

OCTOBER-DECEMBER

Q
2000

PROVERBS

WISDOM TO LIVE BY



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



Orlando Magaña, Jr.: Senior Theology Major and Music Minister

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best sermons
are preached
with lots of soul
and no words."**

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Proverbs: The Wise Have It



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Welcome to *CQ's* World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ's* writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School lesson Bible Study Guide, more than 300 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 65,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Indonesian, and Finnish.

Get Interactive

Ever think about writing for *CQ*?

Why not? Each year three hundred young adults from around the world participate in the *CQ* writing program. It gives Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the church.

You are the most important ingredient in our *CQ* formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson, write us today:

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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.

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

Circulation of CQ is about sixty-five thousand.

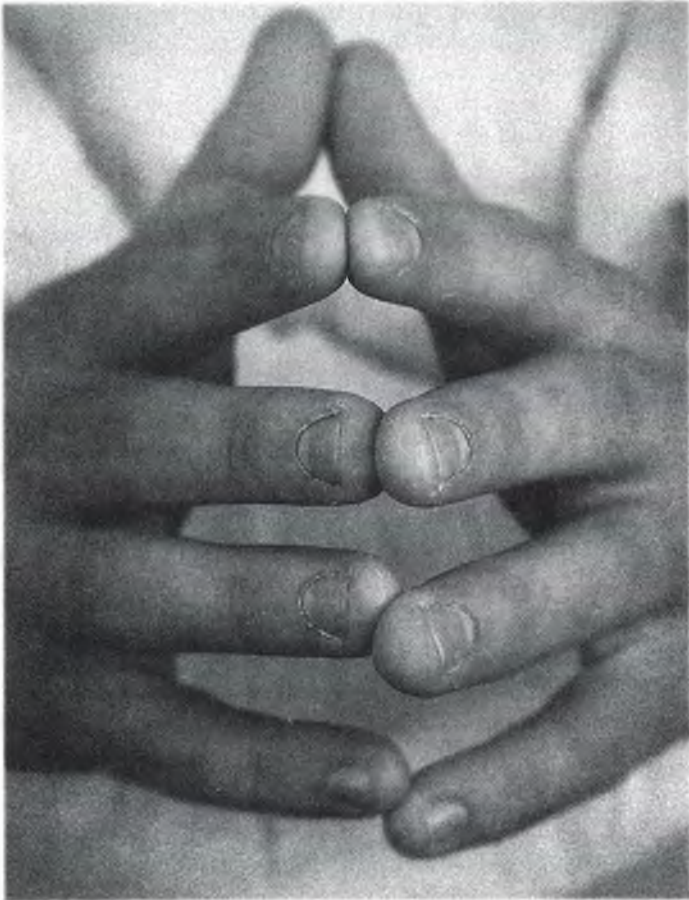
POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The scriptural references on which each week's lesson is based appear in bold type at the beginning of the "Logos" portion of the lesson.
3. The Bible passage for the week is usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.
4. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the lesson:
 - "**Introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "**Logos**," as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage 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 collegiate/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.*

What are your **Priorities?**



**“ ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One
is understanding’ ”
(Prov. 9:10, NIV).**

INTRODUCTION

Gal. 6:7

A few weeks ago, I borrowed a library book on special reserve and completely forgot to return it. Though I needed it for only an hour, I checked it out overnight anyway. The next day was Sabbath, and as usual, I went to church, unaware that the book I had borrowed from the library was due first thing Saturday morning. I returned the book Sunday afternoon to learn that I had accumulated a charge of more than \$25. I did not have the money to pay the fine.

A friend suggested that I ask for the fine to be forgiven.

A friend suggested that I ask for the fine to be forgiven, so I went to the circulation desk and presented my case. The answer was swift: "Sorry; it is policy. There is nothing I can do, but you can pay in installments: a dollar, fifty cents, any amount. You just have to clear your fine before your graduation."

Great, I said to myself. I have three years ahead of me. No need to worry.

This incident reminds me that we sometimes tend to forget our obligations to institutions, community, and persons. Of course, sometimes we are not conscious of our forgetfulness, but the more salient point is found in this biblical passage: "You reap whatever you sow" (Gal. 6:7, NRSV).

As Christians, we should consider this statement in relation to our future reign in God's kingdom. However, there are practical things we must do now. These are very simple things, but they are very important. The Gospel of Matthew gives a good example of what our priorities as Christians should be (25:32-46). The detailed account of the dynamics of judgment shows clearly how persons are treated in relation to their priorities: those who live their lives while positively helping the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, etc., are the ones who enter the kingdom. The criteria for entering God's kingdom, then, are the ways we set our priorities in relation to others. Yet we are constantly bombarded by society with the idea that the most important thing is to acquire material goods. Even in our education we sometimes think of getting the degree or finishing school primarily to get a good job to make money.

As we set our priorities as young Adventists, we should ask ourselves important questions:

- How do we set our priorities in relation to institutions, communities, and persons?
- Is there a direct correlation between setting our priorities and living a righteous life?
- Should our priorities shape our lives, or should our lives shape our priorities?

Sunday
October 1

A Perspective on Wisdom

LOGOS

Prov. 1:1-7; 2:1-11; 4:5-7; 21:3; James 1:5

Proverbs 1:1-6 provides the purpose and function of the collection of Proverbs: to comprehend the collective value of wisdom, instruction, and understanding in order to develop and preserve moral living, balanced judgment, and quality citizenship. This is the ideal of life.

Proverbs 1:7 is the first proverb: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline" (NIV). This is the principle at the heart of the book of Proverbs, the motto of true religion. Obviously, there is the element of contrast here. It is implicit that the wise fear the Lord while, as is explicitly stated, fools despise wisdom. The fool is described in Proverbs as arrogant and rash (12:15, 16), morally inept and dangerous (13:19, 20), and undeserving of honor (26:1-10). On the other hand, the wise are so designated precisely because they fear God, i.e., believe in Him and show Him reverence, or respect.

The fear of the Lord permeates the Bible: God's sheer power dwarfs humans and elicits awe (Exodus 19, 20); His holiness calls forth the same (Isa. 6:1-7); His covenant demands loyalty and honor (Deuteronomy 10). Solomon states that to fear God is the beginning; that is, the essence or chief part of knowledge (Prov. 1:7). Undoubtedly, we recognize the parallelism between fearing God and knowledge that is so common to the book of Proverbs (1:29; 2:5; 9:10; 30:3). Associated with these are wisdom and discipline (1:7). Yet Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Hence, wisdom and knowledge bear affinity in relationship to the fear of the Lord.

The fear
of the Lord
permeates
the Bible.

In Proverbs, the central function of this motto is to shun evil (3:7; 14:16; 16:6; 21:3). It has a decidedly ethical, moral quality. To overlook this is to divorce ourselves from a relationship with God and become fools. It is to accept evil as the norm and, in essence, deny the existence of God (Ps. 14:1).

Four basic and interrelated factors are dominant in the book of Proverbs with regard to wisdom:

1. Wisdom is related to listening (1:5, 8). This is an activity frequently used in wisdom vocabulary. It denotes obedience, patience, and a willingness to be corrected. This is not the case with the fool (14:29; 18:13). Listening brings direction and purpose (1:5).

2. Wisdom is a gift. Proverbs 2:6 is clear: "The Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (NIV). (See also James 1:5.)

3. One must desire wisdom (Prov. 2:1-5). Though wisdom is a gift from God, it can be ascertained only when one truly wants it and pursues it. Wisdom is the result of divine providence *and* human cooperation.

4. Wisdom is the best quality. Note Proverbs 4:5, 6, and especially verse 7: "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (NIV).

REACT

1. What would you be willing to do in order to receive wisdom? Be specific.
2. What is *fear* and what does it mean to *fear* God?
3. How does respect for God help you with your calculus exam or understanding music theory? Be specific.

Monday
October 2

God's Invitation to Seek Him

TESTIMONY

Isa. 55:6

The definition of *seek* stated in the dictionary is "to look for, ask for, pursue." If we are seeking someone or something, there must be evidence that tells of its existence. In Isaiah 55:6 God instructs us to seek Him, and the evidence of His existence is seen in the heavens and the firmament (Ps. 19:1). The birds shout His praises, the trees and flowers praise Him with their beauty, the rain pours out blessings on His creatures, the stars magnify His name, and together they all invite us to seek God.

If God is not hidden, why then are we invited to seek Him? In the beginning humanity was created perfect; after sin, however, humankind became imperfect and a prisoner of Satan. If it were not for the love of Christ and the invitation to seek God, humanity would be eternally lost. Ellen White points out that in seeking

**By ourselves
we are incapable
of choosing God.**

Christ we find righteousness, wholeness of character, complete surrender of self, and the greatest Friend of all humankind.¹ She also states that "through the things of nature, and the deepest and tenderest earthly ties that human hearts can know, [God] has sought to reveal Himself to us."²

Therefore, if we freely accept God's invitation to seek and know Him, then Satan will not be able to lead us astray by saying God is unjust, impatient, or unkind.

How do we accept the invitation to seek God? The Spirit of Prophecy says that in order to accept God, our minds must first be "quickened by the Holy Spirit."³ By ourselves we are incapable of choosing God, but through the Holy Spirit we can see the evil of sin and how it has separated us from God. We must realize our helplessness, that our motives are impure, and that our heart is unclean. We must also yearn to be forgiven, to be cleansed, and to be set free from the bondage of sin. Without God there is no happiness, no hope, and no love, and wealth and security are unattainable. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33, NIV).

REACT

If God puts the desire to look for Him in our hearts, how can we be free moral beings?

1. *Steps to Christ*, Foreword.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

God's Wisdom Is Absolute

EVIDENCE

Prov. 9:10

The story is told of six blind men and an elephant. The first caught the animal by the trunk and said, "I see, the elephant is like a snake." The second took the elephant by the tusk and exclaimed, "An elephant is like a spear!" The third held the knee and shouted, "An elephant is like a tree!" The fourth grabbed the tail and said, "Oh! The elephant is like a rope." The fifth felt the animal's huge body and declared, "The elephant is like a wall." The sixth touched an ear and was convinced that the elephant was like a fan!

When they met to discuss the elephant, each was adamant and fully convinced that his own perspective of the elephant, albeit limited, was correct.

The moral of this ancient fable is that perception is not necessarily reality. No matter how convinced or sincere one may be, partial knowledge makes a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole as revealed in Jesus (1 Cor. 13:9,10).

The French philosopher René Descartes blamed human error on our "limited knowledge and unlimited choices."¹ The truth is that humanity's vision is limited and myopic. Hence, the appropriate spirit is never to be too sure that one is

correct. One must try to see clearly through God's eyes, in God's Word because God is the ultimate reality (Prov. 11:15; 14:12).

We live in an information age, but the more information we have, the less we seem to know. T. S. Eliot asked, "Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"² True knowledge includes a heart, mind, and body experience that, in turn, leads to an intimate relationship with the true and living God, who alone has absolute knowledge. Consider this Caribbean proverb: "One must sleep in the fowl's coop to know whether the fowl snores."

Ellen White tells us that true wisdom is attained by "humbly receiving the revelation that [God] has been pleased to give, and in conforming the life to His will."³

The more information
we have, the less
we seem to know.

1. René Descartes, translated by Donald A. Cress, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993), p. 85.

2. T. S. Eliot, "Choruses From 'The Rock'" in T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963), p. 147.

3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 431.

HOW-TO

2 Tim. 3:16

I am generally an impatient person—not a good character trait, especially when it comes to learning new things. I remember my dad always saying to me: “Be patient. The world was not built in one day.” He is a carpenter, and I always wanted to be able to build things as he did and as fast as he did; of course, I was never able to because it had taken him more than 30 years to master his profession, and here am I in my teens wanting to do it all now.

The problem with my father’s advice is that if you are a young person, it just doesn’t work. We want to get things done now. If we want to succeed, however, we must slow down and take instructions, accept corrections, and sometimes endure rebuke. What is true for our professional and our social lives is also true for our spiritual lives. Timothy gives us steps to follow God’s will: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV).

**Scripture is
from God,
and its content
for our benefit.**

1. We must take it for granted that Scripture is from God and its content is for our benefit.

2. Teaching and learning are particularly important for living our lives in a way that will please God. Teaching is also fundamental for the growth of the church. We have to teach the people we come into contact with (Matt. 28:19, 20).

3. Though most of us do not like to be rebuked, it is vital for our growth. However, we should always rebuke gently and in love, for verbal abuse is not synonymous with rebuke.

4. The need to heed correction is so vital that Proverbs ties it to wealth: “He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored” (13:18, NIV).

REACT

1. What is the connection between rebuking and righteousness?
2. What evidence do you have that all Scripture is God-breathed?
3. How does teaching others to serve God help you in your search for God?
4. What is the difference between wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, and how do you apply them in your life?
5. How can you know for certain that your plans and ideas are shaped by God’s wisdom?

Having More Important Things to Do

OPINION

Matt. 6:33

We seem to be resigned to the idea that we must learn our lessons the hard way, that we'll find wisdom and truth when we get older. This doesn't have to be the case with those who choose to follow God. By choosing to spend time wisely and to focus our energies on our relationship with Him, we can live a life that increases in knowledge as we walk closer with God.

We often use the excuse that we are too tired from a hard day at work or school to spend time in study or prayer. Thus, instead of leaning on our Lord for the help we need, we sacrifice the very thing that will help us survive.

We must learn to be truthful with ourselves about our time. Many try to excuse their lack of spiritual activity by stating they are working two jobs or having to overexert themselves in order to make ends meet. Are we *really*

Most of us are probably working to meet our luxuries, not our needs.

working so hard just to meet our needs? Or are we really putting in the extra time and effort to move up in the company, to impress the boss, or to get that nicer car? Most of us are probably working to meet our luxuries, not our needs.

Our Father has promised that if we seek Him first, He will take care of everything else. God will never ask us to work for our needs at the expense of our relationship with Him. We must learn to trust in Him to complete His holy promises and show Him, through our actions, that we choose Him first, over everything this world will provide.

Many of us think we would walk closer to God if only we had more time. What are we doing with the time we have now? Let's remember the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). If we are faithful with what we have, then the Lord might decide to entrust us with more.

Many are living each day as though we're not nearing the end of a heavenly conflict—the battle for our very souls. We live each moment apparently unconscious of the fact that our Redeemer is about to fulfill His promise to come again. This world will distract us with many things that we *must* do. However, we must learn that the things of today are only temporal and that priorities should lie in our preparation for the eternal. We must learn to trust God for our needs and to focus on His works. When we are so bogged down by the responsibilities and chores this world is telling us we must do, we must learn to say, "I've more important things to do."

Friday
October 6

Creating "Godspace"

EXPLORATION

Ps. 9:10

CONCLUDE

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10, NIV). If we are honest, most of us will admit paying only lip service to plumbing the depths of God's wisdom. However, when we respect God enough to seek out His wisdom and understanding, He gives us the ability to understand our world, to make sense of the happenings in our lives. When we are perplexed, He gives comfort and assurance. But such wisdom and understanding will not come by osmosis. We must intentionally create "Godspace" in our lives.

CONSIDER

- Prioritizing the following items, numbering each from one to five: Family, God, pet, work, friends. Beside each item write one sentence explaining why you gave it the number you did.
- Creating a "Collage of Wisdom" by assembling photos of the wisest people you know (family members, celebrities, etc.). Pay special attention to the way in which God uses others to enrich us.
- Interviewing two older people with whom you feel comfortable. Ask them to recount a moment when they felt perplexed about something and how God worked it out after they spent time consulting Him.
- Carving a Bible, hands folded in prayer, and two people talking using three bars of soap. We get wisdom from God when we read the Bible, pray, and share our faith with others.
- Writing a letter to Wisdom, which the Bible personifies as a woman. Tell her about the times when she helped you and the times when you wished that you had consulted her.
- Memorizing Proverbs 3:13-18 from a modern translation of the Bible. Share this special Scripture during a service or meeting at your church.

CONNECT

Proverbs 3; 4; Ecclesiastes 7.

Mind, Character, and Personality, vol. 1, chaps. 4, 11; *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, chap. 13.

Ben Carson with Gregg Lewis, *The Big Picture*, chap. 4.

A Star to Guide the humble



“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5, 6, NIV).

Relax: God Is Driving

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 3:5, 6

Fred would call—just before leaving the office—to alert Kathleen (his 2-year-old daughter) and Rose, his lovely wife, that he was on his way home. Kathleen would look out the window, see him approach the door, meet her Mum, and together, stand in front of the garage. Fred would then rev his sleek Mercedes and in 60 seconds drive up the 500 m driveway, applying the brakes right in front of Kathleen's nose! This would thrill Kathleen so much that they made it a "welcome home ritual." The neighbors would watch in amazement at the level of trust that Kathleen, let alone Rose, had.

What is trust? Is it not the ability to see beyond the "what ifs," the ability to stand in front of anything knowing that, just in the nick of time Daddy would apply the brakes? Is it not our understanding of God and how much we mean to Him that will give us the courage and confidence to take risks? Is it not having a peace that passes all understanding that will leave everyone else around us amazed?

Trust is the most important ingredient in any relationship. If we do not trust God, subsequently we will not trust His creation, let alone His Word. The absence of trust would render us suspicious, nervous, anxious wrecks! Imagine a world with no trust! One would not even dare sit on a chair for fear of it giving way; there would be no marriage for fear of rejection and probable divorce; no one would dare take a walk for fear that the sky would fall on their heads! Trust is essential.

**The neighbors
would watch
in amazement
at Kathleen's trust.**

The greatest enemy of trust is fear, which is, actually, False Education Accepted as Reality. True education stems from the Lord, if we can humbly accept His instruction and reassurance.

It is therefore up to us to overcome fear and take the risk to enter a relationship with a God who knew us from our beginnings (Jer. 1:5), understands our every trial (Heb. 4:14-16), and promises us total security (Matt. 28:20; Isa. 43:2-4). And because faith and trust are inseparable, when fear knocked at my door, faith opened it—and no one was there.

Our Understanding or God's?

EVIDENCE

1 Kings 3:1-18; Phil. 4:19

Solomon had no experience when he became king. He loved the Lord and obeyed His laws, so the Lord appeared to him in a dream and asked him, "What shall I give you?" (1 Kings 3:5, NKJV). In response, Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge God's people and to be able to discern between right and wrong. In answer to Solomon's request, the Lord gave him wisdom "so that," He said, "there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you" (verse 12, NKJV).

One day two harlots sought King Solomon's counsel. The first reported how she had delivered a child followed by the delivery of the second woman's child three days later. When the infant of the second woman died, she exchanged it for the living one. Then the king asked for a sword and commanded, "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other" (verse 25, NIV). He knew that no mother would endure the slaying of her own child.

The mother of the living child begged, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" (verse 26, NIV). Then Solomon restored the child to its rightful mother.

My father, Tobias Otieno, a retired gospel minister, left Kenya for Taiwan at the invitation of a friend. He knew nobody else there and could speak only English and his mother tongue. There was nobody to meet him at the airport. So he asked the Lord to lead him to where he was to meet his host. But even before He did so, he needed another miracle; he had spent all his money! He pleaded with the Lord, clinging to the promise of Philippians 4:19. No sooner had he prayed than the Lord sent to his rescue a relative of a Dr. Scotts, whom he had worked with in Kenya 20 years before, when he was the chaplain of Kendu Mission Hospital. This gentleman gave him a hundred-dollar bill—enough to meet all his needs! He then got directions to his final destination.

**There was nobody
to meet him
at the airport.**

Consider the universe and all that it contains. Is it not wise to trust the Being behind it all for wisdom and understanding? He will surely guide you (Ps. 25:9).

REACT

1. For what do you pray? List the different kinds of things.
2. What is a miracle? Be as thorough in your answer as you can be.
3. If God gave you the ability to plan and organize, then why does He ask you to depend upon Him for everything?

Monday
October 9

Let God Certify Your Blueprint

LOGOS

Prov. 3:5, 6; 11:4; 16:9; 22:17-19; 28:26; Phil. 4:19

Humankind is limited both in time and space. Our vision can take us only so far and is limited to the present moment. We behold brand new scenes every passing second. This unfortunate limitation adversely affects our plans. No wonder that we often spend many hours, or even days, designing blueprints, only to be shattered in a moment of time by unforeseen forces.

The Scriptures reveal that God is omniscient and omnipresent. These wonderful attributes of God give us the confidence to place our plans and desires before Him for approval. It is wise to include God in all our plans.

Hats Off to God (Prov. 3:5, 6)

A friend of mine invited one of his friends, a highly placed man in society, to a church service. The man declined, saying, "I have everything I need in this world, the education, wealth, and a wonderful family, so why should I disturb God? Let the poor and the ignorant have the full and uninterrupted attention of God."

Worldly knowledge and riches can be very deceitful. God may endow people with genius and wealth to the extent that they begin to see themselves as equal with, and even better than God, that trusting Him seems unnecessary.

No matter what rung of the ladder we may have climbed to, the Word of the Lord still comes strongly to us, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5, 6, NIV).

When Riches Don't Count (Prov. 11:4)

We were doing visitation one Sabbath evening at one of the best hospitals in my country. There we met a wealthy man fighting for his life in the intensive care unit. He was totally helpless; his riches had reached their limits! There was nothing more he could do for himself, even with all that he possessed. I looked down and remembered Jesus' words: " 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' " (Matt. 4:4, NRSV).

"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11, 12, NIV).

Plan but Wait for the Signal (Prov. 16:19)

A person's heart is full of activity during the waking hours, ever planning and devising things. Many times I have stopped in my thinking to review all that has been going through my mind within a short span of time and have been amazed at the number of topics and scenes covered. This is one of the best gifts the Lord

has bestowed upon us: to be able to think and plan for ourselves. This is our privilege and opportunity.

Every gift with which the Lord has endowed us grows only by exercise. The Lord expects and encourages us to think and plan for our activities so that we may grow in knowledge and understanding. In so doing, however, we must acknowledge God's part—that of bringing it to pass. The wise man says, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Prov. 19:21, NIV).

Bow Before the Lord (Prov. 22:17-19; 28:26)

"God speaks to us in His word. . . . Here is open before us the history of patriarchs and prophets and other holy men of old. They were men 'subject to like passions as we are.' James 5:17. We see how they struggled through discouragements like our own, how they fell under temptation as we have done, and yet took heart again and conquered through the grace of God; and, beholding, we are encouraged in our striving after righteousness. As we read of the precious experiences granted them, of the light and love and blessing it was theirs to enjoy, and of the work they wrought through the grace given them, the spirit that inspired them kindles a flame of holy emulation in our hearts and a desire to be like them in character—like them to walk with God."*

We met a wealthy man fighting for his life in the intensive care unit.

God Shall Supply All Your Needs (Phil. 4:19)

It is easy to acknowledge God's will in our lives when things are moving in the right direction for us. But when the currents are contrary, we tend to loosen our grip on God's hand and begin seeking ways of providing for ourselves and ignoring God's direct will concerning us.

In times of trial and temptation, we need to rest assured that the Lord is working out things for our own good and that He ensures that all our needs are supplied. He assures us, "I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11, NIV).

REACT

1. How can one help others trust in God?
2. How do we acquire trust?
3. What causes distrust?

*Steps to Christ, pp. 87, 88.

Tuesday
October 10

Look Up and Live

TESTIMONY

Prov. 28:26

"The Lord requires us to move with a humble dependence upon His providence. 'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps' [Jer. 10:23]. In God is our prosperity and our life. Nothing can be done prosperously without the permission and blessing of God. He can set His hand to prosper and bless, or He can turn His hand against us. 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.' [Ps. 37:5]."¹

"Every saint who comes to God with a true heart, and sends his honest petitions to Him in faith, will have his prayers answered. . . . Be not afraid to trust God. Rely

**We need a personal
experience with God in
order to have absolute
confidence in Him.**

upon His sure promise: 'Ask, and ye shall receive.' [Matt.7:7]. God is too wise to err, and too good to withhold any good thing from His saints that walk uprightly. Man is erring, and . . . he does not always ask for the things that are good for himself, or that will glorify God.

When this is so, our wise and good Father hears our prayers, and will answer, . . . but He gives us the things that are for our best good and His own glory."²

We need a personal experience with God in order to have absolute confidence in Him and to trust Him fully. "If we mistake the wisdom of man for the wisdom of God we are led astray by the foolishness of man's wisdom. Here is the great danger of many. . . . They have not an experience for themselves. They have not been in the habit of prayerfully considering for themselves, with unprejudiced, unbiased judgment, questions and subjects that are new and that are ever liable to arise. They wait to see what others will think. . . . Their identity is submerged in others; they are merely shadows of those whom they think about right. Unless these become sensible of their wavering character and correct it, they will all fail of everlasting life; they will be unable to cope with the perils of the last days. . . . Neither young nor old are excusable in trusting to another to have an experience for them. . . . 'Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.' [Jer. 17:5]."³

If we trust implicitly in God, the Creator and Owner of all that there is, we "shall not want" (Ps. 23:1, KJV).

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 482.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 120, 121.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 129, 130.

Never Disappointed

HOW-TO

Job 13:5

I have learned not to question God's whereabouts in moments of trial and temptation. I have witnessed losses of my loved ones in quick succession, but I knew it was for my own good that God allowed it so. It began with my father, who died in 1996. This did not affect me quite so much since my mother's relatives were there to care for her and my siblings. Little did I know that a few months later things would change. In May 1997, Uncle Ken, my mother's closest brother, passed away. Five months later, Auntie Zil, mother's only sister, followed. Her death was such an unexpected shock that it drove me into a spiritual limbo for months and my mother to her grave.

Despite my trust in God, I was disappointed with life. I experienced a period of depression. It was then that I discovered that trust in God is not a matter of believing that God will do everything we ask of Him in exactly the way and at the time we expect. He even allows death to overtake our loved ones at a time that seems so wrong to us. In all these, however, if we really know Him well, we will not be shaken. Our trust in Him will help us to continue our walk with Him.

The following principles will help us to hold on to God when all seems to go wrong:

1. Acquaintance with God. This is the beginning of a trusting relationship with Him. We cannot trust God if we do not know Him (John 17:3). As we grow in our relationship, we learn to trust Him more and more.

2. Keeping the lines engaged. Relationship is strengthened by communication, without which trust cannot develop. We communicate with God through prayer, and He communicates with us through the Bible.

3. Faith in God. Faith is the twin sister of trust. Without faith in God there cannot be a relationship with Him.

4. Dependence on God. Lean not on your own thinking (Prov. 3:5). Those who do otherwise lack trust in God. They are likened to someone who tries to hang onto a spider's web.

**It drove me into a
spiritual limbo for
months and my
mother to her grave.**

Whenever the devil inflicts us with painful experiences and causes us to doubt God, let us remember the apostle Paul's encouragement that in all things God is working for the good of those who trust Him (Rom. 8:28). God is still working in us to make us what we ought be. Every painful experience we pass through is God's outworking of His will in our lives.

Thursday
October 12

Showing Me the Staple

OPINION

Prov. 11:2, 4

During my fourth form as a literature student, my teacher intentionally failed me in poetry. To prove that he was wrong and I was right, I wrote a poem to ridicule him and gave it to him to read. He pulled out the staple from the papers, tore the papers to pieces, and threw them into the fire without reading the poem.

"You should have read the poem before burning it," I said. "There was something valuable in it for you."

Showing me the staple, the teacher shot back, "I have already taken out what was valuable."

I erupted in anger. My ego made me distrust my teacher's evaluation of my work. What he meant was, "Apply your heart to what I teach" (Prov. 22:17, NIV).

Confidence in our own abilities and self-worth give us an exaggerated sense of our own importance. We are puffed up with pride and passion, making it difficult to receive the refining influence of the great Teacher.

Humility cautions us not to overestimate ourselves. It does not tell everyone our worthlessness, but reveals who we are, what God is doing and has done in our lives. God cares and wants us to ask Him for help. He is a friend to lean on, and He guards our steps.

The attitude of my teacher made me acknowledge the value in the staple and the worthlessness of my self-opinion. When I relied upon my own strength and wisdom, my own efforts accomplished nothing. As the paper with my opinions are consumed in the fire, my God-motivated attitude of humility stands and endures the test as a staple would.

Christ is the value in the pages of Scripture. If we pick Him out and keep Him in our hearts, He remains our wonderful Counselor. "Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal" (Isa. 26:4, NIV).

If you have never trusted anyone but yourself, turn to Jesus. He is a trustworthy friend.

"You should have
read the poem
before burning it,"
I said.

REACT

1. How can someone be both humble and self-confident simultaneously?
2. What is self-esteem, and how does it relate to Christianity?
3. How does the value God places upon you teach you to be humble?
4. What is God trying to teach through humility?

The Faith Factor

EXPLORATION

Prov. 3:5, 6

CONCLUDE

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. How? We live in a world filled with distrust. We place bars on windows and locks on doors, install alarm systems, and carry panic buttons. We fear famine, earthquakes, wind storms, disease, and our neighbors. Yet in Philippians 4:19 Paul says that God will supply all our needs. Can we trust God to guide us? Yes, by committing everything we do to the Lord, we *can* let go of the worry and take hold of the trust. It is a personal experience with God that allows us to take this step of faith.

CONSIDER

- Listening to the “Do I Trust You Medley” from the Twila Paris CD, *A Heart That Knows You*. Sing along when it comes to the part “Lord, I’m keeping my eyes on you, following you.”
- Writing your own psalm, using words that express your personal trust in God.
- Finding a child who is willing to trust you enough to let you catch him or her when they jump from a high place. Talk about how it felt for them to jump and for you to catch them.
- Placing a bookmark in Hebrews 11. Read this chapter every morning for the next week.
- Journaling your thoughts on how God remains a constant in your life. Especially note how He continues to help you build trust in Him.
- Walking around your home, apartment, dormitory, or office, touching things you trust to work. Make a list. Identify whether the items are animate or inanimate. Think about how much more we should trust God who remains the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.
- Paraphrasing Proverbs 3:5, 6. Use words meaningful to you and place your name in the text where appropriate. Apply this paraphrase to your schooling, family, and your relationship with God.

CONNECT

Psalm 37:5; Proverbs 3:5, 6; Matthew 6:25, 26; Hebrews 11.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 482.

Chuck Swindol, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*, pp. 91, 92, 192, 193.

What I Am versus what You Think I am



**“A good name is more desirable than great riches;
to be esteemed is better than silver or gold”
(Prov. 22:1, NIV).**

News Flash!

INTRODUCTION

John 1:10

In an unexpected development, it appears that the Pharisees and Sadducees have won their long-standing debate with the common people. The much debated question? Is Jesus really the Messiah?

Yesterday, religious leaders claimed that the verdict was now indisputable: Jesus of Nazareth was a fraud. As proof they cite His execution on a cross last Friday. For the first time in three years the people, as a whole, have agreed with their leaders, even participating in their former hero's downfall.

When asked why they turned so swiftly and fiercely against their leader, a common theme prevailed: he did not deliver on his claims. Though he was a man of his word, though he treated all as his equal, though his humble actions could be faulted by no one, though he worshiped Yahweh, he had not lived up to the people's expectations. He had not acted as they had wanted him to act. This resulted in his death and a renewed search for a Messiah.

**This resulted
in his death and
a renewed search
for a Messiah.**

This morning sources within the Nationalist Movement revealed the outcome of a long debate. The essential characteristics for their new leader include:

- a desire to deliver his people from bondage.
- an outward manner that mirrors his internal thoughts.
- strength to withstand opposition.
- a refusal to exalt himself above his fellow Jews.
- a love for God with all his heart and soul.
- obedience to God's will for his life.

Ironically, this list mirrors the character of the man they killed only days ago. According to one of Jesus' closest aides, "The one factor responsible for His death was the dispute between Jesus and the religious leaders on what constituted 'bondage.'" For Jesus the bondage was spiritual and social; for the leaders it was political. For someone who matched their requirements so perfectly, it is amazing how such a small discrepancy could hold such dire consequences.

Anyone brave, or crazy, enough to apply for this position needs to ask one question: How do I compare?

Sunday
October 15

What I Am Versus What You Think I Am

LOGOS

Prov. 14:31; 16:18; 22:1; 25:6, 7; 30:5, 6; Mal. 3:6; Rev. 3:12

My friend, reticent to engage in the expected bargaining process, asked if I would come to her aid and purchase a suitable gift from the marble retailer's shop. After narrowing the selection to two or three beautifully crafted marble vases, I searched them for defects. It was commonly known that the artisans cleverly cover up flaws with an identically colored putty! I made my selection, bargained the price to what I thought was reasonable, and, feeling rather pleased with my performance, presented the treasure to my friend waiting outside.

It was carefully wrapped to avoid damage in the suitcase in transit to Australia where my friend, a physician, was to have orthopedic surgery. The gift was for the surgeon, who had indicated reluctance to charge a colleague for his services.

While she was convalescing, I volunteered to wrap the gift. To my horror, when I removed the original wrapping, I spotted a flaw about an inch long camouflaged with putty. I was embarrassed beyond belief! How could I have missed that? It looked perfect when I bought it. There was nothing to do except pray the defect would not be noticed or that it would be supposed that it had not been detected by the giver.

So much for thinking I had outsmarted the shopkeeper. For all my self-assurance, I had been taken in. But why should I have been so surprised? That's the way it's done.

I've thought about that vase quite a bit. Actually, it is quite a metaphor for us. We put on a good front and hope no one will see beneath the veneer to the cracks under the surface. And as with the marble vase, some are fooled and others are not so sure.

Once in London, I went to a Russian shop to purchase a Matryoshka doll. In the process of selecting and purchasing one, I mentioned to the shop assistant that I would use it in talks on self-esteem and answering the question "Who am I?"

As the shop assistant turned away, she said, "Does any of us know who we are?"

This week's lesson gives us the opportunity to examine that question at a somewhat uncomfortable level. How do we really think of ourselves and what is our attitude toward, and treatment of, others we might consider to be not like us?

Let's become a little vulnerable as we explore the wisdom of Proverbs. It's a bit frightening to take an honest look at ourselves. Many choose not to. Some, like the rich young ruler, go away sorrowful. For the rich young ruler, reputation and status proved far more important than a personal relationship with Jesus. The choice is ours.

Personal Inventory

The texts given for our study remind us that God is dependable (Mal. 3:6) and that those who become like Him, the flaws taken away, will be given a new name, a new identity (Rev. 3:12).

Proverbs 14:31 teaches us that attitudes influence behavior. In this particular proverb the thrust of the arrow strikes at the heart of our actions. It has been truly said:

Sow an act and you reap a habit,
Sow a habit and you reap a character,
Sow a character and you reap a destiny.

(Charles Reade)

Our Maker says that if we oppress the poor, we bring reproach on Him, but we honor Him if we show mercy. Do we truly care about people? Does it matter to us that many suffer in poverty? Apparently it matters to God.

Proverbs 16:18 draws our attention to the hazard of having an inflated opinion of ourselves. Actually, there is a real distinction between pride and a healthy self-concept. The wise man is saying, "Don't get too big for your boots unless you want to fall on your face." The problem with this inflated self-opinion is that God can't do anything for those who think they're fine and have no need.

Lacking deep insight into their own hearts, they miss the chance to be made new, and to know the freedom that results.

Proverbs 22:1 highlights the importance of personal reputation. According to this verse it is important to pay attention to who we are and how we are perceived. In many cultures the honor of the family name is bound up with the reputations of individual family members. And in the family of God, God's reputation is bound up in our portrayal of Him.

Finally, Proverbs 30:5, 6 assures us that we are safe in God's hands, that He has truly spoken, and we need to accept that.

From these verses it's clear that God is concerned about who we are and how we relate to others. It matters because that is how people get an idea of what God is like. Someone once said to a Christian friend, "If God is like you, I think I'd like Him pretty well." Wow. What a compliment.

REACT

1. Some Christians fear that a healthy self-concept leads to sinful pride. What is the problem with this point of view?
2. If someone should attack your character and attempt to ruin your good reputation, what would be the most constructive way to respond?
3. In what way is God's reputation bound up with ours?
4. How can we go about exercising our new name, while still proudly holding onto our birth name?
5. How can you be a reflection of God's name, when God is so powerful, awesome, and infinite?

**Let's become a little
vulnerable as we
explore the wisdom
of Proverbs.**

TESTIMONY

Prov. 22:1

Ever played word-association games? Well, here's a go. What do you think of when you hear the name "Joseph"? What if I said "Joseph Stalin"? Now what do you think? Just recently I watched a documentary on Joseph Stalin and was appalled at the calculated cruelty that marked this man's life.

The lives we live infuse a deeper meaning in our names. This deeper meaning is what others see. More important, it is this meaning—character—that God is so interested in. Ellen White says, "A great name among men is as letters traced in sand, but a spotless character will endure to all eternity. God gives you intelligence and a reasoning mind, whereby you may grasp His promises; and Jesus is ready to help you in forming a strong, symmetrical character. Those who possess such a character need never become discouraged because they have not success in worldly affairs. They 'are the light of the world.' Satan cannot destroy or make of none effect the light that shines forth from them."¹

**The lives we live infuse
a deeper meaning
in our names.**

Stalin's name appears in history books, but God delights in other names, the names of those who serve Him in love. So what's your name—not the name your parents gave you but the name others see? Is it a good name?

In the book *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan, characters' names reflect who they really are. There is a man named "Help" who helps people. There is "Hopeful," "Pliable," and a host of others. If we were characters in Bunyan's book, what would we be called?

My name is Won't-say-it-to-your-face-but-will-gossip-behind-your-back, or maybe it would be What-you-see-is-what-you-get, and these are my friends Affirmation and Procrastination, or Image-is-all-that-matters, or God-is-first-in-my-life. We all bear the name "Christian." Ellen White says that this name "signifies Christlike."² Let us all let Jesus live out such a name in us.

REACT

1. Research the names of various Bible characters and find out the literal meaning (i.e., Daniel = God-is-my-judge). Do these names throw any light on the meaning of their lives or teach us about what God did in their lives?

2. Based on what others observe in you, what is your name? Is it what God wants it to be?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 579.

2. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 85.

Are Reputations Still Relevant?

EVIDENCE

Prov. 25:6, 7

The words of Proverbs 25:6, 7 encapsulate the thought behind a parable told by Jesus in Luke 14:7-11. Jesus warned against seeking the best seats at a marriage feast because you might be humiliated by being asked to move to a lower seat. He concludes from this that those “who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12, NRSV).

For the wise men who collected the proverbs that appear in our Bible, as well as for Jesus, religion was intensely practical. It touched every area of life: money, human relationships, property, and our interaction with a wider society. In our interaction with the wider society, each of us has one or more public persona. This is the image of ourselves that we present to those around us. We dress carefully, we are polite, we get along with people, even on those days when we don't really feel that good.

There are sensible things we can do to keep a good reputation.

Does this mean that if we were living authentic lives we should throw away our public persona and let everybody know who we really are? Probably not. We need it for basic survival in society. We just don't have time to let everybody see who we really are. But there does come a time when there is too great a gap between who we really are and the person we show in public.

When this happens, we not only feel false about ourselves, but our self-awareness of this difference leaks in many ways—causing others to pick up signals that we are untrustworthy.

Reputation and integrity are old-fashioned values. They are also values that allow us to be at peace with ourselves and our environment. Moreover, if we are interested in getting ahead in life, they are essential ingredients of any successful career.

The message of both the book of Proverbs and of Jesus Himself is that there are sensible things we can do to keep a good reputation. If we care what others think, then it is better to allow others to give status to us, without our need to seek it. If we care about what God thinks, then we can take His opinion of us. If we are “in Christ,” then His opinion of us is that we are His sons and daughters. It's hard to become more important than a son or daughter of God!

REACT

What do you think God really thinks of us?

Robert K. McIver, Cooranbong, Australia

Wednesday
October 18

Naming the Nameless

HOW-TO

Prov. 22:1; Rev. 3:12

You may think your name is not very important, but in many respects, it defines who you are and separates you as an individual from the rest of the world. Although a name is just a series of letters, when joined together, they comprise a word that is full of meaning and is descriptive of you as a unique human being.

Take the word *cat*, for example. There is no linguistic or physical reason that the word *cat* is applied to the furry, four-legged animal with whiskers. When I mention the word *cat*, however, you understand to what I am referring. This similarly applies to names. We can be compared to letters. By ourselves, we lack what we could be, but God helps us achieve our full potential. He turns letters into words.

In olden times people were named after personality traits or occupations. Mr. Blacksmith could well have had grandparents who were actual blacksmiths. Finding out who we are and where we have come from is an important part of self-discovery. Family trees are an interesting way of tracing our heritage.

Nowadays, people are invariably given names because of the names' synthetic qualities, or because of the relationship you have shared with a person of that same name.

But wait a second. Did you know that from this instant you have a new name? In Revelation, John says that God will write on him/her who overcomes the name of God! Imagine being named after God! But did you think of the consequences?

**"Hey! Here
comes a child
of God!"**

"Hey! Here comes a child of God!" Wouldn't it be great if people said that when they saw us? Wouldn't it be great if people saw God when they saw us? Do they?

Sometimes we try to disguise who we really are behind our names. We may make ourselves out to be someone we are not—or

not the someone we are. We use meaningless letters after our name (or before) to try to add power or prestige, but only three letters can do that—GOD.

We no longer have to try to reach the expectations of others or ourselves. When we overcome and accept God into our lives, we are named after the King of the universe! We should have the confidence to be who we really are and have the faith to believe that we are therefore special.

If you trace your family tree back far enough, you will discover Adam and Eve were your second parents; God was your first. We carry the mark and name of an awesome Creator and Friend. Why not try to let others know of your new name? What do you have to lose?

Get Real!

OPINION

Prov. 27:17

We live in a culture obsessed by image. The outer life we project is often how our social value and status are determined. Ironically, though, we also live in a culture that seeks the genuine; the ability to be oneself is highly regarded. So we exist in this paradox of negotiating between the superficial and the real, and we are left to make decisions that either enhance or falsify our own reality.

The Velveteen Rabbit is an enchanting tale of a young child and his favorite toy, a "fat and buncy" rabbit. A discussion between two nursery characters provides an insight into the process of becoming authentic:

"What is *real*?" asked the Rabbit one day. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time not just to play, but really loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You Become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."*

One of the ways we become real is through relationships that promote acceptance of the individual. Christ also invites us to be ourselves. Being real in many ways is a multiple transaction of love; because He has shown us not only His power but also His vulnerability, we are safe to share with Him.

Experiencing this unconditional love makes it possible to appreciate and encourage authenticity in our other relationships.

**"By the time
you are Real,
most of your
hair has been
loved off."**

*Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit or How Toys Become Real* (Harper Collins Publishers Pty Ltd, 1996).

Friday
October 20

Am I Real (or Just a Look-Alike?)

EXPLORATION

Prov. 22:1

CONCLUDE

In our image-conscious society, we are tempted to value ourselves by what other people think. When we're brutally honest with ourselves, we know that even our best qualities make a poor showing. Most of us feel the need for plenty of well-applied veneer when we go on display. So it comes as a shock when God owns us as sons and daughters. We hardly like to own ourselves sometimes. But to be called by Christ's name doesn't imply a cover-up identity. It announces both our true, needy state—we desperately need a Savior—and our grace-filled status as royal citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

CONSIDER

- Taking a week to describe in a journal your daily personal response to Psalm 25, David's very vulnerable appeal for forgiveness and protection from shame. Carefully study three verses a day.
- Creating a collage—physically or with the help of a computer scanner and graphics program—of your favorite activities and things that reflect who you are as a person: mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Use magazine pictures, artwork, and/or personal photos.
- Analyzing your social development. Compare and contrast your social relationships at age 9 or 10 with your relationships now. Are you more or less reactive to social pressures? Does your faith shield you or make you more sensitive?
- Spending an hour observing the stars and contemplating Job 38:31-33 in relationship to personal worth and reputation.
- Talking with your friends about what they think are your best gifts and how you could best serve others. Ask them for examples of when they have observed your abilities in action. Do the same for them.
- Putting to music part or all of Psalm 18:28-34 or another text that describes God's unconditional regard for you.

CONNECT

Psalm 51; 139; Ephesians 1:17-23.

The Great Controversy, chap. 5.

Philip Yancey, *The Bible Jesus Read*, chap. 3.

Spiritual preventive Medicine



“The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their way preserve their lives” (Prov. 16:17, NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 3:1-6; Prov. 16:17

Ever since that day in ancient history, when Adam and Eve saw a fruit they couldn't resist, humankind has had difficulties fighting temptation. Resisting temptation is one of our major weaknesses. Through seduction Satan tries to separate us from God.

Giving in to temptations has proven to be bad for our health. Sexual seduction may lead to sexually transmitted diseases; nicotine in cigarettes is a neural poison (as it works on the nicotinic-receptor) apart from the fact that it may cause lung

cancer; alcohol destroys our brain and liver—two important organs. Other bad habits—listening to very loud music that damages the ears, too much television, too many

What is health anyway?

hours of computer games, or overeating—all have their effects on our health.

But what is health anyway? According to the world health organization, the definition that comes closest is this: "Health is a state of complete mental, physical, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease."

How can we get this health? We cannot get it! It doesn't come by chance! God Himself gave us advice on how to promote good health. It is a lifestyle. The first sin began by giving in to temptation, and this is where bad health starts. Admitting that this is one of our weaknesses doesn't mean that we should just let go or that we should not enjoy life. We face the challenge of keeping the fine balance between fun and health. Just like John, I wish you good health: "I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul" (3 John 1:2, NRSV).

Staying Strong

EVIDENCE

Prov. 5:1

To live in a metropolitan city today means interaction with different races, cultures, and behaviors. In Amsterdam, for example, you will find that approximately 65 percent of those aged 18 to 30 use tobacco and that 71 percent use alcohol. Also 30 to 40 percent use other drugs, which include sedatives, cannabis, and cocaine.¹

And this does not include substances like coffee, one of the main drinks in the Netherlands. In the typical Dutch working environment, coffee is consumed three to five times a day. Where I work at the University of Twente, my colleagues drink coffee five times a day; for 8 to 10 people, a coffee tin of 2500 grams is used weekly. It is thus quite easy to form the habit of drinking coffee if you have had a bad night, woke up too late, forgot breakfast, and can't open your eyes at work. Yet, what a way to treat your body. How do we protect our bodies from harmful substances and from becoming addicted to these substances?

This answer is twofold, which always leads back to the initial condition that God had in mind for humans. The first answer is found and repeated many times in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 5:1 says, "My son, . . . listen well to my words of insight" (NIV). This sentence is repeated many times. And that is exactly what needs to be done.

As a society, we have forgotten how to listen to the Word of God. When studying the Word of God and going back to basics and listening to the voice of God, we are reminded that our body is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Keeping in mind that the body includes the physical, mental, and emotional state, and remembering that God is the Creator, we are naturally drawn to follow in the footsteps of God and not to harm the body.

**We are naturally
drawn to follow in
the footsteps of God.**

Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski says, "Addiction is a disease, not a moral failing.

However it is a disease with a spiritual component."² He then continues to explain that addictive behavior arises from a negative self-image that distorts the addict's perception of reality and leaves a feeling of emptiness and purposelessness. This ultimately drives the victim to self-destruction, trying to fill the void.

God created humans in His image, and the whole plan of salvation is about a God who loves His creation. This means that we should have an extremely positive image of ourselves.

1. Licit and illicit drug use in Amsterdam III, Cedro, centrum voor drugsonderzoek, Nederland.

2. Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., founder and medical director of Gateway Rehabilitation Center, Pennsylvania.

Monday
October 23

Mind-Body-and-Spiritual Medicine

LOGOS

Prov. 5:1-9; 7:1-5; 14:7; 17:22; 20:1; 23:17; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20

Proverbs gives insight into wisdom for living. Unlike Greek wisdom of old, which was philosophical and detached from daily life, biblical wisdom deals with life's issues: "the space we live in, our profession, our communities, our relationships, our sexual life, the way we treat our bodies, the workings of our mind and our spiritual life."¹

The underlying principles of biblical wisdom take us back to the Ten Commandments, which provide guidelines to safeguard the well-being of all our capabilities and relationships. The first four, which are concerned with our relationship to God, we could call the "vertical dimension." The last six are concerned with our social relationships, the "horizontal dimension." These principles are spiritual preventive medicine against the disintegration of human life.

Proverbs 5:1-9; 7:1-5

These verses in particular apply the seventh commandment to our intimate relationships and the temptations we may face to cross the borders of such intimate bonds. The texts give insight into the initial "magical attraction" of intimate sinning that in the end leads to moral and spiritual disintegration, distrust, guilt, pain, and broken relationships. To safeguard the integrity of intimate relationships, it is wise to stay as far away as possible from these temptations. This biblical principal (Prov. 7:1, 2) should be integrated into our thinking. It will prove to be preventive spiritual medicine in the hour of temptation.

Proverbs 14:7

Relationships and friends influence our decisions. We are part of society; however, our moral principles should not be molded by godless people. "Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God' " (Ps. 14:1, NRSV) and therefore do not take biblical wisdom seriously. Authority figures, friends, and associates with such a mind-set should not be our source of moral knowledge and wisdom: "Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not find words of knowledge" (Prov. 14:7, NRSV).

Proverbs 17:22

Our decisions, our behavior patterns, and our emotions are determined by our thinking. Our brains, nervous systems, and all our other delicate systems are well integrated. We are ingeniously created. Attitude affects well-being. We need to guard our thinking well. Scientists tell us that at least 60 percent of all illnesses originate in the mind. Proverbs provides an excellent principle: "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (17:22, NIV).

Proverbs 20:1

Our thinking process has a physiological basis. Brain nerves, called neurons communicate with each other, and several chemical processes underlie our thinking. Substances we use affect these neural networks and may either enhance or block them. Through our nervous system we perceive the world around us and process incoming information. "The brain nerves that connect with the whole system are the medium through which heaven communicates with man and affects the inmost life. Whatever hinders the circulation of the electric current in the nervous system, thus weakening the vital powers and lessening the mental susceptibility, makes it more difficult to arouse the moral nature."²

It is therefore wise to keep the system healthy. A numbed brain has difficulty being alert to the Spirit's leading. Substances like alcohol strongly interfere with our perception and lead to wrong decisions. "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise" (20:1, NIV). Better to prevent than to be sorry for irreversible damage resulting from alcohol use. God's prescriptions are not given to limit our freedom but rather to safeguard it. The apparent freedom of those using chemical substances is actually an illusion that ultimately leads to addiction. Therefore we should not envy individuals who neglect God's natural laws but rather feel sorry for them. "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord" (23:17, NIV). This is not fear in the sense of being afraid but rather in respecting the Lord.

**Relationships and
friends influence
our decisions.**

1 Corinthians 6:19, 20

When Jesus died for us and rose again, He secured our salvation. Salvation has to do with our total being, body and mind. There is nothing we can do to earn heaven. Jesus has taken care of that, and that is wonderful news. We may not be satisfied with our appearance, or we may sometimes be ashamed of what goes on in our mind. But God loves us anyway, and the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit takes place within us. We belong to Him, and nothing can take us out of His loving hands. The only true response we can give is to worship Him.

In many religions the body is viewed as inferior to the mind, but in biblical thinking the body is as important as the mind. God regards our body highly and makes it His temple. Recognizing the greatness of God's love only deepens the longing for worshipping Him.

1. Claus Westermann, *Hoofddijnen van een theologie van het Oude Testament* (J. H. Kok: Kampen, Netherlands, 1981), p.101.

2. *Education*, p. 209.

Tuesday
October 24

Entering a New Way of Living

TESTIMONY

Prov. 7:1-3

"The law of God, as presented in the Scriptures, is broad in its requirements. Every principle is holy, just, and good. The law lays men under obligation to God; it reaches to the thoughts and feelings; and it will produce conviction of sin in every one who is sensible of having transgressed its requirements. If the law extended to the outward conduct only, men would not be guilty in their wrong thoughts, desires, and designs. But the law requires that the soul itself be pure and the mind holy, that the thoughts and feelings may be in accordance with the standard of love and righteousness."*

This passage explains the importance of the Ten Commandments. Rightly understood, these principles show us what God means by being just and good. Not obeying these principles is to sin.

"Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12, NIV). The penalty for sinning is death (6:23), but God didn't want the sinner to perish. If we have faith in Christ, His work, and His sacrifice, the power of sin is broken. Then, by being baptized, we begin a new life and take part in Christ's life.

"Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know

**By being baptized,
we begin a new life.**

that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (6:3-6, NIV).

Baptism is the symbol of the new life and the breaking of the power of sin, which ruled the old life. Partaking of this new life becomes possible only through faith. In baptism your faith is publicly expressed; in the water your old person dies, but only by the power of God working through faith. Once you're baptized, you receive the Holy Spirit from God to live the new life by faith. After baptism you learn to live as a Christian through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism, though a symbol, is thus an important step in acknowledging that Jesus overcame sin and grants us the victory. We may fall but can stand by the grace of God. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16, NIV).

*Selected Messages, book 1, p. 211.

What If We Fall Back?

HOW-TO

Prov. 17:22; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20

Most of us know addictions or bad habits in our own or someone else's lives. It's not usually difficult to *begin* to get rid of these if you really want to, but it's also easy to falter.

When this happens, what can you do about it?

If It's You

- Recognize that you failed, but don't conclude that you're worthless, not even after several failures.
- Talk with somebody you trust. Maybe he or she knows already that you tried to quit. Discuss together what to do now.
- Avoid things that stimulate your habit. There may be things in your life that you thought had no influence on you, but you've come to realize they have. It's not too late to get rid of them now!
- Find something to replace the things that stimulate your addiction, especially at times when you want to comfort yourself with your addiction because it makes you feel good.
- Don't forget that, with God, it is never too late to begin again. He is the best help because He knows better than anyone else how to resist temptations of any kind.

If It's a Friend

- Recognize that your friend failed, but do not blame him or her for failing. It is good that your friend realizes his or her mistake, but don't let him or her feel like a failure.
- Discuss a plan to begin again and ask if you may speak up if you see things going wrong again.
- Encourage your friend to make the right choices when you sense that he or she is weakening.
- Help him or her find something to replace the addiction or bad habit.
- Stop contact with your friend only when his or her addiction has too much bad influence on your own life. Be clear in why you made this decision.

REACT

1. Have you had times in your life when you realized that you failed to quit an addiction or a bad habit? How did you handle it?
2. How can you help a friend who thinks he or she is unable to quit an addiction?

OPINION

John 4:13, 14

I have always trusted God and believed He would make things well, whatever it was that made me sad. But at a moment in my life when I really needed happiness and thought God was there for me, I realized I did not know Him at all. I had a wrong image of Him because I had not taken time to get to know Him and had replaced Him with other things. I was seeking something, but had not found it.

Many are aware of the senselessness of intemperate behavior. They know that drinking, overeating, being selfish, or being totally self-dependent are not the ways to act. Then why do we still yield to these attitudes?

Sinful pleasures are sought to fill an emptiness in the heart, the very thirst of a human soul. In a sense, it is like a medicine to an illness. But attempts to satisfy the longings of the heart through pleasant experiences is as senseless as that of a thirsty man to satisfy his thirst by pouring buckets of fresh water over

himself. Mere wetness does not satisfy thirst. Emptiness in our hearts cannot be taken away merely by creating happy feelings; they can only repress awareness of our primeval discontent. Is not this the reason that people are unable to drink away sorrow and pain?

**Sinful pleasures
are sought to fill an
emptiness in the heart.**

We are caught up in the extremes around us. The more we get, the more satisfied we think we will be. The problem is primarily guilt or worry, but even if we believe in God, we lose sight of Him and fall prey to intemperance. Burdens oppress us, and we pray for months without results. Has God forsaken us?

By admitting that we need God as our spiritual guide, we are able to confess that we do sin and to let Him lead us. He tells us: "Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty" (John 4:14, NRSV). We should not neglect the Holy Scriptures by thinking that praying is enough, or our idea of God will become distorted. God wants us to be really happy: just as we should provide for our physical health, we should take care of our spiritual health as well.

REACT

1. What are the most common ways you or your friends distract yourself from spiritual emptiness?
2. Does it seem that these distractions often turn into addictions? Why or why not?
3. What do you think Jesus meant when He said, "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst"? (John 4:14, NIV).

Unchaining Your Body

EXPLORATION

Prov. 16:17

CONCLUDE

The spiritual and physical parts of our existence as human beings are inseparable. By controlling the physical, we can make room for God to control the spiritual. Our part is to make our hearts available to Him by removing any barriers to communication. His part is to change our hearts. We need to go to the Word of God for the strength to avoid temptation. We also need to recognize that sometimes we will fail, so we need to prepare ourselves with the tools to get back up and get going again.

CONSIDER

- Listing in a journal the times that you indulge in bad habits. Think about what triggers that bad behavior. How can you reduce the stimulus to practice a bad habit?
- Listening to Bob Carlisle's song "We Fall Down" from the *Stories From the Heart* CD. How does the key line, "The saints are just the sinners who fall down and get up," describe the Christian life?
- Interviewing people who have quit drinking and been dry for at least a year. Ask what was the hardest part of the process? How did they finally achieve victory? Are they still tempted? What do they do to resist that temptation? Offer to pray for them in their efforts to remain alcohol free.
- Volunteering to help with a stop-smoking clinic or seminar.
- Making a chart of everything you eat for five days. Analyze your eating habits and decide where you need to make changes to improve your health.
- Beginning an exercise program with a friend. Plan a reward (not food!) when you reach a certain goal.

CONNECT

Proverbs 3:5-8; 15:30; 1 Timothy 3:1-5; Titus 2:1-8.

The Ministry of Healing, pp. 295-310.

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, chap. XVII; S. I. McMillen, M.D., *None of These Diseases*, chap. 9.

Your Choices determine Your Destiny



“Folly is a joy to one who has no sense, but a person of understanding walks straight ahead” (Prov. 15:21, NRSV).

God's Natural Prescription for Healing

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 12:28

Do you want a prescription for eternal happiness that can begin at this very moment in your life? No, you don't have to head for the pharmacy! This medication is free, and it's available to everyone. The only side effects are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. You've got the idea: it's the fruit of the Spirit! (Gal. 5:22, 23). It comes to us naturally as we gain complete confidence in God's perfect law of love.

Five years ago I lost my job as an accountant for a government agency. Four months after that painful event, my precious wife was diagnosed with advanced cancer. She died eighteen months later. I felt that God had abandoned me, and I chose the wrong path to recovery through alcohol and other drugs. This poor choice led me into deep depression and loneliness. It was only through the grace of God and the support of my church and family that I began the process of healing.

One morning, while looking at a daily devotions calendar that my wife had treasured, I spotted the words, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV). I placed that message in my computer as a screen saver.

Shortly afterward, my friend James brought a large banner and encouraged me to place it above my fireplace. It read, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV). Having these life-saving messages constantly before me, I developed an overwhelming desire for fervent prayer and meditation.

God filled the void! As I began to share my time and talent with others, He was revealing the spiritual gifts that lay deep within me. God showed me that perfect love means reaching out to meet the needs of others. Today I'm healthy, happy, and drug-free. My life is filled with love, laughter, caring, and sharing. People seem to need me everywhere, and it feels good!

When our greatest desire is a loving relationship with our Creator, we will dance for joy and sing our hearts out just as David did! I can't help raising my hands toward heaven when the people in church sing, "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High."

Remember this! Jesus worked tirelessly to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others. He assigns to us the same task. In so doing, God's purpose for humankind is revealed: restoring us in His image. If you are broken by life and you choose God's divine prescription for healing—His holy and perfect law embodied in the life of Christ—then, I promise you that He will perform within you the miracle that you cannot do for yourself!

**People seem to
need me everywhere,
and it feels good!**

Sunday
October 29

“Like Sands Through the Hourglass”

LOGOS

Prov. 3:1-8; 11:3; 15:21, 25; 22:8; Rom. 7:12, 14

Viktor Frankl, author of the book *Man's Search for Meaning*, was imprisoned by the Nazis in the Second World War because he was a Jew. His wife, his children, and his parents were all killed in the Holocaust. The Gestapo made him strip totally naked. As they cut away his wedding band, Viktor said to himself. “You can take away my wife, you can take away my children, you can strip me of my clothes and my freedom, but there is one thing no person can ever take away from me—and that is my freedom to choose how I will react to what happens to me!” Even under the most difficult of circumstances, happiness is a choice that transforms our tragedies into triumph.¹

The Bible portrays diverse men and women so that everyone may identify with someone portrayed therein. Through his proverbial knowledge, Solomon tends to deal with life's fortunes and adversities in a down-to-earth manner.

A daytime television drama so appropriately states: “Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.”² Daily each of us is faced with decisions that could determine our destiny. This principal can be applied to following God's law. Those who choose not to follow God's law must pay the consequences. Those who choose to follow God's law, however, will receive a great reward.

In Proverbs 3:1-8, Solomon not only convinces us to follow God's law, but gives us several sensible pointers—as well as the rewards.

- We must have a never-ending regard for God's promises because there is no other way to be happy.

- We must live a life of communion with God because that is the way to be safe.

- We must keep God's law not only in our heads, but in our hearts.

In Proverbs 11:3; 15:21, Solomon observes that the foolish person's actions will run their own course—ultimately to ruin, whereas the virtues of an honest person will serve as a guide. A foolish person takes pleasure in sin, but a wise person grasps the understanding of duty. The foolish live by no rules and drift aimlessly about, but a person of understanding walks uprightly, lives a solemn, orderly life, and chooses to honor God's law.

In Romans 7:12, 14 Paul, himself once a Pharisee, would probably not have known the sinfulness of his thoughts, motives, and actions, but by the law. He was aware of the law but was not aware of the spirituality of the law. It was only later, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, that he saw what the law demanded. Paul realized he was unable to fulfill the law and felt like a condemned criminal. Yet he tells us, “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (7:12, NIV).

“The same heat that softens wax, hardens clay. Food or medicine when taken wrong, may cause death, though its nature is to nourish or to heal. The law may

cause death, through man's depravity, but sin is the poison that brings death. Not the law, but sin discovered by the law, was made death to the apostle.³

Throughout the book of Proverbs, Solomon tells of the follies of the foolish person, yet he also shares with the reader the happiness that may be found in choosing to follow God's law. This is what God desires in each of us. "The law is an expression of the thought of God; when received in Christ, it becomes our thought. . . . God desires us to be happy, and He gave us the precepts of the law that in obeying them we might have joy."⁴ His law is not to be thought of as a legal noose around our necks! "But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. . . . Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy."⁵

Some time ago, one of the TV talk shows featured an elderly man as a guest. He was a rather rare fellow. His oddity? He simply looked and acted truly happy. When asked the secret of his apparent joy, he replied, "I haven't any great secret. When I get up in the morning, I have two choices—either to be happy or unhappy. I just choose to be happy, and that's all there is to it."⁶

**"The same heat
that softens wax,
hardens clay."**

Much like this man, we too have two choices. We can choose to enter into a personal relationship with God that results in conformity to His law or choose to disregard His law and become, as Solomon calls it, *fools*. Our salvation rests upon our willingness to enter into a relationship with God that leads to obedience of His law. Your choices determine your destiny.

REACT

1. How do the following examples help you to understand what motivates our choices: Lot (Gen. 13:1-12; 19); Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42); Moses (Heb. 11:24-28)?

2. How can you best explain to a non-Christian that one's earthly choices determine one's eternal destiny?

3. If you found you were going to die in the near future, what one instruction for living would you leave for your child to read when he or she was grown?

4. How would you explain the difference between having God's law in your head and having His law in your heart?

1. Robert Schuller, *The Be-Happy Attitudes*, p. 199.

2. *Days of Our Lives*.

3. *The Unbound Bible*, Matthew Henry's Commentary, Romans 7:7-13.

4. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 85.

5. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 109.

6. The Autoillustrator Online, Media Management, "Choosing Happiness."

Monday
October 30

Choosing a Happy Ending

TESTIMONY

Prov. 3:3-8

Have you ever made a choice that felt right, but turned out to be wrong? Solomon shares this wisdom about making choices in Proverbs 3:3-8.

I can picture Ruth reaching out in faith and hope to the God of Creation; choosing to go with Naomi and care for her in her old age; choosing love instead of self-preservation; choosing uncertainty in a new land among strangers. We are

**How can you and I make
the choices that will
bring happiness?**

not told how long her natural inclination had been subdued and her path directed by God, but her choices led her to abundant happiness in this life and for eternity.

In life's complexity, how can you and I make the choices that will bring happiness now and for eternity? Ellen White gives these insights: "It is for you to yield up your will to the will of Jesus Christ; and as you do this, God will immediately take possession and work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. Your whole nature will then be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ, and even your thoughts will be subject to Him. You cannot control your impulses, your emotions, as you may desire, but you can control the will, and you can make an entire change in your life. . . . You will have strength from God that will hold you fast to His strength; and a new life, even the life of living faith. . . . Drink daily at the fountain of truth, that you may understand the secret of pleasure and joy in the Lord. . . . When He gives you the mind of Christ, your will becomes as His will, and your character is transformed to be like Christ's character."

REACT

Consider the experiences of John the Baptist and Judas Iscariot. Both made a dramatic impact in the short ministry of Jesus, but their choices took them to an opposite destiny.

1. What did John the Baptist and Judas Iscariot have in common?
2. How were their choices different?
3. What were some of their final choices, and what was the result of those choices?
4. Describe a time when you found peace and joy in your choice to do God's will, even when it seemed to bring hardship or trial as it did with John.

**Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 514, 515.

Wisdom Rules

EVIDENCE

Prov. 4:7

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is based on obedience to God's laws and not based on personal pursuit or genetic advantages. There are only two classes of people in the world as far as God is concerned: wise and foolish. The distinction is made through personal choice: submission to God's will or rebellion against it. This simple basis gives all people an equal footing in the pursuit of wisdom.

In the parable of the builders (Matt. 7:24-29), Christ reiterates the distinction between those who hear His words and put them into practice (wise) and those who hear His words but do not put them into practice (foolish). Note the importance of action: a lack thereof distinguishes the fool. Adherence to His Word is the sole criterion determining who is truly wise.

Solomon is the epitome of Adam's lost wisdom and the manifest wisdom of Christ yet to be revealed. Wisdom, knowledge, and understanding were original characteristics of humankind, not something to which he would attain. These were the spiritual and intellectual equipment that would be needed by humanity to interact with God, which is what humanity was created to do.

"In the garden of Eden there was a tree called 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.' It stands for revelation. God did not want his people to learn evil through practice; he wanted to reveal the truth about it to them so they could avoid it. This tree symbolizes the word of God in our life,

which tells us what is right and wrong, what is wise and what is unwise. If we want to be wise, we need to hear the Word, read it, listen to it, and obey it."*

Proverbs teaches that what makes a person wise is dependence on God, not a dependence on natural or human wisdom corrupted by sin. This is how we can discern the difference between good and evil. Wise men listen to the Word and respond in obedience. Fools reject the truth of God. And when Solomon stopped listening to God, he became a fool just like any sinner who makes a poor choice and is in need of Christ's redemption.

**Proverbs teaches that
what makes a person
wise is dependence
on God.**

REACT

1. Despite his gift of wisdom, Solomon failed—ironically because of foolishness. What lessons can we learn from Solomon?

2. Why does Solomon say that wisdom is supreme? Why not righteousness?

*David H. Roper, *King Solomon's Ring*, 1973 (from <http://pbc.org/dp/roper/3059.html>).

My Choice — Their Destiny

HOW-TO

Rom. 12:19-21; 13:8; 14:7, 8, 10, 13

For more than three years I struggled with feelings of bitterness toward my daughter's husband and his mother. I rationalized that I had a right to feel that way because they had lied about me numerous times and continuously abused my disabled daughter. In my heart I knew these feelings could destroy me, but I did not want to admit the truth and call them hatred. That was too strong an emotion for a Christian who loved Jesus deeply and planned an eternity with Him! But there it was, like a rat in the dark, gnawing at the foundation of this heart-temple in which Jesus longed to dwell.

As I seriously considered the sinfulness of that rationalization, my Savior spoke, "You are blocking Me from reaching Jon and his mother and endangering your own soul. In My mercy I have allowed them into your life. You feel they are your enemies. I had enemies. Vengeance was Mine and I had a right to use it. Instead,

For more than three
years I struggled
with bitterness.

I gave it to My Father. How else will you learn to love Me truly unless you truly love an enemy who may never respond?"

Bowing in the quietness, after Jesus' counsel, I asked Him for wisdom and strength to take the steps necessary to eradicate these satanic thoughts.

Are you carrying an overpowering load of pain and guilt and a longing for freedom from it? Let me share with you the healing steps that Jesus revealed to help me gain that freedom:

1. Recognize and admit your need (Ps. 51:1-17). It is the Holy Spirit that calls you today.

2. Ask forgiveness and forgive the offender (Eph. 4:30-32). Jesus will forgive you even if you don't *feel* sorry. You must forgive the offender *even if he or she does not ask*—as in the Lord's Prayer.

3. Surrender and claim freedom (Ps. 55:22; 103:12). Just give it to God. Write a list of all the evil things you feel—and then burn it! How great that feels! Fire cleanses—as does the blood of Jesus.

Father, in the silence of this moment we bow and praise You for cleansing our hearts. Enable us to stand in Your strength when Satan tries to force these sins back into our lives and tell him no such sin exists. Live in and shine through us, Lord, for the salvation of those who have wronged us and whom we have not loved. Fill us with Your love and walk with us toward our eternal destination. Amen.

Tar Versus Vaseline

OPINION

Prov. 3:1, 2; John 14:23, 24

As I read the book that means more than riches and gold to me, I can't help wondering about how much I really apply the Bible to my life. How many times have I let an inappropriate word slip out, coveted the neighbor's new car, or took longer to forgive a wrong done to me that should have been forgotten right then and there. I just can't imagine living a life free from sin. When I join our Savior in the sky, only then will I understand the beauty of true life.

In the daily grind of life, I have days that are great. Letting other traffic go ahead of me, holding open doors, sharing my faith, smiling even though I've just stubbed my toe. Then there are the days when I feel like things just couldn't get worse. I locked my keys in the car, I forgot to get milk for cereal the night before, and I got rather perturbed at the man who cut me off with his shiny red pickup. These days are at opposite ends of my spiritual spectrum! I call them Tar and Vaseline Days.

These days are at opposite ends of my spiritual spectrum!

Tar is manageable, strong, and rather dark in color, and it sticks to everything that touches it. Vaseline, on the other hand, is petroleum jelly, slick and clear. It isn't very easy to work with and is just plain weak. My good days are Tar Days, and my low days are Vaseline Days!

On the Tar Days, I'm manageable. It's much easier for the Lord to work with me. I'm rather strong, sticking to the Bible's counsel, and out to do good works. Vaseline Days, on the other hand, are completely different. It's clear to see that I'm not having a good day, and the reasoning that the Lord would much rather that I be a pleasant person just slides right off like water.

In the morning I pray for Tar Days. I'd much rather witness to others than growl at them. I have learned that God's recipe for Tar Days is the Ten Commandments. He didn't create them for us to recite in Sabbath School so we could get a gold star by our name. No, they are to be applied daily. And for further guidance, the book of Proverbs was given to help them along. I pray that you all have Tar Days, but when Vaseline days come along, don't be afraid to take them to the Lord. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (Ps. 32:8, NIV).

REACT

1. Give a specific example of how keeping God's commandments can make the difference between having a bad day and having a good day.
2. What everyday experiences weaken your ability to keep the law? Be specific.

Tanya Edie, La Grande, Oregon

Friday
November 3

To Happiness: Turn Right Here

EXPLORATION

Eccles. 12:13

CONCLUDE

Each of us must choose whether or not to be happy. Proverbs equates wisdom with happiness, and wisdom depends on God. God invites us to trust Him for our long-term happiness. Successful, happy living comes from daily surrender to God and choosing to obey God's law. Being happy means giving up destructive emotions like hatred and experiencing freedom through God's power. Still another way to happiness is through reaching out to others. God's prescriptions for happiness have all sorts of positive side effects (see Gal. 5:22, 23)!

CONSIDER

- Devising a mime presentation to convey the message that happiness depends on our choices. Think about sharing it with a youth Sabbath School class.
- Writing a paraphrase of the Ten Commandments, telling how each one can help you to be happy, e.g., "Because God wants me to be happy, He says that I must worship Him only—not pleasures or things. This will help to give me perspective on life and allow me to experience real joy."
- Creating a mural showing people making choices to obey God's laws.
- Keeping a log of decisions you make throughout this weekend. At the end of the weekend, sit down and chart: (1) how each one relates to God's law; and (2) how it contributes to your happiness. Review your log in two weeks to see how time has affected your perceptions.
- Brainstorming with a friend a list of things that the two of you could do when one of you is in a slump—ways of helping others or doing nice things for them.
- Reflecting on your HQ (Happiness Quotient). Do you see yourself as a joyful individual? Are your instinctive reactions to a new idea positive or negative? How can you change the way others perceive you?
- Making a collection of songs that contain a message about choices or happiness. Develop a slide show (pictures or PowerPoint) or interpretive (dance) movement routine to go with one or more of the songs.

CONNECT

Matthew 5:1-12; Psalm 119.

The Desire of Ages, pp. 298-314; *My Life Today*, pp. 156-182.

Ann Kiemel, *I'm Out to Change My World*.

Sharon E. Wright, Silver Spring, Maryland

Live within Your means



“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” (Prov. 3:9, 10, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 3:9, 10

The plan was to use my scholarship during the school year and supplement it as needed with savings. Summer would give me the opportunity to work and resupply the savings that would be the cushion for the following year of school. Seemed like a good plan to me. At the end of the first year of classes, however, it was obvious that the plan didn't work out very well. Moving expenses and unexpected costs over the year had drained my savings almost completely. Being a single parent didn't help either. In fact, credit cards and their allure made it too easy, and I found myself not only without any savings at all, I was also several thousand dollars in debt.

Instead of working that first summer to put more money in savings, I was working to pay off the loans that I had already accumulated. The second year of school started with no savings in the bank and some remaining loans still owed, as well as the realization that I would need to borrow throughout the year. And now I am at the beginning of the second summer break. I tell myself that this is temporary and comfort myself with thoughts that I will finish this program, and I will pay off all the school bills. I will.

This didn't happen (too much) from carelessness or irresponsibility. Unexpected things do happen sometimes. I worried about this all the time. I even started working extra during the school year in an attempt to help with the finances, but this started to affect my grades. I remember that after paying the bills and having very little left, sometimes asking myself if I should charge my tithe. Wouldn't it be better to not tithe and pay off another bill instead of just making the debt even bigger? After struggling with this for a time, something changed. I realized that if I

I sometimes asked myself if I should charge my tithe.

give back to God what wasn't mine in the first place and do what I can, I have the opportunity to trust God. Again.

I have two to three more years of school, and I have no idea how this is all going to turn out. But trusting God seems far better than anything else I can dream.

All That Glitters Is Not Gold

EVIDENCE

Eccles. 2:10, 11

Despite the fact that countless books have been published on money management, too many people are in debt. Many families struggle from month to month, barely able to meet their financial obligations. Among those scraping to make ends meet are Christians like myself. Yet, with each credit card offer that comes in the mail, we are quick to fill it out and anxiously await the arrival of our new \$2,000 credit limit.

Like many young people today, I have a desire for the finer things in life.

Why are we caught up in the web that Satan has carefully woven to interfere with our walk

with God? "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Luke 16:13, NIV).

Like many young people today, I have a desire for the finer things in life: a great home with a shiny BMW in the garage; a wardrobe full of DKNY outfits and Nine West shoes to match; plus much, much, more! However, this is not the empty existence that the Lord has instructed His people to live.

Recall the story of King Solomon. Read Ecclesiastes. It is a beautifully written book, illustrating how meaningless are the pleasures of this world. Solomon was in pursuit of rewards and satisfaction. He worked very hard to achieve what he thought would make him happy, but at the end of the day he realized that it was all in vain.

So as we continue our journey down the road of life, let us remember to keep God first in every aspect of our lives. God has things in store for us that we cannot even begin to imagine.

REACT

1. What can we do to aid us in staying debt free? Be specific.
2. How can a young Christian live a simple life without being a total misfit?
3. Why do you think people are addicted to shopping?
4. Why do you think many of the truly great saints in history have embraced poverty?
5. What are some warning signs that we are moving toward financial trouble? What can we do about it?
6. How can credit be an asset rather than a liability?

LOGOS

Prov. 3:9, 10; 6:1-5; 11:24, 25, 28; 14:15; 22:3

In her best-selling book *The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom*, multimillionaire financial investor, advisor, and author Suze Orman notes that we receive many messages about money through our families, and many memories associated with its importance. For example, I can remember quitting the almost nightly habit of bed wetting at age 9 when my grandmother offered me \$1.00 per dry night when I visited her one summer. Those were powerful dollars!

Money is important not only because we exchange the hours of our lives for it, but because we exchange it for the necessities of life. Money is important because so many emotions surround it. Spiritual values are expressed in the ways in which we spend, save, or otherwise use money. According to Orman, most of us go through life believing that we will never have enough money. We allow fear to keep us from recognizing the power of the dollars we earn and to prevent us from achieving our goals.

“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” (Prov. 3:9, 10, NIV). This is a practical expression of the first principle of living within our incomes—tithing. It is tempting to believe that tithes and offerings are simply a loss, another form of tax. This may seem particularly true when you are making \$6.00 to \$10.00 per hour as a student and have little left after tax is taken out. But wisdom says otherwise.

The fact is that people who can learn to manage without 10 percent or more of their incomes are way ahead. With management skills derived from honoring the God who owns it all, it becomes much easier to live within our incomes. Tithing first (first fruits) is simply a prioritizing that recognizes not only God's ownership, but reflects the personal financial management style advocated in Proverbs. People with open hands are free to receive! “One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty” (11:24, NIV).

“Tithe?” you say. “I’m so far from making it that I have to take student loans every semester. How can you possibly suggest tithing?” Yet the command is there. You have choices, and your dollar has the same power as anyone else’s. Careful discretion when you’re young can make a difference that will last a lifetime. Loans may be inevitable, but don’t get trapped. Be sure you never borrow more than your bottom line need. Your loans should be funding your tuition, not taking you and your friends to the movies every week or to Cancun on Christmas break! Debts, even educational ones, will seriously drain your future energies and resources. Proverbs 6:1-5 addresses this issue in part. Wisdom, in reference to debt, urges that you “free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler” (verse 5, NIV). Powerful words. When we fail

to live within our means, our freedom turns to bondage.

Of course, living within our means doesn't imply a stingy approach to life or to the needs of others. Though the real intent of the above passage is to point us to the wisdom of not tying our financial well being to the debts of another, wisdom encourages true generosity. "A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed" (11:25, NIV). Being a tightwad with God cannot possibly pay!

It is amazing what we sell our lives and our futures for. Whether it is that raging 9-mile-per-gallon road eater or a daily dose of java juice, we all spend money on something. Advertising deceives the vast majority of us, convincing us that our lives cannot be complete without one gizmo or another. So we spend megabucks trying to stay current, never counting the costs. Debt is not an issue, as long as we look good, or so we think. . . . And so we come to these words: "A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps. . . . A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it" (14:15; 22:3, NIV). Who would have guessed?

Your dollar has the same power as anyone else's.

With prosperity comes responsibility. It is tempting to dismiss the poor as do-nothings who collect a welfare check. It feels righteous to sympathize with the addict who has lost everything but refuse to help on the grounds that he or she is simply the result of poor choices. The particularly naïve and thoughtless among us might even ask of a homeless person, "Why don't you just get a job?" Yet Jesus reminds us that when we have done it unto the least, we have done it unto Him! That is truly amazing, and is all the more reason to live within our means. Not only must we seek to avoid the dire situations this section addresses, we must receive God's blessings that we might bless others.

I am convinced that God wants good to come of our lives. Nothing can hinder that faster than ignoring the council given. I know from personal experience.

REACT

1. Can you think of any of your early memories about money? What message was communicated, and how does that fit with what wisdom teaches?
2. How do privilege and responsibility relate?
3. Read Matthew 19:16-25. Even if you are not wealthy, what direction do you think you would have taken if you were the young ruler in the story?
4. Read Proverbs 11:24. In your experience is this true? Are the wealthy people you know more likely to be generous or selfish with money?
5. How would you explain to a non-Christian friend why you return tithe?

Tuesday
November 7

Giving to Make Ends Meet

TESTIMONY

Prov. 3:9, 10; 6:1-5

"Dear Brother: I am sorry that you are situated as you are, under the pressure of debt. I know of quite a number, who, like yourself, are troubled and distressed over their financial condition. . . . The Lord does not take pleasure in your distress. He wants to bestow upon you the consolations of His Holy Spirit, that you may be a free man, abiding in His light and in His love. . . . You ought not to allow yourself to become financially embarrassed; for the fact that you are in debt weakens your faith and tends to discourage you; and even the thought of it makes you nearly wild. You need to cut down your expenses, and strive to supply this deficiency in your character. You can and should make determined efforts to bring under control your disposition to spend means beyond your income."¹

Although archaic in style, the principle is still relevant. I appreciate Ellen White's real encouragement: if I live within my means, I will worry less and not be stressed out!

She also writes regarding tithing: "All who will take a wholehearted, decided position to obey God . . . who will render to the Lord the portion that He claims as His own, will receive the blessing of God."² Now that is good news for a recent

college graduate struggling with student loan bills, apartment rental, car lease, and all the other good things that come along with being on one's own.

Check out Suze Orman, a contemporary, secular financial advisor. In her book, *The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom*, she affirms, in a secular context, what Ellen White wrote more than a century earlier. "Money flows through our lives

**"The Lord
does not take
pleasure in
your distress."**

like water. . . . I believe each one of us is, in effect, a glass, in that we can hold only so much; after that, the water—or the money—just goes down the drain. When you make an offering, the glass will be filled again and again and again. I knew I always felt better right after I made an offering—stronger, worthier, more powerful. And after a while I began to believe that it was no coincidence that after I made such an offering, more money would always begin to flow my way."³

REACT

What are some ways God can bless me financially when I consistently return my tithe?

1. *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 254, 255.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

3. Suze Orman, *The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom* (New York: Crown Pub., Inc., 1997), p. 254.

Spiritual Economics

HOW-TO

Prov. 3:9, 10; 6:1-5; 11:24, 25; 22:3

We had a 1-year-old son and had just found out we were expecting another child. We had recently moved into our first home, both family cars were due for repairs, the holidays were coming up, and we had a long-anticipated vacation trip scheduled. Then, as if on cue, in a perverted sort of way, it happened: After years of near-perfect health, I had a major health scare that required hospitalization. Less than a week later, I was downsized at work.

Proverbs has sound principles for personal financial management still applicable today:

1. Prioritize. In the context of contemporary life, which includes not only groceries, utility bills, clothing expenses, and home mortgages, but also car payments, insurance, student loans, child care, professional and other membership dues, travel, recreation, and a host of other “necessities,” it is easy to overlook what should be our highest priority: God.

Less than a week later,
I was downsized.

2. Plan. We often sense impending financial crises yet ignore the warning signs and continue on the same path. We do have options: the wise man looks ahead and plans for success. It may involve a simple adjustment of a habit or a radical shift in lifestyle, but it must be done.

3. Give. The idea seems contradictory to the intent of living within one’s means. It is said that “what goes around, comes around.” This is also a sound spiritual and financial principle. Giving opens ourselves to receive more.

4. Avoid debt. Credit is a two-edged sword. When managed properly, it can be helpful, but when mismanaged, it makes one feel like a hunted animal caught in a trap (Prov. 6:5).

A wise friend gave me good advice in the form of a question: “One man earns a hundred thousand dollars a year and spends a hundred and ten thousand, and another earns ten thousand dollars a year and spends nine thousand. Who is the richer man?”

As an architect who has faced various financial situations—salaried, consulting, contract, and private practice—for me finances have never been taken for granted. We lived through the above crisis like the many who came before it. With God’s continued blessings, we have never gone hungry nor been delinquent on a mortgage payment. Life continues to be a challenge, but God always comes through for us.

Thursday
November 9

What You Really Need

OPINION

Luke 9:25

"You need what you don't have." "You need more of what you do have." These messages shout at us from billboards advertising everything from GUESS? jeans to BMW convertibles. Through every medium possible we are reminded that who we are, where we live, what we drive, and how much money we earn are simply not enough. Enough for what?

Many of us, including Christians, live as if more things, more money, more leisure will make us happy. And the belief that fulfillment is impossible without more of something leads us to trade the promised contentment and peace we experience as God's cared-for children for the restless, relentless pursuit of the elusive something more. How much more?

The something-more lifestyle takes many forms. It can be seen in the frugal late-middle-aged couple who have saved far more than enough to retire comfortably but who just can't seem to stop worrying about whether they'll have enough. It can be seen in the college student who has maxed out credit cards and three part-time jobs to finance the right wardrobe, automobile, or social life. It can be seen in

The something-
more lifestyle
takes many forms.

the twenty-something who won't share any of his means because he is unable to stop paying himself back for the deferred gratification of his college years. And it can be seen in the lives of those who pursue increased livelihood with such focus that no passion or energy remains for a relationship with God, with others, for life.

In the book of Luke we hear Christ asking His listeners: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (9:25, NIV). There are some areas of life in which money has power and some areas in which it is powerless.

C. S. Lewis proposes in *Mere Christianity* that all of us are born with a "God-shaped void"—a void that will never be filled with money or possessions. God, our Creator, Sustainer, and Provider offers Himself as Enough, Infinitely More, and The Life. And that belongs on a billboard.

REACT

1. Do you think financial security is more important to your generation, your parents' generation, or your grandparents' generation? Why?

2. In your mind, what would be the biggest advantage to having more money? What would be the biggest advantage, if any, to having less money?

Jill Bowen Hoenes, Los Angeles, California

Tithing the Heart

EXPLORATION

Ps. 128:2

CONCLUDE

Stock portfolios, initial public offerings, e-business, climbing the ladder of financial success, making money, spending money. God asks, "What about Me?" Balancing God and money isn't just difficult. It's impossible. Put God first, and He'll teach you the principles necessary to deal with the unexpected, find happiness in an unhappy world, return a joy-filled tithe, keep your priorities straight if wealth happens, live within your means, and deal with the two-edged sword of credit. Return to God His 10 percent and watch Him bless the rest.

CONSIDER

- Creating an "emergency plan" to deal with unexpected financial concerns. Jot down step-by-step instructions. This will keep you from any knee-jerk responses that can cost you dearly in the long run; e.g., if the car breaks down, know how to find alternative transportation and where to get timely, economical repairs.
- Attending a financial-planning seminar in your area. Be sure the presenter is a dedicated, practicing Christian who cites biblical principles.
- Printing out a budget that includes all expenses and income. This will give you a true picture of what you can and can't spend. Be sure that tithe tops the expenses list. Nothing else should take place in your financial world until that matter is addressed properly.
- Writing a song (feel free to use someone else's melody) about how God has blessed your life in simple, nonfinancial ways. You might include something about your close friends, your favorite (healthful) food, your love for nature, the warmth you feel in the arms of that certain someone, etc. Financial matters are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to God's blessings.
- Heading to the library or Christian bookstore to select material on financial planning. Make sure the author is a practicing Christian. Anything by Larry Burkett should do just fine.
- Sitting down and doing some soul-searching, determining what's most important in your life. Convince yourself that money is a tool or resource for something much nobler than gaining wealth. It's not merely a goal to reach.
- Placing a small, printed sticker on your credit card(s) that asks, "Can I do without this purchase?"

CONNECT

Malachi 3:10; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; 1 Timothy 6:18, 19.

Counsels on Stewardship.

Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . ., chap. 20.

Charles Mills, Berkeley Springs, West Virginia

As the Needle to the Pole



“The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity” (Prov. 11:3, NIV).

Poker Face

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 29:1, 2

Rachel sat in church, listening to the pastor with more rapt attention than she usually gave to the sermon. Remember the Sabbath day. . . . Honor thy father and mother. . . . He was up to the fifth commandment and closing in quickly on the one she wanted to hear about: number seven.

She watched him closely for signs of nervousness. Was he perspiring? Drumming his fingers on the pulpit? No, he looked cool, confident and—well, Christian. He looked like one of God's shepherds, telling the flock about God's law of love.

But he wasn't that at all. As he barreled on through "Thou shalt not kill," Rachel couldn't take her eyes off the man: not a shepherd but a wolf in the fold.

She had just learned that the pastor was having an affair—with one of Rachel's close friends. It had been going on for months. Two spouses and four children were unaware, but for how much longer? Word was beginning to leak out. And here he was, preaching on the Ten Commandments, looking and sounding as if he believed every phrase.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery!" his voice rang out. He began condemning Hollywood movies and soap operas, the degraded sexual mores of modern society. Rachel didn't even see him tap his foot or shuffle his papers. He wasn't nervous at all.

That must be what card players call a poker face, Rachel thought. He's bluffing, and you'd never guess unless you knew the truth. How does he do it? Has he actually managed to convince himself that adultery is OK in his case? Or does he just compartmentalize, pretend he's two different people?

She thought of the smaller hypocrisies in her own life. *I guess it's true that as Christians we all claim to believe one thing, and do another, she considered. But how long do you have to ignore your conscience before you get to the point of being so blatant about it?* The thought made her shiver. Could little sins, ignored over time, harden the heart to the point at which integrity was just a sham? Where you could preach with a poker face about God's holy law while privately flouting it?

As the pastor wrapped up his comments on adultery and went on to "Thou shalt not steal," Rachel stole a look around the church. There was Stacey—the pastor's lover—with her husband and kids. A few pews ahead, the pastor's wife and children. And all around, a roomful of people who believed in their pastor, who trusted him when he opened God's Word from the pulpit.

Soon the secret would be shattered. Rachel couldn't even imagine what picking up the pieces would be like.

**"Thou shalt not
commit adultery!"
his voice rang out.**

LOGOS

Prov. 11:17; 20:8, 17; 21:15; 29:2; Rom. 8:6

I've been living in St. John's, Newfoundland, for three years now. One of the most delightful surprises of my first summer here was the appearance of huge icebergs, right off the coast! Now I look forward to their yearly arrival. Tour boats circle them so that eager tourists can get a better look. Kayakers can get even closer! Some local businesses bottle iceberg water. The advertisements proclaim that this water is thousands of years old and totally free of pollution. All who see them are amazed by the beauty and purity of these icebergs.

As they drift south, however, effects of wind and warmer temperatures take their toll. They begin to melt, cracks appear, and they break up into smaller pieces. Eventually they are no longer grand structures of pure ice, but have melted away. Merged with the ocean, they are indistinguishable from it.

The icebergs come to mind when I think of the challenge of living as a Christian in a sin-fixated world. The integrity and wisdom needed to live uprightly is a gift from God, the One from whom all truth proceeds. Without a living faith in Christ, our purity melts away.

God created human beings. As our Maker, God knows what conditions are best for our mental, physical, social, and spiritual completeness. Genesis 1 and 2 show God's perfect planning for human wholeness. A friendly environment was prepared. Then a man and woman were placed together as companions. They had pleasing work to do in the garden, and they were able to talk with God. All the aspects of their being were happily engaged. God wisely provided for their every need.

As the opponent of God, Satan actively seeks to destroy the conditions that give us completeness. Satan twists our thinking until it is opposed to the wisdom imparted from our Creator. He planted doubt in the mind of Eve by asking, "Did

**Without a living
faith in Christ, our
purity melts away.**

God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1, NIV), and then followed it up with, "You will not surely die" (verse 4, NIV). After being told that by eating the forbidden fruit she would be like God, knowing good and evil, the Bible tells us that Eve "saw that the tree *was* good for

food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise" (verse 6, NKJV), so she ate of it. Eve was persuaded by a master con artist. If only she had refused to enter into discussion on God's Word and simply trusted in His loving authority!

In our fallen state, God continues to share with us the conditions of completeness. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11, NKJV). God is so very gracious! He keeps on loving the ones He created even when they

forget Him. He keeps trying to reach us with His principles of living life to the fullest. The Ten Commandments outline the basics of living at peace with God and other people. Read them over and think about how distorted and ignored they are in modern life. The “works of the flesh,” packaged by Satan as natural and fun, are at odds with the fruits of the Spirit, the noble traits exemplified by Christ and bestowed by God on the converted life (Gal. 5:19-23).

Christ gives us the power to live in harmony with His conditions of completeness. “To be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace” (Rom. 8:6, NKJV). By keeping our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus and His example (Rom. 5:1), by daily prayer for the leading of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), and by filling our minds and hearts with Bible truth (Matt. 24:35; Luke 4:8; John 15:10, 14), we will be able to resist any distortion of truth. Hebrews 11 depicts the victories of faith in the lives of those who trusted in God.

“Before every man there lies a wide and pleasant road that seems right but ends in death” (Prov. 14:12, TLB). Ultimately, our Creator is our Judge. He gives us many opportunities to turn to Him, but we are responsible for what we choose to do with those opportunities. We can either live an incomplete and doomed life or ally ourselves with the One who came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

REACT

1. How would you define *integrity*, *purity*, and *wisdom*? Would you use any of these words to describe yourself? a friend? a parent? a mentor?

2. Do upright individuals make a difference in today's world? Explain your answer.

3. *The Jerry Springer Show* reveals the iceberg of society's immorality. How may this awareness be used to prevent similar activities among my Christian peers?

4. What ingredients are necessary to sustain faith in Christ that will distinguish you from this sin-fixated world?

5. Would you associate the characteristics of the iceberg in the story as: (a) the manifestation of God's presence in your life; or (b) the evidence of Satan's influence on your life? Give three experiential reasons for your choice.

6. The “Logos” Scripture speaks of dividing the good from the bad, the righteous from the unrighteous. Does this make you nervous? Do you have confidence that you are on the right side?

7. In the iceberg illustration, the iceberg gradually loses its pure mass. How can we keep from losing our spiritual mass while floating in this world?

8. Some will say that the best way to stay pure is to not float in the open sea (world). Is there anything wrong with this reasoning? Explain your answer.

Monday
November 13

His Righteousness in Us

TESTIMONY

Matt. 6:33

In the world in which we live, we see morality, integrity, and character slipping further away from the biblical standard. Yes, we do see some individuals who strive to maintain in their lives a higher standard than the norm, but how as individuals do we compare to the example Christ set for us? Is that standard attainable?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20, NIV). Here was a group of people trying to outwardly display righteousness. I look at myself and think that I can not even attain the righteousness of the Pharisees, let alone trying to surpass it as Christ calls us to do. But how is that achieved?

In comparing the righteousness of the Pharisees to Christ's righteousness, the Spirit of the Lord says: "The religion of the Pharisee does not touch the soul. He is not seeking Godlikeness of character, a heart filled with love and mercy. He is satisfied with a religion that has to do only with the outward life. His righteousness is his own—the fruit of his own works—and judged by a human standard."¹

The righteousness that God calls us to live by comes only from God, and we receive it by faith. "By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ,

**By faith He can and
will transform us
into His character.**

the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness.

Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah."² His righteousness results in our outward display of right doing when we, by faith, surrender to His Holy Spirit. This changes the heart so that by impulse we do His will.

Christ said that we are to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33, NIV). "Make this first and last. Seek most earnestly to know Him whom to know aright is life eternal. Christ and His righteousness is the salvation of the soul."³ His righteousness is a most precious gift to those who reach out to Him in faith. By faith He can and will transform us into His character.

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 151.

2. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 113.

3. *Maranatha*, p. 71.

Human Integrity

EVIDENCE

Job 27:6

When people graduate from university, they participate in a convocation ceremony with a large group of graduates, receiving a wide variety of degrees. As a Canadian engineer, I went through a convocation ceremony, and I also participated in a special ceremony with all my engineering classmates as we pledged an oath and were each presented with an iron ring.

One of the purposes of this ceremony is to remind graduating engineers that social and ethical responsibilities are inherent in the engineering profession and that an individual engineer's integrity, or lack of it, reflects on the engineering profession as a whole.

It is entirely possible that some graduating engineers may take part in that special ceremony, known as "The Ritual of the Calling of an Engineer," and not feel

Christians must strive to see others through Jesus' eyes and treat them as He would—with love and compassion.

impressed or motivated to consider *their* own integrity. It is also possible that some of us Christians may take part in the weekly ceremony known as "church," and not feel impressed or motivated to consider our own integrity.

Engineers must represent their chosen profession by carrying out their day-to-day activities in an ethical and responsible manner. Christians must strive to see others through Jesus' eyes and treat them as He would—with love and compassion. Both of these illustrate integrity as it is defined by *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* to be a "firm adherence to a code of . . . moral or artistic values."

But there is more to integrity than Webster's would lead us to believe. Integrity is not just following a moral code. It is integral to being a Christian; it is a part of who we are.

To represent Christ truly to the world is to exhibit integrity; to express the love of Christ honestly and faithfully to those around us is to be a person of integrity.

REACT

1. If we do not exhibit integrity, whom do we hurt most? (a) God, (b) others, (c) ourselves. Explain your answer.
2. Does unjust treatment from another person give us the right to put our integrity aside and "give as good as we get"? Why or why not?
3. If we find that we can put our integrity aside, what does it say about our integrity?

HOW-TO

Prov. 11:3

Proverbs 11:3 is tough counsel from a loving God! But the reality is that if Christians don't have integrity, their mission in a sin-sick world is of no effect. Integrity involves adhering to a certain set of moral values and the ability to practice them in our daily lives on a consistent basis.

One of the hardest things to do is to maintain the principles of the Christian faith in a society that has rejected Christian morality. When we are with friends who do not believe as we do, it is difficult to maintain allegiance to Christianity's laws, but when we do stand for what is right, integrity is naturally the end result.

For the Christian, integrity cannot exist apart from ethics. What makes Christianity unique in a world filled with ideas and philosophies is that Christ is the center of our world view. Christian integrity is not only about practicing fairness, justice, and honesty, but also about expressing a divine love that accepts people where they are currently in their walk in life. By sharing our happiness and

peace in Christ, we can make integrity attractive in this fast-paced world. The challenge for Christians who believe in Jesus Christ is to be a light, not a judge—a model, not a critic.

**Integrity cannot exist
apart from ethics.**

Promise Keepers is a men's movement in the Christian community. One of the organization's strengths is that it not only encourages men to make promises in their relationships but to keep their promises. Christianity is about building trust with others. When others know that they can depend on you, they respect your counsel. Keep your promises. Show others how Christianity can meet their situation and your faith becomes effective and relevant. Your beliefs not only emanate from an ancient Book, but under power of the Holy Spirit they become a real force for change.

We must challenge ourselves to stay close to Christ by asking Him to help us understand the plight of others and by responding in a way that adds credibility and integrity to the cause of Christ.

REACT

1. There are people who are dishonest, yet they appear to prosper. How do you explain this to a struggling Christian?
2. How do I relate to a promise keeper who defaults on his promise? How does Christ relate to me?
3. If we are only a light and not a judge, at what point do we become responsible for others' actions when they hurt society?
4. Have you heard the expression "the truth hurts"? Why is this so?

Litmus Test

OPINION

James 3:17

It amuses me when people claim to have integrity. If one has to convince others they are merciful, just, and honest—forget it. Do not pass GO, do not collect 200 dollars. Individuals are not always perceptive in deciphering someone's true colors. I have only to think of Waco, Texas, to remember one illusion of righteousness. Followers were drawn in hook, line, and sinker. It's so sad.

How is it we can be so easily deceived? If I were downtown

today and someone approached me claiming to be the Son of God—I would offer him medication. But that's me. I know what my Bible says. I know what to look for and what to ignore. "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17, NIV). A true man lives the characteristics and wisdom of Jesus. He can't just claim it.

Each of us needs to learn to hone our biblical instincts: to know God, really know Him. Then by knowing Him, we can recognize those Christlike characteristics in others. That's our guide. That's our litmus test. It's wisdom to live by.

Individuals are not always perceptive in deciphering someone's true colors.

REACT

1. How would you react to someone who claimed to have integrity when you knew otherwise?
2. Do you think the Bible asks too much of us in this day and age? Explain your answer.
3. Where do you stand personally with your living fellowship with God?
4. How can I acquire that happiness and peace in Christ to make integrity attractive in this fast-paced world? How can I use this security in Christ to show others that Christianity can meet their situation?
5. Many who were deceived by David Koresh were in search of deep biblical truth. What can you do to ensure that such seekers of truth in your community do not make the same mistake?
6. Is it easy to identify a person with integrity? Is integrity relative? Explain your answer.
7. What is the essential difference between the world's definition of integrity and God's?

How Can They Do That?

EXPLORATION

Prov. 11:3

CONCLUDE

"How can they do that?" we wonder when wrongdoers act innocent. Adam and Eve exhibited this duplicity first. We too often follow. God's solution? A relationship with His Son maintained by daily prayer, Bible study, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Once we choose this relationship, we are transformed into Christ's character. We become examples of integrity to the world. We keep our promises. No one has to claim to have integrity. If it's there, we recognize it, and so do others.

CONSIDER

- Searching through newspapers and magazines and cut out photos and descriptions of people of integrity. Arrange them into a collage.
- Taking a walk in a wooded area (or examine plants, trees, or flowers nearby). Architects, engineers, interior designers, and artists talk about integrity of design. Find examples of God's integrity of design in nature. Think about what this tells you about God.
- Thinking about these questions: In what ways have I shown integrity? In what ways have I not? How can I rectify those times when I haven't?
- Looking up the word *integrity* in a concordance. Read the passages you find. Discuss with a friend what the passages have in common.
- Writing a letter of affirmation and encouragement to a person in public or private life who has recently taken a stand on an issue or in a situation in which he or she could have compromised integrity.
- Watching, reading, or listening to the news. On a scale of 1 to 10, rank some of the people you see, read about, or hear about according to their integrity. A rank of one means a person acted with no integrity; 2 to 9 means a person acted with some integrity; 10 means the person acted with complete integrity. Then ask yourself: Can integrity be ranked?
- Finding a psalm about integrity. Set it to music. Teach it to your family and friends.

CONNECT

Matthew 6:1-7, 14-18; 7:1-5.

Education, pp. 51-70; *Positive Christian Living*, pp. 322-327.

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, July 31, Aug. 4, Sept. 1, 10, 11.

Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*, pp. 25-27; *Discipleship Journal*, Issue 104, Integrity, March/April 1998.

Apples of Gold



**“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold
in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11, NIV).**

The Great Healer of Broken Relationships

INTRODUCTION

John 1:1-3

One day Jared Omolloh, a Kenyan literature evangelist, encountered a direct confrontation with Kenya police in search of culprits.

"What are you carrying?" one officer asked.

"Swords," Jared answered steadily.

His answer aggravated the situation. The officer grabbed the bag and ordered Jared to lay open the contents. When they saw the bundles of Holy Bibles inside the bag, a good relationship was restored.

Jesus Christ is the great healer of broken relationships. He was there in the beginning, and He is here today. Tomorrow He will be here. Christ, the Word, is our source of blessing, hope, and joy. He is our source of life. If we accept the Word, our practical everyday concerns will reflect His character. For Jesus Christ is the center of the Written Word; and the central idea of the Holy Book of God is His

**"Swords,"
Jared answered
steadily.**

love for humanity, which is proved in the life, teachings, and death of His Son.

As we study the lesson this week, may our principal focus be on Christ, the original Word from which all our words should stem.

Right Word, Right Time

EVIDENCE

Prov. 25:11

As a development extensionist, I often notice how words clash during meetings. The manner in which one speaks and the kind of words used often affect the general perception of those who receive them. For instance, one may talk of harvesting matters when people are dealing with planting matters. Both planting and harvesting stages are important in agriculture, but the order in which they occur is even more important.

Saying something at a time when it is not needed is like somebody doing impulse buying. The money is wasted. Words have an impact on those around us: our family members, our church members, our peer groups, our elders, and our youngsters as well. Words can build or they can ruin. They can integrate or segregate. Words are a fountain of life. They are also a spirit-crusher (Prov. 15:4).

To hold the tongue means to know just what to say before it comes out of your mouth. Today several people have experienced the consequences of unnecessary speech. Some have talked about their fellow workers, and it has resulted in fighting. Others have lost job opportunities because of their words. In most cases, enmity has developed because of misuse of words. In the church, Satan gets hold of our minds according to how we speak.

Only right words bring relief: words of wisdom, words of help, words which are golden apples in silver plates.

**Words can build
or ruin, integrate
or segregate.**

REACT

1. How can you illustrate the power of words in your church?
2. Why is it sometimes difficult to hold our tongues rather than to say something unkind or sarcastic?
3. How can we resist saying things we know we shouldn't? Be specific.
4. Can silence be more than just avoiding saying something negative? When is silence a good thing?

LOGOS

Prov. 10:11, 19; 15:4; 26:28; 30:5

Power to Give Nutrients (Prov. 10:11; 15:4)

Have you ever felt as if every cell of your body is craving food? I once did. I remember one day being very hungry, and the result was something I won't soon forget. How could I overcome the grim fatigue, the absolute hunger? It was like a paralysis that only food could heal.

This brings one thing to my mind: the effect of food on hunger. A good friend offered me food when I was in that state of hunger. I ate to my satisfaction, and all my concerns seemed to be solved.

As human beings, we are spiritually hungry. We need food for the soul and food for the body. Our words are one kind of food. Rightly used, they have the power to satisfy, the power to give nutrients, to bring us to the Holy Spirit, to Jesus, to God.

Ruin and Nonsense in Speech (Prov. 10:19; 26:28)

There is "a time to be silent and a time to speak" (Eccles. 3:7, NIV). Solomon adds this interesting observation: "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable" (Prov. 10:19, NASB). Elsewhere in the Bible, Colossians 4:6 clarifies that our speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and that we should know how to give the right answer to everyone.

Words, if used wrongly and unwisely, can be harmful. They cannot be a healing to the mind and soul. Words without Christ are empty. They are like a toothless dog that only barks but cannot bite. Instead of being a source of encouragement and strength, they will cause only weakness and despair.

**Words, if used wrongly
and unwisely,
can be harmful.**

To avoid ruin, we must build our words on Jesus Christ. "To those who believe, Christ is a sure foundation. Upon this living stone, Jews and Gentiles alike may build. It is broad enough for all and strong enough to sustain the weight and burden of the whole world."¹

Immutability (Prov. 30:5)

The Lord himself does not change (Mal. 3:6). We receive the assurances that promises will come true. He is just and kind; He is our only hope. But remember, the promises are twofold: those of happiness and joy and those of turmoil, crying,

and gnashing of teeth. Judgment will be made according to how one has used his or her words. Will you stand the storm? The lucky lot is the group that has used words rightly, with reverence for the Lord, those who are humble and patient, those who have respect for the poor, who are loyal to friends.

“ ‘The keys of the kingdom of heaven’ are the words of Christ. All the words of Holy Scripture are His, and are here included. These words have power to open and to shut heaven. They declare the conditions upon which men are received or rejected. Thus the work of those who preach God’s word is a savor of life unto life or of death unto death”²

REACT

1. How can your speech be a healing to the bones of a friend who is physically sick? See Proverbs 15:4; 16:24.

2. What are the areas in the church in which you should speak out? In which you should keep quiet?

3. If God knows our thoughts anyway, why is there such an emphasis in the Bible on what we actually say?

4. Think of a time when you felt the power of words. Why were they powerful?

1. *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 175.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 413, 414.

TESTIMONY

Exod. 3:11, 12, 18, 21

Moses was concerned about how he could approach the Israelites in Egypt and lead them out of the bondage of Pharaoh. He was worried at the instruction that God had given him. And he made an observation about his speech, his words.

In the Holy Spirit-led words of Ellen G. White, "A man will gain power and efficiency as he accepts the responsibilities that God places upon him, and with his whole soul seeks to qualify himself to bear them aright. . . . The fact that a man feels his weakness is at least some evidence that he realizes the magnitude of the work appointed him, and that he will make God his counselor and his strength."¹

Those whose words are wise and Christ-centered experience a kind of ability that is dependent on the Holy Trinity. Though they may see themselves as physically weak and of poor speaking ability, Christ uses them to accomplish divine tasks.

**Wisdom is often hidden
behind apparently plain
and simple looking faces.**

Just as great minerals may be found in ordinary looking soil, so is wisdom often hidden behind apparently plain and simple looking faces.

If Christ is manifest in our words, we shall overcome the world. "Man is not left alone to conquer the power of evil by his own feeble efforts. Help is at hand and will be given to every soul who really desires it. Angels of God, that ascend and descend the ladder which Jacob saw in vision, will help every soul who will, to climb even to the highest heaven."²

REACT

1. How can a nonbeliever know that your words are Christ-centered?
2. Do your words draw members of your family to church? Explain.
3. When it is difficult to find the right words to say, how can we react to such situations?
4. Words are as much about the reader or listener as they are about the writer or speaker, so how can barriers to communication be overcome by both the writer/speaker and the reader/listener? Be specific.
5. What part should God play in working through what we say?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 255.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 568.

Winning by Word

HOW-TO

Col. 4:6

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:6, NIV).

Someone once said that “words are the most powerful drug used by mankind.”

Let us have a look at Christ, our example. We see Him interacting with children, men, women, the old, the sick, and the respected people of the world. How did He communicate with them? Let us emulate His examples:

**We must be humble
even in our words.**

1. Humility. We need humility in order to accept and serve the unlovely, the poor, and the deprived. We must be humble even in our words.

2. Love. Love is fundamental, and it is love that serves. The speech of a loving, caring person is a relief to the person receiving it. It will promote service, and service is a great social power in changing communities.

3. Hope. In the spiritual transformation of people, we must instill hope in their minds. All of us must have hope. Words of hope encourage us to persevere as we work with difficult people in difficult situations.

REACT

1. What role do words play in your church, community, or nation?
2. How can your words promote service to others?
3. What are some of the words spoken by Jesus that have special meaning and power for you? Why?
4. If you had only 10 words to say on an international broadcast, what would you say?

Words With(out) Deeds

OPINION

James 2:14-17

One day I called on a friend to join me for a nature walk, for I felt quite bored at home. On that day our television set had run short of power. It was functionless.

Up the mountain, down the valley, and then on the street my friend and I walked. Finally, I spotted a TV antenna outside a house. We knocked on the door and asked if we could have a look at one of the programs that afternoon.

But we were advised that the antenna was set up but there was no TV set. Too bad. Like an antenna without a set, so is faith without action, and, more so, words without deeds. Of all the things you wear, your expression is the most important. We preach about the Second Advent and the three angels' messages, we return our tithes, and we read the Bible—but our lives do not reflect what we say.

**An antenna is useful
only when there is
a television set.**

In order to be put right with God through faith and to be justified, we must clothe ourselves with Christ (2 Cor. 5:7). For our God is able to give us whatever we need even in excess (9:9).

An antenna is useful only when there is a television set. Words are useful only when there are deeds. Our words are most instrumental in public evangelism. They have the power to build up or tear down. Their use has two possible consequences: blessings or curses. Focusing on our Savior Jesus Christ, our mission as Christians will become fulfilled: to reap the fruits of everlasting life with Him.

REACT

1. Are words alone enough? What about people who say one thing and do something different?
2. Which are you more likely to take notice of: words or actions? Explain your answer.
3. Considering that we all fall short of perfection, should we simply dismiss what others say if we believe that they aren't living up to it?

Give Me the Words

EXPLORATION

Prov. 25:11

CONCLUDE

Words. They are one of the means of expression given to us by God. Had humanity not sinned, our words would have been used to uplift, praise, and glorify God and our fellow humans. That's not the case, is it? When our words are guided by God, they are a source of healing to those who hurt, enlightenment to those in darkness, and comfort to those who are broken-hearted. They become, as Solomon poetically stated, "apples of gold in settings of silver" (Prov. 25:11, NIV).

CONSIDER

- Collecting one item from each day of Creation week. Imagine each item gaining its form and substance as Jesus spoke them into existence.
- Listening to a recording of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. King's desire to bring about racial healing in America led him to speak words that pricked his listeners and called them to a higher social standard.
- Reading the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 to discover the importance of language in bringing about understanding.
- Organizing a rap session with a group of friends. Have each person share an experience in which words spoken by someone helped or hurt him or her greatly.
- Playing a game with your family or friends in which no one is allowed to speak for one day. All communication must be accomplished through gesturing. No writing. The ability to communicate verbally is a gift from God.
- Using a camcorder to create a video journal of your daily conversations for one week. At the end of the week count the number of conversations that had a spiritual focus.

CONNECT

John 1:1-18; Psalm 119:9-16; Psalm 29; 1 Kings 19.

The Voice in Speech and Song, chaps. 1, 4, 8, 13.

“What hath God wrought!”



“Speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?” (Job 12:8, 9, NIV).

God's Love Letter

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 3:7-9

Eve: "Oh Adam! What have we done? I feel so ashamed and so dirty. How can God love us now? Will He ever speak to us again? It's so dark, God must be so far away."

God: "I love you."

Eve: "What was that sound? It must have been the wind blowing."

God: "I will take care of you."

Eve: "Adam, that bird that just flew past seemed to be chirping something, but I can't understand the animals anymore. What is the bird trying to say?"

God: "I said I'll take care of you."

Eve: "How will we survive now that the garden is gone? I can't bear the idea of starving to death."

God: "I'm taking care of the little ants—how could I desert *you*, the jewel of my creation?"

Sin separated us from God. The cloud was so thick and dark that Adam and Eve felt alone and afraid. God sent the sun and provided water to help them grow food. He sent birds to sing and flowers to give sweet fragrance. Animals taught the simple lesson that they could depend on God for their every need.

Nature was and still is a love letter from our Creator to us. In the beginning this letter was in perfect condition. Time and sin have tattered its edges, but the message remains. It says, "I love you and I am taking care of you."

This week we will consider nature from Solomon's, David's, and Jesus' perspectives.

We will also consider why, in light of how great this gift is, we as Christians are charged, like Adam and Eve, to take care of the environment (Gen. 2:15).

How are we to treat the love letter from our Creator, Provider, and Friend?

**Nature is a
love letter from
our Creator.**

Sunday
November 26

Don't Worry; Be Happy

LOGOS

Ps. 8:3-6; 19:1-6; Prov. 3:19, 20; 6:6-11; 8:22-31; 30:25, 27-31; Matt. 6:25-34

There is something that we all learn to do as we grow older. No one teaches us how. There are no special classes. It is not even counted as a relevant measure of our childhood development, nor any standard for the attainment of maturity. Yet without exception we all do it. We all *worry*. Even Christians, the supposedly happy people. In this context consider Christ's words of encouragement in Matthew 6:25-34.

The things that we worry about generally fall into three basic categories: First of all, concerns in relation to personal security such as money, happiness, safety, etc. Second, concerns in relation to the future, or a sense of hope or hopelessness; again money, happiness, destiny, careers, eternal life, etc. Third, concerns with regard to identity or self-worth. Am I valued, needed? My heritage, belonging, residence. The texts that we will look at in our studies this week help us with the universal concerns, or worries, that we are confronted with on a daily basis. The following is just a taste of some of the ways that God addresses some of the issues that constantly weigh us down:

Security (Ps. 8:3-6; Prov. 3:19, 20). How amazing the knowledge that a great God cares for us and for the detailed workings of this planet!

Hope (Prov. 30:25, 27-31; Matt. 6:25-34). Even as weak as we are, God can do so much with us and for us. Put Jesus first, and He will meet all your needs.

Identity (Ps. 19:1-6; Prov. 6:6-11; 8:22-31). All creation bears witness to our heavenly parentage. We are capable of so much more than the ant. Yet we waste precious moments and opportunities.

**So why are we
as Christians so
worried at times?**

What a heritage Christ has! Before our creation, He rejoiced in us. So why are we as Christians so worried at times—sometimes to the point of despair?

Why did David (and the other psalmists) pen so many words of comfort and encouragement? Did he worry just as we do?

Did he and his associates have the same concerns that we do? What about his son Solomon, the author of the book of Proverbs? Maybe he, too, at times worried to the point of despair. Hence the inspiration to pen the texts that we have begun to study this week.

Even Christ Himself seems to have worried. Maybe not so much for Himself, though He constantly cried unto His Father on behalf of His disciples—and also the rest of humanity. “My prayer is not for them alone” (John 17:20, NIV). Read also John 17:6-26.

What are we saying here? Does it then follow that worrying is a good thing? Should we just accept it? Is it an essential to a Christlike character? Is this why God asks us to love one another as Christ loved us? Why Paul counsels us to bear

one another's burdens? To have no regard or concern for one another's welfare would be totally against the example of Christ.

Maybe David, Solomon, and Jesus are encouraging us not to despair. Not to be afraid for the future (Matt. 6:34). We should feel secure in the fact that God cares for us and is constantly with us (Ps. 8:3-6). We should rejoice in our unmatched heritage and the knowledge of Him with whom we have to do (Ps. 19: 1-6; Prov. 8:22, 23, 30).

So many words of encouragement spring to mind. There just isn't time or space to cover them all in our brief, daily studies this week. So we will concentrate on a few verses that, when properly analyzed, lift the soul heavenward. All our worries then become totally surmountable. We need, as followers of Jesus, to have the constant reassurance that He is on our side. Ellen White puts it beautifully: "All who choose Christ's kingdom of love and righteousness and peace, making its interest paramount to all other, are linked to the world above, and every blessing needed for this life is theirs. In the book of God's providence, the volume of life, we are each given a page. That page contains every particular of our history; even the hairs of the head are numbered. God's children are never absent from His mind."*

God Himself describes Solomon as the wisest person who ever lived. Yet Solomon made so many mistakes in his life, some of which echoed for generations. For David it was the same. What a privilege to take a little time to look at these chosen words of wisdom. What better source of advice than from one whom God has singled out?

Solomon counsels us to focus on God's creative power. Then we can deal with the questions, Should we worry? Should we be happy?

REACT

1. Why do you think Christians still worry?
2. What scriptural passages serve for you personally as sources of encouragement?
3. From nature, how could you encourage a friend who felt discouraged?
4. If only God is superior to me (Ps. 8:4, 5), how should I relate to kings, presidents, paupers, and street people?
5. "A pound of worry never pays an ounce of debt." How can this proverb help to reduce the sin of worry in my life?
6. What is the source of encouragement? How does one become an encourager, by encouraging self first or by encouraging others first? Explain your choice.
7. Why does worrying do us so much harm physically and spiritually?
8. Read Matthew 6:33. If this text is a remedy for worry, how do you put it into practice? Be practical.

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 313.

My Maker and Creator

TESTIMONY

Ps. 8:3-6

As I feel the gentle breeze and hear the birds singing in the trees, I am reminded of how great and powerful our God is.

"Nature testifies that One infinite in power, great in goodness, mercy, and love, created the earth, and filled it with life and gladness."¹ The Bible tells us that God created the heavens and the earth, parted the waters from the sky, made the sun and the moon, dry land and the seas. He made the fish, the birds, and all the animals of the earth. Ellen White writes, "God's handiwork in nature is not God Himself in nature. The things of nature are an expression of God's character and power. . . . So while nature is an expression of God's thought, it is not nature, but the God of nature, that is to be exalted."²

**"The things of nature
are an expression
of God's character
and power."**

On the sixth day of the great Creation week we are told, "God created man in his own image" (Gen. 1:27, NIV). The Bible then informs us that "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (2:7, NIV).

"In the creation of man was manifest the agency of a personal God. When God had made man in His image, the human form was perfect in all its arrangements, but it was without life. Then a personal, self-existing God breathed into that form the breath of life, and man became a living, intelligent being. All parts of the human organism were set in action. The heart, the arteries, the veins, the tongue, the hands, the feet, the senses, the faculties of the mind, all began their work, and all were placed under law. Man became a living soul. Through Christ the Word, a personal God created man and endowed him with intelligence and power. . . . Above all lower orders of being, God designed that man, the crowning work of His creation, should express His thought and reveal His glory. But man is not to exalt himself as God."³

Being created in the image of God does not mean you are literally like God; rather, it implies that you have the ability to reflect many of His characteristics of love, patience, forgiveness, kindness, and faithfulness. You can feel positive about yourself, knowing that God created you and that you are of great worth to Him. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (1: 31, NIV).

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 411.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 415.

Rumble in the Jungle

EVIDENCE

Rom. 1:20

Listen and you *will* hear. Look and you *will* see. The wonders of God's creation, the joy of His handiwork. Romans 1:20 clearly demonstrates to us that the God we serve is a mighty God, a God of order and beauty, a God who is always in control. Through nature God is revealed—His qualities and personality.

I love to watch wildlife programs. It's fascinating to see how God reveals Himself and His plans for you and me. One thing that always captures my attention is the sea life. I enjoy watching the largest and the smallest fish, seeing how they are equipped to protect themselves against prey, how they feed, how they change shape and color to suit their environment.

I have to say Hallelujah because it makes me realize that if God can provide for even the smallest fishes of the sea, what more can He do for you and me? Through nature God reveals that even in the darkest hour, He will bring us through, and when all fails, God will never fail.

Before sin showed its ugly face on earth, all was perfect. Adam and Eve found pleasure in the wonders of His hands; but seduced by the devil and his lies, they fell to temptation and lost the pleasures of knowing and having perfection. Therefore, in order for us to really understand the laws of nature, we have to seek this knowledge from the Creator Himself (John 1:4).

Today many scientists are using the knowledge that God gave to them to explore creation. They are cross-breeding animals, genetically modifying food, and now they want to clone humans. This is contradictory to God's words (1 Tim. 6:20). This is clearly the work of the devil. Even though sin entered the world and disfigured the perfection of God's work, we can still see His eternal power, invisible qualities, and divine nature. Read Psalm 109:24-32; 19:2-6; Jeremiah 10:10.

If nature continues to praise and glorify His name, is it not time for us to show our neighbors—through our lifestyle—the power, love, kindness, and peace of God? From this day forward ensure that the life you lead . . .

- glows like the moon,
- praises His name like the roaring ocean,
- models His beauty like the stars of the skies,
- sings praises like the birds,
- whistles sweet melodies like the wind, and
- points to glory like the flowers of the earth.

**Listen and you *will* hear.
Look and you *will* see.**

HOW-TO

Gen. 1:26; 2:15; Ps. 8:3-6; Prov. 6:6-11; 30:25; Matt. 6:25-34

Have you ever thought of God as an artist? Have you ever considered yourself to be a work of art? Well, He is and you are! God is the Master Artist.

The Bible teaches us that we are so special that God sent His Son to this earth to die just so that we could be saved. Just as God loves us, we should love ourselves. Understanding how precious we are in God's sight is important. Unfortunately, some people do not love or even like themselves very much. They may feel that they are of no good to themselves or anyone else. This could result from past disappointment, hurt, and rejection. Because life is full of uncertainty, we will all have experienced sadness or disappointment at some stage of our lives. Despite this, we can all be certain of God's love for us and how much He wants to have us live with Him eternally (John 14:1-3). We can also be certain that as long as we keep our minds focused on Him, all our needs will be cared for, just like the creatures of the earth. (See Matthew 6:25-34.)

How can an understanding of God's love for us, and learning to love ourselves more, help us better understand the love we should have for all other living things on earth? While we are to have dominion over the earth, we as human beings can also learn from its creatures. For instance, we can learn something about how to succeed in life from the ant (Prov. 6:6-11; 30:25).

**Take time to see
what you can learn
from the Master Artist.**

As you go out each day, why not take time to see what you can learn from the Master Artist? Like the illustration above, look for ways to apply similar lessons to your life. As God has loved us, we should love each other and ourselves. Take time to show love for all God's creation and help to preserve it. That's what God expects us to do (Gen. 2:15).

REACT

1. If I cannot love myself, can I appreciate the love of other human beings? Give two reasons for your answer.
2. Humans seem so insignificant when compared to the universe of God's creation. How do you explain the disproportionate amount of attention He gives us?
3. "Consider the ant." Does God want us to be mindless workers? How do you understand this illustration?
4. If God is the Master Artist, has He put a brush in our hand too? If this is true, what implications does this have for us as Christians?

What Are You Worth?

OPINION

Matt. 6:25-34

God created the heaven and the earth. He spoke and everything was. Toward the end of the sixth day, God created the object of His love—human beings (Gen. 1:26). God created humanity with His own hand, in His own image, and gave us dominion over all His own creation. These acts of God were not accidental or by chance. He designed them before He lay the foundation of the earth. The acts of God are always for the benefit of humankind.

He further provided everything necessary to sustain human life and gave instructions on how to benefit from His providence. Humanity was to tend the garden for food. God's providence, also, ensured the safety and sustenance of the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the beasts of the land through human stewardship.

**No one except you
can diminish your value.**

Why have we forgotten that all the earth and everything in it, including humanity, are the Lord's? We spend so many hours working hard, compromising godly principles and our integrity to acquire things, but we only destroy ourselves. We don't give God as much time as we do things. Appearance has taken priority over character. We haven't learned that we are living on borrowed time. We take our lives into our own hands, and we quickly forget that God is still in charge of the affairs of the world despite widespread sin and suffering.

The only sure way to safeguard our lives against self-sufficiency is to heed the everlasting advice of Matthew 6:33, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (NIV). What this means for me can be explained by the computer's *on* and *off* symbols, i.e., 1 and 0. God is 1 (1 for our illustration) and things are 0.

God first: 1000000000

Things first: 0000000001

If you put God first, He adds all things to you. The more God adds to you, the higher your value. However, the more things you accumulate before God, the lower your worth. God has placed a high value on humanity. Can you trust Him enough to let Him take full control of your life? No one except you can diminish your value.

REACT

1. In what ways have you devalued your worth?
2. How can you reclaim what you have lost through your carelessness?
3. What lifestyle change must we make to maintain the value God has placed on us?

EXPLORATION

Ps. 19:1-6

CONCLUDE

Creation displays God's might and power. His creative expressions of love grow all around us. Yet, we often find our lives filled with worry. Sometimes our focus becomes one of self-doubt or self-absorption. God loves us very much and wants us to know how valuable we are to Him. How does He do this? By surrounding us with beauty in nature, He reminds us of His great love and *our* great worth. Matthew 6:26 reminds us to observe the birds and how God cares for them. Surely we are worth a lot more.

CONSIDER

- Singing the following songs for worship. "How Great Thou Art," "This Is My Father's World," "All Things Bright and Beautiful." Focus on the words and the message they convey.
- Building a bird feeder and placing it outside a window of your home where you can observe the birds that come to visit it.
- Pressing flowers and leaves between book pages. When they dry, arrange them on a strip of construction paper (the size of a bookmark) and laminate it. Place the bookmark in your Bible at Psalm 19.
- Visiting a nature center near your home. Many of them provide tours, and the tour guides will often provide fascinating facts about this great planet on which we live.
- Writing a poem expressing the joy you feel when you encounter God's creation. Share your poem with a good friend.
- Taking a nature walk with a child. Let the child dictate the pace. Observe everything that the child does, and look for new things to show him or her. Watch the wonder and excitement the child experiences in nature.

CONNECT

Psalm 19:1-6; Genesis 1; 2; Isaiah 40:26; Matthew 6:25-34.

Christ's Object Lessons, chap. 6; *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 51-58, 261-268.

Alice Joyce Davidson, *Reflections of Love*; YouthPAGES Web site <<http://www.youthpages.org>>.

Like **Father,** like **Child**



“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Prov. 17:22, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

James 1:19, 20

There's a story told about a small family with an even smaller income. Christmas was approaching quickly, and the man of the house was planning a special surprise for his wife and 3-year-old daughter. With rough hands he had crafted two wooden jewelry boxes then bought one roll of special gold wrapping paper to add a finishing touch. On Christmas Eve he hurried home from a long day at work to wrap the presents. Upon reaching home, however, he found his daughter on the living room floor with a box in front of her. The box was wrapped crudely with the entire roll of gold paper. He immediately became infuriated, knowing that part of his surprise had been ruined, and punished his daughter, sending her straight to bed.

Nevertheless, bright and early on Christmas morning, his daughter came running to him with the crudely wrapped package and placed it in his lap. "Here, it's for you, Daddy," she said, grinning from ear to ear. The father was immediately embarrassed at his earlier tirade and set to work opening the present. He tore the gold paper from the box and lifted the lid, anxious to see what lay hidden inside. To his horror, the box was empty. Once again his anger flared. "You gave me an empty box? Don't you know that when you give presents you're supposed to give something in them?" Disgustedly he turned away.

Then he felt a tiny hand touching his arm. He turned around quickly and looked down into the tear-stained face of his daughter. "But Daddy, I blew kisses into the box for you," she said, holding the box up for him to examine. "They're all for you, Daddy." The father's anger was again squelched, and he reached down, gathering his daughter into his arms.

From that day forward, the father kept his unique present on a table next to his bed. Every morning before he got up, he would reach into the box and take one of

the special kisses with him as a reminder to keep priorities straight in his life.

You and I aren't any different from that father. At one time or another each of us has reacted to a situation selfishly, leading to

unwarranted and irrational anger. Hard to admit, but it's true. So, before you get out of bed tomorrow, reach into the treasure chest that God has given you (the Bible) and let it be a reminder to you to keep your priorities straight. I'll do the same!

The box was wrapped crudely with the entire roll of gold paper.

Wisdom to Live By

EVIDENCE

Prov. 17:22

Is it really valid? Do the Proverbs really work today? Can they be trusted to accomplish in the twenty-first century what they supposedly did in the time of King Solomon?

In the context of the subject of anger in this week's lesson, let's see if we can define the proverbial approach to anger and its opposite emotions: joy, contentment, and happiness. You be the judge as we look specifically at chapter 17 for our evidence. You could do the same to any chapter, but the final decision is yours; do you believe what it says?

The advice is usually opposite to what my natural mind might come up with.

Verse 1 Would you rather be hungry and at peace or full around a table of angry people?

Verse 4 Have you ever listened to (and accepted) the way of a mischievous and wicked tongue? How did it turn out for you?

Verse 9 Have you ever been hurt by someone and, instead of forgiving them, started spreading the story around? Were you glad with the outcome?

Verse 13 Have you ever returned evil for good and come out smelling like a rose?

Verse 18 Have you ever co-signed a loan and gotten burned?

Verse 22 Have you ever had a downcast spirit and felt stronger and healthier because of it?

Verse 27 Have you ever bit your tongue before saying something and been glad for it?

Verse 28 Have you ever spoken before you thought and had to eat those words later?

The greatest evidence that I can come up with regarding Proverbs is to encourage each of you to test it for yourself. The temptation for me is to try things the way my cultural setting dictates, but I have discovered greater wisdom in reading the Proverbs each day and trying to select just one of them to concentrate on that day. The advice is usually opposite to what my natural mind might come up with and often different from what my culture or society would tell me. But it works!

There are 31 chapters and 31 days in the month. Give it a try. You be the judge. For one month read the "proverb of the day," pick out one that God impresses on your heart, and see whether applying it to life doesn't make a positive difference for you too. The evidence is there, so what are you going to do with it?

LOGOS

Prov. 11:23; 16:32; 17:22; 20:22; 24:29; John 3:16-21

Does it get your temperature rising when you get a paper cut or you lose the pen you just had in your hand or the radio station doesn't tell who sang that song or you reach under the table to pick up something you dropped and smash your head on the way up? We can talk about all the anger and violence in the world, but do we notice how little incidents spark our own? What does the Bible say about anger, its causes, and God's answer for keeping it in perspective?

God's Tests (Prov. 17:3)

Why does God test the heart? When something goes wrong, it is a test to see how we will respond. When people hurt us, we think the problem is with the other person. God allows tests, however, to show that the problem is with our heart. The problem with the world is me, not others. This is not to say that people aren't doing evil things. Through anger God is telling us that something is wrong. Many of the things that anger us are our own unresolved issues. Let's examine some of the tests that God gave others to see what this reveals about the human heart.

Guilt and Rejection (Gen. 4:1-11)

When God "did not look with favor" on the offering of Cain, the Bible says that "Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast" (verse 5, NIV). God responded, "Why are you angry? . . . If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? . . . But you must master it" (verses 6, 7, NIV).

What caused Cain's anger? "His own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous" (1 John 3:12, NIV). He was jealous of Abel because Abel's sacrifice was accepted and his wasn't. When we feel unaccepted, we are hurt and feel anger. When our bad behavior causes the problem, we feel guilty. What we do with guilt is the key. If we confess our sin, the anger will dissipate. The anger is really against ourselves, but we take it out on the other person as Cain did with Abel.

Low Self-Worth (1 Sam. 18:6-9)

When the women sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (verse 7, NIV), Saul became angry. He was jealous of David. Jealousy can be a symptom of low self-esteem. When we compare ourselves to others and feel inferior to them, we want to compensate. The problem is this: we base our self-worth on the estimation of other people. Self-worth comes only from God. "What a man desires is unfailing love" (Prov. 19:22, NIV), and unfailing love comes only from God. This alone is adequate to give us proper self-worth. We will often be angry if we base our self-worth on the opinions of humans.

Expectations (2 Kings 5:1-14)

When Elisha told Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan, “Naaman went away angry” (verse 11, NIV). His anger was caused by his expectations. He thought Elisha would call on the name of the Lord and wave his hand over the leprosy, and he would be cured. Anger comes when we expect God or other people to act or react in certain ways and they don’t. If their words or actions fall short of what we expect, we become angry. All our expectations must be tempered by the sovereign will of God (Ps. 62:5).

Injustice (Acts 19:23-29)

Paul had convinced many Ephesians that “man-made gods are no gods at all” (verse 26, NIV). A silversmith named Demetrius called the workers of his trade together and told them that their idol business was going to decline if they didn’t address this issue. Their anger came from perceived injustice. This is a great concern with people today. They expect life to be fair, and when it isn’t, they are angry.

Conclusion

We see that anger is a God-given emotion that indicates unresolved issues in a person’s life. Our motives and our form of expression of anger determine whether it is sinful or appropriate. The critical issue with anger is how we respond to our feelings of anger. “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath” (Rom. 12:17-19, NIV).

In Galatians 5:16 we are told to “live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (NIV). The last of the fruits in Galatians 5 is self-control. The Bible teaches that those who are walking with the Spirit by listening for His instructions each day see changes in their lives. They will see a slow growth in self-control and a steady decline in anger and hostility. Destructive anger will be replaced with an acceptable response that channels anger into constructive communication. We will learn to speak the “truth in love” (Eph. 4:15, NIV).

**The problem with
the world is me,
not others.**

REACT

1. If someone becomes angry easily, how would you recommend that he or she deal with that anger?
2. How can you discern the difference between harmful anger and “righteous indignation”?
3. What are appropriate issues to be angry about? What kind of anger should we express?

TESTIMONY

Prov. 16:32; 17:22; John 3:16

Our daily life is filled with highs and lows, moments of happiness and moments of anger. Because of our routine of studying or working, we seem to be completely accustomed to that. Is that God's plan for our daily living? No. Only good things are part of God's desire for us. Nothing is an excuse to make us behave in anger. We

**Nothing is an excuse
to make us behave
in anger.**

will doubtlessly meet with things that will test us, but self-control may be ours in the strength of Jesus. We can't forget that our health, physically, mentally, and morally, depends on a proper government of our temper.¹

As we get into this crazy world of activities, we do not see when we are getting in trouble, and the result is often regret. "Self is difficult to conquer. Human depravity in every form is not easily brought into subjection to the Spirit of Christ. But all should be impressed with the fact that unless this victory is gained through Christ, there is no hope for them."²

For sure "there is a noble majesty in the silence of the one exposed to evil-surmising or outrage. To be master of one's spirit is to be stronger than kings or conquerors. A Christian leads one to think of Christ. He will be affable, kind, patient, humble and yet courageous and firm in vindicating the truth and the name of Christ."³

God is the absolute example of it. "He knows every one of our failings; but He uses patience; for otherwise we would have perished long ago on account of our bad treatment of Him. The greatest insult we can inflict upon Him, is to pretend to be His disciples while manifesting the spirit of Satan in our words, our dispositions and our actions."⁴

"The victory can be gained; for nothing is impossible with God. By His assisting grace, all evil temper, all human depravity, may be overcome."⁵

REACT

1. What situations usually make you lose self-control?
2. How did Jesus show self-control when on earth?
3. Why do you think God gave us the emotion of anger?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 501.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 349.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1160.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 349.

Give Thanks

HOW-TO

Acts 2:28; Rom. 5:3, 4

"Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" declares the apostle Paul (1 Thess. 5:18, NIV). He does not limit that idea saying, "give thanks just when everything is fine" or "give thanks in some circumstances."

Often we find ourselves in despair and cannot think what we should give thanks for. In some cases, that is aggravated by the tendency to become too easily angered because of a short temper.

The Bible is clear when it says that a Christian's duty is to be cheerful. This is not just to give a positive witness to others and show confidence in God; it is also good for our health.

Here are three steps to help focus your life on God and, as a result, to receive His heavenly presence in your life, bringing happiness and a spirit of peace.

1. Learn from the past. Remind yourself of all the blessings and joyfulness the Lord has poured upon you and how He has guided and acted in your life over time. This will help you to notice that God has a special plan for your life, and just as He has interceded for you in the past, He is ready to do so today.

2. Live the present. Analyze your life from the Christian point of view. We do not belong to this world. This life is passing, and it is like a blink compared with the eternity that God offers to us. Pray to God for wisdom and self-control in dealing with your problems. As Jesus could transform John, "the son of thunder," into "the disciple of love," He is able to help us.

We must not waste our health and time on worldly problems. Jesus Christ, our example on earth, went through as many problems and sufferings as we have now and even worse. He faced His own death on the cross, but He always found contentment in God.

3. Think about the future. Keep His promises always in mind. Christ is coming back, and soon we will be by the fountain of happiness that is Jesus. The contentment that comes from Him never ends, and it will fill up our hearts so much that there won't be room for anger.

God never promised us an easy life while here in this world, but He did promise His presence and help if we surrender ourselves to live the plan that He has for us and to be faithful to His word.

**A Christian's duty
is to be cheerful.**

REACT

1. How does a short temper affect your physical, emotional, and spiritual health?
2. How can we influence others by our life of contentment in God?

OPINION

Phil. 4:4; Matt. 6:25-34

Gertie and her sister Vertie were 90-year-old twin sisters who shared a house out in the farm country of Missouri. I was afforded the privilege of meeting them when my mom was assigned by her home-health office to visit Gertie. Not long after my mom started taking care of Gertie, her sister passed away. It was a horrible loss to Gertie in more ways than one. Not only did she lose her best friend, she was forced to move out of her house and into a rest home. Gertie, bless her heart, had all the reason in the world to be sad, angry, and discontented. Never once, though, did she have anything but words of praise about her Lord and Savior.

“Each day has its burdens, its cares and perplexities; and when we meet how ready we are to talk of our difficulties and trials. So many borrowed troubles intrude, so many fears are indulged, such a weight of anxiety is expressed, that one might suppose we had no pitying, loving Savior ready to hear all our requests and to be to us a present

“Do not tell your troubles to your fellow mortals.”

help in every time of need.”¹

Jesus explains to us in the Sermon on the Mount that we are of utmost importance to Him. He reassures us that if we seek Him first, He will supply everything we could possibly need. There is no need to worry and to burden others with our anxieties.

“Do not tell your troubles to your fellow mortals, but carry everything to God in prayer. Make it a rule never to utter one word of doubt or discouragement.”² This quotation really hit home to me. I am as guilty as anyone of sitting in my dorm room and relating my woes to my roommate or anyone who will listen. We’ve all experienced how one person tells a discouraging story, and then it becomes a contest to see who has had the worst lot in life. Instead of contemplating all the things that have ever gone wrong, we should rejoice in all the wonderful blessings God has so graciously given us.

Gertie is still alive, well, and praising God. She is an example of how we can positively affect those around us.

REACT

What can you do to be more encouraging to those you come in contact with? Be specific.

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 121.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

Toward a Calm and Quiet Spirit

EXPLORATION

Prov. 17:22

CONCLUDE

Anger is a natural response to hurt, frustration, rejection, and injustice. Productive anger can motivate us to face problems we need to deal with. Anger out of control, however, leads to depression and violence. Trust in God helps us keep our focus on life's true priorities. As we claim Christ's righteousness, we can also practice His patience and His willingness for God to avenge our wrongs. And as we practice an "attitude of gratitude" and learn to be content with God's leadership, we begin to share His perspective on everything that troubles us.

CONSIDER

- Illustrating Proverbs 25:28 in terms of your own life—what kinds of things "break into your city" when you lose control of your temper? Draw or create a montage of a broken "city" and contrast it with another montage of one that's well-ordered and contained.
- Creating a special garden outside or in your home, where you can go to commune with God and regain perspective during frustrating times.
- Reflecting on the roles productive and nonproductive anger play in your life. Set some goals and outline action steps toward developing self-control, trust, and gratitude, balanced with an honest, realistic, Christ-like approach to dealing with situations that must be handled.
- Acting out in role-play current situations that make you angry. Ask a friend or two to help you. Trade roles several times, so you have a chance to play both sides of the situation as well as see how others would handle the problem.
- Collecting the music that best helps you calm your spirit and redirect your heart toward God on a tape or in a music notebook. Add to your collection as you find new music that uplifts you.
- Brainstorming all the activities, places, music, Bible verses, Ellen White quotations, and artwork that help you put anger and frustration in a proper perspective. Keep these notes in a place where you can access them when you need them.

CONNECT

Proverbs 16:32; 17:28, Ephesians 4:26; Titus 1:7.

The Desire of Ages, p. 310; *Education*, p. 197; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 101; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 431.

A **Friend** for all **Seasons**



“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm” (Prov. 13:20, NRSV).

Through Thick and Thin

INTRODUCTION

Ruth 1:6-18; 1 Kings 17:8-15; Mark 2:3-5; Luke 10:30-37

When Janet was granted a visa to Australia, she was elated. The days leading to her departure dragged, for she could not contain her eagerness. But when the day finally came, her happiness turned into sadness. Two things happened. First, she realized that since she was leaving her parents and relatives behind, she would not be seeing them for a long time. Second, her best friend did not show up at the airport to see her off. Later she found out that her best friend had chosen to stay away, for she would not be able to contain her pain at saying goodbye to her best friend.

**The word *friend*
is defined differently
by different people.**

The word *friend* is defined differently by different people. One person defined a friend as "someone who makes you laugh and cheers you up and is there when the world falls on you." To 92-year-old Claire, a friend is "someone who is there when you need them, never too busy, and a person who gets pleasure and joy out of what they do for you."

What does it take to be a friend? The story of the paralytic man in Mark 2:1-5 demonstrates the characteristics of a true friend. These include persistence, loyalty, devotion, and compassion. Ellen White wrote, "The warmth of true friendship, the love that binds heart to heart, is a foretaste of the joys of heaven."*

This week's lesson focuses on companionship among loved ones who share similar values and convictions, hospitality that brings others to Christ, and kindness to strangers.

**The Adventist Home*, p. 106.

LOGOS

Prov. 13:20; 25:21, 22; 27:6, 9, 10; 31:20

What would you expect from a true friend? You might come up with answers like companionship, sharing, and caring in times of joy and need. One Bible writer describes friendship in this way: “a friend . . . sticks closer than a brother” (Prov.18:24, NIV). Faithful friends are the greatest treasures in life.

A Part of God’s Plan

Jesus commanded, “ ‘Love each other as I have loved you’ ” (John 15:12, NIV). Therefore, establishing friendship, trust, and love is not an option. It is part of our Christian life. God has actively demonstrated His love to us by offering us His companionship and, ultimately, eternal life with Him. We can enjoy His companionship in our daily communication with Him through prayer and Bible study. God is faithful with His promise to send His Holy Spirit to accompany us daily.

Christian Friendships (Prov. 13:20; 27:6, 9)

The foundation of Christian friendship is love, trust, and faithfulness. True friends are more than just acquaintances. “A friend loves at all times” (Prov. 17:17, NIV). This means through the good times and bad, during times of stress and times of joy. Jesus developed a close, loving relationship with His disciples. He affirmed them by adding, “ ‘I no longer call you servants. . . . Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you’ ” (John 15:15, NIV).

The easiest way to picture this Christian friendship is perhaps the marriage relationship. Two persons become one in their thoughts, feelings, visions, and actions. One would expect companionship, help in times of need, and constant communication from one’s spouse. Friendship involves developing understanding based upon similar values and conviction. Christian friendship always strives to reflect a Christlike character. Friends encourage and support each other to reach this ultimate goal. True friends “live in peace with each other” (1 Thess. 5:13, NIV) because “the peace of Christ” rules in their hearts (Col. 3:15, NIV). True friends will always be ready to forgive (verse 13), “correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim. 4:2, NIV), and listen to advice from wise men (Prov. 12:15). Peter observes that we can develop this friendship only through obedience to God’s truth (1 Pet. 1:22, NIV).

Friendships for Evangelism (Prov. 13:20; 25:21; 27:10)

God wants us to be living witnesses to the world as to what people may become through the grace of Christ. Through her friendship Naomi helped Ruth know God. Her example was sufficient for Ruth to make a decision to follow God (Ruth 1:8-18). Christ demonstrated friendship to bring people to God. He came to earth to meet humankind on

level ground, taking care of their physical and spiritual needs. He helped many to see that it was their faith in God that healed them (Mark 5:34; 7:29; 9:23, 24).

We offer Christlike friendships to our non-Christian friends by giving them a warm welcome from our hearts, by giving a helping hand, or just by listening to them. We have been “chosen . . . out of the world” (John 15:19, NIV) not to embrace bigotry, favoritism, and exclusiveness, but to “preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15, NIV). Peter advises us that we should “live such good lives among the pagans” (1 Pet. 2:12, NIV). Our genuine friendships will speak of our faith in Christ to people who may have never known Christ.

Kindness to Strangers (Prov. 25:21; 31:20)

We demonstrate kindness to strangers in many ways, such as helping those we meet on the street or offering some help to those lost on their way. Paul urges us: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2, NIV). This verse tells us to show unbiased kindness and not to judge others by appearance. We must have great love for the poor and the needy and try our best to assist not just their immediate needs, but also their long-term needs. For some people, inequalities in society may cause them to hate others. But Jesus had compassion for His enemies (Luke 23:34, NIV). We should love those who hate us, not seeing them as enemies, but rather as people who need help. In that way we “heap burning coals” on their heads (Prov. 25:22, NIV).

Our friendships with others should be the result of our faith in action. In developing friendships with our fellow human beings, we should follow Jesus’ example. Understanding the nature of Christ’s friendship will help us to relate best with our Christian and non-Christian friends.

Our friendships with others should be the result of our faith in action.

REACT

1. Most modern enemies will not be hungry or thirsty. So how else can we “heap coals of fire” upon their heads? Be specific.
2. Besides those who do not have jobs or homes, what other types of “strangers” might there be in your community? How can you help them?
3. If we make friends with non-Christians to win them to Christ, is our friendship really sincere, or is it tainted by “ulterior motives”?
4. How supportive and spiritually encouraging do you find your friendships with other Christians to be? How can we create deeper, more nurturing friendships within the church?
5. Are we called to be friends with everyone? Why or why not?

Companionships of Similar Interest and Faith

TESTIMONY

Prov. 27:6, 9, 10; 1 Sam. 18:1-4

Humans are social creatures, and as we grow together with those who have similar interests and convictions, we can follow the example of Jonathan and David to avoid some pitfalls. They had an open avenue of communication between them that resulted in the development of mutual respect. "They related their varied experiences, and Jonathan strengthened the heart of David."* "Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself" (1 Sam. 18:1, NIV). This is the kind of faithful friendship to cultivate toward our families and close friends. We are to encourage, enrich, support, and listen to our friends as if they were our own brothers. We should walk with them through the joyous and disheartening times. This experience of friendship becomes a source of strength to each soul because as we become better communicators, we become better friends.

Read Proverbs 27:6, 9, 10. It is wise to have friends as close as a brother on whom we can rely. In times of need, we then have someone to share with as

**If we cannot love those
who love us, then we
become destitute of love.**

opposed to the silence of an empty chair. When David faced danger, he knew that he could rely completely on his friend Jonathan. He knew that confidential information regarding his location would be

secure. Trust is the second cornerstone to communication that develops such a strong, faithful friendship.

When conflicts arise with friends, the counsel given is to talk it through. With open minds and tolerant hearts, work through the problems rather than storing them up within to explode in the face of another person. We should not exaggerate our circumstance to seek sympathy or make rash decisions. David was able to talk clearly and rationally with Jonathan regarding his danger so that he could make an informed decision about where God was leading him.

REACT

1. How can spouses develop closer interpersonal relationships?
2. What are the emotional and physical boundaries between friends of different gender? Same gender?
3. What are some ways you can increase the level of trust in a friendship?

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 660.

How Sunburn Changed My Life

EVIDENCE

Matt. 5:14-16

I grew up in a Christian home. When I was 18 years old, I was baptized into the Adventist Church and moved from a small country town to the city a week later. I felt as if I had no friends, even at church, so I stopped going. I didn't turn my back on God, but I didn't really understand how He could be my friend.

When I was 20 years old, I visited the Solomon Islands for a month. I lived with a couple whose hospitality changed my life. When I got so sunburned one day that I couldn't sit down, they moved everything onto the floor. Just for me! They put cushions down, and we ate and talked on the floor, so that I could lie on my stomach and join in. This is the type of sacrificial friendship Jesus offers us. He does everything possible to enable us to join in life with Him.

If we are sick or discouraged, our friends might visit for an hour or two, but God cradles us in His arms until we are ready to stand again—no matter how long it takes. If we are to show God's love on earth, then this is what He expects of us too.

We have a responsibility to demonstrate God's friendship and love through our relationship with others. When I chose to be around people who loved God and wanted to share Him with others, it renewed and strengthened my own relationship with God and changed my life. This is the impact we should be aiming to have on the lives of those around us.

The most effective form of evangelism is "friendship evangelism." Our friends see something in us that they'd like to have too, and so they become open to hearing and learning about God. Ellen White tells us that "those who have tasted the love of Christ [should] develop their social powers, for in this way they may win souls to the Saviour."^{*}

**God cradles us in His
arms until we are ready
to stand again.**

REACT

1. What activities could you begin in your church to develop friendships?
2. Who is someone in your life that has shown you a good example of God's friendship?
3. How might you reach out to someone who was once a Christian, but has left the church? How would this be different to someone who was never a Christian?

^{*}*The Adventist Home*, p. 457.

Wednesday
December 13

My Friend, Adelyn

HOW-TO

Prov. 31:20; Luke 10:25-37

"What should we do now?" I whispered to my best friend, Janice, who was shifting uncomfortably in her seat beside me.

"I don't know! We can't leave now. Those people who welcomed us at the door will think we're crazy! You don't just enter a church and leave two seconds later. This was your stupid idea."

"How was I supposed to know this is a church?" I tried to keep my voice down. "It's Saturday. Nobody goes to church on Saturday. We didn't see any sign stating that this is a church from that little side entrance, did we? And don't you agree that this place looks just like a community center?"

"Well, I don't know when this thing is going to finish," Janice fumed. Her patience was running out fast. "Remember, we still have a lot to study for our exams next week. Hey, maybe we can leave through that other entrance, there is no—"

"Good morning!" Both of us turned to see a pleasant looking young woman smiling warmly at us, and I was just in time to catch the look on Janice's face that simply said, "Oh no!"

The young woman sat down beside us. After what they called Sabbath School, we continued to talk to this delightful person called Adelyn. She invited us for lunch and Bible studies at her place. She even offered her place for us to use to study for our exams. She was infectiously friendly, and we were so taken by her warm hospitality that we just had to accept her offer. These Bible studies eventually led me to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

**"How was I
supposed to know
this is a church?"**

It has been more than 13 years since this incident happened. Janice and I were studying in junior high school. We were both painfully shy and had low self-esteem, which caused us to exclude ourselves from the other kids at school. The fact that Adelyn was so ready to accept strangers like us to be her friends and treat us like normal people made us want to be her friends. As our friendship grew, I couldn't help yearning to know the God that she served so faithfully and whom she claimed to be the One that had changed her life to the person she was.

My experience with Adelyn has certainly opened my eyes to the kind of friendship that true Christians offer. The world's idea of friendship is to show kindness, loyalty, and support only to people we know and love, but Jesus said that we need to show kindness even to strangers, as illustrated in His parable of the good Samaritan. How much quicker will our church grow if we ask God to help each of us be a true Christian friend, like my friend Adelyn.

Fiera Kesuma-Chang, Sydney, Australia

To Be a Friend

OPINION

Eccles. 4:9, 10

God is our perfect Friend and staunchest Supporter. He will stick with us through the best and worst times. He can be someone we know intimately and with whom we can share our private thoughts without fear of rejection. He is the model for our friendships with others.

We think consciously about developing ourselves as friendly people. Observe how Jesus developed friendships. The following steps will help you become a true friend.*

**Jesus is the model
for our friendships
with others.**

1. Listen. The most important ingredient in any relationship is listening actively by expressing your interest and keeping your conversation focused on your friend, not on you. Encourage your friend to talk.

2. Support and Pray. By being supportive, make it possible for the other person to fulfill his or her dreams. Offer your friend encouragement. Think of specific areas in which your friend may be struggling. Take those issues to God in intercessory prayer. Ask God to work deeply in your friend's life and give your friend insight into the future and healing from the past.

3. Affirm. Let your friends know that you will be their friend through both the good and bad. Be reliable, dependable, and available when they need you. Let them know that you care and that they can depend on you.

4. Discern. Offer your friends perspectives and alternatives. Help them see that life is more than isolated instances of success or failure.

5. Commit and Risk. Make sure your friends understand that you are serious about a long-term relationship. Your life-long commitment to them will provide much-needed stability, which is often missing in our fast-paced, mobile society. Share your own fears and insecurities, encouraging your friends to do the same. As trust continues to develop between you, take even greater risk until there are no secrets between you.

Friendship, both from God and from others, provides strength during affliction. Jesus offered His friendship to each person who came to Him with a trusting heart and burdened soul.

REACT

1. The segregation of generations is a problem for some cultures. What can we do to correct the problem or prevent it?

2. How can friendships with others overcome the discrimination some face in society?

**First Class Male*, pp. 44-48.

EXPLORATION

Prov. 13:20

CONCLUDE

What is a friend? People have grappled with that question for centuries. But everyone recognizes a true friend when they find one. To Christians, friendship has a deeper meaning. Christian friends pray for and support one another. They also use friendship as a means of getting to know those who don't have a relationship with God yet. But ultimately, there is only one completely faithful Friend, and it is through His strength and love that we can minister to others.

CONSIDER

- Making a list of your closest friends. Send them a note or e-mail message of affirmation.
- Writing a poem about friendship or about a special friend you have.
- Practicing and performing the song "Friends" by Michael W. Smith.
- Devising a strategy for finding a new friend; for example, join a health club or sign up for a watercolor painting class.
- Sending out a "non-Christmas letter," updating your friends on what you're doing.
- Having a party! Invite a group of friends and celebrate friendship.
- Finding an old friend with whom you haven't had contact for years (you might try using the Internet to look up their address). Write and tell them the effect their friendship had on your life.

CONNECT

Proverbs 17:17; 18:24; James 4:4; John 15:9-17.

The Desire of Ages, pp. 90-92.

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, March 20, June 3; *Communion With God*, pp. 84, 85.

Drink from your Own Spring



“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prov. 31:30, NIV).

The Source of All True Love

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 5:15-20; 31:30

It has been said that marrying a woman for her beauty is like buying a house for its paint. We may know people who are beautiful of face and form, yet their impure thoughts lead to acts of selfishness and unfaithfulness. True beauty and charm of personality is evidenced in the wife who reveres and respects her divine Maker and who has received wisdom from Him. She is a gift from God to her husband, for in the wedding ceremony, it is our heavenly Father who gave away His daughter to the waiting bridegroom, as He did in the Garden of Eden.

Because the Lord knows best the needs, desires, and personality traits of each individual and can best provide for our happiness, He is able to bring together and unite the right couple. He is the Source of all true love. When the man and the woman first commit to Jesus and seek to do His will, the Holy Spirit draws them together, and true love is born of God. Who would deny that God is the Best Matchmaker? Two have become one in purpose. This oneness is similar to Christ's relationship with His church (Eph. 5:22-31). To achieve this oneness, an agreement as to beliefs and practices is necessary to avoid tension and misunderstanding within the marriage. Therefore, people should marry within their own community of faith.

God is gracious in helping us build noble characters; therefore, any man or woman can become virtuous. The woman who fears God is praised by her husband and her loved ones. As others are blessed by her virtuous works, her family is honored; but most important, God is glorified. The Lord is pleased with the man of integrity who loves, honors, and cherishes his wife.

Proverbs 5:15-20 counsels us to cultivate love with one's spouse, comparing the union of husband and wife to an overflowing spring of water that refreshes their hearts and lives. This is more than poetry. It describes the blessings of

**Marrying a woman for
her beauty is like buying
a house for its paint.**

happiness and enjoyment that are characteristics of this life-long companionship. If prior to marriage couples reflected on and proposed in their hearts that they are not only marrying for better or worse but also for *good*, then instead of high divorce rates, marriage would become what God intended—a reflection of His image in a permanent union. Also, marriage would become a source of spiritual, emotional, and physical blessing to the partners, likewise a blessing of peace to their children, relatives, friends, and society. Christ's bride, the church, knows Him with an intimacy that transcends that of all other relationships. The church drinks of the Living Water and is satisfied.

God's Broken Gift

EVIDENCE

Gen. 2:18-25

A recent news program reported on a church pushing a "radical" concept: abstaining from sex until marriage. "They believe this may actually help save marriages," the anchor woman reported, "but many are skeptical as to whether this is really healthy for a relationship."

In today's Hollywood climate of glitz and glamour we can easily become jaded to the harsh realities existing in a world lost in sin. It seems, sometimes, that every aspect of God's

"Many are skeptical as to whether this is really healthy for a relationship."

creation has been ill-molded by Satan's destructive hand. Marriage is no exception. For a world that witnesses seemingly countless marital breakups (over half of all new marriages in the U.S. fail.¹) a solution is desperately needed. Like most aspects of human life, God provides a blueprint of what He has in mind for us. No sooner had God created humankind than He said, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18, NIV). From the very beginning of this world, we see that it was good that man and woman be joined in a union formed and maintained under the protective banner of God's love, a union portraying God's own character.

Here now, in the dawning of the twenty-first century, we see the beautiful institution of marriage crumbling under the heavy weight of Lucifer's wrath. The commercialization of physical love, the ever-growing social acceptability of premarital sex, the proliferation of extra-marital affairs, alternative lifestyles, etc., all work to undermine God's true intentions in bestowing on us the gift of marriage.

The prince of lies knows that anything that shrouds the true nature of God is a weapon forged for his use. Over the last 30 years in Canada, the divorce rate has risen 600 percent!² Between 1980 and 1995, marriage failure in China jumped from 4 to 26 percent.³ In the U.S., the number of failed marriages quadrupled from 4.3 million in 1970 to 18.3 million in 1996.⁴ And behind the numbers lie countless broken hearts, innumerable broken homes, bitter anger, weakened faith, and clear evidence of the devil's efforts to separate us further from God.

Satan is in the business of breaking gifts. We, as Christians, should be in the business of respecting, appreciating, and repairing them. As Satan works to destroy the gift of marriage, let each of us embrace God's ideal and, at every turn, resist Lucifer's efforts to destroy us.

1. Maggie Gallagher, *The Abolition of Marriage*, p. 5.

2. "Alberta Report," August 4, 1997.

3. *Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education Newsletter*.

4. "Marital Status and Living Arrangements" Census Bureau release.

LOGOS

Prov. 5:18-20; 18:22; 21:19; 31:10-31; Eph. 5:21-31

Life is a journey. In the beginning God saw fit to place a man and a woman in marriage to make this journey more enjoyable. Both parties are responsible to keep the relationship fresh (Eph. 5:21-31). The marriage highway has two lanes, not one. But sin altered life on earth (Genesis 3). Millions of people become married every year; millions get divorced too! Somehow they don't find the bliss Solomon talks about in Proverbs. Why?

Marry to Love

Heather (not her real name) said she wanted to talk with me. As we visited, she said she no longer loved her husband. I asked her why, and she said she simply had "lost her love for him." I arranged a visit with both. He was a quiet, hardworking man. She was educated in a health-related career. He had no degrees but was an honest worker. They both were in their early thirties. No children. Heather was a member of one of my churches in the district. Her husband was a member of another Protestant church in town. He loved her very much. He didn't want to break the relationship. She was decided. There was nothing else he could do. What had happened?

Love can be a strange thing. Although a heavenly principle, many times we manipulate love. We define it and redefine it to make it fit! Taking a partner for life is a serious matter. Love is at the heart of this experience. We "fall in love" and get married. Is there anything wrong with that? No, unless we forget the reason for being married. *We marry to love.* Like Heather, many love to marry, and when love runs out of steam, the marriage dies. True love increases in steam, instead. It takes a conscious act on our part to love (1 Corinthians 13).

The principles have not changed. Monogamy is the way God intended for us to build lasting relationships. But polygamy and a host of other lifestyle behaviors are prevalent in past and present societies. Like other truths (Sabbath, state of the dead, etc.), marriage is also perverted by Satan. Many see greener grass on the other side of the fence, but they fail to realize that you still have to mow it! So, they go from one relationship to another, hardly finding anything different, many times leaving behind offspring caught in the middle of painful, dysfunctional situations. Heather has been in at least three relationships and is still looking for the ideal. What makes some people think that a new relationship is the only solution? Does a person's ego have anything to do with this behavior?

The Ideal Partner

Solomon speaks of the ideal, virtuous woman as a fountain of joy (Prov. 5:18-20), a fountain that fills a man's heart for all his days. But, just as there are unfaithful

men, there are unfaithful women also. The virtuous man will not allow himself to be ensnared by another woman. He will be on guard always to stay faithful to his wife, even when age take its toll. The same applies to the virtuous woman.

On the contrary, life can be pretty rough if either of the parties becomes irritating (Prov. 21:9,19). In spite of the sun during the day, or the wind and cold at night, Solomon declares that it is better to live in the desert or on the flat roof of the mideastern house, where so many people lived, than to endure the frustrations of living with a nagging spouse. But this is no license to break up a relationship. The power of God is greater than any human condition! If spouses seek God's guidance and submit to His leading in their lives, just as an entire life of sinful practices is changed by heaven's grace, so will any relationship.

Conversely, in Proverbs 31:10-31, Solomon extols the virtues of the industrious wife and mother. Though this is directed at the female spouse, equal principles of dedication and commitment apply to the husband and father. Countless children, unfortunately, find themselves

**The marriage highway
has two lanes, not one.**

growing up in a broken family situation. But God's ideal is for children to grow up in a caring, loving environment of a home in which mother and father pass on to them those virtues that will make future generations stronger and better. The person who is willing to work to attain these traits, and finds a partner willing to do the same, is truly blessed (Prov. 18:22). Children grow up to perpetuate those values from their parents and pass them on to their children. If we succeed in this quest as parents, what a difference this could make in our world today!

REACT

1. How can one be sure his or her marriage will last?
2. What can those in a troubled marriage learn from the fact that God's grace reaches and transforms people, even after a lifetime of sin, into children of His kingdom?
3. What role do the religious beliefs of the parties play in their relationship?
4. Describe for yourself the ideal life partner.
5. Comment on the statement: "It is more important to *be* the ideal partner than to *find* the ideal partner."
6. Define the condition of being in love as you see it. Compare your definition with others. Is this state of being in love a sound basis for marriage? If not, what needs to be added to the relationship before you can build a marriage on it?
7. How would you counsel a friend who, like Heather, believes that she no longer loves her spouse?

TESTIMONY

Eph. 5:22

How often we have heard the words, "Wives submit to your husbands!" At times it is repeated for fun, and at other times it has a serious tone. What we fail to remember is how the verse ends: "as to the Lord."

"In the creation, God had made [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. . . . It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed in subjection to her husband. . . . But man's abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter, and made her life a burden."¹

In His relationship to the church, Christ has given the perfect example of a marriage. The husband should be in control to the extent that Christ is the head of the church. "If he 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 everything; for he is not the Lord, he is not the husband in the true significance of the term."²

Some of you may be thinking, *I'm not married, or even thinking about getting married.* This can still have application in your life. We are all the bride of Christ. Christ doesn't force us into submission to His will. It is with love that He accepts us and with love that He lets us divorce Him. In the same manner that Christ has given each of us the power of choice, so too

**Christ has given
the perfect example
of a marriage.**

are we to be "Christ" in our relation to each other.

As it is written, "Christ abiding in the heart of the wife will be at agreement with Christ abiding in the heart of the husband. They will be striving together for the mansions Christ has gone to prepare for those who love Him."³

REACT

1. Do you feel the church forces you into submission? How? Why?
2. Think of your own marriage or another significant relationship in your life.

What is one area in that relationship in which you could become more selfless?

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

2. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

"I Do, All the Days of My Life"

HOW-TO Prov. 31:10-31

The woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 is the renaissance woman of all times. She is a top-notch entrepreneur, who bargains for the choicest land to grow magnificent crops to feed her household. Her hobbies include feeding the poor, spinning silk thread to sew beautiful garments for her family, and cooking healthful, delicious meals. Oh, and in her spare time she works out to stay buff. What a woman! What a bride! The wife every woman would like to be. The woman every man would like to have. The bride Christ wants us to be.

What a woman!
What a bride!

What does it take, then, to become this bride that excels above all the rest (verse 29)? It takes everything we have—or rather everything we don't have. As this super mom/super wife gave her life to the service of those around her, we are asked to give our lives in service for our Bridegroom. It takes dedication, diligence, perseverance, commitment, faith, hope, and love.

All the bride's deeds were based on love. "Love the Lord your God, [and] walk in all his ways, . . . hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul" (Josh. 22:5, NIV). "Where love is expressed in words and looks and deeds, is a place where angels love to manifest their presence, and hallow the scene by rays of light from glory."¹ Loving with all our heart, mind, and soul is loving with commitment.

"Do you take this man . . . all the days of your life?" These solemn words ideally represent a rock solid foundation of loving commitment. However, in today's society, this commitment is all too often like a sand castle built at the edge of the ocean's tide, lasting only until the next wave washes it away: "I do—until I change my mind." Jesus asks us for our heart, mind, and soul. Jesus asks us for commitment: "Break all associations that would stand between you and your king; identify yourself fully with your husband."² And with this we will have a perfect commitment to carry on His duties, as the best couple of all times.

REACT

1. What does this magnitude of commitment entail?
2. What does it take for me to be this kind of bride for my husband; what does it take for me to be this kind of bride to Christ?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 417.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 742.

OPINION

1 John 3:16

The world teaches to please self. Many of us allow worldly pleasures to rule and govern our lives to the point that the love of self is far greater than the love toward our fellow humanity. The lesson this week focuses on the aspect of pulling together in the sense of marriage. Brides and grooms throughout time have pronounced the words "I do" when they commit their lives to each other. They look for a little bit of heaven here on earth through the joining of their lives in matrimony.

Mary Lou Kownacki once said, "Engrave this upon your heart: There isn't anyone you couldn't love once you've heard their story." Have you heard Christ's story today? Christ has heard your story and He loves you. That love led Him to the cross. This is *the* only kind of love every person should have to experience life. This

"There isn't anyone you couldn't love once you've heard their story."

is the kind of love that destroys the image of self and constructs the partnership of husband and wife.

"Jesus Christ is our sacrifice. He speaks for us. He is our Brother, standing in human form before His Father's throne. He will

be one of us forever. He is the Son of man. Jesus did all this to lift us from the ruin of sin. He wants us to reflect the love of God and share the joy of godly living."¹ His example can live forever in our lives if we choose to listen to His soft, yet persistent voice telling us His story. Look for Him in your companion and follow His example of what love really means. "The Lord will help every one of us where we need help the most in the grand work of overcoming and conquering self."²

REACT

1. What degree of success can a man and woman have when God's love is not part of their marriage?

2. Reflect on the quotation in this lesson: "There isn't anyone you couldn't love once you've heard their story." How would you apply this to human love relationships? Do you think it's universally true? Why or why not?

3. What can you do if you honestly feel that you are trying to love selflessly, but your partner isn't? Is there a limit to how unselfish you should be in a relationship? Explain your answer.

4. How would you counsel a spouse who remains in an abusive relationship because she believes she is following Christ's example of suffering and selfless love?

1. *Steps to Jesus*, p. 15.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1164.

The Vital Knot

EXPLORATION

Eph. 5:21-33

CONCLUDE

Satan has worked tirelessly to destroy marriage. This should imply how important marriage is to God! He intended marriage to be a wellspring of blessings, with overflowing benefits for husband and wife. Like happiness, love is a choice based on virtue and commitment. Loving commitment is the foundation of all the good qualities Solomon mentions in Proverbs 31 (which apply to both husbands and wives). Jesus has provided a model for marriage through His relationship with us, His people. True Christlike, self-sacrificing love can transform marriage and help it grow toward God's ideal.

CONSIDER

- Interviewing several married couples. Ask each one what marriage has taught them about God or the plan of salvation.
- Thinking of at least three animals that display or personify qualities that God intended for the marriage relationship.
- Writing a set of "marriage vows" that Jesus might make to His church-bride.
- Creating a sculpture or drawing that illustrates two hearts becoming one, or the idea that the whole is sometimes greater than the sum of its parts! (Two people together can often accomplish more good than they could by working separately.)
- Spending some time meditating on what you are doing each day to *be* an ideal partner, whether for your spouse or for Christ. Remember that you are the only person that you can change.
- Comparing your list of qualities to look for in a mate with what Jesus looks for in His bride.
- Listening to "Guard Your Heart" by Steve Green, from the CD *The Mission or People Need the Lord*. Meditate on the words and apply them to your own choices for commitment.

CONNECT

Hosea; 1 Corinthians 13; Revelation 21:2, 3.

The Adventist Home, pp. 105-115.

Russell Holt, ed., *Lyrics of Love, God's Top Ten*.

No Pruning, no Grapes



“My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments” (Prov. 3:1, NRSV).

Is There Love?

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 5:8

At the first cry announcing the birth of another human being, a long process of discovery, comprehension, molding, and adaptation begins. Life is a process of maturation, constantly based on the understanding of previous experience and the advancement into the unknown that gives new dimension to our lives. This is why human experience in time and space can be called “whole life’s school.” In this school one’s progress is determined by one’s willingness to accept and learn “the discipline of love,” taught by Jesus Christ Himself, the greatest Teacher in the world. The Bible says that “although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8, NIV).

The discipline of divine love is centered on the perfection of those who will inherit the heavens. It is nothing else but the manifestation of a love that wants to give us a future and a hope. During this week think and pray about it, and you will surely begin to understand God’s love in what you call absurdity, chaos, disappointment, and bitterness.

July 18, 1999. I was driving fast to Bacau, where my wife and child were waiting for me. I had been away for two weeks for a Pathfinder summer camp. On the way back my heart was filled with joy, and I was tempted to press the accelerator more and more because I was exhausted and needed much sleep. I stopped the car twice and took a nap in order to be able to continue on my way to my loved ones. Finally, with only 15 miles left to go, the car in front of me braked to a stop, so I stopped as well. I couldn’t understand and accept this delay. The traffic was stopped going both ways.

A thought flashed through my mind: accident. From a damaged minibus was pulled the body of a child. With tears in my eyes, I was tempted to ask: “Why, God? Where are you?”

Gradually my mind quieted down. A voice seemed to whisper to my ear: “You can hasten the coming of Jesus Christ—the end of grief.” Another thought turned up then in the darkness: “All are in God’s hands. He will save everyone who can be saved. Trust your heavenly Father, and some day you will better understand that there is love—don’t be afraid!”

**I was exhausted
and needed
much sleep.**

LOGOS

Prov. 3:1, 11, 12; 6:16-19; 12:15; 13:24; 22:6

The discipline of love is God's way of preparing us for the heavenly places. Sometimes His instruction is painful, but without pruning there are no grapes. True wisdom means to accept divine pedagogy in our own redemption and to use its principles to train the young generation.

The Sons of Wisdom (Prov. 3:1, 11, 12)

The first exhortation for the sons of Wisdom is to follow the father's teaching (verse 1). This is the only place in Proverbs that identifies God as Father. His commandments are guideposts on the road to a life worth living. Forgetfulness of His law is the fault of the character.

True education includes not only what we ought to do, but what we ought to suffer as well. In God's providence the suffering, the sorrows, and the disappointments can be the means of correction. The highest gift of wisdom is a spirit of trust and devotion in the midst of trials (Job 5:17, 18; Ps. 94:12; Rev. 3:19). We have to distinguish between discipline and vengeance. Indeed, it is the father-son relationship (verse 12) that provides insight into the nature of true discipline (compare Hebrews 12:5, 6). As God should not be forgotten in days of prosperity, so we should not be estranged from Him in days of adversity.

The Sons of Foolishness (Prov. 6:16-19; 12:15)

The self-complacency of the fool is contrasted with the conduct of the wise (Prov. 12:15). Though God has given objective criteria of a righteous life, the fool knows no other standard than his own opinion. We are not so wise as not to need good counsel, especially in the concerns of the soul.

The rejection of right discipline bears its fruits (6:16-19). God hates these vices because they frustrate His good purposes for humankind. The seven abominations comprise sins of attitude (verse 17a), thought (verse 18a), speech (verses 17b, 19a), action (verses 17c, 18b), and influence (verse 19b).

By true repentance we will hate what God hates, and, conversely, we will love and desire (1) humility, (2) truthful speech, (3) preservation of life, (4) pure thoughts, (5) eagerness to do good things, (6) honest witnesses, and (7) peaceful harmony.

Match the following verses with the sins specified in Proverbs 6:16-19.

The Manner of Discipline (Prov. 13:24)

Parental love is displayed in disciplining children responsibly. A balanced tenderness allows room for the child to grow while learning the limits (Prov. 4:3, 4, 10, 11; Eph. 6:4). "The work of 'breaking the will' is contrary to the principles of Christ. The will of the child must be directed and guided. . . . Treat it wisely and tenderly, as a sacred treasure."¹

The rod may stand as a figure for firm, yet kind discipline. We are in danger of thinking pain to be worse than sin. We should learn that it is worse to sin than to suffer. However, we can administer needful chastisement so that children should feel that by it they hurt themselves.

The correction should be: (1) carefully proportioned to the offense; (2) administered in the calmness of conviction, not in the heat of temper; (3) as free as possible from physical violence; (4) strictly just; and (5) occasional and of brief duration.²

God's chastisement of His children is for their good. There is neither weakness in the Almighty nor selfishness in the All Merciful. We have to choose whether we are to endure the punishment of the impenitent or the chastisement of the penitent. This perspective may guide us in disciplining our children.

The Time of Discipline (Prov. 22:6)

The training that Solomon enjoins is to direct, educate, and develop the personality and abilities of the young. The child is to be initiated in the way of life from the earliest dawn of intelligence (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15; Deut. 6:7; Judg. 13:12). Childhood is pliable; maturity is hard and less impressionable.

The training of a child is needed for various reasons: (1) an undeveloped condition, (2) ignorance, (3) weakness, and (4) evil.

The law of training has in view: (1) a practical end in education, (2) the future requirements (the specific career expected for each child), and (3) personal qualities. The result of the training: "When he is old he will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6, NIV).

**The highest gift of
wisdom is a spirit of
trust and devotion.**

Heaven's Extension Course

In getting the true education, our heavenly Father is the Teacher; Jesus Christ, as God-man, is the true Disciple; the Holy Spirit is the Great Counselor; the main textbook is the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16, 17); the time of discipline is "the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2, NIV); the teaching method is the providence of God; the teaching staff is made up especially of parents; and the aim of education is salvation.³ The discipline of love is Heaven's Extension Course for us.

REACT

1. Which commandments of the Decalogue are represented in Proverbs 6:16-19?
2. If Jesus was punished for our sins, why do we still need God's correction?

1. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 116.

2. *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 9, pp. 267, 268.

3. *Education*, p. 13.

The High Degree of Heaven

TESTIMONY

Rom. 8:28

Passing through life seems to be often boring and exhausting travel. In a way, this travel is like the long journey into freedom that the Israelites began the night they left Egypt. Beyond difficulties of travel, this long journey was also a school that finally ended at the banks of the Jordan. On the other side lay the land God had promised. All the travel experiences were lessons that taught the Israelites the taste of freedom. Any event in our lives can draw us closer to God.

"Life is disciplinary. While in the world, the Christian will meet with adverse influences. There will be provocations to test the temper; and it is by meeting these

"Life is disciplinary."

in a right spirit that the Christian graces are developed. If injuries and insults are meekly borne, if insulting words are responded to by gentle answers, and

oppressive acts by kindness, this is evidence that the Spirit of Christ dwells in the heart, that sap from the living Vine is flowing to the branches. We are in the school of Christ in this life, where we are to learn to be meek and lowly of heart; and in the day of final accounts we shall see that all the obstacles we meet, all the hardships and annoyances that we are called to bear, are practical lessons in the application of principles of Christian life. If well endured, they develop the Christlike in the character and distinguish the Christian from the worldling."¹

It is interesting that the Bible records only isolated instances during most of the years that Israel spent in the wilderness. Even though there are only a few, these reports are enough to understand God's way to transform character. After we accept them, these principles will prove a solid base that won't be shaken by time. Any small thing that appears in our lives will actually become a step on the way to heaven.

"Parents, teachers, students, remember that you are building for eternity. See that your foundation is sure; then build firmly, and with persistent effort, but in gentleness, meekness, love. So shall your house stand unshaken, not only when the storms of temptation come, but when the overwhelming flood of God's wrath shall sweep over the world."² Then every house built upon the sand shall fall, and great shall be the fall of it, for the ruin is for eternity.

REACT

How can God use the unpleasant events of life to shape character? Be specific.

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 344.

2. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 63.

God's Way of Discipline

EVIDENCE

Prov. 12:15; 13:24; 22:6

Mashawleem (proverbs, comparisons) are short, ancient Near Eastern stanzas (usually doublets) addressing our taste and memory: "Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to advice" (Prov. 12:15, NRSV).

So the book of Proverbs is for the wise only! "My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments" (3:1, NRSV).

As commentary on the fifth commandment (Exod. 20:12), Proverbs displays the vocative *benee*, "my son!" 30 times. *Tau-rah* (law), and *mitzwoth* (commandments) stand for both parental and God's requirements.

The secret of holiness consists in what we treasure (Ps. 119:11, 16, 61, 83, 109, 141, 153, 176; Luke 2:19, 51). That's why God commanded the Israelites to stay close to their children and teach them (Deut. 6:6-9; 11:18-21). "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray" (Prov. 22:6, NRSV).

It's a hard drill! From the same root (*hanach*: initiate, dedicate) comes Henoch's name, and Abraham's *hanichim* (experienced slaves in Gen. 14:14). Parents often fail because of their own poor training, lacking command themselves and hating limits (Heb. 12:20, 21). Still undisciplined children who have now grown old are poor officers because they weren't good soldiers. "Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them" (Prov. 13:24, NRSV).

Beating is common in old societies. Harsh words are even more devastating (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; Prov. 17:10; 19:18; 27:22; Deut. 21:18-21). But today we find the opposite. Some parents are doomed to fail because they mix loveless correction with religious claims.

**The secret of
holiness consists in
what we treasure.**

Ways of punishment relate to culture (Num. 12:14; Mark 8:23; Heb. 12:10), but can we deny the principle, on modern philosophical bases? Adam's children need discipline. God didn't forbid corporal punishment, but limited and "sanctified" it (Deut. 21:18-21; 25:2, 3). "My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Prov 3:11, 12, NRSV).

Disciplining involves suffering (Isa. 53:5). Those who received no love-inspired correction from their parents can hardly understand God's love (Deut. 8:5; Job 5:17-19; Ps. 50:16, 17; 2 Sam. 7:14, 15; Heb. 12:3-11). God uses even persecutions for the wise (Dan. 11:35; 12:9, 10), and the Laodicean is punishable too (Rev. 3:19).

Do You Enjoy Discipline?

HOW-TO

Prov. 3:1, 11, 12

Let's be honest. No one enjoys being disciplined.

When someone tries to discipline you, it means that what you are doing is not good and that you have to change. Those who discipline you know better than you what should be done and how it should be done. They evaluate you, guide you, and even have the power to punish you. Parents discipline children, teachers discipline pupils, and employers discipline employees. In life we learn that it is more desirable to be in the first category than the second.

It is doubtless that God also disciplines His children. The problem is that we often misunderstand the ways He is doing this.

**Disciplining children
does not necessarily
mean punishing them.**

Disciplining children does not necessarily mean punishing them for mistakes. Divine discipline does not necessarily mean punishment and suffering. Discipline is about spending time together, about care, communication, love, and help. It is not the

punishment that comes first, but the relationship. God is present in our lives to change every trouble, of which He is in no way responsible, into a victory.

Imagine that someone close to you is going through a really tough time. He is very sad and does not know what to do about the new and painful problems in his life. Which of the following thoughts would you share with him?

- God may be trying to teach you something through your problem.
- God is with you and will always be.
- Every problem in the world is brought, either directly or indirectly, by the enemy of righteousness and truth.
- You can use this problem, together with God, to aid your spiritual growth.
- You can be totally confident in God and believe that everything that is happening to you will eventually be for the best.

REACT

1. If you believe that God disciplines His children, does this imply that God causes suffering? If so, how does this affect your view of God's character? If not, how can suffering be an aid to spiritual growth?

2. Is every difficulty a Christian faces in life a form of spiritual discipline, or is there a certain amount of "just bad luck"? Explain your answer.

Grapes First, Pruning After?

OPINION

Eccles. 11:9

In Eden, Lucifer's challenge postulated that experience is superior to innocence (Gen. 3:5): Try and see! Try and you will be like God!

In this philosophy, everything is perceived as being good. Evil is necessary and even a force of progress. So, you can think: let there be grapes first and pruning after. In other words, try everything possible first, and then you can decide what is good in the end.

Those who think like this are in a trap. They mix up the terms. Let's think about pruning first versus pruning after.

Pruning first suggests prevention and selection. Prevention qualifies a situation before it happens. In Solomon's words, prevention is to know that "for all these things God will bring you to judgment" (Eccles. 11:9, NIV). This means knowing or seeing the fruits of your actions before the harvest. This encounter requires pruning first of all. That's why we need Jesus and revelation of His Word. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us to accept the discipline worked out by our Master.

But prevention, judgment, or discipline seems to be very uncomfortable for our independence. Sometimes pruning first is so painful that it could be mistaken for penalty. Most of us avoid this.

Pruning after is a trap that turns indulgence into penalty. Penalty disqualifies a situation after it happens. After the sap of the vine has been wasted by fruitless shoots and clusters have been stunted by lack of nutrition, pruning can change nothing. Pruning now is too late. Pruning now means only penalty.

But many times, because we do not like any constraint, pruning after is mistaken for acceptance and liberty. Unfortunately, under this mask, many choose penalty rather than prevention.

But Jesus wants to avoid confusion. He takes away any mask and speaks out the truth regarding us in the clearest way possible. He wants us to understand that the world of our pseudo-values stunts the fruits of our lives. He appeals to our conscience to judge between true and false and decide in favor of eternal values. His purpose is to invite us in a process of moral reasoning, where He struggles to convince our will to accept pruning.

Let's be pruned first, in order to harvest fruits of good quality at the end.

**Those who think
like this are
in a trap.**

EXPLORATION

Job 5:17, 18

CONCLUDE

Being a true Christian means that you've felt the correcting rod of God's love in your life. Some regard this rod as a tool of suffering, but they're wrong. God does not correct *with* pain. He corrects *through* pain, using the suffering we bring on ourselves to teach eternal lessons. Like any loving parent, our heavenly Father's discipline is designed to keep us out of trouble in the first place, pruning our wayward branches before they take root. God's discipline builds up; it doesn't tear down.

CONSIDER

- Going to your local Christian bookstore and purchasing a poster that illustrates Jesus at His most loving (perhaps surrounded by children). Display it where you'll see it every day and write these words at the bottom of the image. "I choose to allow this Man to discipline me today."
- Recording a CD or cassette of your favorite songs that highlight God's never-failing love. Then the next time you fail and need a little heavenly correction, play the songs, and then go to God in prayer.
- Calling a friend who seems to have a growing relationship with God. Ask him or her how they handle God's correction in their life. If their relationship with God is growing, they've come to grips with discipline.
- Drawing a circle on a piece of paper. In the circle write the word *God* and list the best things about your life. Outside the circle, write the word *evil* and list the worst things about your life. Then choose to focus throughout the day only on those things found in the circle.
- Taking a walk in a nature-filled environment (forest, desert, park, garden, zoo) and examining the intricate details of plants while enjoying the nobility of animals. Think about the fact that the same God who made all of that beauty has the power to help you overcome temptation.
- Making a list of all the suffering you've had to endure in the past. Jot down why that suffering happened (bad habits, wrong choices, disregard for the laws of God). Ask your heavenly Father to help you engrave the lessons you learned into your mind for future review.
- Growing a plant in your room or office. Learn how to prune it properly for optimum growth. Apply the principles you've discovered to your own life.

CONNECT

Psalm 94:12, 13; 1 Corinthians 11:32; Hebrews 12:6, 7, 10, 11.

Steps to Christ.

James Dobson, *Love Must Be Tough* (book or video).

Charles Mills, Berkeley Springs, West Virginia

Next Quarter's Lessons

GREAT PRAYERS AND PRAY-ERS OF THE BIBLE

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 2001, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: The Model Pray-er and the Model Prayer: Christ

Scriptures: Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-14.

Theme: Prayer is the communication line between ground forces in battle and headquarters. When Jesus entered enemy territory to be with us, He showed us how to make full use of this communication system.

Lesson 2: Prayers of Despair: Job

Scriptures: Job 7, 10, and 14.

Theme: Due to the nature of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, an incredible amount of suffering exists. The best way to maintain one's sanity in times of darkness is to continue praying, even when it seems as if God does not hear.

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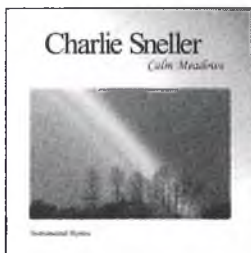
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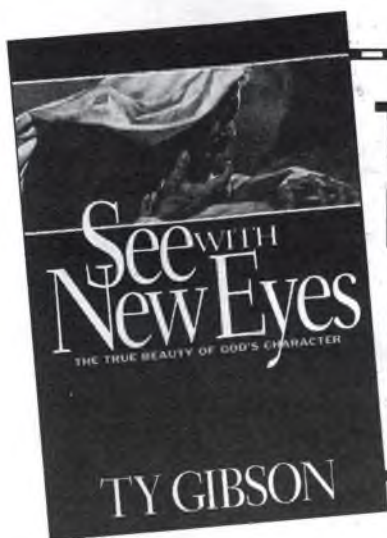
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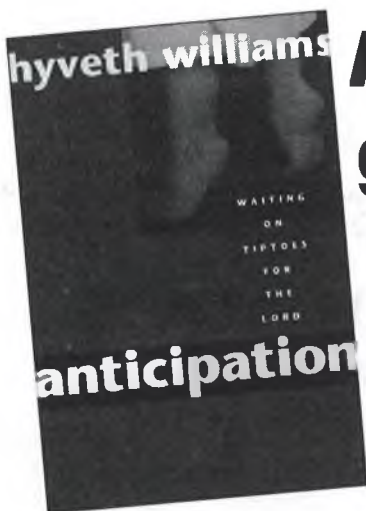
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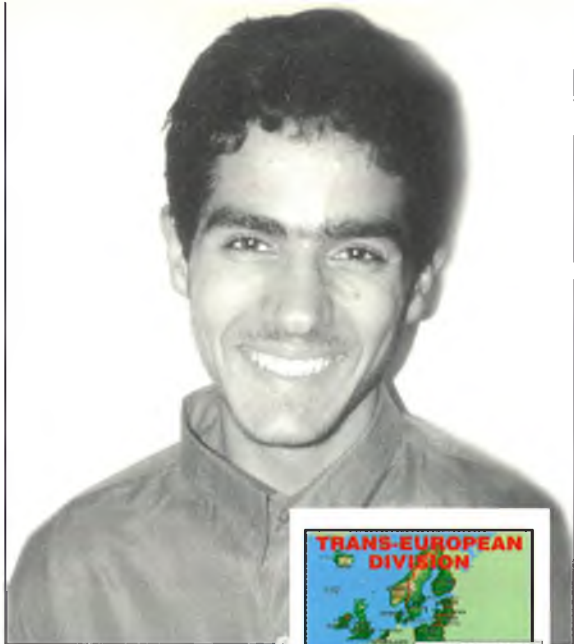
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M I S S I O N

P R O F I L E



NAME:
Rami Hadroj, Tirana,
Albania

BACKGROUND:
Rami was a Muslim, but when his girlfriend gave him a Bible for Valentine's Day, he promised to read it. When he read the

fourth commandment, he wondered why Christians he knew did not worship on Saturday. One day as he was reading his Bible in a post office line, a girl saw him and thinking he must be a Christian, asked him what church he attended. Rami answered that he attended no church because he could not find one that worshipped on Saturday. The girl knew of one and gave its address to him. Read Rami's story in *Mission* to learn how tragedy did not stop him from seeking God.

THE THIRTEENTH SABBATH OFFERING:
Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help provide a church-evangelistic center in Tirana, the capital city of Albania.



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