations that come to you?

From Philandering to Faithfulness

EXPLORATION

Rom. 12:2

CONCLUDE

Why do people do foolish things? Lack of experience combined with physical prowess often contribute to a sense of invincibility. Consider the quarterback of a Superbowl championship team who rode his motorcycle without a helmet because it gave him a sense of freedom. Unfortunately, when his motorcycle slammed into a car, this “freedom” resulted in serious injuries and speculation about his future in football. Self-centered focus means less attention paid to relationships with God and other people.

CONSIDER

- Imagining yourself as a life coach. Map out a game plan for your life.
- Placing blue or red food coloring in a clear glass of water. Cut across the bottom of a stalk of celery. Place the stalk in the glass. After several hours, note how the color has permeated the stalk’s veins. How does this relate to what prayer and Bible study can do for us?
- Listening to the song “Honesty” by Billy Joel. Reflect how Samson’s life would have been different if he had embraced honesty in his relationships with God and women.
- Playing a shell game (three walnut shells with a bean under one—guessing which shell the bean is under after shells have been shuffled) is a form of gambling, as were Samson’s sexual practices. Make a chart of the best and worst ways to express sexuality. How are the worst ways like playing a shell game?
- Making a wall hanging or poster depicting spiritual disciplines such as prayer, daily devotional study, and forgiveness.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 54.

Gunter Krallmann, *Mentoring for Mission: A Handbook on Leadership Principles Exemplified by Jesus Christ*.

Boaz and Ruth: Firm Foundations



**“Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay.
Your people will be my people and your God my God.
Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried’ ”
(Ruth 1:16, 17, NIV).**

Boaz and Ruth: Firm Foundation, or the Bedrock of Marriage

Sabbath
August 11

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 45:10

Two decades after my colorful wedding, I still reflect with zeal on all the blissful activities that led to that memorable occasion. During our courtship period, my spouse and I really used the opportunities that would lead to a solid, lifelong relationship. Frustration, discouragement, and depression, which often mar courtship among young adults, were not a part of our dating experience.

Our courtship was without travail from beginning to end, climaxing in a joyous wedding and a subsequent happy, solid married life. By taking care of all the factors to be considered during courtship, we made sure that our dating experiences were always at their best. We allowed for personality development. We helped one another understand each other. We filled the need for human love by supplying opportunities for recreation and by being instrumental in improving and developing one another's spiritual life.

As newlyweds, the train of marriage carried us at a modest pace on the railroad of life. We were constantly pledging our love or doing sweet things for one another. My partner and I felt we belonged together; we were extremely close and deeply in love. Though I have no idea what your married life has been like, tidbits

As the saying goes,
"Marriage is not a bed of
roses."

from my own experience have led me to conclude that for the seed of marriage to germinate and develop into a desirable plant and to yield more desirable fruits, firm foundations are a major prerequisite that must occupy both persons' minds.

My marriage has been loving and harmonious. Although it may have lost the touch of its initial glow due to the more mundane realities of marriage, I feel secure. The relationship gifts we unwrapped as newlyweds continue to delight us. The secret? It's simple: We operate together like a thermostat. When it's chilly, we eliminate the source of the cold. When it's hot, we find ways to circulate cool air.

I'm in a reassuring, stable relationship that allows me to devote attention to career, children, and other pursuits. But as the saying goes, "Marriage is not a bed of roses." You should not forget that while you and your spouse are still in love, there are also clouds on the horizon. Your success in overcoming those clouds largely depends on whether you laid a firm foundation while you were dating. This foundation will serve to unite you for life. May our study this week of Ruth and Boaz help us to focus on how married life can last by laying such a foundation.

Sunday
August 12

The Value of a Lasting Relationship

LOGOS

Ruth 1-4

The book of Ruth places us face to face with a subject that has been the concern of many religious and secular scholars for a long time: what it takes to make marriage an enjoyable, lifelong relationship.

God performed the first marriage in the Garden of Eden, intending that the institution of marriage would uphold the divine principles of heaven for all ages to come.

Loyalty, Devotion, and Honesty (Ruth 1)

In chapter 1 of Ruth, we learn that the title character was a woman with astounding qualities. Here is a Moabitess who, despite her condition as a widow, has remained loyal and faithful to her mother-in-law, Naomi. The supreme devotion she demonstrated to Naomi and to the God of the Israelites shows that she had vital insight, which only God can provide. Thus she allowed Him to take control of her entire mind by developing a close relationship with Him.

**How many people today
would champion the same
course as did Ruth?**

How many people today would champion the same course as did Ruth? She sets a fitting example that should inspire us to follow God's will for our lives. In obtaining the treasures God has planned for us, it is up to us to follow Him.

Generosity, Responsibility, and Straightforwardness (Ruth 2)

The second chapter of Ruth shows Boaz as a person of excellent character. From the moment he meets Ruth, he shows her sympathy and selflessness and treats her as a member of his household. These qualities made Boaz a good match for Ruth, and the formation of the right attitude between this pair paved the way for a successful marriage founded on their mutual faith in God.

Ellen G. White gives a suitable observation as far as foundations for a lasting marriage are concerned. "If there is any subject which should be carefully considered and in which the counsel of older and more experienced persons should be sought, it is the subject of marriage; if ever the Bible was needed as a counselor, if ever divine guidance should be sought in prayer, it is before taking a step that binds persons together for life."¹

From the story of Ruth and Boaz, we learn about how God showers His blessings upon those who are faithful to Him, despite prevailing circumstances in their lives. Good character formation is one way by which a person can be blessed by God's gifts. "He has placed means in the hands of men, that His divine gifts may flow through human channels in doing the work appointed us in saving our fellow men. This is one of God's ways of exalting man. It is just the work that man needs; for it will stir the deepest sympathies of his heart, and call into exercise the highest capabilities of the mind."²

Naomi as a Role Model (Ruth 3)

In reverence to God, Naomi believes that whatever the situation and its outcome, God will provide. Despite daunting odds, she is so convinced of this belief that she takes the initiative to lay the first blocks of the foundation for the relationship between Ruth and Boaz.

"Fathers and mothers should feel that a duty devolves upon them to guide the affections of the youth, that they may be placed upon those who will be suitable companions."³

In the third chapter of the book of Ruth, we learn how Naomi succeeds in ensuring that her daughter-in-law finds a suitable partner in marriage. The responsibility to guide, advise, and lead rested with Naomi. Her principles should be emulated by all the generations before Christ's second coming.

REACT

1. As a Christian living today, what qualities would you consider for a marriage partner?

2. Should wealth and influence be requirements for an ideal marriage partner? Explain your answer.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 175.

2. *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 15.

3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 176.

What Heaven Considers Perfect

TESTIMONY

Prov. 12:4

In marriage, couples should become submissive and more selfless toward each other. Although sin dominates the world we live in, we have the knowledge of Christ's victory over sin. Mrs. White reassures us that "in the creation, God had made her [Eve] the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other."¹

As much as the wife is scripturally commissioned to submit to her husband (Eph. 5:22), the Bible commissions the husband to love his wife as Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for it (Eph. 5:25). If the husband is "a coarse, rough, boisterous, egotistical, harsh, and overbearing man, let him never utter the word that the husband is the head of the wife, and that she must submit to him in every-

thing; for he is not the Lord, he is not the husband in the true significance of the term."² Thus we see that both the husband and the wife are to submit to each other. "Christ abiding in the heart of the wife will be at agreement with Christ abiding in the heart of the husband."³

Both the husband and the wife are to submit to each other.

This magnitude of commitment entails a prayerful life. We should "prepare for eternity with such zeal as you have not yet manifested. Educate your mind to love the Bible, to love the prayer meeting, to love the hour of meditation, and, above all, the hour when the soul communes with God."⁴

When God's love is the major part of a marriage, success in that marriage can be boundless.

1. *The Adventist Home*, p. 115.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 268.

In Search of the Right Partner

EVIDENCE

Amos 3:3

The book of Amos advises us that when different tastes and preferences abound, especially in spiritual dimensions, it is risky for two people to yoke together as a couple. However, Scripture teaches that a good foundation for a successful marriage depends mainly on a couple's ability to fight sin with courage, conviction, faithfulness, loyalty, and selflessness.

Heaven rejoices when we include the Godhead family in our family affairs to the degree that however weak we may be, our hearts will receive jets of Holy Spirit power to overcome. From the character of Ruth and Boaz, we learn a great lesson in life: "Every act of life, however small, has its bearing for good or for evil. Faithfulness or neglect in what are apparently the smallest duties may open the door for life's richest blessings or its greatest calamities."¹

Solidarity in marriage is achieved through a steady, progressive commitment to the interests of the other partner. "A successful marriage does not come spontaneously or by chance. Instead, a happy marriage involves two people working through small difficulties as well as the big ones."²

**Heaven rejoices when we
include the Godhead family
in our family affairs.**

For better or for worse, couples share the responsibility of making their relationship pleasing to God. The atmosphere of tranquility, the spirit of caring and sharing, and the touch of love in every action show that Boaz and Ruth were deeply committed to Him. From this family line, Christ would be born. The qualities of wisdom and integrity that dominated the lives of Boaz and Ruth show an everlasting love that paved the way for the birth of the world's Savior.

REACT

Which qualities of the following people could help you strengthen your marriage, or your relationships in general? How can you develop those qualities? (1) Ruth (2) Boaz (3) Naomi.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 158.

2. Nancy Van Pelt, *Blueprints for Family Happiness* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn.), p. 16.

HOW-TO

Josh. 24:15

Whatever your objectives are, the Bible is quite clear: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3). Lessons from Old Testament couples teach us that though sin can mar even the best of marriages, we still can choose to surround ourselves with the Creator's never-ending fountain of mercy and love.

In order to obtain the joy, freedom, and fulfilment that graced the original marriage in Eden, we must exercise high voltages of the following virtues:

Love and appreciation. No marriage relationship can thrive in an atmosphere devoid of love and appreciation. These two virtues were dominant in the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, and the end result of their relationship still speaks to us today so that we may rightly follow in their footsteps.

Acceptance. It takes the character of Christ to accept someone the way He accepts a person. It is difficult, if not impossible, for sinners to accept one another unconditionally. However, as followers of Christ, we should bear in mind that each

family member has a distinct character. When we accept our mate on the basis of their character, we show that we love them regardless of their faults. This is the type of acceptance needed in a marriage.

Communication and understanding. Keeping all the lines of communication open in a marriage can

solve many problems that might otherwise destroy it. Problems persist only if couples cannot or will not talk about them and decide upon solutions satisfactory to both of them. In a marriage, communication and understanding add a beautiful ribbon to the package.

Worship. Involving Christ in a marriage relationship is one sure way of overcoming obstacles whenever they rear their ugly heads. When Christ is allowed to take control of the relationship, He is able to crown the union with wonderful results. "Only to those who wait humbly upon God, who watch for His guidance and grace, is the Spirit given. The power of God awaits their demand and reception. This promised blessing, claimed by faith, brings all other blessings in its train."*

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 672.

Tending the Marriage Garden

OPINION

Prov. 31:10

The lesson for this week discussed a dynamic area of our lives: how to create a marriage within biblical bounds. Imagine how I personally do it; but as you do, remember that I'm not yet above the average!

After reading and analyzing the story of Ruth and Boaz, I have come to the conclusion that I need to take major steps in my marriage. Just as Paul says he has not reached the goal (Phil. 3:12–14), so we also are charged with the task of running with determination to the goal of perfection.

As I said in the beginning of this article, the marriage relationship is a dynamic area of human life. Therefore, the harmony that should characterize this union should match that of the first marriage in Eden. After putting into practice all the factors and principles that aid in the management of the marriage garden, I feel that a dimension of fun, enjoyment, and delight gives this garden a sense of completion. As humans, we possess the inherent quality of humor. Therefore, enough doses of fun, right from the earliest years of marriage, can assist the relationship in being a small heaven on earth.

Couples can achieve fun and enjoyment through small acts of sharing and caring. Finding time together for a romantic dinner, picnicking in a favorite place by a waterfall, a hand-in-hand walk in a valley during sunset, or just a relaxing drive are all ways to revitalize the marriage relationship and to provide a healthful, natural tranquilizer.

If you have not done this before, try it for yourself. It's simple. For the sake of your marriage, engage in fun activities that can add color to the rainbow of worship. Such activities will make you feel special, young, and in love all over again. Such were the habits that dominated the lives of Ruth and Boaz.

For the sake of your marriage, engage in fun activities that can add color to the rainbow of worship.

REACT

1. If you are married, how do you and your spouse achieve fulfillment in your relationship? When or if you marry, how do you intend to do it?
2. How would you advise a friend whose marriage is not working out to the best of their expectations?

Friday
August 17

To Have a Happy Marriage

EXPLORATION

Ruth 1–4

CONCLUDE

The story of Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi models several key qualities of a successful marriage. These qualities include an appreciation of wider family ties, an acceptance of each partner's individual character, faithfulness to the marriage union, and the sharing of one another's burdens. The behavior of each of these individuals teaches us how to follow God's leading in building and maintaining relationships with others.

CONSIDER

- Compiling a scrapbook about marriages that have been positive examples of Bible-based partnerships. Include photographs, quotations, or notes about couples in the Bible, from history, or who you've known personally.
- Choosing to engage in a recreational or service activity with your spouse or a small group of friends that is designed to help you communicate and get to know one another better.
- Writing a special prayer for God's guidance in finding a compatible spouse or in evaluating the person you are considering as a spouse.
- Creating a self-profile that outlines your strengths and weaknesses in order to consider the type of spouse that might suit you best.
- Listening to several songs that are regularly sung or played at Christian weddings. How do these songs reinforce the Bible's plan for marriage?
- Making a list of items from the natural world (flowers, animal species, plants, etc.) that represent marriage qualities such as faithfulness or nurturing.

CONNECT

FamilyLife.com (<http://www.familylife.com/default.asp>; see pages on Marriage and Singles).

Ellen G. White, *Letters to Young Lovers*.

Les Parrott and Leslie Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before (and After) You Marry*.

Elkanah and Hannah: Fulfilling a Vow



“ ‘There is none holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God’ ”
(1 Sam. 2:2, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

John 3:16

And be these juggling friends no more believ'd,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear
And break it to our hope.
~William Shakespeare

As a teenager, I made several pacts with friends. Some I kept, and some I broke. How many of us have done the BFF pact? Best friends forever! Do you even know where half of those people are today? Probably not.

As an adult, I've also made pacts or agreements with my children, my husband, and my friends. And by God's grace, I've tried to keep my promises. Sometimes, however, our human nature tricks us into looking for ways to get around our promises. So making a pact in and of itself is not an unusual thing. We all do it. However, Hannah's pact with God had a strange element. The very thing she fervently and

**I pray that we will be more
like Hannah.**

tearfully prayed for is the very thing she promised to give back to God! How strange is that?

The world we live in is so self-serving and self-absorbed that I wonder how many of us keep the promises we make to each other. More important, do we always keep our promises to God? Sometimes we pray earnestly for something, and we make promises to Him we intend to keep. However, it seems that sometimes when we get what we prayed for, we rationalize that God doesn't really need whatever it is we promised to give Him in return. After all, He is the Creator, and what difference is our tiny contribution going to make? Can you imagine what our Bible history would look like if Hannah had thought that way? What if she had rationalized that because Samuel was her only son, God didn't really expect her to give him back?

I believe that Hannah's wish to have a son was not just to stop Peninnah's taunts about her barrenness, nor to stop the whispers of the village women when she went to the market. I believe she saw her wish as a way to serve God—a way to give Him her all. She returned her most precious gift to Him as a thank offering. Such sacrifice! Such faith!

I'm eternally grateful that God keeps His promises to me and to you. I pray that we will be more like Hannah—a humble servant who kept her promise and gave her most desired treasure back to her Creator and Redeemer. I challenge each and every one of us to pray that God will give us that type of selflessness as we interact daily with each other and with Him. Promise?

Adopting the Elkanah Attitude

EVIDENCE

Galatians 2; 6

I can imagine Hannah telling Elkanah about the vow she made to God at the temple. He must have had some apprehension about it. He could have protested. But he did not. Elkanah obviously supported the vow his wife made and, therefore, willingly gave Samuel to the Lord. He chose to support Hannah. Imagine how difficult it was for Elkanah to miss the opportunity to be an active father to his son.

Elkanah never looked back. He continuously showed love and support to Hannah. He demonstrated this clearly. Whenever Elkanah offered a sacrifice, he gave some of the meat to Peninnah and some to each of her sons and daughters. But he gave Hannah more, because he loved her a great deal, even though the Lord had kept her from having children of her own. One could have heard Elkanah tenderly saying, "Hannah, why are you crying? Why won't you eat?" Most important, he went along with Hannah as she gave Samuel to Eli in the temple. He walked through her barrenness with her. He helped her to fulfill her vow to God.

As Christians, we also are called to support each other. We must develop what I call the Elkanah attitude. We are surrounded daily by people who make vows to God: the drunkard who accepted Christ and promised to serve Him, the prostitute who gave up her ways, the thief, or the backslider. They walk into our congregations, and often we are skeptical about their conversion or promises to God. While we may have serious doubts about their sincerity, shouldn't we make ourselves available to support them? Doing so may help them keep their promises to God.

**We must develop what I
call the Elkanah attitude.**

The Bible clearly appeals to us to bear each other's burdens. We are to build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13); look out for each other's best interest (Phil. 2:4); honor and respect one another (Rom. 12:10); serve each other (Gal. 5:13); admonish each other (Col. 3:16; Rom. 15:14); think of one another (Heb. 10:24); not judge each other (Rom. 14:13); accept each other (Rom. 14:1; 15:7); and regard each other as more important than oneself (Phil. 2:3). When we covenant with the Lord, and when we do our part to bear each other's burdens like Elkanah bore Hannah's, God will pour out His blessings on our lives.

REACT

What can we learn from Elkanah and his family? In what ways can we adopt Elkanah's attitude in order to help persons in a spiritual or emotional crisis?

Helyne Frederick, Mt. Rose, St. Patrick's, Grenada

A Faithful God Requires Faithful Servants

LOGOS

1 Sam. 1:1–2:26; Gen. 9:16; Deut. 23:2; Ps. 89:34; Eccles. 5:4

A Faithful God (Gen. 9:15, 16)

After the Flood, God promised Noah that there would never again be a world-wide flood. He placed the rainbow in the sky as a perpetual reminder of that promise. To date, God has remained faithful to His word. We can rest assured that He is ever faithful to His promises. The Scripture is replete with promises of God, which are guaranteed by the full weight of His being. God says, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Ps. 89:34). Also read 2 Corinthians 1:20.

God Expects Us to Keep Our Vows (Eccles. 5:4)

As God is faithful to His vows, He requires faithfulness from us. Read Deuteronomy 23:21.

We almost always can find a reason to justify not fulfilling our vows before God.

Ellen White comments on the seriousness of our vows to God, "Persons who thus pledge to their fellow men do not generally think of asking to be released from their pledges. A vow made to God, the giver of all favors, is of still greater

importance; then why should we seek to be released from our vows to God? Will man consider his promise less binding because made to God? Because his vow will not be put to trial in courts of justice, is it less valid? Will a man who professes to be saved by the blood of the infinite sacrifice of Jesus Christ, 'rob God'? Are not his vows and his actions weighed in the balances of justice in the heavenly courts?"¹

Hannah's Vow (1 Sam. 1:11–13)

Hannah's plea to God was from the heart. "The burden which she could share with no earthly friend she cast upon God. Earnestly she pleaded that He would take away her reproach and grant her the precious gift of a son to nurture and train for Him. And she made a solemn vow that if her request were granted, she would dedicate her child to God, even from its birth."²

Hannah's encounter with God reminds us of the power of prayer. "Prayer is a heaven-ordained means of success. . . . Prayer moves heaven."³ For the child of

God, access to heaven is given through prayer. In every situation, we can turn to the Source of unlimited power and rest in His promise to care for us.

Hannah Keeps Her Word (1 Sam. 1:28)

Perhaps Hannah could have argued, "Maybe in time I would have had the child anyway, without God"; or "I was desperate; surely God cannot expect me to honor a vow I made under difficult emotional circumstances." Or maybe Hannah could have kept Samuel longer, arguing that there was no time limit to her vow. We almost always can find a reason to justify not fulfilling our vows before God. But Hannah was prompt and faithful.

"As soon as the little one was old enough to be separated from its mother, she fulfilled her solemn vow. She loved her child with all the devotion of a mother's heart; day by day her affections entwined about him more closely as she watched his expanding powers, and listened to the childish prattle; he was her only son, the especial gift of heaven; but she had received him as a treasure consecrated to God, and she would not withhold from the Giver His own. Faith strengthened the mother's heart, and she yielded not to the pleadings of natural affection."⁴

A Quality Gift

We admire Hannah because she recognized her duty as a steward and wisely trained Samuel. She was careful to give God the best she had. The child Samuel was a blessing to Eli, and later the child became Israel's highly respected judge. It was all a result of Hannah's faithfulness.

"During the first three years of the life of Samuel the prophet, his mother carefully taught him to distinguish between good and evil. By every familiar object surrounding him she sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. In fulfillment of her vow to give her son to the Lord, with great self-denial she placed him under the care of Eli the high priest, to be trained for service in the house of God. . . . His early training led him to choose to maintain his Christian integrity. What a reward was Hannah's! And what an encouragement to faithfulness is her example!"⁵

REACT

1. How difficult was it for Hannah to keep her vow? How have you benefited from her example?

2. How careful should we be about making a vow before God? Is God as particular now as He was then? Explain your answers.

1. *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 315.

2. *Conflict and Courage*, p. 137.

3. *In Heavenly Places*, p. 75.

4. *Conflict and Courage*, p. 137.

5. *Child Guidance*, p. 197.

Faithful to Her Lord

TESTIMONY

1 Sam. 2:2

Ellen White offers insightful guidance to God's people when, like Hannah, they are faced with difficulties and their faith wavers. She says, "When at Battle Creek, Michigan, May 5, 1855, I saw that there was a great lack of faith with the servants of God, as well as with the church. They were too easily discouraged, too ready to doubt God, too willing to believe that they had a hard lot and that God had forsaken them. I saw that this was cruel. God so loved them as to give His dearly beloved Son to die for them, and all heaven was interested in their salvation; yet after all that had been done for them, it was hard to believe and trust so kind and good a Father. He has said that He is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children."* Our greatest Example keeps His promise to us daily. He did not forget Hannah. Never doubt His coming through for you.

Every saint who comes to God with a true heart and sends their honest petitions to Him in faith will have their prayers answered. Your faith must not let go of

God is too wise to err.

the promises of God if you do not see or feel the immediate answer to your prayers. Do not be afraid to trust God. Rely upon His sure promise: "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matt. 21:22, NIV). God is too wise to err and too good to withhold any good thing from His saints. Our wise and good Father hears our prayers and will answer, sometimes immediately, but He gives us the things that are for our best good and His own glory. God gives us blessings; if we could look into His plan, we would see clearly that He knows what is best for us and answers our prayers accordingly. What seemed impossible for Hannah became a possibility because she trusted in God for a son.

If you do not see immediate answer to your prayers, keep trusting. Trust your desires to the Lord, and He will grant them as He sees fit.

REACT

1. How does the story of Hannah and Elkanah prove that if we are faithful to God He will supply our needs?

2. We are admonished to have faith in Christ even if the circumstances are difficult. Is there such a thing as "risky faith"? Can we have too much or unrealistic faith?

* *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 120.

How to Move a Mountain

HOW-TO

1 Sam 1:10; 1 John 5:14, 15

How to move a mountain? What is she talking about? Don't worry. You're not expected to move Mount Everest. However, just like Hannah and Elkanah, you definitely can make a mountain shift. Often, we are faced with obstacles that loom large over our heads. Our jaw drops as we gaze on the impediment that towers over us. How do we get that thing out of the way?

Hannah's mountain was her infertility. Her heart was burdened with her inability to bear children. People taunted her. A priest rebuked her. Oh, how she wanted to move that mountain!

Our mountain can be just like Hannah's. Or it could be landing a job, getting an education, or earning enough money to buy what we need. Whatever your mountain is, it can be moved! Here are a few pointers on how:

Be sure. Is your mountain in sync with God's will? Is your desire His desire? We must satisfy ourselves first that our desires are God's before we can proceed further.

Ask Him. First Samuel 1:10 tells us that "in bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord" (NIV). She suffered a prolonged

period of anxiety and prayer. She poured out her soul to God. John tells us that "this is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:14, 15, NIV).

Believe. If we are to move mountains, we must believe God can do it! Believe He will help us find a job. Believe He will help you find the resources to attend that university. We must trust Him unconditionally.

Give thanks. Praise God for what He does on your behalf. Testify! Tell of His love, His goodness, His mercy, and His grace. Then watch your faith grow as a result!

With increased faith that God will provide, our mountains can be moved. He did it for Hannah and Elkanah. He did it for Daniel. He did it for Moses. Believe that He can do it for you!

**Whatever your mountain is,
it can be moved!**

REACT

1. How can you tell if your desires are in accordance with God's will?
2. How can we increase our faith so that we can ask God confidently for larger answers?

Why Are You Crying?

OPINION

Isa. 41:10, 13

"Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" (1 Sam. 1:8, NIV).

In today's world, I can imagine Hannah's response: "Men just don't understand, do they?" However, 1 Samuel 1:5 states that Elkanah gave Hannah "a double portion [of meat] because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb" (NIV). This shows that Elkanah was sensitive to her feelings. So Samuel was born into a home with parents who loved him deeply. I can just imagine the joy he brought to his parents' hearts. His life was mapped out for him because of the promise Hannah made. He was going to the temple from a young age to serve God. But in all this, Samuel had a choice. He could have rebelled, deciding to go his own way. Instead, he chose to fulfill his mother's promise to God. He became the last of Israel's judges. Today's youth certainly pose a challenge to parents, teachers, and the church. Temptations constantly bombard them from every angle, trying to

divert their attention away from eternal things. However, I believe that if we would spend more time in prayer with and for our children, we would increase the chances of their making the right choices. Please don't

**"Men just don't understand,
do they?"**

get me wrong. I'm not saying that this is a guarantee. After all, look at Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They grew up in the temple with a high priest as their father, yet they "were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:12, NIV).

Hannah's tearful supplication to God gave her the son she longed for. I also can imagine Hannah's tears as she brings Samuel to the temple to live with Eli. She would get to see him only once a year! But although the tears may have flowed every day because she missed her precious son, she also prayed for him to remain faithful to God.

REACT

1. How can parents impress upon their children the need to follow God's path?
2. Should parents discuss their own flaws with their children? Explain your answer.

Promises! Promises!

EXPLORATION

Ps. 89:34

CONCLUDE

Politicians and other public leaders make promises to get elected or to achieve their end, and then they later forget those promises. Many of us do the same. Against this backdrop, Hannah's vow to return Samuel to God after only three years of rearing him seems almost otherworldly. When we make a vow to God, we must keep it, and we must be like Elkanah and help others keep their vows to God. When God keeps a promise to us, He is modeling for us the kind of faith that we should exercise in honoring our promises to Him.

CONSIDER

- Surveying friends and family by asking the following questions: What promise or vow have you kept lately? Why did you keep that vow? List the reasons people gave for keeping their vows and compare them with reasons God might give for keeping His vows to us.
- Thinking about one promise you'd like to make to God, or have made to God. Perhaps you've broken this promise before. Ask God to renew your commitment to keeping this promise and try again.
- Listening to the song "Promise Keeper." You can find it on the 1996 release by Fred Hammond and Radical for Christ titled *The Spirit of David*.
- Planting a tree for the most important promise you have made to God and/or your parents.
- Capturing the journey as you seek to keep your promises to God. Be sure to write about moments when you've kept your word to God and when you have not. Each month, look back to see how far you've come.
- Taking pictures of friends who have asked God for specific answers to prayer. Create a collage with their photos and spend a moment each day in prayer for one of these people.

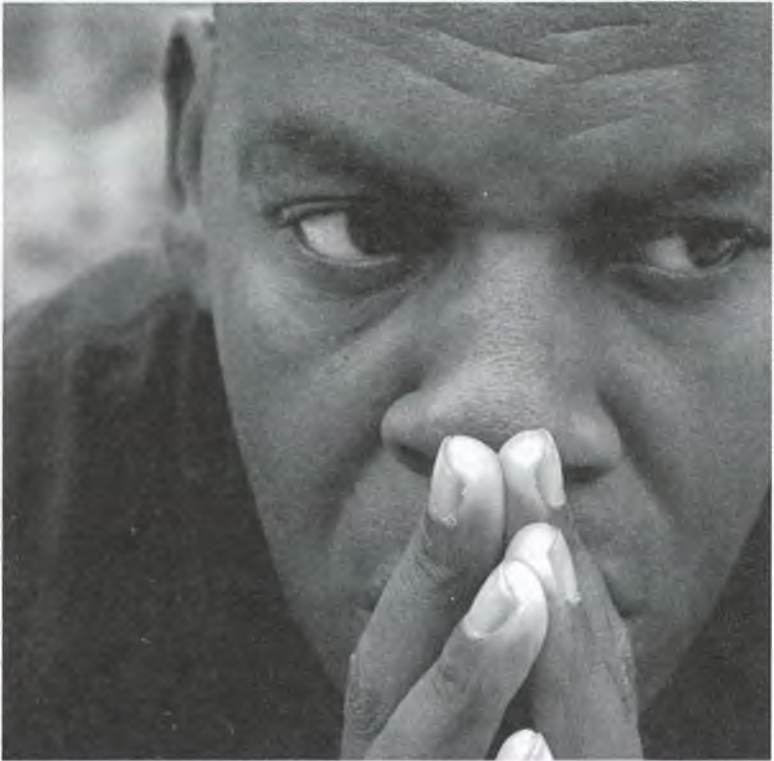
CONNECT

Psalm 132.

Steps to Christ, chap. 4, "Consecration."

Jim Hohnberger, *Escape to God*, chap. 11, "The Hesitant One."

The Jobs: Living With Losses



“He replied, ‘You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?’ ” (Job 2:10, NIV).

Hold Fast to Your Integrity

INTRODUCTION

Job 2:3

“Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason’” (Job 2:3, NIV).

Many a time, Christians are afflicted in all spheres of life with the evils that characterize the systems of this world. These afflictions include such things as economic constraints, spiritual lukewarmness, and political issues. As a result, we experience dissatisfaction and are tempted to express ourselves accordingly. Often, we even are tempted to resort to unscrupulous acts—acts we normally think only people of the world would engage in.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we claim to interpret the Bible correctly. But how well do we hold fast to our integrity when affliction comes upon us?

A thorough analysis of Job’s life reveals the type of steadfastness every true Christian should have when such experiences come their way. Job’s painstaking efforts exhibit this steadfastness in the two phases of his ordeal: (1) losing his property and children and (2) being afflicted with loathsome sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Because he was steadfast, God exclaimed, “‘He still maintains his integrity, though you [Satan] incited me against him to ruin him without any reason’” (NIV).

Seventh-day Adventists must develop such steadfastness. “Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12, NRSV).

As you study this week’s lesson, think about where and when you will have to prove your integrity, and how you will get the strength to do so.

**How well do we hold fast to
our integrity when affliction
comes upon us?**

Suffering, Godliness, and Riches

LOGOS

Job 1:1–2:10

Why the Suffering? (1 Cor. 9:24–27; James 1:13)

Most of the time, we do not know why bad things happen to good people. We can only guess. Yet afflictions or suffering cannot always be termed punishments. The consequences of our mistakes can serve as punishments. But Job was not suffering because of any mistakes or sins he committed. He did not know his suffering was a test from God. Could we even say Job's suffering was a conspiracy between God and Satan—the destroyer? God does not afflict His own with pain or sorrow. Rather, He permits such to occur in order for our faith to be made strong. “The Lord said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger’” (Job 1:12, NIV). So Satan obeyed God by destroying all of Job's possessions. Yet “in all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (Job 1:22, NIV).

The Christian's journey is full of surprises and challenges. Paul compares us to an athlete who prepares diligently in order to win perishable medals. Likewise, we must prepare to remain faithful to God, despite the bad things that happen to us. That is how we win an imperishable crown. When we do remain faithful under adverse circumstances, people around us will notice and wonder about the God we serve. Our faith in adversity will draw many to the saving grace of the Redeemer.

Riches and Godliness (Gen. 13:2, 4; Job 1:1–3, 5)

Are riches the reward of the godly? Joseph, the son of Jacob, became a prime minister in a foreign land after passing through a host of temptations. Abraham, also being chosen by God, was rich in livestock, silver, and gold. Much of this wealth he had before he received God's call. And after accepting the call, his wealth increased. His godliness is exhibited in the resolution of strife between his herdsmen and those of Lot, his nephew. Remember also how he pleaded for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Job also was notably rich, blameless, and upright. When he was alive, a person's wealth was determined by the number of livestock and servants he possessed. In our world, we value mansions, certain types of cars, large bank accounts, and hefty stock portfolios. Such things in themselves are not evil. Rather, our love for such things can cause evil to befall us (1 Tim. 6:10). Paul's advice to Christians is this: “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be

generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life" (1 Tim. 6:18, 19, NIV).

When Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and give to the poor before he followed Him, something interesting happened. The young man left sorrowfully and never returned, for he trusted in his possessions and could not do as Jesus instructed (Matt. 19:16–23). The little we possess has been given to us so we would help those in need. Our closets are decorated with clothes, some of which we do not wear often. When we refuse or neglect to help others, we put ourselves in the same category as the rich young ruler. Paul has this to say: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim. 6:17, NIV). This means our possessions are not ours, but God's. So Job exclaimed, " 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. / The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away' " (Job 1:21, NIV).

Disposition of a Christian (Eph. 4:29–32)

In Ephesians 4:29–32, Paul emphasizes the importance of kind words. The beauty of our life is not only in our appearance but in our character and in what we say. We are not told about the character of Job's wife before these tragedies befell them. But when we do finally meet her, she speaks very discouragingly to him. She was not a helper to him. Instead of providing solace, she urged him to curse God and die (Job 2:9). Apparently she offered him no help, for the Bible says Job himself took a potsherd to scrape himself as he sat in the midst of ashes.

Instead of providing solace, she urged him to curse God and die (Job 2:9).

But when we do finally meet her, she speaks very discouragingly to him. She was not a helper to him. Instead of providing solace, she urged him to curse God and die (Job 2:9). Apparently she offered him no help, for the Bible says Job himself took a potsherd to scrape himself as he sat in the midst of ashes.

REACT

1. How do you personally define riches, and why?
2. What possessions do you have? Which of these possessions help you to be a better Christian? Which do not?
3. Getting possessions or letting God get possession of you—which should come first, and why?

It's Not Always Smooth

TESTIMONY

Gal. 6:2

The covenant relationship between God and His people is described in the language of married love. But in our fallen state, the experiences of marriage and other relationships sometimes become unfulfilling, disappointing, and even bitter. We should therefore accept that it's not always for better but also for worse. When it's for worse, as in the case of Job and his wife, Galatians 6:2 gives us good advice: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (NIV). To bear another's burden demands sacrifice, and sacrificing demands losing one's interest in the interest of another.

"Christianity ought to have a controlling influence upon the marriage relation, but it is too often the case that the motives which lead to this union are not in keeping with Christian principles. Satan is constantly seeking to strengthen his power over the people of God by inducing them to enter into alliance with his subjects, and in order to accomplish this he endeavors to arouse unsanctified passions in the heart. . . .

"To each other ever be tender and thoughtful."

"... The spirit that Christ manifests toward His church is the spirit that the husband and wife are to manifest toward each other. If they love God supremely, they will love

each other in the Lord, ever treating each other courteously, drawing in even cords. In their mutual self-denial and self-sacrifice they will be a blessing to each other. . . .

"... To each other ever be tender and thoughtful, giving up your own wishes and purposes to make each other happy. Day by day you may make advancement in self-knowledge. Day by day you may learn better how to strengthen your weak points of character. The Lord Jesus will be your light, your strength, your crown of rejoicing, because you yield the will to His will!"*

REACT

1. To what other relationships can we apply the principle in today's lesson?
2. It's hard for many young people to imagine that tragedy or hardships will ever befall them. But be assured that they will! What measures can you take now to cope with uncertainties, hardships, and tragedies when they do come to you?

**The Adventist Home*, pp. 94–96.

Serve God for Who He Is

EVIDENCE

Job 1

Job's absolute reliance on God is worthy of our emulation. Paul's words echo this virtue of Job's. Read Romans 8:35. Let us also develop the habit of serving God for who He is and not for what He has done, or can do, for us.

In the beginning of God's conversation with Satan, God describes Job as being perfect, upright, and one who eschews sin. The real meaning of these words should not be underestimated in reference to Job. The Hebrew word for *perfect* is *טָמִים*, meaning "innocent, ethically pure." *Yashar* is the Hebrew word for *upright* meaning "straight and pleasing." And *sur*, the Hebrew word for *eschew*, means "to depart from or to turn aside." Though Job was not sinless, he strived to please God and to allow Him to have His will lived out in his life.

Such a description of Job sheds rays of hope into our lives. His example can strengthen us to be upright and perfect amid trials and turmoil. Allowing God to have His own way in our life pleases Him. God's description of Job helps us to trust in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. God bids us to "come now, let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18, NIV).

God promises a safe landing, but not necessarily a safe passage.

God is wise and good—not only in the mercies that He bestows but in the trials He permits. While grateful for the one, we should be submissive under the other and strive to honor Him in both. God promises a safe landing, but not necessarily a safe passage (Isa. 43:1–3, 5). When the road is rough, the way forward is to trust and serve God for who He is—the ever-faithful God, the Creator, and the Redeemer.

REACT

1. In what ways can the Christian accept trials as a necessity in the heavenly pilgrimage?
2. Why are you an Adventist Christian? List your reasons.
3. How can you develop the act of serving God for who He is?

HOW-TO

Phil. 4:6

Sandra was an attractive, bright woman, but her sense of rejection had turned her into a depressed wife. Sandra's pastor decided to meet with her husband. Joe was amazed to learn that he was contributing to his wife's depression. He did not understand how well his wife could read his attitude. Fortunately, the pastor had a specific suggestion. "Joe," he said, "I would like you to select ten positive qualities your wife has. Thank God for them twice a day: once in the morning and again on your way home from work." Since his marriage was deteriorating, Joe did as the pastor advised.

Before long, Sandra began to change. She became more cheerful and affectionate. She grew in self-respect and motivation. She broke out of the walls of her depression.

A little gratitude goes a long way. Focusing on positive qualities makes them expand. The words we speak to the people around us have incredible power. Read Proverbs 12:25. When people around us are down, our words have incredible

**A little gratitude goes
a long way.**

power to lift them up. Think about what you are thankful for in the people around you today. Express your appreciation to them. Encourage them with hope. Consciously share how much they mean to you.

Read Psalm 34:1. There is unusual spiritual power in praise. Praise lifts our spirits and energizes our entire being. Praise revitalizes our spiritual life. Scripture links praise and rejoicing together. "My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song" (Ps. 28:7, NIV). Ellen White wrote, "Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray. . . ."

"It is a law of nature that our thoughts and feelings are encouraged and strengthened as we give them utterance. While words express thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words. If we would give more expression to our faith, rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have,—the great mercy and love of God,—we should have more faith and greater joy."*

* *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 251, 252.

Accept All Gifts From God

OPINION

Job 2:10

Most people presume that all gifts from God must be good. However, the word *gift* does not necessarily indicate anything good or bad. Scripture says “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28, NIV). Here the words *all things* are neutral, as is the word *gift*. Thus, a gift from God can be either good or bad. God, the Omniscient One, has the ultimate purpose of using a gift to His expected end—strengthening us in our faith and saving us.

Job might have understood this principle when he replied to his wife, “‘Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?’” (Job 2:10, NIV).

To accept God's will in one's life is to willingly agree to His way of dealing with us. Until our heart is genuinely converted and truly committed to God, we cannot accept what He brings into our life. Christ once prayed for His disciples, “‘My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one’” (John 17:15, NIV). Note the following about this prayer: (1) Jesus did not promise His believers an accident-free life.

(2) He knows how treacherous the devil is. However, He prays for protection and strength for those who endure road-blocks on their pilgrimage.

We need to be aware of the ongoing great controversy and its implications. Faith must be added upon faith, and strength upon strength in order not to let bad times get us down. Since God wants believers to be worthy of the crown He offers, He sometimes allows us to struggle and fight our own battles of faith. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. Let us not grumble or complain when trials and temptations seem to whittle away at us, because it is for these situations that we will be crowned victorious.

We need to be aware of the ongoing great controversy.

REACT

1. Have you ever blamed God for something? If so, what, and why were you inclined to blame Him?

2. Do you see God as loving? If so, why? If not, why not, and what can be done to change your outlook?

Friday
August 31

Faith, Come What May

EXPLORATION

Job 13:15; 38–42

CONCLUDE

So often we wonder why bad things happen to good people, but the earliest biblical account we have—Job—teaches us that even the upright suffer. Indeed, Jesus promised His disciples no less (John 15:20). Even if we cannot control the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we can control our reaction to them. Job provides us an example of maintaining godly integrity in the face of adversity, resulting in a strengthened faith and deeper understanding of our God. Note that Job is not without his questions, but his deeper understanding comes from the acceptance of God's revelation of Himself—not from any answers God offered!

CONSIDER

- Listing all the questions you have for God, then reading Job 38–41. How does God's response to Job address your questions?
- Praying for your friends (Job 42:10).
- Journaling as Job might have when he first received the news regarding the loss of all his possessions and children.
- Performing a modern-day version of the story of Job.
- Spending time supporting a friend—without dispensing advice—who is going through trials. Note that Job's friends were *good* friends who were there for him in his time of trouble . . . things didn't turn bad until they opened their mouths!
- Giving a testimony about a trial that, at the time, you couldn't see how you'd get through.
- Role-playing Job and his friends and/or wife. Reenact the biblical scene the first time through. Then role-play different scenarios in which those around Job could have been truly supportive.
- Observing different elements of nature that remind you that, no matter what happens, God is in control.

CONNECT

Gerhard E. Frost, *The Color of the Night: Reflections on Suffering and the Book of Job*; Charles R. Swindoll, *Great Lives: Job—A Man of Heroic Endurance*.

David and Bathsheba: Adultery and After



**“Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10, NIV).**

INTRODUCTION

2 Sam. 12:13

David didn't just decide one morning to covet his neighbor's wife, commit adultery, lie, and then commit murder. It took time, and one sin led to another, so to speak. It all started when David saw Bathsheba bathing. He thought she was beautiful and inquired about her. When he found out she was married, he still sent for her and had an affair with her. When she became pregnant, David had her husband killed as a cover-up.

To protect ourselves, we need to guard our senses so we don't take that first step away from God's standards. We must trust that God knows what is best for us. If we give in to temptation, we are basically saying we don't trust God to know what is best for us . . . and Satan wins.

In our own lives, we may compromise our relationship with God or with our spouse in a similar way. Somehow we justify each step. Then all those little steps add up; and soon the relationship is a wreck. Like David, we have to be honest and take responsibility for our actions by confessing our sins to God and asking for His forgiveness.

**It all started when David
saw Bathsheba bathing.**

Because David truly loved God, the burden of his sin was too much for him:

When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.
For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer
(Ps. 32:3, 4, NKJV).

Have you ever felt this way? Lying or withholding information or not being completely honest with someone can tear you up. But as Psalm 32 continues with verse 5, we see that David found peace in God's forgiveness:

I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I have not hidden.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin (NKJV).

Choosing the Right Words

EVIDENCE

Ps. 51:2

After David retired from his confrontation with Nathan, he reviewed his feelings of guilt. As always, David expressed his grief, repentance, and desire for God's forgiveness in poetry. He chose a variety of significant theological words in writing Psalm 51.

Sin (verses 5, 9). The word here is *chet*, which means "error" or "failure."¹ An alternative interpretation is to "miss the mark." The connotation here is that a sin of ignorance can still be against the law and a source of separation from God.

Sin (verses 2, 3). *Chattath* means "sin offering."² Here the meaning implies an act of contrition or penance.

Iniquity (verses 2, 5, 9). The word *avon* is translated as "perversity," but a more mundane meaning is "bent."³ Iniquity is not a sinful *action* but a sinful *condition*. While David asks for forgiveness of his sins, his heartfelt focus is wanting to be cured of his iniquitous condition.

Transgression (verses 1, 3). Here, David addresses the specific sin he committed. The word *pesha* means "rebellion."⁴ This is an overt act. He knew it was wrong, but he did it anyway.

David chose a variety of
significant theological words
in writing Psalm 51.

Create (verse 10). This verb has only one subject: God. He is the only One in the entire Bible who *baras*. This creative act—the same as that which brought the entire world into being by the spoken word—is also the type of act David would have God invoke on his own heart. He desires God's particular intervention, understanding that nothing else can cure him of his iniquity.

REACT

Explore how the imagery of these deep theological words summarizes Christ's work in your own life.

1. *Young's Analytical Concordance* (1982), p. 890.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 516.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 997.

David and Bathsheba: Adultery to Forgiveness

LOGOS

2 Samuel 11; 12

What Are You Doing Here, David? (2 Sam. 11:1, 2)

It was spring—the time when kings went off to war. David, however, remained in Jerusalem. As the king, it was his responsibility to lead and inspire his fighting men. But he chose to “lead” from the comfort and security of the palace. Perhaps this less-than-courageous decision was responsible for his insomnia. He “got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace” (NIV).

Can't a Lady Get a Little Privacy? (2 Sam. 11:2–5)

A man can bathe any time he wishes, but a woman must wait until the men are asleep before she can bathe without being the target of lecherous eyes. Bathsheba had the added problem of living next to the royal palace. But it was now late; she thought the nighttime darkness afforded her the privacy she desired. She was unaware of the royal voyeur watching from the palace.

He should have walked away, but he stayed and watched and lusted.

David had many wives and even more concubines (2 Samuel 3:2–5; 5:13) who would have willingly kept him company that night. He simply took guilty pleasure in watching the

unsuspecting woman as she went about her intimate task. He should have walked away, but he stayed and watched and lusted. When he asked, “Who is that beautiful woman next door?” he was told, “Bathsheba . . . the wife of Uriah the Hittite” (verse 3, NIV). The fact that she was a married woman did not seem to even register with him. Instead, he “sent messengers to get her” (verse 4, NIV).

When the king's messengers came to her door, perhaps Bathsheba was reluctant to answer. After all, Uriah was away with the Israelite army. Had something happened to him? The men were quite insistent that she open the door and come with them. When they produced identification that they worked for the king, she must have been curious about what the king could possibly want with her at such a late hour. However, she dressed quickly and went with them.

Perhaps Bathsheba pled with David. Did she tell him that her husband was a loyal soldier in the king's army? Did she suggest that, since she had just completed her monthly purification, this was a fertile time for her? After what must have seemed a short time to David and an eternity to Bathsheba, she returned home.

But in a few short weeks, she sent a message to the king, “I am pregnant” (verse 5, NIV).

No One Can Tell the Story Like Uriah! (2 Sam. 11:6–25)

David must have thought he had the perfect solution. He sent a message to Joab, requesting a report on how the battle was going and suggesting that his neighbor, Uriah the Hittite, be sent home with the news. When Uriah arrived back in Jerusalem, David assumed he would be only too willing to sleep with his wife. It was still so early in the pregnancy that Uriah would naturally assume he was the father of the child that would be born. But when Uriah finished his report to the king, he chose to sleep where the guards slept, near the entrance to the palace.

David could not believe Uriah! He asked, “Why didn’t you go home?” (verse 10, NIV).

Uriah told the king that as long as the ark of the Lord and the armies of Israel were on the battlefield, he could not go home and take comfort with his wife. David tried for two more days, even using the persuasive power of alcohol to get Uriah to go home to his wife, but to no avail.

Finally, David decided the only answer was to have Uriah die in battle. He wrote a letter of instruction to Joab stating that Uriah was to be sent to the front of the most intense fighting. When the battle was most severe, the army was to pull back from Uriah so that he would be killed by the enemy. Ironically, the instructions to murder Uriah were delivered to Joab by Uriah himself.

After Bathsheba’s time of grieving was past, David took her to be his wife, so she was living in the palace at the time the baby was born.

There Is a Lamb Thief in Jerusalem! (2 Sam. 12:1–24)

Nathan the prophet told David a story about a wealthy man who stole the pet lamb of a poor man and cooked the lamb as dinner for a guest. David could not believe the callous greed of the rich man and declared that the heartless thief should die. Nathan’s reply was like a cold wave of water: “You are the man!” (NIV).

David’s repentance was immediate and sincere. Even though God declared that the baby would not survive, He assured David He had completely forgiven his sin.

There’s a Sermon in That Name (2 Sam. 12:24, 25)

After the death of the baby, David and Bathsheba conceived another son and called him Solomon, but the prophet Nathan came by again with another message from God. David was to name the baby Jedidiah, which means “loved by the Lord.” Then, every time David or Bathsheba called their son, they would be reminded of God’s love.

Whatever our sin, when we seek the Lord in sincere repentance, He reminds us that we are loved by Him.

Tuesday
September 4

Beyond Amazing

TESTIMONY

Rom. 8:38, 39

Power poses the greatest threat not only to our life now but to our eternal life. Blindness to influence and drunkenness to praise breed conceit, cruelty, and self-sufficiency. That is why "the Bible has little to say in praise of men. Little space is given to recounting the virtues of even the best men who have ever lived. This silence is not without purpose; it is not without a lesson. All the good qualities that men possess are the gift of God; their good deeds are performed by the grace of God through Christ."

Yet, here was David: the exact picture of a man who had forgotten his God. By his authority and in awful infidelity, he seized Bathsheba from a quiet life she shared with her husband. Perhaps Bathsheba protested at first, but it was custom then that nobody said No to a king!

However, the Lord and not Bathsheba stands as the greatest victim of this fall. "The Lord was dishonored. . . . David's sin misrepresented the character of God and cast reproach upon His name."²

**"The Bible has little to say
in praise of men."**

As wicked as it already appears, David was never left an orphan. God saw through the cloud of sin swirling about him. And unlike other kings, David repented and surrendered to

the real King! Thereafter, Bathsheba, now his wife, bore Solomon, the successor to the throne and the one to whom was promised unparalleled wisdom. And as if to seal His pardon, God sent word to name him *Jedidiah*, which means "loved by the Lord." God is larger than our sins. Read Psalm 8:4. What an amazing grace!

REACT

1. What if God were vengeful? Where would we be by now if He were?
2. We are made a spectacle of both the fallen and unfallen worlds. How many opportunities have we thrown to the unbelievers to blaspheme our God?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 717.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 720.

How the Godly Can Fall Into Sin

HOW-TO

2 Samuel 11; 12

Let's think of today's lesson as how the godly fall into sin. God provided the Ten Commandments, not because He didn't want us to enjoy life, but because He wants us to have a barometer for godliness. God created each of us with different personalities, different talents, and different desires. We each have the freedom to express these differences; however, we must keep within the safe boundaries of the Ten Commandments. David made some choices that led him outside these boundaries, thus exposing him to a lifetime of consequences.

Having trouble doesn't always mean you are out of the will of God. When you have an intimate relationship with God and/or are in the will of God, you can still have troubles in your life, but their effect is not damaging to you emotionally or spiritually. In other words, your responses to troubling situations will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. But if you actually want to guarantee trouble, here's how you can do so:

Be idle. One way to find trouble is to do nothing. Spring was a time when kings went to war (1 Kings 20:22-26). David, however, remained home. This idleness laid the foundation for the enemy's (Satan's) trap.

Ignore signs that show a lack of morals. We often start ignoring

sound principles or good morals when we take that first step down the wrong path. David inquired about the beautiful woman he saw bathing and was informed that she was married to Uriah. That should have been the first sign to back off!

Break at least one commandment. David broke at least three commandments throughout this entire ordeal: "Thou shalt not covet" (Exod. 20:17). David desired another man's spouse. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exod. 20:14). He slept with another man's wife. "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13). He had Uriah killed.

Cover up your wrongdoing. One of the Near Eastern customs was to allow your guests to wash their feet in your home when they arrived, because people wore sandals and the roads were sandy (Gen. 19:2; Gen. 24:32; Gen. 43:24). David put a little twist on this and tried to encourage Uriah to go back to his own home to wash his feet, hoping that upon seeing his wife, Uriah would desire to be intimate with her.

In 2 Samuel 12:7-12, Nathan tells David the consequences God would permit because of David's sin. Though David did experience these, God showed His love and forgiveness toward him. He accepted David's repentance and continued to see him as the apple of His eye (Ps. 17:8).

**One way to find trouble is
to do nothing.**

Thursday
September 6

The Best Policy

OPINION

Rom. 13:13, 14

The marriage between David and Bathsheba was troubled from the start. David had done many admirable things in his life, but acquiring Bathsheba was not one of them. He showed great arrogance by having an extramarital affair with her and then having her husband killed on the frontlines of battle. Yet as self-serving and horrible as David's actions were, God forgave him. David's story teaches us, however, that just because God forgives us doesn't mean we won't suffer the consequences of our sinful actions. David paid a great price: the death of two children. The first death occurred after Bathsheba became pregnant, and the second when his son Absalom waged war against him and died during the fighting.

So what can be learned about their marriage? It was still a union between two people who presumably loved each other. In any such relationship, honesty is important. The fact that David had Bathsheba's husband killed was very dishonorable. However, a few good things came from this. David returned to God, and

Bathsheba became the mother of Solomon, who would ultimately take over the throne and build God's temple. Despite even the worst of beginnings, there can be great outcomes through God's grace and love.

The greatest thing we can learn from the marriage of David and Bathsheba, I feel, is that a marriage that starts with deception will only lead to heartache, one way or another. Honesty, though difficult, is the best thing—always the best policy.

**As self-serving and horrible
as David's actions were,
God forgave him.**

REACT

1. What if David had had only one wife? How do you think that would have affected his reign?
2. Why did God allow the kings of Israel to have multiple wives? Why has this idea fallen out of favor in modern, Western culture?

"The Road Less Traveled"

EXPLORATION

Ps. 101:3

CONCLUDE

Life is truly a journey, and the route we take determines where the journey ends. In his poem "The Road Not Taken," Robert Frost tells how "way leads on to way" to demonstrate that once we choose a certain path, we know not where that path may take us. Frost says in that poem that he "chose the road less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." Jesus, when on earth, talked a lot about knowing and choosing the right way. He made it easy to identify that way with these words: "I am the way" (John 14:6, NKJV). One evening, while permitting his eyes to roam where they should not, David started an unholy trek down a wrong path, and only the mercy of God saved him from being lost forever.

CONSIDER

- Drawing a route map setting out two possible pathways for a young person, with both routes starting out with an X indicating "You are here." One path has names along it such as "Sin City," "Wrong Turn," etc. The other path features names such as "Conversion Alley," "Right Turn Only," etc.
- Researching on the Internet material for a two-page essay titled "Character Is What You Do in the Dark When No One Can See You."
- Convening a group to discuss lessons from David's story about the dangers of pornography. Use Psalm 101:3 and Matthew 5:27, 28 to guide the discussion.
- Reflecting on the question Why did they go so far?—a question often asked when two young people's sexual indiscretions lead to pregnancy. Consider how one act by David led to another and how biological impulses take over and exert unholy influences. Try to decide, honestly, how far is "too far."
- Revisiting Romans 6:23 and the part death played in David's series of sins. Consider how, in the context of our world today, breaking God's seventh commandment (Exod. 20:14) can lead to physical or spiritual death.

CONNECT

Psalm 101:3; Romans 6:23.

Ahab and Jezebel: Abuse of Authority



“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14, NIV).

Ahab, Jezebel, and the Power

INTRODUCTION

1 Kings 16:28–34; 17; 18

Sometimes God just has to intervene. Why do you think there was the Flood? Why else would Sodom and Gomorrah have been destroyed? Why do you think people have been raised from the dead, like the son of the widow at Zarephath, but to have God step in and show He exists and has the real power?

Power is something we cannot take lightly. Unfortunately, power is often abused. Every day, the news is full of all types of people who misuse the power they have.

Remember when God made the Israelites His own people? He brought them through the wilderness, leading them His way. Then He brought them through the Jordan River and had them march around Jericho, enter and conquer Canaan, and set up a nation.

When they wanted a king, God let them have their way. But He warned them about the problems that come with people who have power, and by about 874 B.C.,* they had King Ahab, who married Jezebel, princess of Sidonia. And because of her, they also had Baal worship.

Jezebel practically tried to take over. She is mentioned to be the one killing the Lord's prophets and feeding 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. Obadiah, the manager of Ahab's palace, had to do some undercover work to hide the Lord's prophets in the wilderness.

Power is something we cannot take lightly.

After three years of famine, Ahab and Obadiah went to search the wilderness for green pastureland.

God had to intervene. He used Elijah.

God used Elijah to show He is the One with the power. By proving He had the power, God not only saved the prophets in the wilderness but purged the land of the prophets of imported false gods.

In this case, God's will was to have a nation led by Him, a nation that was to be holy and righteous, following the One and only Lord. The people messed up God's original plans, and Ahab—the worst yet of Israel's kings—and Jezebel—hateful toward the Lord—set out to destroy everything God wanted. But God had the power and stepped in. He still has the power.

This week we will study power and how it can be abused.

*Edwin R. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan Publishing House, 1977).

God Save the King; Well, He Tried

LOGOS

1 Kings 16:21–22:40; 17–20; 2 Chronicles 18

If He's Not Lord *of* All, He's Not Lord *at* All (1 Kings 16:21–34)

God had established Jeroboam as the king of the northern federation of tribes in response to the arrogant leadership of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. While God recognized the division of the kingdom into the resulting nations of Israel (north) and Judah (south), He still claimed the spiritual allegiance of both nations. The temple He had established was located in Judah. Fearful that his supporters would abandon him and compromise the solidarity of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam established a new form of worship and founded a site for it. This new worship would make it unnecessary for people in his northern kingdom to travel to Jerusalem in the southern kingdom. Rather than trust the matter to God, who had provided his kingly authority in the first place, Jeroboam took matters into his own hands to ensure the allegiance of the northern tribes to himself.

Although Ahab's marriage to Jezebel was not pleasing to God, God did not give up easily.

God was not pleased with this lack of trust or the resultant false worship. Nevertheless, all the kings of Israel, including Ahab, adopted this new worship. It was a blend of the sacrificial system established by God and human elements introduced by the northern kings. Sadly, this compromised system of worship

made it easy to take another step further away from truth, resulting in his marriage to Jezebel.

Jezebel was the daughter of the Sidonian king Ethbaal. His very name indicates his allegiance to the pagan worship of Baal. Since Ahab had grown up in a compromised religious climate, it seemed but a small step to introduce this crass new form of worship to his subjects.

The Lord Is a God of Second Chances (1 Kings 17–20)

Although Ahab's marriage to Jezebel was not pleasing to God, God did not give up easily. He sent a famine to Israel in hopes that Ahab would repent. Unfortunately, rather than accepting God's discipline and hearing His voice, he listened to his wife's pagan influence and resisted the prophets of Jehovah.

Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal brought things to a head. God's

victory at Carmel may have turned the tide of public opinion, but it apparently made no positive spiritual impact on Ahab and Jezebel. Like the Pharaoh whom Moses had confronted (Exodus 7–12), their hearts seemed only to get harder. So Jezebel sent a threatening message to Elijah, which resulted in his flight.

Amazingly, God did not abandon Israel and its rogue hierarchy. King Ben-hadad of Aram formed an alliance with 32 kings in an effort to conquer Israel. Humanly speaking, this was a “slam dunk” for the alliance. There was no way Ahab could win this battle. Yet a prophet who spoke for the Lord promised Ahab victory in the upcoming battle. Ben-hadad’s forces were completely routed. His advisors were convinced that this defeat was merely the result of a tactical mistake rather than the result of divine providence. Thus, they urged Ben-hadad to form another army. This time, however, they would not meet their Israelite enemy in the hills where Ben-hadad’s chariots were more of a liability than a strategic advantage. They would meet the Israelite army on the plains, where their chariots would almost guarantee Israel’s defeat. Vastly outnumbered, even as Gideon’s band had been many years before, the army of Israel scored a stunning victory.

Some People Never Learn (1 Kings 21; 22)

One is tempted to think that someone who had witnessed God’s unmistakable power at Carmel, someone who had been blessed by a favorable climate since the days of Carmel, and someone who had been given, not one, but two incredible military victories against overwhelming odds would have turned back to God. Instead, it seems that Ahab assumed an attitude of invincibility, which in time, became arrogance.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the story of Naboth. Naboth owned a vineyard adjacent to the king’s property. Ahab wanted it; but Naboth refused to sell it to him. This, however, was no obstacle for Jezebel. She merely hired two false witnesses to accuse Naboth of a crime he did not commit. Using the power of the state and a system of corrupt courts, she had him executed. Ahab was then free to take possession of the coveted vineyard. How different things might have been had Ahab been raised in the atmosphere of pure worship and found a mate to match the high ideals he would have found there.

REACT

1. What role does a pure and selfless worship play in influencing the big decisions, such as marriage, that we face in life?
2. In light of Ahab’s mistakes, what criteria should you establish to guide you in the selection of a life mate?
3. How can a person avoid the temptation to mistake the mercy of God to mean personal invincibility, which invariably leads to arrogance?

“Abuse of Power”

TESTIMONY

1 Kings 16:28–34; 17; 18

“Under the perverted rule of Ahab, Israel departed from God and corrupted their ways before Him. . . .

“Ahab was weak in moral power. He did not have a high sense of sacred things; he was selfish and unprincipled. His union by marriage with a woman of decided character and positive temperament, who was devoted to idolatry, made them both special agents of Satan to lead the people of God into idolatry and terrible apostasy. The determined spirit of Jezebel molded the character of Ahab. His selfish nature was incapable of appreciating the mercies of God to His people and his obligation to God as the guardian and leader of Israel. The fear of God was daily growing less in Israel. The blasphemous tokens of their blind idolatry were to be seen among the Israel of God. There were none who dared to expose their lives

by openly standing forth in opposition to the prevailing blasphemous idolatry.”¹

“Ahab related to his wife the wonderful events of the day and the marvelous exhibitions of the power of

God showing that Jehovah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, was God; also that Elijah had slain the prophets of Baal. At this, Jezebel, who was hardened in sin, became infuriated. Bold, defiant, and determined in her idolatry, she declared to Ahab that Elijah should not live.”²

“The prophets of God were hated by apostate Israel because through them their hidden sins were brought to light. Ahab regarded Elijah as his enemy because the prophet was faithful to rebuke the king’s secret iniquities. So today the servant of Christ, the reprover of sin, meets with scorn and rebuffs. Bible truth, the religion of Christ, struggles against a strong current of moral impurity. Prejudice is even stronger in the hearts of men now than in Christ’s day.”³

REACT

1. How did Ahab and Jezebel abuse the power they had?
2. How do we responsibly use the power God has given to us?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 262.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 288, 289.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 587.

The Unlucky Viticulturist

EVIDENCE

Num. 36:7-9; 1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9:25, 26

Naboth owned a vineyard that was probably on the eastern side of the city of Jezreel. Because the land sloped away from the city on this side, the view from the vineyard could have been breathtaking.¹ Moreover, the name *Naboth* means "sprout" or "fruit."² So most likely, his vineyard was quite successful. However, Naboth was an unlucky man, for his vineyard was next door to the king of Israel, and Ahab wanted Naboth's land. Ahab tried to persuade Naboth to trade for the land, and, when that failed, he tried to buy it. Naboth, however, was not interested, since he felt he would be disobeying the Levitical code by transferring the land outside his family. Under the provisions of the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:13-28), it would have been possible to eventually redeem his land. However, he was still unwilling to sell it to Ahab.

It was certainly within Naboth's right to refuse, but Ahab went home sulking. As expected, Jezebel wanted to know why Ahab was having a pity party. Unfortunately for Naboth, she did not tell Ahab to get over it. Instead, she plotted to get the vineyard by writing letters in Ahab's name, falsely accusing Naboth of blasphemy against God and the king. To make matters worse, a fast is proclaimed, and Naboth is seated in a position of "high honor among the people" (1 Kings 21:9, NKJV). Essentially, Jezebel used religion as a cover for evil, a frequent occurrence throughout history.

Ahab went home sulking.

In accordance with Israelite judicial law (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6), two witnesses were brought in to testify and stir up the people who willingly went along with the despicable charade. The result: Naboth and his sons were stoned, and Ahab took possession of the vineyard.

REACT

1. How do you respond when people won't let you have your way?
2. The people in Jezreel willingly went along with Jezebel's evil plans. How can we avoid being victims or perpetrators of any kind of groupthink?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 834.

2. *The Word in Life Study Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996), p. 635.

Wednesday
September 12

How to Make Good Decisions

HOW-TO

1 Kings 16:28–34; 17; 18

Here are some ways you can make good decisions:

Surrender your will to God. By giving us the gift of free will, God chose to allow us to determine our futures. The best decision we can make for our life is to give our lives to God and let Him lead us. Thus, we can begin to live happy, more fulfilling lives (Rom. 12:1, 2).

Choose your alliances carefully. (See Proverbs 18:24.) Ahab and Jezebel brought out the worst in each other. Both wanted complete and utter control over the other's life. They wanted to choose their way in everything. When faced with a crucial decision, be sure to seek the advice of wise people. However, don't let them make your decisions for you.

Know your limitations. Ahab and Jezebel abused their power and authority over the people of Israel. They forced them to worship a god other than *the* God, our God. As Christians, we should follow God's commandments, especially the commandment to “ “love your neighbor as yourself” ’” (Mark 12:31, NIV).

**We are all human onions—
we have many layers.**

Ask God for understanding. (See Proverbs 3:5, 6.) Many of us dedicate our lives to the search for understanding. We want to know

where we came from, how we got here, why the sky is blue. I think it's very important to have understanding, because we are all human onions—we have many layers. We should know why it's important to give all to God, why we should choose our alliances carefully, and why we should know our limitations. It's important to know God and to know ourselves.

REACT

1. How do you think Ahab should have handled the situation when it became obvious to him that Jezebel wanted to eliminate Jehovah worship from Israel?
2. Why is it so hard for us to ask for help? And why is the word *surrender* so frightening even to Christians?

It's All About Those Genes

OPINION

1 Kings 16:30, 31; 2 Kings 9:34; 10:11, 30; Amos 3:3

Genetics is an important ingredient to a successful marriage. When we look for a future mate, we acknowledge the fact that the genetics of our children will be greatly determined by our spouse, and that our spouse has certain basic characteristics as a result of their genes.

In the ancient world, however, it seems that social and economic status played a greater role in spouse selection than genetic composition. Ahab should have taken the time to look at what God had said about genetics—"unto the third and fourth generation." After the fiasco of Elah's assassination, Ahab's father, Omri, started a new rule, because he was not a direct descendant of Elah. First Kings 16:25 says that Omri "did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him" (NIV). First Kings 16:30 says the same thing of Ahab, but also mentions him as the son of Omri even though it is previously stated. I would suggest that this is not simply excessive, but that mentioning Ahab as the son of Omri recognizes the role Omri's genes played in who Ahab was.

First Kings 16:31 says that it had been a trivial thing for Ahab to walk in the ways of "Jeroboam son of Nebat" (NIV). This text also introduces Baal after introducing "Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians" (NIV). Ahab goes beyond merely having golden calves so people can worship God; he attempts to replace Him completely.

At Jezebel's death, Jehu ordered that she be buried because she was the daughter of a king. However, when they went to bury her, her body had been torn to pieces. Jehu wanted to bury her as recognition of her social heritage. But God allowed her to be destroyed, proving that what is important is the genetic heritage with which you live.

Jehu destroyed the entire house of Ahab, because the wickedness had run through the genetics of their family. Because Jehu did this, he received a promise from God that his sons "will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation" (2 Kings 10:30, NIV).

Genetics by itself is a far cry away from determining your salvation, but it plays an important role in the life you lead, the life that you allow others around you to lead, and the life your children will lead.

Ahab should have taken the time to look at what God had said about genetics.

Ahab and Jezebel: Abuse of Authority

EXPLORATION

Rom. 13:11–13; Phil. 2:12–16; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Pet. 4:1–4; Luke 6:46; 11:39, 42–44, 46; 2 Cor. 13:5

CONCLUDE

In my own marriage, if I'm out only for myself (even if I claim or appear to be a Christian), what does it matter if I develop intimacy with someone other than my spouse? Our relationship doesn't work out, so why not just split and find new partners? Am I being God's man or woman, or my own? How much does a relationship with God matter to me? What claims does He have on me?

CONSIDER

- Gathering ten objects that float in water. Fill a large tub with several inches of water and place your items in it. Count how many items you can hold below the water for 60 seconds. How successful do you feel about your efforts? How does this apply to our spiritual life?
- Cutting a lump of moist clay in half. Reseal one portion to keep it moldable. Work the other half into an interesting shape and leave it out to dry. Once your creation is hard, push it together with the moist half and observe what happens. What spiritual conclusions can you draw from this?
- Playing a strategy board game (Risk, Parcheesi, etc.). Secretly play to lose. Observe the interactions of the players as you do this. How easy is it to let others win?
- Talking with the genealogist in your family. What is happening in your life that happened in the life of your mom or dad? Your grandparents? Anything from your life that looks familiar in theirs?
- Journaling the present circumstances of your life. What are the good things? The painful things? How much of what you face now seems impossible to get through? Read what you wrote several weeks later. How has God led you?
- Finding a private place that lets you connect with nature on a grand scale. (City-dwellers might consider a book of nature photography.) Listen for a whisper from God. What is He telling you?

CONNECT

J. Keith Miller, *Compelled to Control: Recovering Intimacy in Broken Relationships*.

Hosea and Gomer: Forgiving the Unfaithful



"The Lord said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes'" (Hos. 3:1, NIV).

From the Red- Light District

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs 31; Hos. 1:1-3; 3:1-3; Matt. 21:31, 32; 2 Cor. 13:4-7

Once upon a time, a highly placed church official decided it was time for him to get married, settle down, be “an example to the brethren,” and raise a family.

As a God-fearing man, he read all the articles he could find on marriage and how to choose a wife. He visualized the ideal woman as epitomized in Proverbs 31, which speaks of a woman of noble character, the desire of every man’s heart—one who has proven so invaluable to her husband that he feels comfortable leaving his household, his children, and his finances to her care. No reason to have a private eye monitor her every move. She is industrious, prepares the finest cuisine, and makes her home comfortable and hospitable to all. Topping it off, she is an astute business woman and investor.

She commands the respect of her home, church, and community. Her husband and family are well respected and praise her for her good works. Above all, she is noble and relies on God. “Yes! This is the type of woman I need!” he said. “I just wonder where I’ll find her,” he mused. *Well, God will direct me*, he thought, as he dropped to his knees and beseeched his heavenly Father for the right companion.

**She surely wasn’t this man’s
idea of the ideal wife.**

But God pointed him to a woman named Gomer. She surely wasn’t this man’s idea of the ideal wife. This

was definitely not the answer he expected. Her reputation left much to be desired. She was a known prostitute and had actually risen to be head of one of the brothels in the red-light district. He had to pay to get her out of trouble. Her pleasure-seeking ways, her desire to get fast money by the display and sale of her “goods” was well-known; her eyes turned to every suave-looking body that passed her way, and even to those men others wouldn’t have given a second look.

Well, maybe God has a plan I can’t see. He can do all things. But I wonder, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?” (Jer. 13:23, NIV). Although she was supposed to be a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), she still retained her old tendencies! “Perhaps after the children are born, she’ll stop her wandering ways,” he said to his friends. But a comfortable home, beautiful children, everything the heart could desire didn’t make a difference.

“Is God trying to teach me a lesson?” asked Hosea. “Despite her unfaithfulness, I give her loyalty, mercy, devotion, and acceptance. I just have to trust Him and remember that God comes after us even when we reject Him. Thank goodness for forgiveness.”

What's Love to Do?

EVIDENCE

Hos. 14:1, 4-7

Unfaithfulness in today's world leads to a number of ills: broken homes, wounded families, divorce, selfishness, distrust in the workplace, and mistrust between nations are just a few. The courts are filled with persons seeking to separate from their spouses, and even children have been known to want to "divorce" their parents. The root cause of all these problems is unfaithfulness to God.

In many cases, couples have not even spoken to each other for months or years. Parents don't speak with children, or children with their parents. Communication among human beings is reduced to monosyllabic exchanges. On the playground, in the home, and in the boardroom there is discord as people are no longer willing to iron out differences.

What are we doing with God? Do we commune daily with Him?

What, therefore, does the story of Hosea and Gomer teach us today? God, in His love and mercy, treats us as Hosea treated Gomer—forgiving her and taking her back every time she prostituted herself. Likewise, He forgives and takes us back each time we prostitute ourselves with false gods and repent for having done so (Hos. 14:1, 4-7). God's mercy and forgiveness began with Adam and Eve

Communication among human beings is reduced to monosyllabic exchanges.

in the Garden of Eden; and the Bible chronicles for our benefit other stories of forgiveness, such as Abraham and Sarah, and David and Bathsheba.

We, like Israel, have pained God with our promiscuity. Yet He has taken us back. However, He reminds us to "break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord" (Hos. 10:12).

How can we demonstrate a similar love to our fellow human beings? We need to spend more time communicating with each other, exhibiting faith, trust, and love.

REACT

1. What are some biblical principles that will enable us to create loving and forgiving families and other types of relationships?
2. List some positive family values as demonstrated in the Bible that can help us to be forgiving.

Monday
September 17

Unbroken Love From a Broken Heart

LOGOS

Hosea 1–3; Matt. 6:9–15; Luke 15:11–32

God Asked Hosea to Do a Strange Thing

“Go and marry a prostitute.” I can just hear the conversation between Hosea and God. “Me? I am a prophet who should be setting a good example. No one will ever listen to me again.”

Hosea wants to obey God, but he is human, and he has his reputation to protect. God must have made a mistake. But the message is clear.

Hosea obeyed God and married a prostitute, who went back to the life she knew. Even the children she had were not all fathered by Hosea. Each time she left, Hosea went back for her, cleaned her up, and continued loving her.

The story takes us to the auction block at the slave market. There he finds Gomer, filthy, half naked. He buys her back for 15 pieces of silver and 7 bushels of barley.¹ Hosea did something many people find difficult to do. He forgave Gomer.

“Forgiveness is the act of excusing or pardoning another in spite of his slights, shortcomings, and errors.”² This unusual story holds some valuable lessons for us.

Hosea did something many people find difficult to do.

God Expects Us to Forgive Each Other (Matt. 18:21)

God certainly asks us to do some strange things at times. When Peter asked how many times he should forgive his brother, Jesus replied, “‘Seventy times seven’” (Matt. 18:22). If we had to forgive so many times, we would lose count. And that’s just the point. Forgiving would become part of our nature. “True forgiveness is not limited by numbers; furthermore, it is not the act that counts, but the spirit that prompts the act.”³ Surely Hosea sets the example.

God asked Hosea to do what we would consider an unreasonable thing. Yet Hosea did not show any anger toward Gomer. “Anger hurts more the vessel that it is stored in than the vessel it is poured on.”⁴ “Anger may also attack your physical body, causing sleeplessness, diarrhea, high blood pressure, ulcers, or even skin blemishes.”⁵

Gomer’s Undeserved Treatment (Rom. 3:23)

Gomer did not deserve the treatment Hosea gave her. Sometimes, the actions of family members hurt our feelings much more than the actions of an outsider. But

despite what people do to us, our Savior has commissioned us to forgive freely (Matt. 18:21, 22). "Nothing can justify an unforgiving spirit."⁶

A Lesson for Us

We are expected to forgive others because God has forgiven us. Read Ephesians 4:31, 32. God holds no grudges against us when we sin. He invites us to confess our sin, and He is willing to pardon. "Jesus teaches that we can receive forgiveness from God only as we forgive others. . . .

"... He who is unforgiving cuts off the very channel through which alone he can receive mercy from God."⁷

Whenever we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse us from our sins (1 John 1:9). We stray from God, just as Gomer strayed from Hosea and went back to her prostitution. Yet through His loving kindness, He woos us back to Him.

How to Deal With Forgiving

1. Ask God for the strength to do so. He is the source of all mercy.
2. Pray for the desire to forgive.
3. Release the hurt by giving it to God.
4. Claim God's promise.

The story of Hosea's willingness to forgive Gomer illustrates how God, a kind and compassionate Father, willingly forgives us. Those who have done us wrong should not even have to confess in order for us to forgive them. When we train ourselves to see others through the eyes of Christ, forgiveness will be prompted by love.

REACT

Why shouldn't we wait for someone to ask for our forgiveness before we forgive them?

1. *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Publishers, 1981).

2. *Nelson Bible Dictionary* (Nelson Reference, 1994).

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 449.

4. Anonymous.

5. Len McMillan, *Taming Your Tigers* (Bakersfield, Calif.: Pacific Health Education Center, 2001), p. 29.

6. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 251.

7. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 113.

TESTIMONY

Hos. 3:1; John 8:10, 11; 1 Pet. 4:8

It's not easy to forgive someone who has done you wrong; and it's harder to forgive someone who promised to be faithful, but then broke that promise. "Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to . . . humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty."¹

Forgiving Gomer required Hosea "not [to] suffer resentment to ripen into malice. Do not allow the wound to fester and break out into poisoned words, which taint the minds of those who hear. Do not allow bitter thoughts to continue to fill your mind. . . . Go to your brother, and in humility and sincerity talk with him about the matter. . . ."

"All heaven is interested in the interview between the one who has been injured and the one who is in error. . . . The oil of love removes the soreness caused by the wrong. The Spirit of God binds heart to heart, and there is music in heaven over the union brought about."²

**"Only the love that flows
from the heart of Christ can
heal."**

We also can learn about forgiveness from Jesus' example in forgiving the woman caught in adultery. Read John 8:10, 11. "In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in

the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn, but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner and reaches to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounce, Jesus bids her, 'Go, and sin no more.'"³

"Only the love that flows from the heart of Christ can heal. Only he in whom that love flows, even as the sap in the tree or the blood in the body, can restore the wounded soul."⁴

1. *The Adventist Home*, p. 100.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 261, 262.

3. *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce*, p. 257.

4. *Education*, p. 114.

Forgiving the Unforgivable

HOW-TO

Hosea 1–3; Matt. 5:44

When we consider forgiving unfaithfulness—as in the matter of Hosea and Gomer—we must realize that Gomer’s unfaithfulness was constant, persistent.

What can Christians do when tempted not to forgive those who have wronged us? Here are a few suggestions:

Rely on God. Unfaithfulness is dehumanizing and demeaning and can leave victims with a feeling of worthlessness that renders them emotionally weak. Draw the strength to forgive from God, and claim His promises (Ps. 37:5; Mark 9:23).

Let go of the hurt. Even after we “forgive,” we still want the person who caused our pain to suffer. Fundamentally, forgiveness is about restoring and reinstating the perpetrator. True forgiveness requires that you treat the person as if he or she has never done you wrong. Forgiveness has healing power for the one forgiving. Many have testified that when they forgave, the cycle of pain was broken. Forgiving heals your memory as you change your memory’s vision. (There may be times when reconciliation—restoring the relationship—may not be advisable; for example, when someone forgives their spouse for inflicting upon them long-term physical abuse.)

Forgiving heals your memory as you change your memory’s vision.

Use Christ as our Example. Read Matthew 5:44. Forgiveness is humanly impossible. So we need to study the life of Christ to see how He dealt with persons who did Him wrong (Matt. 18:21, 22).

Choose to forgive. Contemplate God’s examples of forgiveness. Use His methods and ask for help (Luke 11:4; 23:34). We can meet the demands of true forgiveness by experiencing the new birth in Jesus. Release the person from the obligation to repay the debt. This is when forgiveness truly happens.

Read *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 243–251, to help you more fully understand the methods and power of forgiveness.

There’s so much to enjoy that we shouldn’t let past hurts haunt us. The only way to heal the pain that will not heal itself is to forgive the person who hurt you.

REACT

1. How is forgiving linked to spiritual and emotional health?
2. How can Jesus’ demonstration of forgiveness help you to forgive?

Forgiveness— Winding Down to a Better End

OPINION

1 John 1:9

He stood there, looking dejected as tears streamed down his face. His heart was broken. She had done it again. With outstretched arms, I quickly embraced the person I was mentoring. I was familiar with the story. This time, however, I knew his cup had overflowed. His body convulsed with sobs. I prayed a silent prayer. *Please, God, give him peace.*

A few moments later, he gently pulled away and stared me straight in the eyes as he said, "I still love her and have forgiven her." This experience taught me the true meaning of forgiveness. "Forgiveness is relinquishing my right to hurt back."¹ However, does God really expect me to forgive the unfaithful when it is so hard?

The good news is that it is not impossible for us to forgive the unfaithful. Hosea had a million reasons why he should not forgive his wife, Gomer. Why should this prophet of God subject himself to such humiliation in taking back such a wife? The answer? Forgiveness knows no boundaries. One should be willing to forgive more than seventy times seven times (Matt. 18:22).

**"Forgiveness is relinquishing
my right to hurt back."**

Remember that the greatest Forgiver is Jesus Christ. He has forgiven us so often; yet at times, we still find ourselves being unfaithful to

Him. If we are His followers, then we should be willing to follow His example. When Christ was on earth, He gave of Himself. He forgave sins, healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, blessed the children, and even loved the unlovable. Yet He was crucified by the same people to whom He ministered. Even on the cross, He asked His Father, our heavenly Father, to forgive His persecutors (Luke 23:34).

As ambassadors of Christ in a fallen world, it is incumbent upon us to cultivate a forgiving spirit. Is there someone you need to forgive? Why not ask the Lord to give you the strength to forgive that person now?

"He who cannot forgive others destroys the bridge over which he himself must pass."²

1. Archibald Hart, in Roy B. Zuck, *The Speaker's Quote Book* (Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corporation, 1999).

2. George Herbert, *ibid*.

With God, All Things Are Possible

Friday
September 21

EXPLORATION

Job 1; Hosea 1-3

CONCLUDE

Forgiving is one of the most essential elements to living a life of peace and happiness. In this world, we are plagued with people who cannot forgive. Hollywood pumps out its blockbuster hits that reflect anything but the virtues of living a peaceful Christian life in these last days. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:14, 15 the imperative to be forgiven by our heavenly Father—forgiving others who have wronged us.

CONSIDER

- Creating a visual image that depicts forgiveness or new life. For example, a forest with dead leaves giving way to spring blooms.
- Making a list of people you have not forgiven and asking God to give you the strength to forgive them no matter what they have done to you.
- Writing out a short skit on forgiveness that could be performed for one of the lower division Sabbath School classes at your church.
- Personalizing in your own words Matthew 6:14, 15.
- Searching for people who may have problems with forgiveness and telling them what peace you have found in forgiveness. Pray with them.
- Interviewing people at your church, school, or work, asking them the questions, Is it possible to forgive? and If so, how do you forgive?

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chaps. 10-13.

Larry Yeagley, *Beyond Anger*; Fred Luskin, *Forgive for Good*.

Yahweh and Israel: Fulfillment Beyond Failure



“For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth’ ” (Isa. 54:5, NIV).

Be Joyful

INTRODUCTION

Exod. 3:6-14; Hos. 9:1; Phil. 4:4

This summer, my husband and I are going to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary. Twenty-five years of marriage! In the past, we had not just happy days but also days of misery. When I think about marriage in our day, I am amazed at how light-mindedly some people take the vow of love. You should be there for each other in good and bad times, until the death of one of the partners ends the union.

If God does not hold His hand over marriage, if spouses do not ask for His help, the chances of a marriage failing will be greater. God is our guidance and assistance. How many experiences have we had with our Father in heaven, but still we do not trust Him fully, neither are we content with our lives. God was and is the same; and He will be the same forever (Ps. 102:27; Heb. 13:8). That means He is there for us always and that He is faithful to us.

In the first chapter of the book of Hosea, Hosea's marriage is taken as a symbol of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Just as Hosea took back his wife, Jesus will take us back when we hurt Him. In the New Testament, we find this special text: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil 4:4, NIV). Paul knew very well what he was writing about. He lived what he wrote. He rejoiced in the Lord.

A close relationship with God gives joy. I can pray for that: Please, Lord, give me joy today. Let me rejoice in You. When we rejoice in the Lord, we are advertising the gospel!

If the Israelites had rejoiced more in the Lord and trusted Him more, maybe some things wouldn't have happened the way they did. But how is it working in our lives? Sure, we know that it would be better not to do certain things, but how often we still do them! What a wonderful and patient God we have. Despite our mistakes, we can come to Jesus with our weary hearts and ask Him for forgiveness. Indeed, He is always there, and He knows us so well. With God, it is possible to start all over again. Our past may have separated us from our Creator. Maybe we didn't believe or trust Him enough. Maybe we just did too many bad things, and we feel there is no chance for forgiveness. But still there is forgiveness. We can proclaim today, Lord, I want to start anew!

**We can proclaim today,
Lord, I want to start anew!**

Are We Worthy of God's Love?

LOGOS

Exod. 3:6–14; 6:6–8; Josh. 24:1–18; Jer. 5:19, 22; Ezek. 16:26–29, 34; Hos. 9:1; John 20:21; Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 John 2:12

God Sends Moses to Free His People (Exod. 3:6–14)

We know the story well. Moses is guarding his father-in-law's sheep, when suddenly, he sees a burning bush. Moses is curious. The bush is burning, but not burning up. Moses walks closer to it. Once there, he hears a voice. It is God talking to him. He wants Moses to go back to Egypt to free the Israelites from slavery. Moses, however, doesn't want to go, so he gives God a lot of excuses for not doing so (Exod. 3:11; 4:1, 10–13). But God is persistent and tells him what to do, and in the end, Moses returns to Egypt.

Israel, What Did God Do for You? (Josh. 24:1–18)

Joshua gathers together all the tribes of Israel to help them realize once again how good God is. He reminds them about their ancestors and men of faith such as Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, and Moses. Abraham followed God's instructions to leave his country and move to a foreign place.

Isaac stayed faithful in the Lord. Jacob trusted in the Lord more and more over the years. Moses did not want to go where God was sending him but finally agreed to do so. All these men were as imperfect as we are. Still, they obeyed God.

Joshua especially asks them to consider how God never forgot them. The Bible shares many more stories about God's loyalty, about how He saved His people again and again, despite their unfaithfulness (e.g., 2 Chron. 36:11–14).

God does not turn away
from us.

Why Is God Turning Away? (Jer. 5:19, 22)

The Israelites turned their backs on God so many times that they forgot their God. This was even worse than the behavior of the Gentiles. It was so serious that the Bible even refers to the Israelites as a whore (Hos. 9:1). They prostituted themselves with false gods. The true God was not important to them as long as they lived a comfortable life. But the time came when they were struggling so hard and under so much pressure that they finally turned back to Yahweh. However, in asking Him why He allowed certain things to happen to them, they made Him responsible for their mistakes. They did not get the idea that they themselves were

responsible for the condition they were in.

How often have we been just like the Israelites? We pray. We study the Bible. We go to church. Our lives are running like a well-oiled machine. But suddenly, something bad happens that we did not expect. Immediately we ask, "God, why did You let that happen?" The only right answer is this: God does not turn away from us; we turn away from God. That is why God has to discipline us to get back on the right track. His discipline, His desire to help us, is proof of His faithfulness.

God Is Loyal (John 20:21)

We rarely think of John 20:21 as having anything to do with God's faithfulness toward us. But if we dig deeper into this verse, we will think otherwise. God created the world and everything in it. But even before He did this, He put a plan in place should sin enter this creation (1 Pet. 1:18–21). Sinless Jesus, the Lord of everything, humbled Himself by coming to the earth as a human being to show us how to live and to save us from sin. He was willing to leave the glories of heaven for us! Isn't that faithfulness? Jesus did not come down as a wealthy king in glory, which He could have done. Instead, He was born into a poor family. He came from a town not highly regarded. Isn't that faithfulness?

But there is more. He helped not only rich people and people in high positions. He also healed the sick and helped the poor. That, too, is faithfulness. And He commissioned His disciples, you and me, to preach His Word, to tell everybody about His goodness and love. What faithfulness to trust us with such an awesome work!

Last but not least, Jesus died the second death—the death of never waking up to live with God for eternity—so that we can be forever with Him in glory.

Surely, that is faithfulness!

REACT

1. Why aren't we better than the Israelites?
2. Why does God give us second, third, and even fourth chances? Is there ever a time when we won't get any more chances? Explain your answer.
3. Can we ever be worthy of God's love? Explain.
4. Think about what Jesus gave up to come to this earth, to be faithful to us. How does this make you feel toward Him?

Monday
September 24

Connect With God's Love

TESTIMONY

Exod. 6:6-8

When the Israelites turned to false gods, they forgot the true meaning of love. They forgot that they were to love God with all their heart and their neighbor as they loved themselves (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). They also forgot that "a gentle answer turns away wrath" (Prov. 15:1, NIV).

What a healing power we would experience if we had such love in our lives, for this is God's love. Our lives would be a reflection and a foretaste of heaven. The world believes that money is power. But as Christians, we should believe that godly love is power. Such love can prevent conflict and quarrels; and it can bring true happiness. Wealth can spoil a person's character. Wealth can even destroy a person. But God's love restores.

If the Israelites had desired God's true love and looked to Him as their Husband (Isa. 54:5), they would have been spared so much. His love would have been a "sacred circle" around them, protecting them from harm. Ellen White elaborates on

this sacred circle and on how God's love can help families and groups of people stay close to Him:

"The home circle should be regarded as a . . . symbol of heaven."

"There is a sacred circle around every family which should be preserved. No other one has any right in that sacred circle. The husband and

wife should be all to each other. The wife should have no secrets to keep from her husband and let others know, and the husband should have no secrets to keep from his wife to relate to others. The heart of his wife should be the grave for the faults of the husband, and the heart of the husband the grave for his wife's faults. Never should either party indulge in a joke at the expense of the other's feelings. Never should either the husband or wife in sport or in any other manner complain of each other to others, for frequently indulging in this foolish and what may seem perfectly harmless joking will end in trial with each other and perhaps estrangement. I have been shown that there should be a sacred shield around every family.

"The home circle should be regarded as a sacred place, a symbol of heaven, a mirror in which to reflect ourselves. Friends and acquaintances we may have, but in the home life they are not to meddle."*

**The Adventist Home*, p. 177.

God's Faithfulness to His People

EVIDENCE

Josh. 24:1–18

God wants to guide us safely and securely through life, without taking away from us the freedom to decide. We stand in this labyrinth called life, hoping to make the right choices. But plenty of amenities and distractions lead us down dead-end alleys.

Many remarkable events, scientific achievements, careers, successes, and even tragedies can point us in the wrong direction and can cause us to forget that God has promised to direct our path. Even Israel, led by God through generations, tested His faithfulness too many times. But God's love and faithfulness always have existed. He found a way to save the world by sending His beloved Son (1 John 4:10, 19). But what did the Israelites do? They didn't trust Him, because they decided to serve other gods.

God doesn't force anybody to serve Him. Each of us is to make that decision on our own.

God keeps His promises. He is ever faithful, because He doesn't change (Ps. 102:27; Heb. 13:8), and He made it possible for every person on earth to gain salvation—everybody who wants to accept this

gift. God's love grows neither cold nor weak over the years. He was with His people in Egypt where they worked as slaves. He led them through the desert, and He was with them in the Promised Land. With confidence and faithfulness, we should determine to share our faith in words and deeds with the world, our friends, and our families, so they also can see the faithful love of God for His children.

There are three facts we must always remember: (1) We were born in sin, but (2) by God's grace we can become completely new. (3) Today, God is talking to us with the same clear voice: "You are My people, you are My bride, and you are My children."

**There are three facts we
must always remember.**

REACT

1. What assurance do you have that God is still your Companion?
2. When was the last time you made a decision to give up a false god and follow the true God?

How to Have Full Joy

HOW-TO

1 John 1:12

Everybody likes to talk and chat with their friends. In school, however, this can be a bit stressing, because teachers don't like it very much—but when you want to tell your friend something brand new, you can't be quiet!

Communication is very important for a relationship—and that's why John said he wanted to talk face to face with the people to whom he was writing. He knew that talking face to face is an important communication tool, because there's something about being together that makes our joy complete. A good friend told me lately that writing a letter is often easier than communicating face to face, but that we need to learn to talk to each other also. Talking to each other in person makes it easier to become good friends and to keep relationships strong. We've all talked with relatives and family members over the phone or via e-mail. But we've also experienced how much more fun it is to be with them in person.

Make the Bible living. Take every chance to talk with your friends and family about different topics in the Bible. A lot of your friends will be interested in this. And you will experience great joy, because you were bold enough to talk about such things! Jesus will give you the right words, if you trust Him.

**The Bible . . . doesn't live
unless you talk about it.**

Make your prayer living. The Bible is a huge letter to each one of us—but it is *only* a letter. It doesn't live unless you talk about it. And of course you'll talk to the Creator about it. He will make the Bible a living entity in our lives.

Make your joy living. If you follow the first two steps, this third step is a matter of course. Only if you have experienced full joy will you be able to give full joy and to live a life full of joy! Such a life will attract many people who will want to know about our Savior, the real Joy-Giver!

REACT

1. Is it possible to lead people to God without having full joy? Explain.
2. What would change in your life if you had full joy?

Serve Our Creator

OPINION

Josh. 24:14

We live in a time when faith and God don't play a big role in many people's lives. Rather, they are looking for God within themselves, because they don't believe He really is bigger than they are. Sin has programmed us to think that we cannot believe in things we cannot see. Sin also has programmed us to be distrustful because of disappointments we've experienced. God knows this, however, and that is why He wants to draw us close to Him.

We can't really justify any of the bad things we do. In many ways, we worship false gods just as the Israelites did. Have we really learned from their mistakes? Do we really want to learn from their mistakes? How easy it is to see the bad in others without ever noticing the bad in us. It is all a matter of pride. And it's impossible to learn how to do better if we don't realize what our problems are. Jesus died for our sins. He doesn't want to give up on us, even when we worship other gods.

What about our hobbies?

There's no problem with having a hobby, except when it replaces God by becoming the most important thing in our lives. The choice is ours. God has blessed us with a free will so that we can decide to follow Him

or not. And even when we decide not follow Him, He still respects our decision.

He loves us and wants us to be faithful. He wants us to learn from our mistakes and to ask for forgiveness. He wants to use us for big things. It is His will for us to include His principles of love in our relationships on earth.

God is our Bridegroom. Are we ready to be His bride?

**God is our Bridegroom. Are
we ready to be His bride?**

REACT

1. What can we learn from the Israelites about accepting or rejecting God's faithfulness on our behalf?
2. How can we be more faithful to God and humans?
3. What separates us from God, and how can we make these things less important than He is?
4. Why was it important that God allows us to decide whether or not to follow Him?

Love and Service Last Through Eternity

EXPLORATION

Joshua 23; 24

CONCLUDE

Joshua 24:31 identifies Joshua's legacy: "Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the leaders who outlived him—those who had personally experienced all that the Lord had done for Israel" (NLT). This is a legacy to cherish—an entire nation serves the Lord as long as it is led by those who had a personal experience with Him! While daily life demands our attention, we periodically need to reflect on the long-term impact of our lives. Evidence of our discipleship, a solid relationship with the Lord, will affect those around us.

CONSIDER

- Creating a sacred space that minimizes the noise of the modern world and allows you to focus more deeply on opening your soul to God through prayer and Bible study.
- Selecting a symbol of your commitment to the Lord similar to reflecting on the pillar of rock that Joshua chose to be a testimony.
- Writing a contract that details how you will serve the Lord.
- Making a list of people you are likely to see this week and identifying ways you can demonstrate God's love to them.
- Interviewing someone you don't know well and encouraging them to share their life story.
- Recording a message from the Lord about how you can live a godly life. Listen to it daily and note how it affects your actions.
- Writing your obituary. How do you want people to remember you?

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 49.

Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*;
Tod E. Bolsinger, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian: How the Community of God Transforms Lives*.

Next Quarter's Lessons

The Refiner's Fire

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 2007, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: The Shepherd's Crucible

Logos: Psalm 23; Rom. 12:18–21

Memory Text: "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Ps. 23:3, NKJV).

Key Thought: Sophie leaned back against her bedroom door and slid to the floor. Tears were welling up fast, and it was only a moment before she was sobbing. "How could he? How could he!" Sophie had just received news that was breaking her heart. Someone she thought was a friend, someone she respected and trusted, was spreading awful gossip about her in order to ruin her reputation and the work she had been doing. Grabbing her Bible off the bed, she suddenly found herself staring at some very familiar words: "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Ps. 23:3, 4, NKJV).

"Surely this can't be!" she blurted out to herself. But the logic seemed inescapable. The Shepherd in the psalm was guiding His sheep in paths of righteousness, but these very paths also seemed to wind their way into the valley of the shadow of death. Could it be possible that even this painful betrayal by a friend, this dark valley, could be used by God to train her in righteousness?

The Week at a Glance: At what times have you grown more spiritually—through the easy times or the harder ones?

Lesson 2: The Crucibles That Come

Logos: Jer. 9:7–16; Rom. 1:21–32; 2 Cor. 12:7–12; 1 Pet. 4:12–19; 5:8–11

Memory Text: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet. 4:12, 13, NIV).

Key Thought: In chemistry labs one often places various materials into a small container and heats them to extreme temperatures. As the container becomes hotter, the materials either melt, fizzle, spit, or burn brightly, depending

upon what they are made of. The container is called a crucible.

A crucible is defined in the dictionary as (1) a vessel used for melting a substance that requires a high degree of heat, (2) a severe test, (3) a place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development.

These definitions also give us a helpful insight into what happens in our spiritual lives. This week we'll highlight some reasons we may suddenly find ourselves under pressure and experiencing tests in places in which circumstances cause us to change, develop, and grow in character. This will help to give us an awareness of what God is doing in our lives so that when we enter a crucible, we will have an idea of how to respond.

The Week at a Glance: What are the causes of the difficult times that we experience through our lives?

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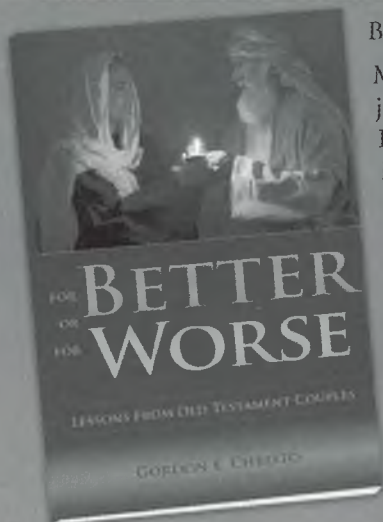
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