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# All the World's a Stage

Q  
2001



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide  
for Young Adults



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# All the World's a Stage



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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 Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors 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, Hungarian, and Finnish.

## Writers Wanted

# Ever think about writing for *CQ*?

Why not! Each year 400 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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## This Quarter's Illustrator



Freelance artist and designer Lilian Radziszewski, of Adelaide, Australia, is six leap years old—she was born February 29, 1976. In 1997 she completed a degree in design, majoring in illustration at the University of South Australia. She began to teach in design school in 1999 and is presently working on a teaching degree. She speaks English and Polish, lives with her parents and brother and a cat named Edgar, and reports that she plays classical guitar—badly.

# 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 59,000.

## **POINTERS FOR STUDY**

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.
3. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in 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 quarterly:
  - "**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**" a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is 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.*

# The Contenders



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“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NIV).

# He Loves Me; He Loves Me Not

## INTRODUCTION

John 1:14

Dear Lord Jesus,

Thank You for becoming one of us and “pitching Your tent” next to mine. Choosing to live with You is the best decision I have ever made.

Before realizing that *You* are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, I had followed Satan’s ways. His lies about You were clever, and I accepted many of them. Offering me happiness and pleasure, he abused my life with darkness and pain (Eph. 2:1-10).

But You, Lord Jesus, are gracious and humble, and You devote Yourself to serving and saving me. You give me the right to choose whether or not to love You freely and willingly. You *died* to give me that right. You exercise the right kind of power over Your people. You forgive me and send words of encouragement when I bring my mistakes and shortcomings to You. You certainly do not cast me off; nor do You reject me (John 6:37). At times, Satan tempts me by pushing me to think that You have forsaken me, but he is the father of lies (8:44).

Lord Jesus, You have done all You can to provide peace and security in my heart. You love me. You *cherish* me more than I can understand!

Drawing near to You is the only refuge in times of turmoil and temptation. Why You need my love, I do not understand, but I do understand rejection. I realize that You, too, are brokenhearted when You are rejected (Luke 22:48). Please use me to let others know of Your great mercy and love, Your forgiveness and power, and Your need to be loved and worshiped, for You are worthy of worship (Rev. 5:12-14). Oh, how to express the joy of realizing You really *are* in control, just as I asked You to be (1 John 4:4).

Thank You for showing me that coming closer to You helps me understand how imperfect I am and therefore, how much I need, more than ever, to reach out and accept Your infinite purity and loveliness.\*

Lord Jesus, as we, Your children, study the plan of redemption unfolding in the lives of the Bible characters discussed in this *CQ*, may Your Holy Spirit strengthen our hearts, because You dwell in them by faith. Plant us firmly in love, so that we may understand the width, length, height, and depth of Your love for us; for this love surpasses all knowledge, filling us with the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14-19).

Thank You, Lord Jesus. In Your name I pray. Amen.

Thank You for “pitching  
Your tent” next to mine.

*Steps to Christ*, pp. 64, 65.

## LOGOS

Isa. 9:6; Ezek. 28:12-15; John 1:1, 2; Rev. 12:9

In the race to win our hearts, there are two candidates for us to choose from: Christ or Satan. Whom will you elect to lead you forever? We know if we do not choose Jesus, we've voted for the other side. "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matt. 12:30, NKJV). Who will win your vote?

### God's Strategy (Isa. 9:6, 7)

"His name will be called wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6, NKJV). Isaiah expresses the Messiah's oneness with His Father and the Holy Spirit. From when Jesus lived on earth, we see how these promises are true blue. The Old Testament promises sketch a two-dimensional portrait of the Savior to come. But we discover a rich three-dimensional picture of God when Jesus visited our planet.

"The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us" (1 John 1:2, NIV).

We see the clearest picture of God's true character as Jesus died. Like Mary's broken perfume bottle, its fragrance was sweetly dispersed everywhere so God's compassionate, forgiving nature was seen so clearly. Our God who runs our universe forgives even before we ask! When we believe God's pardoning attitude to sinners destroying Him at His most vulnerable moments includes us personally, then our Father's forgiving heart becomes *real* to us.

### Smear Campaign (Ezek. 28:12-15)

"God permitted Satan to carry forward his work. . . . It was necessary for his plans to be fully developed, that their true nature and tendency might be seen by all." God does not intervene with every disaster on our planet. He gives the opposition plenty of space to reveal his true colors.

"Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble" (Isa. 14:16, NIV).

"Satan had revealed his true character as a liar and a murderer. It was seen that the very same spirit with which he'd ruled the children of men who were under his power, he would have manifested if permitted to control the intelligences of heaven."<sup>2</sup>

"The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him" (Rev. 12:9, NIV).

"[Satan] tempts [us] to distrust God's love and to doubt His wisdom."<sup>3</sup>

Why does the devil eclipse Jesus from view by getting us to focus on our faults or others' faults? Because, when we keep our eyes on Jesus, we will mirror His life. (See Matthew 12:30). The devil has given God a lot of bad publicity to turn us off

---

the right track to life. Because Jesus said once you really knew Him, you can't help falling in love with His character.

What single truth would help someone choose God and open the door to a trusting friendship with Him? Let's look at the end of the story:

"They realize what they have forfeited by transgression, and they fall at the feet of those whose fidelity they have despised and derided, and confess that God has loved them."<sup>4</sup> Why was this so hard to believe before this moment?

"The shortness of time is frequently urged as an incentive for seeking righteousness and making Christ our friend. This should not be the great motive with us; for it savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God should be held before us, that we might be compelled to right action *through fear*? It ought not be so. Jesus is *attractive*. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion. He proposes to be our friend, to walk with us through all the rough pathways of life."<sup>5</sup>

**" 'You ought to fire that God!' "**

## Lost the Plot?

"The new man said, 'No way I'm going to turn my life over to God! He'd ruin me—and I'd deserve it.' He went on to say that for him God was a giant policeman and that his experience with the police was not at all positive.

"The oldtimer, a strong, quiet man, listened to the new man's description of God and then in all seriousness said, 'You ought to fire that God, you ought to fire him! . . . The God who operates here is loving, forgiving and gives you all the chances you need to get with the program. He is honest and will always be there for you. I had a God like yours when I first came in here, but I had to fire him and get me a new God.'

"'What can I do about a God if I fire mine?' the new man asked. The oldtimer thought for a minute. 'Well,' he said, 'you can use mine till you get on your feet.'"<sup>6</sup>

## REACT

1. What barriers prevent you (or people you know) from believing God really loves you?
2. How can these barriers be broken down?
3. How have you developed your picture of God?
4. How do we actually "keep our eyes on Jesus" on a daily basis? Be specific.

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1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 41.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

4. *The Great Controversy*, p. 655.

5. *Lift Him Up*, p. 98.

6. J. Keith Miller, *A Hunger for Healing* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 50.

## TESTIMONY

Matt. 4:4

In Chinese operas, the bad guys always have the most decorated faces so that spectators have no difficulty interpreting the good from the bad. George Lucas certainly applied this idea well to his latest sci-fi movie. Darth Maul's painted face clearly showed his connection with the dark side. Life would be much simpler if only everything were truly black and white!

Unfortunately, we live in an age in which black is white and white is grey. Sin is so common that we are becoming indifferent to it. The word *sin* is fast becoming extinct in our modern-day language.

In the wilderness, Jesus overcame the age-old conflict. "But within the domain of every human heart this controversy is repeated."\* Jesus has won for us the innocence that Adam and Eve lost to the serpent. Despite being under enormous stress, He exercised a self-restraint stronger than hunger. He refused to buy His way out of the confrontation by obeying Satan's demands. In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus

**Darth Maul's painted face clearly showed his connection with the dark side.**

brings us back to our senses, to let us realize that we are numbed by sin and to warn us about Satan's disguise. The prince of darkness came to Jesus in the form of a holy angel, not in the image of a red-skinned monster with horns and a forked tail. Yet the words he uttered betrayed his appearance. "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matt. 4:3, NIV). Satan was provoking Jesus to test God in order to prove His divine nature to the world.

By doing so, Satan hoped to undermine the light and authority that God's Word represents. Jesus could have chosen to bow to Satan by giving an excuse—since I am extremely tired and hungry, it is forgivable to disobey my Father. Nothing on earth is black and white anyway. Instead Jesus refused firmly (Matt. 4:4, NIV).

Satan's next attempt was even more insidious. Using God's Word as his weapon, he quoted Psalm 91:11 out of context to trap Jesus. In reply, Jesus firmly quoted Deuteronomy 6:16. This verse must have pierced through Satan's heart like a spear, for he knew he was tempting the Son of God—an act that God had strictly forbidden—for what authority does the created have over their Creator?

I used to think that Jesus' power is best seen when He calmed the Sea of Galilee. Yet in the wilderness, Jesus won without performing even a single miracle. He won by His trust and rock-solid faith in His Father.

\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 116.

# What's in a Name?

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 9:6; Rev. 12:9

Were you given a particular name because of its historical meaning or hoped-for future for you? It still happens in China today, and it's what happened in Bible times. So, if we look at the meanings of people's names, we can gain information about them even from that.

**Jesus.** Originating from the Hebrew name *Joshua*, *Jesus* carries several meanings: to be eternal, to be open, to be free, to be safe, or to bring salvation. So Jesus is there for us eternally, in His safe house, openly offering freedom when we choose salvation through Him. Isaiah 9:6 says Jesus would "be called Wonderful [a miraculous and marvelous thing],

**Jesus is there for us  
eternally.**

Counsellor [to advise, deliberate, or resolve], The mighty God [the strong and prevailing God over all gods], The everlasting Father [the never leaving, separating, divorcing Father of all fathers], The Prince of Peace [the Lord and Master, who takes our weary load and gives us rest by restoring us in His perfection]" (KJV).

**Satan.** Satan's original name, *Lucifer*, means to shine, and we are told that he was the most glorious of all the angels.\* But Lucifer now also means to boast of one's self, as he chose to boast. He was renamed Satan, which means to attack, accuse, or be an adversary. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* links adversary with contender, which, in Hebrew, means to meddle with, stir up, complain, and separate thoroughly. So Satan is the one who interferes with our lives by separating us from the One who loves us unconditionally. His other names include devil (false accuser, slanderer), serpent (sly, cunning, malicious), and dragon (a fabulous serpent). The latter two have roots linked to "closely observing," which implies him spying on us to tempt us so we would choose him. But when he does, we have Jesus' example to help us choose against temptation.

History records whether someone's life best fitted their birth name. Over the coming weeks, we will see how some people's lives reflected their choice for God, while others reveal they did not. Will history reveal you as one of God's friends? The choice is yours. (Josh. 24:15).

## REACT

1. Apart from accepting God's grace, what steps might we take to do all we can so our names will be made new? (See Revelation 2:17.)
2. If you had to describe your current spiritual life, what name would you give it?
3. If the meaning of Satan's name reveals his ugly character, why are we still often attracted to him?

\* *The Great Controversy*, pp. 493, 494.

## HOW-TO

Eph. 1:15–2:10

Whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian, it is important to consider who is the rightful Victor and King over the world; and whose side you're really on.

God, Creator of the world, has given Christ headship over everything. Christ is above every rule, authority, power, dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in Paul's time—"the present age"—but also in the age to come (Eph. 1:15-23).

By nature we choose ourselves as the rulers of our lives. By doing this we are rejecting the rightful rule of our Creator in telling us how we should live. By default, we are part of the rebellion of crowning ourselves king instead of recognizing the authority of God, which He has given to Jesus (2:1-3).

**Pray for your own growth in godliness.**

But amazingly, while we were still living in disobedience to God, He gave us life (verses 4-10). We had the chance of joining the right side only because of God's great love and mercy toward us. In response to such love and forgiveness, our part is to:

- Believe that because a righteous Man took the punishment deserved by you, a sinful person, that God can forgive you for your rebellion against Him.

- Tell God that you realize you have not been on His side and that you don't deserve to be forgiven for rebelling against Him. Tell Him that you accept Jesus' punishment on your behalf.

- Learn how to fight on God's side. Remember that Jesus is Savior *and* Lord with the authority to change our comfortable patterns. We show our thankful hearts by our loving obedience to Him.

- Give God first priority. Being reconciled to God through Jesus is of eternal value whereas career, marriage, and earthly enjoyments disappear over time. Our lives are not to be centered on our own selfish ambitions, while trying to live as nice, decent people on the side.

- Continue to listen to and learn from His Word yourself and with fellow Christians. God has revealed salvation and all we need to know about life and godliness in the Bible. Allow His Word to challenge your mind-set and your lifestyle so that you will continue to grow like Christ.

- Encourage and be encouraged by other Christians. This may be at a church gathering, during small group Bible studies, or one to one.

- Tell non-Christian friends, family, or neighbors about the side they're on and the provision God has made for them to change to Jesus' side.

- Pray for your own growth in godliness, for your non-Christian contacts, for yourself, and other missionaries to be bold in sharing the gospel.

# Forgiving Satan

## OPINION

Ezek. 28:12-19

Review Lucifer's situation in pre-downfall heaven from two perspectives—his own and others:

### View from others

- the highest of the angels
- stood in the presence of God
- gave homage and allegiance to God
- fulfiller of God's purposes and law
- God, the Supreme Being, had all power

### View from Lucifer

- not divine
- did not have the glory given Christ
- wanted others' allegiance for himself
- thought God's laws unfair
- desired his own supremacy

God's government initiated and preserved love, harmony, justice, and truth in the universe. Lucifer was respected by all because God bestowed upon him special responsibilities. Only after Christ was proclaimed as Creator did Lucifer renew allegiance to God, but this was short lived. Until then, he had kept his thoughts only to himself, but now he spread his dissatisfaction among the angels.

Even at this stage Lucifer could have been accepted back. God was willing to accept the risk of continued disharmony in heaven by forgiving Lucifer.

Only after Lucifer had announced that those who sided with him could not be forgiven by God was his deception complete. Actually, Lucifer was the only one who was beyond forgiving because of his deception about God's character. Read the full account in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter one.

Where was the problem? Dirk van Zuylen lists four factors for dynamic discipleship: truth, love, relevance, and faith. Without these, discipling is mechanical and without life.\* Dynamic disciples internalize the four pillars completely. Lucifer focused on the mechanics of heaven's government while God focused on the dynamics of the relationship He could have with each constituent. Lucifer had untruths, sham love, irrelevance, and artificial faith. In spite of all this, God was willing to forgive him. It's the difference between discipling and discipling. Forgiveness, like salvation, is based on a relationship, not simply an act of divine congress.

**Forgiveness is based on a relationship, not simply an act of divine congress.**

Jesus was building that relationship with His disciples during the three years of training. Later, the Holy Spirit helped them understand that relationship and proclaim it (Acts 2). Regrettably, Judas, one of the chosen, followed Satan's footsteps. All the reasons for Satan's downfall became Judas's as well (Luke 22:3).

Who among us would permit our consciences to be controlled by untruths we have not fully investigated? Let's learn from those whose history is known.

\*Dirk van Zuylen, "Discipling Like Jesus," *Discipleship Journal*, March/April 1999, pp. 76-80.

# Let's Get Ready to Rumble

## EXPLORATION

John 1:14

## CONCLUDE

When sin came to earth, a battle began between God and Satan for the soul of every human being. God sent Jesus as a living, breathing embodiment of His love to rescue us. Satan noticed this special Person who would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6, NIV). He then resolved to defeat God at all cost. When we obey God and do what He asks of us, we help Him defeat Satan and hasten the day when evil will be no more.

## CONSIDER

- Preparing cookies and punch for four or five people. Invite some of your friends to come over and share "war stories" of how God has helped them during stressful periods when they felt like giving up.
- Reading Psalm 91 and meditating on God's promises of protection and care. Ask God to make His assurance of protection real in your life.
- Finding a Christian chat room on the Internet and share with someone why you chose to follow God and His will for your life.
- Doing an analysis of the battle between the forces of good and evil. Compare and contrast the weapons God uses and those of Satan, our adversary.
- Creating a dramatization of the fight between God and Satan. For instance, you may do a court scene in which God is Judge, Satan the prosecutor, and Jesus our Defense Attorney.
- Drawing a picture that illustrates how you felt on the day when you gave your heart to God, enlisting in His army.
- Listening to the song, "The Battle Is the Lord's" by gospel artist Yolanda Adams on the album *Yolanda, Live in Washington*. This song encourages us to turn over the fighting of our battles to the Lord.

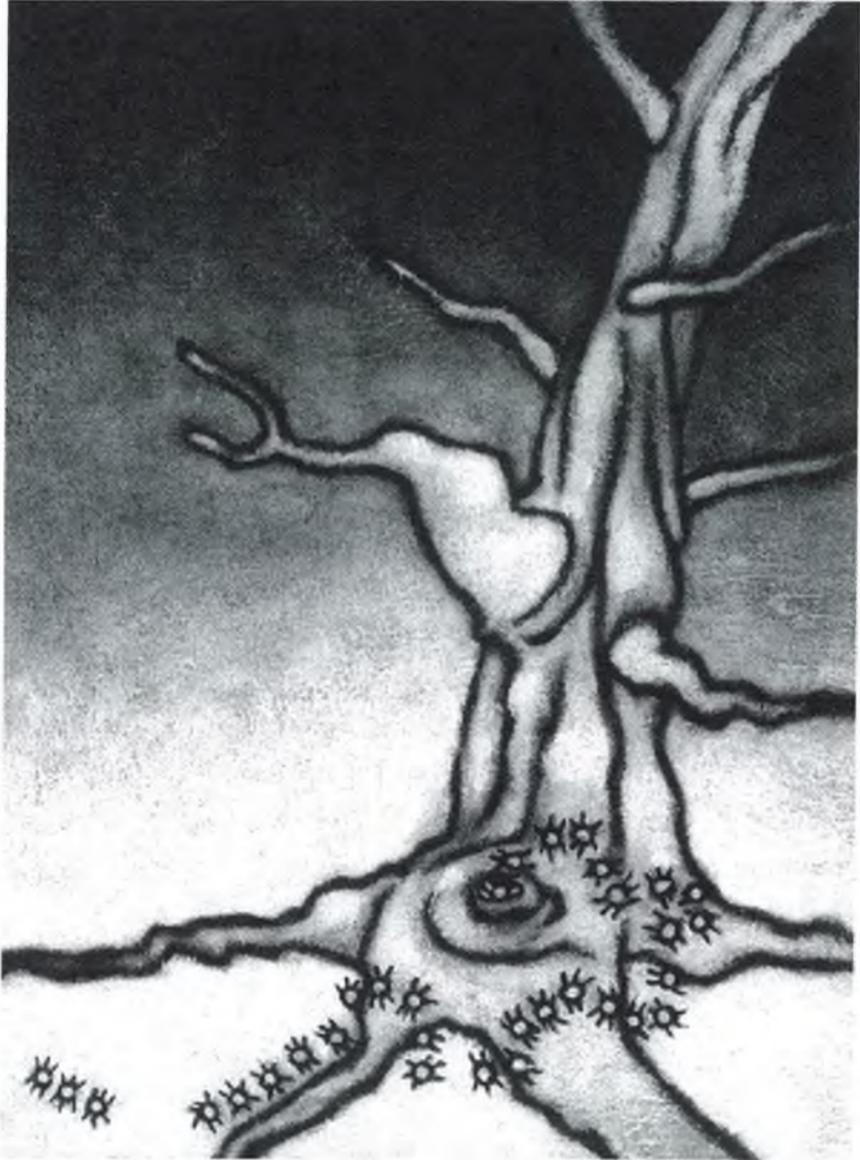
## CONNECT

Romans 8; 12:1, 2; John 1:1-32.

*The Great Controversy*, chap. 40.

G. Edward Reid, *Almost Home*, chap. 11.

# The **Betrayers**



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“The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times’ ” (Luke 22:61, NIV).

## INTRODUCTION

Ps. 51:10-12

It began as a seedling on the slopes of the Colorado Rockies some 500 years ago. For centuries it had stood tall, enduring violent wind, blizzards, lightning strikes, and even avalanches. Now the once peculiar tree is just a mound of decaying wood that has no value. What caused its demise is just a horde of beetles that had attacked it, gnawing away until it gave up to the tiny pests.

This is the tragic story of many Christians. For many years they have stood tall for God, they resisted the devil, and they were bold in the strength divinely provided. But *little* sins began to eat away their lives—little lies, greed, theft, etc. Sins gradually eroded their Christian character and suddenly they fell.

Maybe for Judas it was greed and for Peter it was lies. They both were close friends of Jesus Christ, moving with Him wherever He went, seeing all He did. We expect them to have been good examples of Christians but at one point in life they failed. They betrayed Christ within hours of each other, and these incidents are recorded in the Bible.

We too could be Peter or Judas in one way or another. Though both were disciples, they had different personalities. Peter depended on Christ's strength while Judas depended on his own; hence we hope to find Peter in heaven.

How many times have we let the small evils in us cause a big fall? We could be betraying our Lord through our thoughts, actions, speech, or movement.

After betraying Christ many of us give up instead of seeking true repentance as Peter did. Though we may see lies, greed, abuse, gossip, theft, etc., to be small sins as compared to murder, idolatry, adultery, etc., these very sins are the ones that give birth to a very cruel death. Sin is sin and the result of sin is death. There is a penalty for every sin committed and the safest measure is Jesus Christ.

**Little sins began  
to eat away their  
lives.**

Judas's experience of repentance did not go deeper than feelings, just as with many people who build upon the sand and when adverse winds come, their houses are swept away. Like Judas Iscariot, they repent but guilt overtakes them. If Judas had repented with faith, he could have lived forever with Christ.

"Many who speak to others of the need of a new heart do not themselves know what is meant by these words. The youth especially stumble over this phrase, 'a new heart.'"<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>*Messages to Young People*, p. 71.

# The Way Out

## EVIDENCE

Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:11-15

A prisoner waiting on death row had a deep sense of guilt. During a robbery attempt, he had killed a man in the presence of the victim's two young children. The convict was bothered so much that he refused to allow his lawyer to appeal for a stay of execution. For him departing this life was an escape from his nagging conscience and the reproach of an angry society. He said, "It's my way out of this living hell."

How mistaken he was. Unless he had made his peace with God, death would open the door of something worse—an eternal hell! "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27, NIV).

According to Romans 3:23, we all have sinned. This calls for the death penalty in Romans 6:23, but Jesus has provided a way of escape. He came down and died in our place. Hence all those who believe this fact and believe in Him have been delivered from condemnation.

**"It's my way out of  
this living hell."**

Unlike the convict who was hoping to find release through his execution, we can find true freedom as Peter did. Judas did not see any sense of continuing to live in this world where all the other disciples were going to point accusing fingers at him. He was not sure what was going to get him.

Christ is the only way out of our sinful dilemma. It helps when a Christian waits for Christ's help when in a fix and learns to listen to Him speak. His voice is tender and soft. His gift is free for those who are ready to receive it.

We keep worrying whether there is anything we can do to inherit the kingdom of God and even so we worry about many worldly things. It is time to worry no more since we have a sure way out: our Lord Jesus Christ. He is faithful; let us count on Him.

## REACT

1. We know that "the wages of sin is death," but even before a person dies, how does sin destroy a person's life?

2. Describe a time when you worried about something only to discover that God was in control and only wanted your trust.

3. In our heads we know that "Christ is the only way out of our sinful dilemma," but what does this mean in our everyday experience? What must I do to experience this?

## **LOGOS**

Matt. 26:69-75; 27:1-9

Most of us show little awareness of God's majesty. We enter His presence in worship and prayer with less reverence than we would if we were meeting our national leader.

### **The Traitor (Matt. 27:3-5)**

Mark told the beautiful story of what Mary did for Jesus and what Judas did to Jesus in the same chapter (14). We are saddened when we think of Judas and his betrayal of Jesus. Some people have tried to explain why Judas betrayed Jesus and would seek to excuse him. Luke 22:3 and John 13:27 both say that the devil entered into Judas; thus it was sin that caused Judas to betray Jesus. Judas had not allowed Christ to change his life and heart. When the opportunity to betray Jesus came, Judas yielded to the temptation even after Christ had announced that He was the Christ they were looking for.

When Jesus spoke to His disciples about a traitor among them, apparently the disciples did not think it could be Judas (John 13:29). They all began to examine themselves, asking: Is it I? Thinking Jesus could exonerate him, Judas even asked, but Jesus said: So you say! Still Judas could not resist the power of Satan.

### **The Failure of Friends (Mark 14:27-31)**

Upon the completion of the memorial supper, Jesus began to tell His disciples what was going to happen. He, the Shepherd, would be smitten and the sheep would be scattered. Peter was foremost among the disciples in declaring his faithful intentions, but Jesus knew Peter as He knows us all. He is aware of our shortcomings and He is ever ready to forgive and strengthen us. All His disciples declared

**Most of us show  
little awareness of  
God's majesty.**

their willingness to follow Jesus even to death. It was not their love that failed them, but fear that seized them. They could not stand the cruel death of Jesus, hence they flew away. Later, after power had been bestowed unto them we see Peter, James, John, and the other disciples courageously standing for Jesus.

### **Peter's Denial of Jesus (Matt. 26:69-75)**

Peter did not wish to be recognized as one of the disciples of Jesus, and he thought by mingling carelessly with the people he could be taken for one of those who had brought Jesus to the hall. He remained in the outer court with the servants and soldiers. There a servant girl recognized him as a disciple of Jesus, but Peter denied it. Jesus' words were now coming true. It seems that Peter was determined

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to stand for Jesus, but his courage failed him three times. He denied Jesus even with an oath.

Even if his courage failed him, Peter's love for Jesus did not fail. After the third denial, the cock crowed. His conscience was smitten when his eyes met those of Jesus. His memory was aroused and, recalling the promise he had made just a few hours before, he burst into tears of true repentance. Later in Acts we see how courageous Peter became as he faced the Sanhedrin: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, NKJV).

## **Real Satisfaction (Titus 2:13, 14)**

Is this world all that is worth living for? When Barnabas came to Antioch where many had recently been converted, he was glad and urged them all to be faithful and true to the Lord with all their hearts (Acts 11:23, 24). This is what the Christian is to do: Cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart. There is power and sufficiency in Christ for all He would have us do and be. Some are allowed a long season of joy on first believing, but God knows our hearts and how soon we begin to depend on our joy instead of Christ. Yet not the joy but Christ is to be our object.

Judas could not find satisfaction in the 30 pieces of silver, so he tried to find satisfaction by returning them so Jesus could be released, but it was too late. He was not patient enough to wait for what God had in store for him so he hanged himself.

The Lord is not slow to do what He has promised; instead He is patient with us because He does not want anyone to be destroyed but all to turn away from their sins (2 Pet. 3:9). He warns us that anyone is deceived who is a hearer and not a doer of His word (James 1:22). "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8, NIV).

The devil followed Judas to the bitter end because Judas did not resist him. Ephesians 4:27 says we ought not to give a chance to the devil for when he gets a little chance in a Christian, he utilizes it maximally. The only place we can find real satisfaction is in Jesus Christ alone. Let us wait no more—He is ready to receive us.

## **REACT**

1. Why did Judas commit suicide?
2. Is there any probability of meeting Judas in heaven? Explain your answer.
3. What evidence do you see in your life that you are controlled by the Holy Spirit?
4. What does the verse Jesus quoted mean: "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered"? (Zech. 13:7, NIV).

## TESTIMONY

Rom. 6:22, 23; Titus 2:11-14

Anticipating what God has in store for us can put a smile in our hearts. Hope gives us poise and lets us live with inner strength because we know that one day we will be dramatically different from what we are now.

"There is no evidence of genuine repentance unless it works reformation."<sup>1</sup> This demonstrates a difference between Peter and Judas. "It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them."<sup>2</sup> "True repentance will lead a man to bear his guilt himself and acknowledge it without deception or hypocrisy."<sup>3</sup> It does not help to lead a hypocritical life.

Why do we claim to be Christians yet do what does not testify of our Christianity? "No man can tell how far he may go in sin when once he yields himself to the

**"There is no evidence of genuine repentance unless it works reformation."**

power of the great deceiver."<sup>4</sup> Judas did not realize that he was going deeper in sin when he was hanging himself to die. His aim was to run away from reality, which is not a viable method of solving such a problem.

"When trouble comes upon us, how often are we like Peter! We look upon the waves, instead of keeping our eyes fixed upon the Saviour. Our footsteps slide, and the proud waters go over our souls. Jesus did not bid Peter come to Him that he should perish; He does not call us to follow Him, and then forsake us."<sup>5</sup> Knowing that Christ knows each one of us by name gives us an intense assurance of salvation. This is a living hope we have as Christians.

## REACT

1. How can we guard ourselves against our weaknesses so we don't fall victim to them as did Judas (greed) and Peter (fear)?
2. How was Peter's denial of Christ different from Judas's betrayal of Jesus?
3. What can we learn about repentance from Peter's example in this story?
4. How would you define true repentance?
5. After studying Peter's denial, when do you find you are most tempted to downplay or even deny your Christian beliefs?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 59.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 103.

5. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 382.

# Be a True Disciple

## HOW-TO

Luke 14:27; 2 Cor. 5:17

Did you know that you could be a true disciple of Jesus and not a Judas anymore? Discipleship calls for one to be fully dedicated to one's master. It means being a follower; when one is a follower, he or she has to follow in the footsteps of the master.

Discipleship calls for:

**1. A response.** Jesus calls us to follow Him, His teachings, and His commands.

Disciples of Jesus are expected to love and serve others as Christ did when He lived among us. We respond by loving one another and calling others to be disciples too. By so doing, we are setting the example of true disciples.

You could be a true  
disciple of Jesus.

**2. Leaving all behind.** We ought to leave all that interests us and follow Him. The apostles left their families, homes, possessions, and many other things and followed Jesus.

**3. Taking a new life in Jesus.** The disciples took on a new life of real hardship involving preaching in far and unknown places where they were not sure of security. When you take a new life in Jesus, you allow Him to do all for you. You can be sure He will intervene in case of any problem along the way.

**4. Being committed.** Discipleship is a way of life that requires a personal response and commitment to Christ. When you are committed to Christ, the devil will not have a chance to tempt you so hard that you cannot stand or overcome. You cannot afford to betray Him in any given manner.

There are two principle commandments that Christ left with us to obey:

- Love the Lord your God with all your soul, your heart, and your mind.
- Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

He summarized the Ten Commandments given to Moses at Mount Sinai. Read Exodus 20:1-17. If we understand these commandments well and live with them in our hearts, we will not have to say we do not know Him in terms of what we think, speak, or do.

## REACT

1. What is the difference between loving God and serving God?
2. How do most people react to Jesus' terms of discipleship?
3. Who in your life has modeled being a follower of Jesus? What do you admire about that person?
4. What costs of following Jesus seem especially high to you now?

Thursday  
April 12

# The Danger of Denial

## OPINION

John 18:12-27; 2 Tim. 2:12

We usually think that denying Christ is an outright act like Peter's disavowal of Jesus in John 18. But Heber Reginald, an English writer, pointed out that we deny the Lord in more subtle ways: love of the world and forsaking the course of duty, which Christ has plainly pointed out to us.

We deny our Lord whenever we lend our praise, thoughts, silence, speech, actions, etc., to things we believe to be sinful.

We deny our Lord whenever we forsake others in affliction and refuse to give countenance, encouragement, and support to those who for God's sake are exposed to persecutions and slander.

Those of us who are baptized will consciously avoid any open, deliberate, and vocal denial of the Lord. But loving the world, failing to do as God directs, tolerating sin, and refusing to support our fellow brothers are subtle ways we do deny the One who has redeemed us.

It is not easy for one to turn his back on Christ if he keeps his eyes on Him. When Peter's eyes met with those of Jesus on the cross, he repented of his sins.

To openly deny the Lord is shameful and appalling but tolerating any sin forsakes our righteous calling. Let us determine to live faithfully for Jesus so that no one will ever be able to accuse us of turning our backs to Him.

**We deny the Lord in more subtle ways.**

Remember we are always in danger of denial.

Many Christians who do not live according to the Word of God shrink from active warfare for their Lord and are driven by ridicule to deny their faith. By associating with those whom they should avoid as Judas did, they put themselves in the place of temptation: to circumstances, which they could not have been guilty of.

The disciple of Christ who in our days disguises his faith through dread of suffering or reproach denies his Lord as truly as did Peter in the judgment hall.

Peter and Judas will forever be remembered for their betrayals—Judas only for that act, Peter for that act plus many other positive ones. Both disciples had desirable and undesirable character traits. The difference is that one responded to Jesus' power, the other did not; one had genuine repentance, the other did not.

# All Have Sinned; Some Are Sorry!

## EXPLORATION

Luke 22:61

## CONCLUDE

It is a given that we will betray our Lord. The question is What will we do when we come to our senses? How will we respond to His look of love? Will we be able to accept His forgiveness? Each of us has the potential to be a Peter or a Judas—to humble ourselves and let His strength replace our weakness or to struggle to live the Christian life ourselves and find ourselves overcome, unable to rise. As long as we are willing to look once more into His eyes, He will be able to draw us once more to His side.

## CONSIDER

- Journaling ways in which you resemble Peter and your response to Jesus' look of love and forgiveness.
- Making a "rooster reminder" as a means of remembering your personal denials of Christ. Create a paperweight or bookmark or some other object with a rooster motif and place it where you will see and/or use it regularly.
- Potting an aloe plant, whose leaves must be broken in order to shed its healing "lifeblood."
- Studying the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, focusing on the step involving making amends to those we have wronged. We are all addicts of sin and these 12 steps apply to each of us.
- Identifying with Jesus by deliberately forgiving someone who has wronged and betrayed you. If possible, do it in person; if not, then alone with God.
- Working with a partner to write and perform a skit in which Peter and Judas explain to each other what they did and why and debate their courses of action late Thursday night before Jesus' crucifixion.

## CONNECT

*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 414, 415, 417-421.

Lloyd C. Douglas, *The Big Fisherman*; Skip MacCarty, *Things We Don't Talk About*; Elizabeth O'Connor, *Call to Commitment*; Carolyn Rathbun, *Journey to Joy*.

# Grace under Pressure



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**“Job replied to the Lord: ‘I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted’ ” (Job 42:1, 2, NIV).**

# Milk, Rain, and Job's Testimony

## INTRODUCTION

Job 42:1, 2

*Stop and buy a gallon of milk.* The young man shook his head and said out loud, "God, is that You?" He didn't get a reply. But again he thought, *Buy a gallon of milk.*

"OK, God, in case that's You, I will buy the milk." It didn't seem too difficult a test of obedience. He could always use the milk. He stopped, purchased the gallon of milk, and began again.

As he passed Seventh Street, he felt the urge, *Turn down that street.* At the next intersection, he turned back and headed down Seventh. He drove several blocks, when suddenly he felt as if he should stop.

Again he sensed something, *Go and give the milk to the people in the house across the street.* It was dark, and it looked like the people were already asleep.

"Lord, this is insane. Those people are asleep. If I wake them up, they are going to be mad and I will look stupid." Again the feeling came that he should give them the milk. "OK, God, if this is You, I will go to the door and I will give them the milk. If You want me to look like a crazy person, OK."

He walked across the street and rang the bell. A man's voice yelled out, "Who is it? What do you want?"

As the door opened, the young man thrust out the gallon of milk, "Here, I brought this to you." The man took the milk and rushed down the hallway.

Coming back to the door, the man had tears streaming down his face. He began to speak, half-crying, "We were just praying. We had some big bills this month and we ran out of money. We didn't have any milk for our baby. I was just praying and asking God to show me how to get some milk." His wife

**"They are going to be mad  
and I will look stupid."**

in the kitchen yelled out, "I asked him to send an angel with some. Are you an angel?"

"I didn't think those things happened nowadays," you might say to yourself. God does still speak to people as He spoke to the man in our story and He did in Bible times too.

God asked Noah to build an ark! That may not sound too crazy, but considering rain had never fallen before, God's asking Noah to build an ark must have seemed crazy to him.

Job was in one of the worst situations in the Bible. He not only had no milk, he'd lost his family and all his belongings. But he still trusted God and like Noah and the couple in the story who prayed for milk, they knew that God can most certainly do all things.

## LOGOS

Gen. 6:22; Job 1

### Noah

Why did Noah triumph while others buckled under pressure? Was his faith something he had naturally or did he acquire it over time? Two characteristics seem to indicate why he was listed in the Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11.

First, Noah obeyed God explicitly and without question. Whatever God said, he carried out. Noah shared the same trait with other members in the Hall of Fame: (1) "Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him" (Gen. 21:4, NIV); (2) "David did as God commanded him" (1 Chron. 14:16, KJV).

The building of the ark was an act of obedience to the command of God. Noah took God at His word. He became a preacher of righteousness (1 Pet. 3:19, 20). His faith triumphed over all ridicule, insult, and lack of tangible evidence that His word would come to pass.

Second, despite evidence to the contrary, Noah refused to cave in. Imagine the pressure to give in to supposedly logical arguments in face of a seemingly illogical command from God:

- The God-is-merciful argument. Who would believe that a merciful God who created the world in love, who had drawn the waters off the dry land (Gen. 1:9), would carry out His threat to drown the world?

- The it's-impossible argument. The world had never seen rain (2:5). Even if there were a deluge, the earth could never be covered by water.

Noah found favor in the eyes of God. Probably, he did not find favor in the sight of humankind because he condemned the world by his preaching and his ark building. Every blow of his hammer and cut of his axe was a call to repentance. Noah had to endure ridicule for his credulity. His obedience was resolute.

### Job

The book of Job is the story of a man who lost everything and wrestled with the question, Why do the righteous suffer if God is loving and all powerful?

He went through three cycles of debates with his friends. Job 42 records the climax of the long and arduous struggle Job had had with himself, his wife, his friends, and his God. Here his self-justifying ended, and confession began. Ashamed of his conduct and foolishness, he repented of his feebleness and vileness (verse 6).

In Job's finite view, God's scheme seemed baffling and often beyond the reach of human comprehension. Nevertheless, His plan went on unhindered and will at last be seen as infinitely wise. It was God's prerogative to execute all His designs and overrule evil with good. Given that God was omnipotent and just in all His dealings, Job no longer demanded the reasons of his sufferings. He willingly submitted to God's plan.

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When grace is under pressure, submission to God's plan is the best course of action. We cannot always understand why, but we can always trust in the goodness and power of God. Because He is omniscient and omnipotent, His ways are at times incomprehensible (Isa. 55:8, 9). Without the divine perspective in chapters 1 and 2, Job's affliction is a mystery. As for us, when the curtains are finally drawn aside, we too shall have access to chapters 1 and 2 in our experiences. Until then we will do well to say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (Job 13:15, NIV).

## Some Comparisons

Noah was described as a "just" and "perfect" man (Gen. 6:9). The description of Job is similar to that of Noah: "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). Sometimes we say to ourselves, "It's not fair. Look at these giants of faith. They have advantages that I don't have. They are perfect, I am not! I can never make it!"

Perhaps a little word study would help. The word *perfect* is translated from the Hebrew word *tam*. With the exception of KJV and a couple of translations that translate the word as perfect, most modern translations prefer blameless or without blemish to perfect. *Tam* actually means upright, undefiled, morally and ethically pure.

Noah and Job were perfect, not with sinless perfection, but a perfection of uprightness, sincerity, and blamelessness. One may say they had perfect devotion to God. They were wholly committed to God, His sovereignty and His commands.

**Every blow of his hammer was a call to repentance.**

## REACT

1. Did Noah and Job have advantages over us? Explain your answer.
2. Why did Noah believe God and listen to what would seem like a crazy idea?
3. After all the hardships Job went through, why would he still trust God to lead him and provide for his needs?
4. What is the first thing you do when a significant challenge presents itself to you?
5. How does the presence or absence of daily devotional time affect your activities throughout the day?
6. How would you have reacted to Noah's assignment?
7. How would you characterize God's behavior in the stories of Noah and Job?

Explain your answer.

8. Faith was once defined as "believing what you know ain't so." How do Noah and Job refute such a statement?

9. God's commendation of Job was "He has said of Me what is right." What would you want your commendation from God to be?

10. God invites us to "reason" (Isa. 1:18) with Him about sins and other perplexing issues. To what degree can we reason with a God who knows all?

# When Doubt and Fear Blow You Apart

## TESTIMONY

Phil. 4:6, 7

Rent, tuition, jobs, friends, relationships, marriage, children, parents, grandparents. All these issues cause a great deal of grief and worry for many people. All are compounded by the fact that we cannot know the outcome of any and all decisions we make with complete certainty. "From the beginning it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God, that he might secure them to himself."<sup>1</sup>

"There are many who become restless when they cannot know the definite outcome of affairs. They cannot endure uncertainty, and in their impatience they refuse to wait to see the salvation of God. Apprehended evils drive them nearly distracted. They give way to their rebellious feelings, and run hither and thither in passionate grief, seeking intelligence concerning that which has not been revealed. If they would but trust in God, and watch unto prayer, they would find divine consolation."<sup>2</sup>

To indulge in worry, fear, and doubt is to bring separation from Christ. It is necessary for the Christian to bring every concern to God (Phil. 4:6, 7).

Throughout their many trials, both Job and Noah were challenged to renounce

**To indulge in worry is  
to bring separation  
from Christ.**

God and their relationship with Him. Both were strengthened by the foundation of prayer and communion with God. They knew anything that prevailed upon them while on this planet was powerless to touch their

eternal souls. Their lives are inspiring to us because of their tenacity to stand firm in their beliefs.

The stories of Noah and Job are recorded in Scripture because of their exemplary lives. The accounts of these men are a testimony to the merits of faith, the assurance of hope, and the promise that the grace of God will carry them through every conflict. They held the belief that their Counselor loved them and therefore they had nothing to fear. That same belief is also ours for the taking.

Like Job and Noah, we will be tested for depth of love and conviction toward our Savior. The forbearance of trials is the test of discipleship. Job demonstrated his discipleship through persistent prayer and faith despite his losses. God knew, however, that Job believed in the promise: "He that hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward to the day of Jesus Christ. Pray more fervently; believe more fully."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 738.

<sup>2</sup> *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 687.

<sup>3</sup> *Steps to Christ*, p. 64.

# Floods of Justice and Goodness

## EVIDENCE

Gen. 6:8, 9

It's said that one's true character is revealed only when he or she is alone. Job is utterly alone once his adversities fall upon him. He can't convince anyone (not even his wife or friends—and just barely himself) that God is just. Noah is alone among his generation in believing that God will save everyone who accepts His mercy and will destroy the violent wickedness filling the earth. In 120 years of preaching, the only people he can convince are his immediate family.

**It is God's grace that  
is under pressure.**

The story of Job rams home the point that God is completely in charge of everything. The prolonged response by God later in the book emphasizes His omnipotence. In the story of Noah, human depravity revealed in evil imagination (Gen. 6:5) puts grace to the test. In the book of Job, however, there is nothing that God can think that He cannot do (Job 42:2).<sup>1</sup> The force of Job 1:6 is that Satan is commanded to come before God to test Him.<sup>2</sup> God commands Satan to do his worst, he does it, and God responds by outdoing Satan with gracious, bountiful goodness.

We are not the only generation who have ever questioned the factual nature of the story of Noah. But the facts are not the point. The evidence presented is to show that God will do immense, impossible things, to bring about justice (the destruction of wickedness) and to show mercy (salvation).

It is God's grace that is under pressure in the stories of Job and Noah. In Job's, God puts His goodness into the balances with Satan's works on the other side of the scales, and God's grace far outweighs the worst that Satan can do. In the narrative of Noah, human beings put God's grace to the test. The worst wickedness imaginable is destroyed. The world is cleansed and saved for a fresh start. The animals are saved two-by-two and are no longer to be amalgamated. A rainbow stretches over both humanity and beast.

## REACT

1. Is there such a thing as love without justice? Explain your answer.
2. Is there such a thing as justice without mercy? Explain your answer.
3. How do you interpret the idea that God is completely in control of everything?
4. Is there anything that God is not in control of? Explain your answer.

1. <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/g/geneva/notes/Job/42.html>

2. <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/g/geneva/notes/Job/1.html>

Wednesday  
April 18

## What Is Keeping You From Staying Afloat?

### HOW-TO

Job 42:1-3

Imagine yourself underwater with a 40-pound weight tied around your neck. In our daily lives, we get overwhelmed with a magnitude of stuff that keeps us from living our lives to the fullest. We forget that God has given us tools that are stronger than we are to help us survive. These are faith and grace.

In today's society, the media barrage us with images and heroes that tell us to depend on ourselves for success. Someone else will probably let you down because they don't trust you or they want to get to the top. It is a rare moment when a

**Let God's grace  
heal your heart.**

magazine or television show encourages people to help each other. Instead of it being a usual event, it is something special when we see a human being in the news that has helped a neighbor.

Thank God for role models like Noah and Job. Today, when we feel the weight of stuff around our neck, such as family or work or depression or self-pity beginning to pull us overboard, we can do several things.

1. Confess that you don't have all the answers, and admit that God does (Job 42:2). Yes, it's difficult to admit that you don't know everything, but by faith, God will give you the strength to reach out to Him so He can pull you out of the water and save you from drowning.

2. Exercise your faith so you will have the strength to encourage others (19:2, 3). When you are feeling lonely and discouraged, you are unable to encourage others. Don't crush them with negative words of pity or blame that you may be using on yourself. Let God's grace heal your heart so that you are able to encourage someone else who may be hurting.

### REACT

1. What do you think about the following statement: "We must master difficulties or they will master us."

2. Why is it important to admit our needs and our failings?

3. God points to pride and arrogance as the things He hates most. Why?

4. How can we rely on faith if our feelings tell us otherwise?

5. When Jesus spoke of salvation, He often illustrated through healing what He meant. What does this tell us about what God does for us?

6. What does it mean to depend totally on God? How do we sometimes prevent God from helping us?

# Controlled or in Control?

## OPINION

Phil. 4:6, 7

The request in the bulletin raised a few smiles and eyebrows.

"Please turn off your mobile phones and pagers while in the sanctuary. You cannot be contacted, but God can, without accessories, 24 hours a day."

We live in a high-pressure world. Palmtops, mobile phones, filofaxes, diaries—all demand our attention. And things are getting worse. In the constant juggling act of managing work, family, and spirituality, many let one or more balls drop in despair. Demands seem to mount up, crowd in, and crush the struggling soul.

Does life have to be like this? Pushed and pulled, stretched and stressed, crowded and crushed? Are we controlled or in control?

"Why can't God just ask me to do one *big* thing for Him and then it's over? I could fit a big project into my calendar, but every Sabbath is a different story," complained a friend.

Was it so much easier for the patriarchs of old? Was theirs the quiet, meditative, pastoral life, with plenty of time to commune with God? Job, the wealthy agriculturist, managed an ever-expanding agricultural industry. Noah was a master builder. Did their interaction with God pivot around Job's sufferings and Noah's building enterprise? Divine intervention disrupted the smooth pattern of their lives, demanding their time and attention. What made them respond positively under pressure?

Under pressure some things explode. Grace is like that, God's wonderful glorious grace. The greater the pressure we are under, the greater God's grace becomes. Our heavenly Father takes those constraints of life in the palm of His hand and crushes them. Then He opens His hand and like a wonderful fireworks display, His grace showers us with His blessings and love, transforming darkness and despair into light and beauty.

After the mockery, the confinement in the ark, and the trials of looking after all the animals, Noah received the rainbow promise and was blessed by God.

When his suffering was ended, Job's life was richer and fuller. His experience with God was deeper and more real. God's grace is always sufficient for our needs.

Job and Noah did not have the on-off *big* task dreamed of by some. They daily accepted God's grace in every situation. When the pressure was on, they recognized God's voice. They were not alone. They trusted God's grace.

Palmtop, mobile phone, fax, pagers, diary, filofax, deadlines, and pressure—God's grace is bigger than all these. It puts us in control because it always meets our deepest needs.

**The greater the pressure  
we are under, the greater  
God's grace becomes.**

Friday  
April 20

## Grace — One Size Fits All

### EXPLORATION

Phil. 4:6, 7

### CONCLUDE

The Hebrew word *tam* has usually been interpreted as “perfect” when its actual meaning is “upright,” “undefiled,” “morally and ethically pure.” Understanding this point lessens feelings of inadequacy when comparing oneself to giants of faith in the Bible. The accounts of Noah and Job are a testimony to the merits of faith, the assurance of hope, and the promise that the grace of God will carry you through every conflict. It is encouraging to think of trials as tests of discipleship. Confessing that you don’t have all the answers, persistent prayer, and diligent exercise of your faith will keep you afloat during trials.

### CONSIDER

- Looking through your favorite song book to find a song that defines grace. Sing it and write a reaction. Repeat daily next week. After six days, summarize how your perspective on grace has changed.
- Finding a poem about grace. Copy or reproduce it on a card, poster, or similar medium that you can present to a friend.
- Taking time this week from your busy schedule to extend grace to someone who is struggling with discouragement, anger, or chronic pain.
- Visiting the Web site <[www.charismamag.com/](http://www.charismamag.com/)>. Type the word *grace* in the search field and read two or three of the articles that seem to relate most directly to this week’s writing in *CQ*.
- Going for a walk and looking for signs of hope in nature.
- Writing your faith experience in Hebrews 11 style, beginning with the words “By faith [YOUR NAME] . . .”
- Creating a montage of pictures clipped from magazines that help you better understand facets of grace.

### CONNECT

Luke 24:33-48; John 20:19-29.

*The Desire of Ages*, chap. 84.

Dwight K. Nelson, *Outrageous Grace*; Reinder Bruinsma, *Our Awesome God*.

# Wives as Advisers



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“ ‘Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ ” (Esther 4:14, NKJV).

## I Should Have Listened!

### INTRODUCTION

Gen. 2:18

In his best-selling book, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, John Gray tells us that women like to give men advice, and men don't like it—at all. Consider: "To offer a man unsolicited advice is to presume that he doesn't know what to do or that he can't do it on his own. Men are very touchy about this, because the issue of competence is so very important to them."\*

Recently our family was driving around, lost. And I do mean *driving around*. It was night. It was raining. I was driving. I had no idea where we were. True, I was trying to *act* as if I knew exactly where we were. Still, I knew it was coming. I steeled myself. Yet it still sliced through my competence like a hot knife through butter: "Why not just stop and ask for directions?" A sensible suggestion, right?

At one level, I understood my beloved: "We're truly enjoying driving around in the dark and in the rain in unfamiliar neighborhoods, but it would be nice to get back home sometime this week, so let's do whatever necessary to get there." That's what she was saying. Yet, what I *heard* was more like: "I know you're trying hard, but it's time to admit it—you need help! You can't do this on your own. So find someone who can help you!"

Gray is probably right. Though most men wouldn't sign up for a seminar titled, "Wives as Advisers," we would be happy to *offer* a seminar titled, "Don't Tell Me What to Do!" But honesty compels me to reconsider the issue.

Maybe it is time to  
prove Gray wrong.

A grief recovery group I led was comprised almost exclusively of men whose wives had recently died. The group reached a quick consensus one day: "The thing we miss most is getting a second opinion."

Sometimes on simple and sometimes on great decisions, what they missed most was their wives' advice!

Remember Nabal, the fool who died of sheer fright when David was marching toward him to settle the score? Should have listened to his wife.

In fact, too many situations in my own life are testimony to the fact that though I have no recollection of her saying it, it is nevertheless often true that I should have listened. "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Gen. 2:18, NIV). Partners not only work together; they also freely advise each other. Maybe it is time to prove Gray wrong, not by saying he is inaccurate, but by maturing enough to accept the advice of our closest partner. After all, when I followed her advice, we finally got home!

\*John Gray, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* (New York: HarperCollins Pub., 1992), p. 17.

# Better Than Begging or Subversion

## EVIDENCE

Esther 4:14

The husband-wife relationship is one of equals. To conceive it any other way is to misinterpret and misrepresent the biblical data. Husband and wife are advisers to each other. As such, they equally benefit from the advice the other gives. We are studying a lesson entitled "Wives as Advisers" because of the entrance of sin into this world. Because of sin we all need advice and advisers; the stakes are too high. Failing, under the realm of sin, can mean eternal death! Proper advice, if followed, can prevent eternal death.

Calling someone "adviser," defined as "one that advises, such a person or firm that offers official or professional advice to clients,"\* is a good title, a good name to give and to receive. The second dictionary definition talks about the relationship between an educator who advises and a student. Both relationships, client with employer and educator with student, imply a differential power structure. This is not the case with the husband-wife relationship. God created male and female as equals. Sin brought about inequality. The role of females as advisers, as presented in the Bible, needs to be studied keeping in mind that all metaphors are incomplete and express only partial aspects of reality.

**We all need advice  
and advisers; the  
stakes are too high.**

For instance, in the example of Esther under consideration, what was the biblical ideal as expressed in the Creation story and the New Testament? Did God envision Esther as an adviser to the king or as an equal who should have been consulted before making a decision? It is only because of sin that Esther ended up being an adviser when she should have been an equal partner. Let us consider one more example of this principle.

The story of Nabal and his wife Abigail (1 Samuel 25) presents a wise wife subverting the decision of a foolish husband. If she had taken the role as adviser, the story would have been radically different! Advisers do not force, subvert, or change the decisions of their advisees; only partners and equals have the capacity to do this.

It is here proposed that wives are equal to their husbands and need to be seen by their husbands and society as such. It is also equally necessary for wives to see themselves as equal partners and stake holders in their marriages. If one of these two perspectives is lacking, we end up with stories like Esther's and Abigail's, in which unwise husbands need to be begged (like Esther had to do), or subverted (like Abigail had to do) in order for wisdom and justice to prevail.

\*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, third ed. (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1996).

## Consecrated Copartnership

### LOGOS

Prov. 20:18

Proverbs 20:18 is not recommending war but is emphasizing the importance of consultation before taking action, especially in the graver issues of life. Because of our limited human knowledge, from the inception of an idea to the accomplishment of a dream, "it is wise to take counsel with others who may see a different aspect of the matter or who have had more experience in circumstances similar to the one under consideration."<sup>1</sup> This is particularly significant in relationships between husbands and wives, in which wives are called by God to function as advisers.

God's original plan was that wives (or women) would be the natural advisers, providing practical influence, in the formation of all aspects of life in home and community. When God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18, NIV), He established the role of wives as

**God's original plan for  
wives as coequal advisers  
has gone awry.**

consecrated copartners of husbands. In addition to other important roles and functions, they are also good counselors, whose loving advice strengthens men with whom they face all the

eventualities of life. God also fashioned woman out of the man's *rib*, a word whose Hebrew meaning "could also be interpreted as 'side-room,' which indicates that Eve was created from one whole side of Adam's nature."<sup>2</sup>

The importance of this consecrated copartnership is further underscored by the word *helper*. It is most frequently used in the Old Testament, in a concrete sense, to designate an assistant. It also means support or to corroborate through counsel and is originally derived from a word that generally describes military assistance. It means to rescue or save someone with the military skill and precision of a general, yet providing guidance borne out of a heart brimming with love for their success.

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God (Genesis 3), the divine plan was ruined. One of the first signs of this was that they both acted independently (verse 6), contrary to the instructions of God (2:17). Perhaps if they had consulted with each other, the divine plan would not have been ruined by their rebellion. Another sign of the ruined copartnership was that immediately after sin, Adam named Eve (3:20). The act of naming, among the ancient Hebrews, was a sign of their dominion and authority over the person or thing named. Prior to the presence of sin, Adam was given permission to name only the animals (2:19, 20) over whom they were both given dominion to rule by God (1:26). Ever since that time, God's original plan for wives and women to function as coequal advisers in human development and

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spiritual formation has gone awry.

Jesus Christ's life and death on the cross restored all things to the pre-sin, Edenic conditions for those who are in Christ. Joel 2:28 prophesied and Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:17, 18) confirmed that this would be fulfilled in the last days. The consecrated copartnership with wives and women in Christ has been restored for believers. Therefore, the plans of the church to make war against sin, through the proclamation of the gospel, must be prayerfully prepared by consultation between husbands and wives, men and women, under divine guidance for the success of God's mission before the glorious second coming of His Son.

## **REACT**

1. How do you respond when your advice is unheeded and unappreciated? How did Christ respond?
2. How can anyone be assured that the advice he or she gives is in harmony with God's will?
3. Why is the principle of biblical equality so important to contemporary marriage?
4. Why do you think that contemporary spousal advice giving is so fraught with difficulty?
5. How does the idea of consecrated copartnership fit in today's society? What can you do to make it a reality?
6. What challenges are there in both giving and receiving advice?
7. How would things have been different if Adam and Eve had not acted independently? Explain your answer.
8. Is equality and mutual respect just a dream? Explain your answer.
9. Many marriages fail because of a lack of communication. How should communication in a Christian marriage unit differ from marriages in which God is not the center of the union?
10. Is there ever a time when a husband or wife should not seek the advice of their mate? Explain your answer.
11. Why did God make humanity male and female? What are the behavioral aspects that make men and women complementary?
12. What special qualities do women bring to a marriage? Why do you think God gave them these qualities?
13. When a husband fails to listen to the counsel of his wife, what does this say about how much he values her?
14. Which is more important: the way in which a wife gives advice, or what advice she gives? Explain your answer.

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1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1015.

2. Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, p. 57.

## TESTIMONY

Gen. 2:18

“Brother M has made a mistake in his domestic life. He has not, in words expressed that affection for his wife that it was his duty to express. He has failed to cultivate true Christian courtesy and politeness. He has failed to be at all times as kind and considerate of her wishes and comfort as was his duty. Her not uniting in faith with him has led to much unhappiness for both. Brother M has not respected his

**“In many respects her judgment and discernment are better than his.”**

wife’s judgment and counsel as he should. In many respects her judgment and discernment are better than his. If consulted, she could, by her clearer perception

and keener discernment, help him essentially in his business matters, in dealing with his neighbors. He should not stand back upon his dignity, feeling that he understands it all himself. If he would be advised by his wife, and by his kindly actions would show a regard for her, and a desire to please her, he would be doing nothing less than his duty. If her advice conflicts with his duty to God and His claims upon him, then he can choose to differ, and in the most quiet manner possible give as his reason that he cannot sacrifice his faith or his principles. It would be for Brother M’s interest in temporal matters to have his wife’s judgment and counsel.”<sup>1</sup>

“The husband and father would gain much if he would make it a rule not to mar the happiness of his family by bringing his business troubles home to fret and worry over. He may need the counsel of his wife in difficult matters, and they may both obtain relief in their perplexities by unitedly seeking wisdom of God; but to keep the mind constantly strained upon business affairs will injure the health of both mind and body.”<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

1. What can come in the way of husbands seeking advice and how can these obstacles be overcome?
2. When should a husband seek his wife’s counsel?
3. In your own words, explain what is meant by “unitedly seeking wisdom of God.”
4. When does advice become nagging and complaint? What is the difference between the two?
5. When friends suggest it isn’t macho to listen to your wife, what’s an appropriate response?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 676, 677.

2. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 154.

# How to Advise a Husband

## HOW-TO

Eph. 4:29; Prov. 25:11

At Creation, God said it was not good for man to be alone, and He created woman to be “ ‘a helper comparable to him’ ” (Gen. 2:18, NKJV). In today’s world, many women struggle after the honeymoon with a very common tendency described by marriage and family counselors as an attempt to remake the husband into the man they had hoped to marry, a typically vain effort to attain their marital expectations by offering opinions and advice to their husbands.

Advisement and expressions of opinion are certainly expected in a partnership designed to be complementary, but ever since Adam followed Eve’s dietary advice the happy balance has been disrupted. What principles could Eve have used to avoid giving (and listening to) ill advice?

**1. Pray for God’s Spirit of wisdom concerning all things.** Learn to depend on His wisdom to guide the words you speak (James 1:5) and don’t depend on your own understanding (Prov. 3:5, 6). Let all your communications uplift, build up, and administer grace (Eph. 4:29).

**2. Continually surrender yourself to the indwelling of Christ (Gal. 2:20).** Jesus lived to glorify His Father and to be glorified in us (John 17:4, 10, 22). Before speaking, ask yourself if your words will reflect God’s character (to glorify) and if they will help to develop that character in your husband.

**3. Speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).** Be honest and sincere and let love be your motive. Examine your own motives by looking at the cross of Christ. “The contemplation of the love of God manifested in His Son will stir the heart and arouse the powers of the soul as nothing else can. . . . Nothing reaches so fully down to the deepest motives of conduct as a sense of the pardoning love of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

**Ever since Adam followed Eve’s dietary advice the happy balance has been disrupted.**

**4. Honor your husband by recognizing his God-assigned headship role and submit to him as unto the Lord (Eph. 5:21-33).** Your submission, not subservience, needs to be freely given, as loving assistance, just as husbands are called to offer sacrificial love to their wives. It will, in fact, enhance rather than weaken the marriage relationship.<sup>2</sup>

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 478, 493.

2. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), p.122.

# Equals, Partners, Advisers, and Counselors

## OPINION

Gen. 2:24; Eccles. 4:9-12; Gal. 3:28

Traditionally, Jewish males greet each day by praying, "Lord, thank you that I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman."<sup>1</sup> When Jesus came to adulthood, society devalued women. He overturned demeaning cultural practices and pointed humanity back to God's original intention. New Testament writers caught a glimpse of Jesus' standard for relationships and proclaimed that in Christ, all differences between people are transcended and we live in a community of equals (Gal. 3:28).

The transformed relationship between men and women extends to marriage. Equality is God's ideal for marriage. The Genesis Creation story reveals God's wisdom that it is not good to be alone. The first person needed an appropriate

**Marriage is a gift from  
God, not simply a  
cultural institution.**

being made in God's image (an *ezer*, "a strength," "a help"). The story further states that God's plan was that the two should be as one (Gen. 2:24). "Two are better than one. . . . If one falls down,

his friend can help him up. . . . Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves" (Eccles. 4:9, 10, 12, NIV). In God's plan, each partner is strengthened by the presence, support, and counsel of the other.

Marriage is a gift from God, not simply a cultural institution. The union of the couples' hearts and lives is mystical. God treats this relationship seriously throughout the Bible. He revealed His plans for the future sometimes to a wife, at other times to a husband. He then left the informed spouse to explain or advise the other on God's intentions (Judg. 13:6; Gen. 21:17). Thus, in a marital relationship, two *are* better than one when each respects and humbly utilizes the insight and experience of the other. They are then united and strengthened indeed.

Jesus taught the disciples that they needed to look to God's original plan for union to understand an appropriate marital relationship. The apostles followed suit by outlining radical prescriptions for the life of a married couple: mutual submission and respect based on love. One is strengthened by a spouse's counsel only if one hears and values the other.

What about spousal advisory roles in our lives? A research project recently published in the *Los Angeles Times* found that husbands who listened and took their wives' advice had healthier lives.<sup>2</sup> Gracious, sensitive, and caring advice can still be a strengthening and a blessing from God. May it be so in every Adventist home.

1. Life Application Bible, NRSV, Gal. 3:28, p. 2056.

2. Thomas H. Maugh II, "Study's Advice to Husbands: Accept Wife's Influence," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1998, p. A-1.

# Sound Advice

## EXPLORATION

Prov. 31:26

### CONCLUDE

Men and women were created to be uniquely different. Generally, women like to give advice; whereas men do not like to take it. In the original husband-wife relationship, both parties were equal but each had different roles to play. After sin, men became dominant and felt that their wives' counsel was unneeded and unwanted. To get back to God's original plan, husbands must thoughtfully listen to their wives' advice. And wives must give advice with tact and care. When wives submit to their husbands graciously and offer caring advice, and when husbands treat their wives as they would themselves and value their wisdom, the respect each has for the other will increase and the marriage will benefit overall.

### CONSIDER

- Noticing how animal couples work together. Study a certain species that helps each other. Offer to share what you've learned in a children's Sabbath School class or with a child you know.
- Reading to a child the children's classic, *Make Way for Ducklings*, by Robert McCloskey. Talk with the child about how the parent ducks worked together and how God made human parents to work together too.
- Reviewing Wednesday's how-to principles. Which of the four principles do you need to work on most in your life most? Pray about it.
- Exploring *Underwire*, an e-zine for women at <[www.underwire.msn.com](http://www.underwire.msn.com)>. As you browse through its pages, analyze how its content relates to the principles expressed in this week's CQ articles.
- Meditating on your parents' relationship. Did your mother offer advice? If so, of what sort and in what manner? How did your father react to this advice if it was offered? How would you like your marriage relationship to be—the same or different?
- Comparing and contrasting a world culture in which the wife is considered a valuable adviser with one in which she is not. In which culture do you think the wife is the happiest? the husband the wisest? Is the adviser-friendly culture a Christian one?

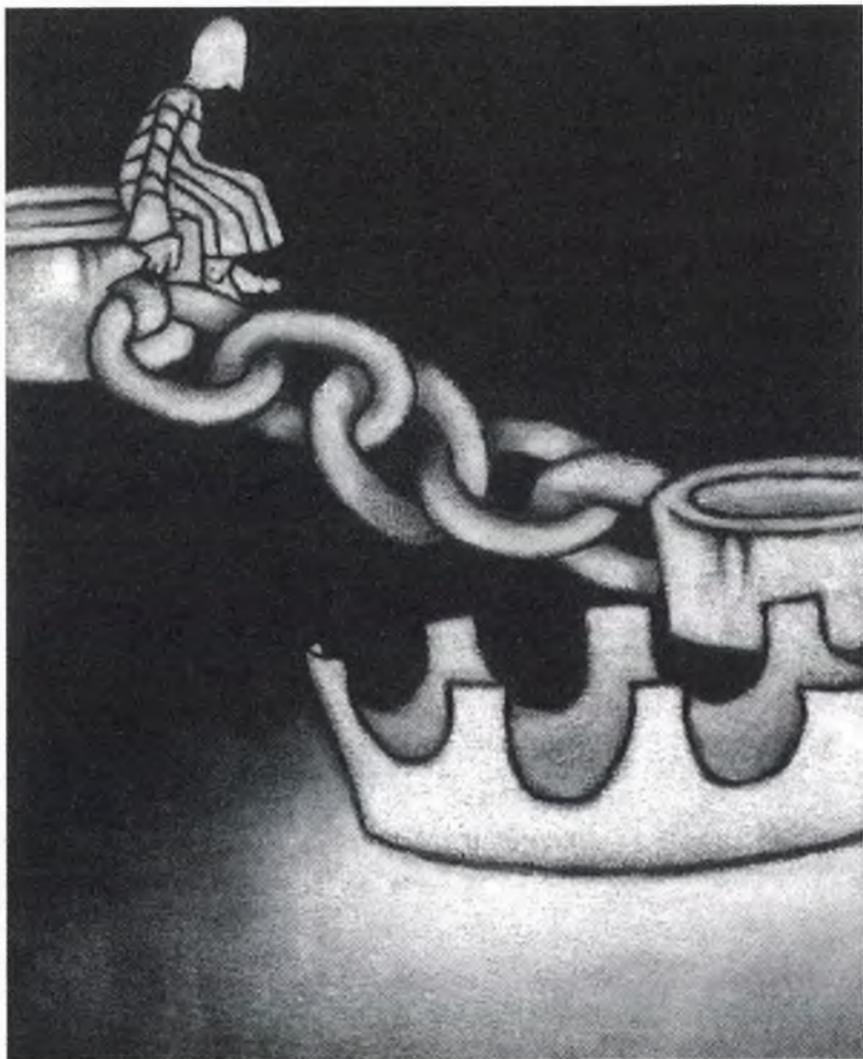
### CONNECT

Proverbs 27:15; 31:10-31; Matthew 27:19-24.

*The Adventist Home*, pp. 115, 116, 226, 227; *Child Guidance*, pp. 67, 68; *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 337.

Nancy VanPelt, *The Compleat Marriage*, pp. 32-44, 66, 67, 98-116; Dennis and Barbara Rainey, *Moments Together for Couples*, March 8, April 12, May 8, May 24-27, June 9, July 6.

# From Pit to Prison to Palace



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“ ‘How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?’ ” (Gen. 39:9, NIV).

# Plus, or Minus?

## INTRODUCTION

Gen. 30:22-25

The Genesis account of Joseph's birth tells us a great deal about both the boy and his parents.

First, the mother. Rachel is Jacob's beloved. He worked for 14 years to gain her! She is loved, but her husband now has three other wives. This is not an easy situation. And it gets worse: each of the three wives has given birth to children while she remains barren. She is burdened with shame, guilt, and jealousy. Then God intervenes. Just when she thinks He must be deaf and has forgotten her, He answers her prayers: He makes her fertile.

When she gives birth to her first child, a boy, she gives him a name with a double meaning. She calls him Minus from a Hebrew root which can signify an arithmetical subtraction. Her shame, guilt, and jealousy are taken away. Now she can live without this load on her heart. At the same time she calls him Plus,

**She is burdened with  
shame, guilt, and jealousy.**

expressed by the same name but understood as coming from another root indicating an addition. Strong in the liberating experience of the subtraction, she asks God for more, to add something else to her life: another son. Now she is sure that the God who has remembered her, who has answered her prayers, is able to do even more. Her faith is growing.

Second, the boy. Knowing about his life, we have no problem understanding that it was a fulfillment of his double name. He was Minus as an unpleasant boy, spoiled by his aging father, exciting his brothers' jealousy. This led him to the pit, deportation, and slavery. But he was Plus when his faithfulness caused him to be sent to prison, then on to the palace, where he eventually became the savior of his brothers, all their families, and the whole nation. What a destiny!

Finally, the father. We know about his past. He deprived his brother of his blessing and birthright. He betrayed his father and then fled, finding refuge with his Uncle Laban where he was betrayed and exploited. He had borne this situation for at least 14 if not 20 years. Now that his beloved wife, Rachel, has given birth to a son he can bear it no longer. He feels able to face Laban, his father, and his brother. Now that he has a son whom he considers his real firstborn, he makes the important decision that opens up his new life as Israel, prince of God, and no longer Jacob, the deceiver.

## The Lord Was With Him

### LOGOS

Genesis 30–50

We all know the extraordinary story of Joseph. But what is God's role in that story? To be more precise, what does the Bible say about the role God played in Joseph's life?

God is active in Joseph's conception and birth (Gen. 30:22). But this intervention concerns his mother, and Joseph is the result of what God did for her.

We may think that God sent the dreams mentioned in Genesis 37:5-11, thus informing Joseph about his future. But God is not mentioned in this chapter. We are told about the actions of Joseph, his father, and his brothers.

Genesis 39 reveals the most about God in the life of Joseph. In verses 1-6 God is called by His name, *YHVH*. It is said that He is with Joseph. Joseph's faithfulness in his service as a slave is a direct result of God's being with him (verse 2). His human master is aware that *YHVH* is with Joseph and attributes Joseph's success to the fact that God is with him (verse 4). *YHVH* blesses not only Joseph's master's family but also everything he owns. Certainly, Joseph is collaborating with God in His service, but the text does not say that Joseph merits God's presence by his side because of his good behavior. He behaves well because God is with him, because he benefits from God's blessing. This is an important illustration of God's grace, which always comes first in our lives. The blessings are not for our personal benefit alone but to be poured out on others.

When Joseph resists the temptation of his master's wife, he explains that he cannot sin against God in this way (39:9). But nothing is said about any special help from God in the moment of temptation.

Rather than being sentenced to death, Joseph is incarcerated. Is this another of God's miracles? Is it a result of his master's questioning the veracity of his wife's accusations against Joseph? The text leaves us with our questions.

Genesis 39:21-23 clearly states that the Lord was with Joseph in prison and attributes his success in all the responsibilities entrusted to him to that presence. This time we might be tempted to believe that this active presence is a reward for Joseph's faithfulness described in the previous episode. But the text remains silent about that link. It again insists on what resulted from the presence of God rather than why He was there. This helps us to understand that God is free. It is by grace that He favors us with His presence and pours out His blessings on us. We should never believe that we have merited it.

From here on, God is acknowledged in the words of Joseph: to Pharaoh's butler and baker who are also there in the prison, and, later, to Pharaoh himself (40:8; 41:16, 25, 28, 32). He expresses his conviction that God intervenes in human history and reveals His intervention through dreams. Joseph is able to understand these dreams. How? Once again the text is silent. We are led to suppose that the God who is with him also reveals these things to him. But the text clearly states

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that, of himself, Joseph has no qualification that would give him this understanding. Nevertheless, the king of Egypt recognizes that the spirit of God is working through Joseph (41:38, 39). For him, this fact is evidenced by the revelation God gave to Joseph concerning the interpretation of the king's dreams. For him, the spirit of God is the source of wisdom and so qualifies Joseph for the mission He entrusts to him.

Joseph sees in the birth of his two sons God-sent compensation for his sufferings and a means of making his life fruitful (verses 50-52).

When his brothers return the money they found in their sacks, he sees the leading of God—the God of their father, in his life, bringing him to this point (43:23). He is in a position to be able to do good to his brothers though they had wanted to kill him. He asks God to bless his brother Benjamin (verse 29).

But most important, he gives the spiritual conclusion of the whole story: God led in all the events in order to save the family of Israel (45:5, 7, 8, 9; 50:19, 20). Right from the outset, God seems to be absent in the lives of Joseph's brothers. But when

they get into trouble, they believe in a God of retribution (42:22, 28). When Benjamin has been accused of stealing the cup, Judah sees this as God's way of

**God led in all the events  
in order to save the  
family of Israel.**

showing them their guilt with respect to their brother, Joseph (44:16). But in the end they see themselves as God's servants (50:17). So they acknowledge God as the Master of their lives.

## **REACT**

1. If someone has wronged you, what could you do for him to signal that you are ready to forgive?

2. How can the forgiveness that you've received from God help you to reconcile with others?

3. Most of us would view imprisonment as a terrible misfortune. Yet Joseph remained cheerful and loyal to God in spite of his circumstances. What seemed like a curse turned out to be a huge blessing. Describe a personal experience that turned out to be a blessing in disguise. What benefits came as a result? What lessons did you learn from the experience?

4. Do you think it was God's plan for Joseph to suffer hardship? Why or why not? Why does God allow human suffering?

5. What enabled Joseph to resist temptation successfully? What lessons can we learn from Joseph to help us achieve victory over temptation in our own lives?

6. The story of Joseph is one of the best loved in the Bible. Describe how his experiences, his character, his choices, and God's involvement in his life have impacted your own Christian experience.

## Finding God in the Midst of Distress

### TESTIMONY

Gen. 37:23, 24

“Joseph regarded his being sold into Egypt as the greatest calamity that could have befallen him; but he saw the necessity of trusting in God as he had never done when protected by his father’s love.”<sup>1</sup>

“One day’s experience had been the turning point in Joseph’s life. Its terrible calamity had transformed him from a petted child to a man, thoughtful, courageous, and self-possessed.”<sup>2</sup> Joseph’s courage grows in adversity.

“How was [Joseph] enabled to make such a record of firmness of character, uprightness, and wisdom? It was the result of careful training in his early years. He had consulted duty rather than inclination; and the purity and simple trust of the boy bore fruit in the deeds of the man. The most brilliant talents are of no value unless they are improved; industrious habits and force of character must be gained by cultivation. A

**“The most brilliant talents  
are of no value unless  
they are improved.”**

high moral character and fine mental qualities are not the result of accident.”<sup>3</sup> His early upbringing was decisive in his personal development.

“He knew that he was a stranger in a strange land, separated from his father and his brethren, which often caused him sadness, but he firmly believed that God’s hand had overruled his course, to place him in an important position.”<sup>4</sup> God was with him in his struggle.

“In the prison, witnessing the results of oppression and tyranny and the effects of crime, he learned lessons of justice, sympathy, and mercy, that prepared him to exercise power with wisdom and compassion.”<sup>5</sup>

### REACT

1. Often people turn their backs on God under adversity. What factors make the difference in how people respond to adverse circumstances? What is (or has been) your response when faced with calamity?

2. Joseph’s prison experience taught him valuable lessons of justice, sympathy, wisdom, and compassion. Couldn’t he have learned these lessons just as effectively under less adverse circumstances? Explain your answer.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1096.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 214.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 321.

4. *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 134.

5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 218.

# Joseph in Egypt

## EVIDENCE

### Genesis 41

No state of antiquity has left more details of its history than ancient Egypt. But about Joseph, great vizier of Pharaoh, we have no trace yet, and about the period not many traces either. According to the Bible it was the period of the Hyksos (1730-1575 B.C.E.). Coming from Asia, this Semitic (as was Joseph) people invaded Egypt and adopted its customs. The story of Joseph, a foreign slave who became a top leader of the kingdom, is only plausible in this period. Some details of the Bible account fit in with what we know of this period:

Many remains of grain silos have been unearthed in Egypt.

**1. Potiphar.** When Joseph arrives in Egypt, he becomes the slave of Potiphar, "Pa.dy.pa.Ra" = "the one given by Ra," a typically Egyptian name. Genesis 39:1 insists that he was an Egyptian, a precision that would be totally superfluous in a usual historical setting, but necessary in a period dominated by non-Egyptians.

**2. Great vizier.** All the details of Genesis 41:41, 43, fit with this time. Horses and chariots were practically unknown in Egypt before the Hyksos invasion.

**3. Joseph's wife.** Genesis 41:45 gives the name of Joseph's wife, Asnat = "the one who belongs to Neit," a name that well fits this period.

**4. The famine.** Egypt knew many famines. An inscription, dated from the Greco-Roman period, was discovered in 1889 on the island of Sjel or Sehel, near Aswan. It could be the copy of an older text mentioning a very severe famine of seven years. The Bible reports that Joseph bought grain and stored it. Many remains of grain silos have been unearthed in Egypt.

**5. Embalming.** Jacob and Joseph were embalmed when they died (50:2, 3, 26). This practice was typical of Egypt and unknown in Palestine and Mesopotamia.

The Hyksos' power was banned forever by the Egyptian army led by Amosis (Exod. 1:8). If documents or monuments mentioned Joseph, they were probably destroyed by the new Egyptian power. In spite of this, the biblical account gives enough details on the customs of this period that we can trust the story it tells about Joseph.

## REACT

1. How aware are you that God is present in your life? Be specific.
2. To what extent, if any, was God the cause of Joseph's sufferings?
3. Who or what is responsible when some human stories do not have a happy ending as in Joseph's case?

## HOW-TO Genesis 42–45

Biblical forgiveness is more than just a form of politeness muttered under one's breath. It's a profound, intense, and difficult experience that disrupts the lives of the two people involved. The story of reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers is a gripping illustration of this.

First, the offense is real, the intention to harm is obvious, and the rupture is complete. In such a situation, reconciliation is almost impossible. The brothers wanted to kill Joseph, and moreover, in their hearts and in their minds, he was already dead.

**How can a relationship that's been shattered for at least 21 years be restored?**

The geographic distance and the passing of time have only helped to fade the memory of Rachel's son. How can a relationship that's been shattered for at least 21 years be restored?

Because he is wise and inspired by God, Joseph will find a way into his brothers' hearts and create conditions favorable for a forgiveness experience.

**1. Emotional destabilization.** It's seldom that when all is going well one is ready to question oneself. Joseph puts his brothers in an increasingly stressful crisis: unjust accusations, imprisonment, hostage, blackmail, etc.

**2. Awareness.** The crisis produces its fruits. In their distress, the brothers remember their past crime and their sense of guilt assails them: "They said to one another, 'Surely we are being punished because of our brother. . . . Now we must give an accounting for his blood'" (Gen. 42:21, 22, NIV).

**3. Attitude change.** These jealous, irresponsible, and evil brothers are now courageous, devoted, responsible, and ready to die. (See in particular Genesis 42:37; 43:9; 44:9, 33.)

**4. Confession.** Though the whole story is long and detailed, the confession is very brief. Judah makes himself the spokesman for his brothers: "'What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves'" (44:16, NIV). Even if it is declared by reason of a false accusation of theft, this confession refers to the crime committed against Joseph in the past. It is a type of model: no vain justification, just simple confession (it's useless to bring up all the details of the offense), recognition of the role of God in the conviction of sin, and acceptance of the possible consequences.

**5. Ties of forgiveness.** It isn't until the end of this complex process that Joseph forgives his brothers, during a very touching scene recounted in Genesis 45:4-15. Forgiveness appears as an act of restoration to the damaged relationship: Joseph reassures and consoles his brothers and takes it upon himself to watch over them and look after their well-being.

# Joseph's Story in the Book of Amos

## OPINION

Amos 5:1-3

Events that dramatically changed the course of the history of Israel occurred in the eighth century B.C., a time of prosperity and security for both Israel and Judah. In spite of the apparent abundance of wealth, the institutions called to guarantee the well-being of the people, as stipulated in the covenant, were exploitative and careless. Abuse of privilege was creeping into the political, socioeconomic, juridical, and religious spheres. Despite the spread of injustice, the elite felt they were secure, for they thought God was on their side and nothing could happen to them. Calamity could not overtake or confront them (Amos 9:10).

Under these circumstances, how could God shake His people's self-sufficiency, as they indulge in their lack of justice and righteousness and as they threaten the world order established by God for fairness to work in society?

The prophet Amos was sent to the children of Israel to call them back to the covenant characterized by justice and righteousness. In order to awaken the consciousness of his people, to show them the seriousness of their condition, Amos paints a clear picture of their funeral, which is as a result of Yahweh's judgment (5:1-3).

His discourse helps the people to remember their origin, calling, present condition, and future. He reminds them of such patriarchal names as Jacob, Israel, Isaac, and Joseph to help them recall their past, evaluate their present condition, and come back to a covenantal relationship with God.

In this setting, the name *Joseph* is used in the expression "house of Joseph" in reference to an eponymous ancestor who is linked to the main tribe (Ephraim) of the northern kingdom. The name *Joseph* is also used in the expression "the remnant of Joseph" (verse 15, NIV) and in

**How could God shake His  
people's self-sufficiency?**

the expression "the ruin of Joseph" (6:6, NIV). The latter describes the plight of the people. It echoes the story of Joseph narrated in Genesis 37: the brothers of Joseph stripped off his tunic and threw him into the pit, then they sat down and ate a meal.

Likewise, in light of the immediate context of Amos 6:4-6, the leaders are denounced for their involvement in luxuriant living accompanied by carelessness concerning the fate of the people. The expression "ruin of Joseph" pictures the distressful condition of the people who were bearing the heavy load of the oppression and exploitation carried on by the leadership and wealthy segment of the population. The name *Joseph* in the expression "remnant of Joseph" is also analogous with the experience of Joseph as a hero of faith. Joseph caught God's vision and plan of redemption and held on to it firmly, even in the midst of adverse circumstances, trials, or temptations.

# From Spoiled Brat to Diplomat

## EXPLORATION

Genesis 30–50

### CONCLUDE

Even before his birth, Joseph's family background shows God's intervention and His grace. With God's help, Joseph survived the transitions from spoiled brat, to trusted slave, to convicted criminal, and finally, to respected ruler. Joseph demonstrated that integrity pays, that we can trust God to bring good from evil. Trusting God ultimately enabled Joseph to forgive and be reconciled to his brothers. Centuries later, the prophet Amos alluded to Joseph as he reminded people of God's intentions for them. The details of Joseph's story given by the Bible fit in with historically known facts.

### CONSIDER

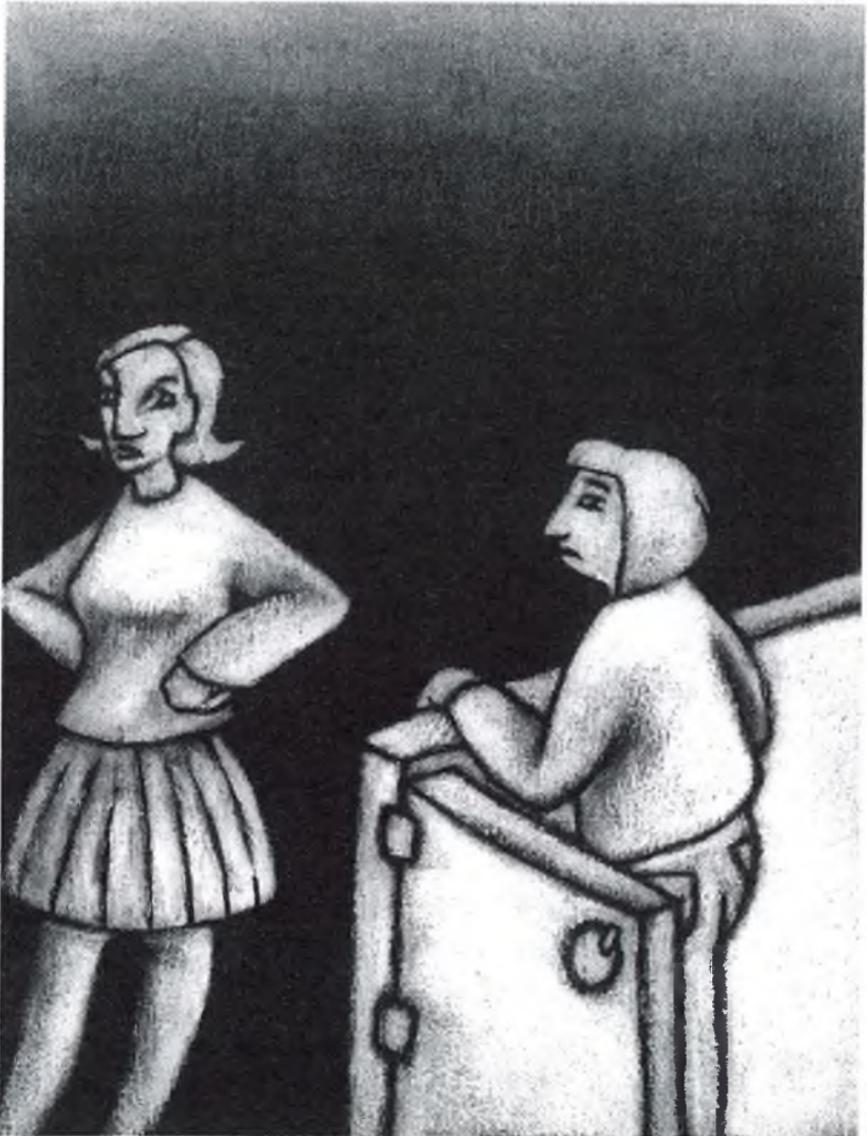
- Making an audio recording of what you think Joseph's thoughts may have sounded like at several different times in his life.
- Writing a recipe for a godly leader, based on the story of Joseph. What would the ingredients include and in what quantities? This concept may be developed into a poem.
- Plotting and labeling the major events of Joseph's life on a line graph that shows high and low points.
- Praying for someone you know who faces a circumstance like one in Joseph's life: betrayal by family, loneliness, false accusations, or even unexpected rise to power.
- Collaborating with a friend to create a series of short dialogues between Joseph and one or more of his brothers showing the stages of resentment, repentance, fear, and reconciliation.
- Exploring the Web site featuring Egyptian archaeology at <[www.akhet.co.uk](http://www.akhet.co.uk)>. Think about what it must have been like for Joseph to maintain his connection with God in the society of ancient Egypt.
- Finding at least five objects in your immediate surroundings—such as a cup (Gen. 44:17)—that can remind you of aspects of Joseph's story.

### CONNECT

*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 209-240; *Conflict and Courage*, pp. 74-79;  
*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 219, 220.

Carlyle B. Haynes, *God Sent a Man*.

# Siblings in Contention



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**"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for  
adversity" (Prov. 17:17, NKJV).**

## INTRODUCTION

Prov 17:17; 18:24

“I swear by the God of heaven that I will never again step into your house, not even into your yard,” said the older woman to the younger one. Apparently they were sisters. The argument began over a loan that the older sister had given her younger sister. The younger one kept telling her sister that she needed additional time to repay, apparently never began the payment, and the older one badly needed the money. The argument heated up, and finally the younger told her sister, “I can talk to my friend better than to my own sister.”

One day the mother of the two women came to visit the younger and apparently became sick and died. The custom in that area was that if an elderly person died at home, the funeral ceremony was conducted there. During the ceremony the older sister stayed by her sworn resolve never to step into the house. She just stood at the gate until the procession came out of the house and then joined the procession to the graveyard.

Genetic relationships are considered to be special relationships, closer than that of friends. However, Satan has used this special relationship to his advantage.

**“I swear by the God of heaven  
that I will never again step into  
your house.”**

A lot of times jealousy arises between brothers and sisters due to their closeness. “Why did God accept Abel’s offering and not mine?” said Cain. Satan accused God of

playing favoritism in accepting the sacrifice of Abel. He told Cain that God favored Abel. Did not Cain bring the best harvest he had? Favoritism is what Satan uses to encourage sibling rivalry. And because of sin, parents sometimes show favoritism.

Controversies among God’s children are just the side effect of a greater controversy between Satan and God. The first three and the last three chapters of the Bible tell of the conflict, which will be won by God. We are all His children, and all of us are siblings. Contention among God’s children is the way Satan draws us out of God’s house.

# Back to Nature

## EVIDENCE

Gen. 1:27

Ideally, the relationship in the family between brothers and sisters is joyful, filled with peace and happiness.

The Bible gives many examples of siblings in contention. Genesis 4 tells of the conflict between Cain and Abel. Genesis 37 tells of the contention between Joseph and his brothers.

Sometimes we ask ourselves, Why does this happen? The Bible tells us that after sin came to our world the harmonious relationship between God and humankind, between husband and wife, between parent and children, between brother and sister has been deeply affected.

Back at the beginning of this world, contention began in heaven. "There was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. . . . The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him" (Rev. 12:7, 9, NIV). This is why humanity, who was created in the image of God, was changed.

In our world today, widespread sibling contention results from pride, a quarrelsome spirit, and fights over inheritance. There is an Indonesian proverb: "Far smell like roses; close smell like dung."

In a world of unhappiness, is it really possible to have harmonious families? Are harmonious sibling relationships just a relic from the past, something you only read of in a book, or only in a dream?

According to the story of this planet, history is "His story" (God's story). When sin came into our world, in the perfect harmony of the universe a discordant note was suddenly sounded. For the

**Is it really possible to have harmonious families?**

good of the universe, sin must be banished entirely because sin causes separation from God. The story of the earth is a painfully long demonstration of what sin really is. All the universe is watching as the controversy has raged in this theater of rebellion.

The human race was lost, and death was the answer. The law of the universe has been broken. And only the death of the Son of God could repair it, could pay its demand. Only such a sacrifice would do.

"To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption."\*

\**Education*, pp. 15, 16.

Monday  
May 7

## The Family of God

### LOGOS

Gen. 1:27; Mark 3:33-35; Eph. 2:19

The Jews claim that they are the family of God, the Arabians, too, also the Americans, and then many denominations like the Moslems, the Buddhists, and the Hindus. Many Christians claim that they are the only family of God. How about the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Surely, we are the strongest one to claim that we are the family of God.

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27, NIV). Human beings came from God's

**Unity in diversity is a principle that pervades all of creation.**

own hands to become the family of God. The population of the earth is currently more than six billion, so we do not know

one another as we think we do. A lot of time we are like the "Levite" or the "Priest" in the parable of Jesus (Luke 18). We may say that someone is not of my family, not of my tribe, not speaking my tongue.

The dialog between Abraham and the angels of God imply the family relationship among all peoples: Abram "said, 'May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?' [The angel] answered, 'For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.'" (Gen. 18:32, NIV).

Paul explains to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, NIV). And to the Corinthians: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17, NIV). Whether we are African, American, Asian, or European, we are all members of the family of God. "The life of Christ established . . . a religion by which Jew and Gentile, free and bond, are linked in a common brotherhood, equal before God."\*

The Old and New Testaments represent the family of God in various forms of imagery:

- The flock (Ps. 23:1). The Lord is likened to a shepherd. He leads his one flock to the green pasture; He will lead the family of God to heaven.

- The human body (Rom. 12:4-6). Church members are one body with many functions, talents, and spiritual gifts to develop the kingdom of heaven on earth around the family of God. If one member of the family is hurt, all the members feel the same.

- The vine (John 15:5-9). Branches in the true vine are the believers who are brought into oneness with Jesus, the Vine. The connection of branches with one another and with the vine constitutes unity, but this does not mean uniformity in everything. Unity in diversity is a principle that pervades all of creation, for all things receive their usefulness and beauty from the same source. We are one in

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Jesus but of different nations and tongues.

● Husband and wife (Eph. 6:23-25). God's intention is to make husband and wife a symbol of the family of heaven on the earth. They represent the links of love. Those who desire to be in harmony with the heavenly agencies should be intensely earnest to do God's will. They must give no place to Satan and his angels.

● Bridegroom (Rev. 22:17). The parable of the 10 virgins waiting for the coming of the bridegroom provides another symbol of the church. The world is still waiting for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

All the word pictures above tell us about unity in Christ as a family around the world. Jesus prayed to His Father: "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. . . . So that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:10, 11, NIV).

We are also the family of God according to our faith. Paul explained, "Those who believe are children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7, NIV). Jesus Christ suggested the same principle: "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35, NIV). No matter your nationality or your country, if you do the will of God, you are a member of the family of God.

We are further the family of God according to the redemption. Through the prophet Zechariah, God described the family: "They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'" (Zech. 13:9, NIV). This promise was fulfilled in Christ two thousand years ago at Calvary. Those who accept Him as a Savior and a Redeemer are the family of God.

When Indonesia was under the colonization of Holland, the Dutch developed a policy called *diveda at impera*. This term described the goal of dividing the people of Indonesia into diverse groups to prevent unity. Satan has been practicing the same policy to separate us from Jesus. The world has too often become a battlefield for fighting with our brothers and sisters. Let us join hands together so we will defeat the worst enemy of humanity.

## **REACT**

1. With all the Bible evidence available that we are all equal members of God's family, why is there so much prejudice and discrimination, even among God's people? What can we do to encourage and promote unity within the human family? Among Adventist Christians?

2. What causes religious, racial, or ethnic groups to feel superior to others? What is the remedy for such negative attitudes? Be specific.

3. What are some of the techniques Satan uses to divide the family of God? How can we guard against his divisive tricks?

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\* *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 191.

Tuesday  
May 8

# Strife Between Esau and Jacob

## TESTIMONY

Gen. 27:41

There was a gulf between Esau and Jacob. Rivalry was the seed of the warfare. Esau bore malice to Jacob on account of the blessing Jacob had obtained through his dishonesty. Esau aimed to prevent Jacob and his descendants from having dominion. He intended to kill Jacob. But God's leading cannot be changed. Rebecca warned Jacob of his danger and advised him to run for safety. We must not presume on God's wisdom and resolution, but care must be taken to stay out of the way of evil.

In this story, we should not fail to observe that we must not follow even the best of men further than they act according to the law of God. We must not do evil that good may come. Even though God overruled in the lives of these people to fulfill

**We must not presume on God's  
wisdom and resolution.**

His purpose, yet we still see His judgment on them through the painful consequences to all

parties concerned. It was the peculiar privilege and advantage of Jacob to convey these spiritual blessings to all nations. Christ, the Savior of the world, was to be born in Jacob's family. Jacob was preferred against Esau, out of the good pleasure of Almighty God, who is certainly the best judge of what is fit and has an undoubted right to dispense His favors as He sees proper (Rom. 9:12-15).

The story of warfare between Isaac's sons is similar to the model of Adam's sons. In Cain's pride, unbelief, and impenitence, he denied the crime, as if he could conceal it from God. He tried to cover a deliberate murder with a deliberate lie. Cain and Abel represent two classes that will exist in the world until the end of time. Cain angrily reproached his brother, and attempted to draw him into controversy concerning God's dealing with them. In meekness, yet fearlessly and firmly, Abel defended the justice and goodness of God.

"Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." John 3:20. The brighter the heavenly light that is reflected from the character of God's faithful servants, the more clearly the sins of the ungodly are revealed, and the more determined will be their efforts to destroy those who disturb their peace." \*

## REACT

1. What is the root and the result of the strife between Esau and Jacob?
2. Why was Cain's offering rejected?

\* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 74.

# Contentment or Contention

## HOW-TO

1 Cor. 1:10

Genesis 1:27 reports that God created humankind male and female after His own image. As human beings, we cannot be separated from the rest of humanity. In the beginning of our history we see contentment.

"Contentment is a state of mind in which one's desires are confined to one's lot, whatever it may be (2 Cor. 9:8; 1 Tim. 6:6)."

Alas, Satan introduced the concept of sibling rivalry. Now the siblings are in contention. Contentment was turned into contention. Many corrupt the relationship with strife like envy (James 3:16), avarice (Heb. 13:5), ambition (Prov. 13:10), anxiety (Matt. 6:25, 34), and repining (1 Cor. 10:10). There are biblical instances of strife between:

- Abraham and Lot's herdsmen (Gen. 13:6, 7)
- Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:25)
- Isaac and Gerar (Gen. 25:20-22)
- Laban and Jacob (Gen. 31:36)
- Moses and the Israelites (Deut. 1:12)
- Jephthah and his half brothers (Judges 11:2)
- Jephthah and the Ephraimites (Judges 12:1-6)
- Israel and Judah, about David (2 Sam. 19:41-43)
- the disciples, over who could be the greatest
- members of the body of Christ in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-17)

Describing the contention in Corinth, Paul refers to "dissension" and "division," with special reference to the party spirit in Corinth. The English word *schism* derives from *schisma* (Greek): "*Schismata*, from the word *schizo*, 'to rend,' 'to split.'"<sup>2</sup>

**Satan introduced the  
concept of sibling rivalry.**

The apostle Paul mentions that the sensual, the covetous, the proud, and the ambitious alike see that the gospel opposes their favorite pursuits. But those who receive the gospel, and are enlightened by the Spirit of God, see more of God's wisdom and power in the doctrine of Christ crucified than in all His other works.

Those who live in malice, envy, and contention live in confusion and are liable to be provoked and hurried to any evil work. Those who are lifted up with such wisdom are near to the Christian love.

1. M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Albany: Books for the Ages, AGES software, version 2.0 © 1997), p. 1726.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 662.

**OPINION**

Rom. 8:28

There was a king in Africa who had a close friend with whom he grew up. The friend had a habit of looking at every situation that ever occurred in his life (positive or negative) and saying, "This is very good."

One day the king and his friend were out on a hunting expedition. The friend would load and prepare the guns for the king. The friend had apparently done something wrong in preparing the guns, for after taking the gun from his friend, the king fired it and his thumb was blown off. Examining the situation the friend remarked as usual, "This is very good," to which the king replied, "No, this is not good," and proceeded to send his friend to jail.

About a year later, the king was hunting in an area that he should have known

**They noticed that the king's thumb was missing.**

to stay clear of. Cannibals captured him and took him to their village. They tied his hands, stacked some wood, set up a stake, and bound him to it. As they came near to set fire to the wood, they noticed that the king's thumb was

missing. Being superstitious, they never ate anyone that was less than whole. So, untying the king, they sent him on his way.

As he returned home, he was reminded of the event that had taken his thumb and felt remorse for his treatment of his friend. He went immediately to the jail to speak with his friend. "You were right," he said, "it was good that my thumb was blown off." And he proceeded to tell the friend all that had just happened. "And I am sorry for sending you to jail for so long. It was bad for me to do this."

"No," his friend replied, "this is good."

"What do you mean, this is good? How could it be good that I sent my friend to jail for a year?"

"If I had not been in jail, I would have been with you."

Situations may not always seem pleasant while we are in them, but the promise of God is clear. If we love Him and live our lives according to His precept, events that seem bleak and hopeless will be turned by God for His glory and our benefit. Hold on. God is faithful! Because "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

**REACT**

1. Looking back on all the circumstances in your past, both good and bad, what is your gut-level reaction to Romans 8:28?
2. Is it possible to see good in every experience? Explain.

# The Importance of Roots

## EXPLORATION

Rom. 8:15-17

## CONCLUDE

Adopted children often seek out their biological parents. In a sense we are all spiritual orphans in whom God has placed a natural desire to know Him as our Father. Jesus became a son of humanity to restore us to the family of God. His death forever destroyed the notion of sibling rivalry when He reconciled us to Himself while we were yet sinners and called us His brothers and sisters. The unique thing about family is that, unlike a best friend or a boyfriend or a girlfriend whom you can break up with, you can't change your blood and whom that blood connects you to. Faith, in the same way, is the spiritual blood that binds us into one family in Christ.

## CONSIDER

- Creating a "global" family tree to show how the world is related. Use markers to draw a large tree with many branches on a piece of poster board. Cut out faces of people and paste them on the branches. Affix a picture of Christ at the center of the tree.
- Planting a tree or a rose bush in the yard or garden of your home or church to commemorate the life of someone who has passed away. Perhaps you know a family who recently lost a child or other loved one. Instead of sending flowers, why not send them a gift certificate from a nursery they can use toward the purchase of a tree or rose bush to plant in honor of the one they have lost.
- Designing a Web site that focuses on being a part of God's family. Download to your site the family tree you created in the first exercise and modify it by scanning the pictures of your church family members onto some of the branches.
- Writing a warm letter to an estranged family member or friend. Or make a family video and mail it to him or her as a way of healing wounds.
- Researching your own genealogy. Go as far back as you can. Make a genealogy chart to display how your past connects you to various groups of people today with whom you may have no immediate contact. Compare your chart to Jesus' own genealogy listed in Matthew 1.

## CONNECT

Genesis 25:9-34; 27; Matthew 5:21-24; Romans 12:10; Hebrews 13:1; 1 John 1:9-11.

*Sons and Daughters of God*, pp. 8, 14, 15; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 177-194.

"Miriam—Forgiven Sister" in *The Victors*.

# Children Showcased



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**“A child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right” (Prov. 20:11, NIV).**

# Welcome Touch

## INTRODUCTION

Mark 9:36, 37

At one time during his 27-year incarceration, Nelson Mandela (first president of the new democratic South Africa, 1994-1999) was visited by his daughter and her husband with their new baby son. The more specific purpose of their visit was for grandfather Mandela, in good African tradition, to choose a name for his new grandson. In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, he recalls, "To hold a newborn baby, so vulnerable and soft in rough hands, hands that for too long had held only picks and shovels, was a profound joy. I don't think a man was ever happier to hold a baby than I was that day."

What is it in children that makes us as adults think twice about our values in life? What is it that children bring to the lives of men and women bound and imprisoned by the chains and bars of a sin-sick world? What is it about children that made Jesus refer to them as illustrating the essences of the kingdom of heaven—an icon of greatness in a social system that seems only to think of power and position? Why did Mandela, the prisoner, yearn so much for an opportunity to touch a child? And why did he later put so much effort into the establishment and successful development of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund?

Maybe part the answer lies in the name that Mandela gave to his grandson that day in the prison visiting room. He called him Zaziwe, which means "Hope"!

In a world where inappropriate touch between adult and child has brought so much pain and dysfunction, we need to restore trust. Our hope is in Jesus who invited little children into His arms when other adults who aspired for greatness were driving them away. "He took a little child and had him stand among them.

Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me' " (Mark 9:36, 37, NIV).

**"To hold a newborn baby . . .  
was a profound joy."**

It may well be that this week God needs someone to touch the life of a child and assure them of their place in His kingdom. Maybe you will welcome such a child by your kind touch. It may even be that you are that child! Welcome!

LOGOS  
Prov. 22:6

In today's Christian working world we often see families separated because a parent is traveling 10 months out of a year. A friend of mine once said she felt her pastor father neglected her because he was more concerned about his work than his family—he was home just long enough so as not to be a stranger, but too long away to be a parent. One of the greatest ministries one can be a part of is establishing a household founded on the love of Christ. Building a God-centered family is a direction that will lead to Him.

The word *train*, in today's key text, conjures Pavlovian images. Perhaps the writer meant *instruct* a child or maybe *encourage* a child. Instruction isn't just when the child is young, but continues through life. The way we deal with day-to-day situations is adopted from our parents or guardians. It may not always be what we like. In a recent email a friend wrote, "It's amazing, you look at the one habit of your parents that you hate, and wouldn't you know it—that's the very habit you pick up." As Abraham lied about Sarah, Isaac lied about Rebecca; as Jacob tricked his father with a coat of goatskin, so his sons tricked him with Joseph's blood-soaked coat. Behavioral patterns aren't always hereditary; they are often learned from example.

As we look to Christ as an example for living our life on earth, His earthly parents provide us with a strong example for parenting. When they found Him in the temple discussing biblical truths, rather than complimenting her Son's talent, Mary brings to attention Jesus' responsibility: to inform them of His whereabouts. He may have been " 'about [His] Father's business' " (Luke 2:49, NKJV), but to Mary Jesus still needed to learn that working in God's business began with learning the basics of responsibility. He returned with them, and in the years to come He grew "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (verse 52, NKJV).

Mary and Joseph's concern for Jesus is evident. Mary didn't just send Joseph to bring the boy home; she went with him. The boy Jesus probably saw the partnership of parenting in their example. As much as Mary and Joseph educated Jesus about God, they demonstrated by their lives the importance of working together as a family.

Dedication, instruction, and encouragement may also come from nontraditional families. Unfolding in the story of Mordecai and Esther is the dedication of a cousin-guardian that builds the morality of a queen and the rescue of a nation. Naomi's mentoring helps Ruth adjust to widowhood, migration, and a second marriage. Ruth was probably a young lady when she was widowed; the only parent figure in her life was Naomi. Both Mordecai and Naomi knew the responsibility they were given and prayerfully approached the task.

It was the worst time of my life. Life just didn't seem all that good, and suicide seemed so inviting (Yes! Christians sometimes think that too!). But that night in my room, on the floor, I decided I would read the Bible. Not for a Pathfinder honor or a

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school project or because my mom said so—but because I wanted to know.

I figured Job suffered, so that would be a good book to begin with. Didn't make a bit of sense.

So I turned to Genesis and discovered the Bible is about people who messed up. It is about new beginnings, about rediscovery, about redemption. It is about the God who loves His children so much that He lets them choose. It is about the God who is open to arguments (Gen. 32:24-34). My mother used to say, "Fight with God, argue with Him, and He will take you past the silence." I used to laugh at her idea of relating to God in a crisis. But that night I knelt, as I'd seen my father do so many times, to argue and pray. The tears rolled down my face, and my heart gave way, and I cried out to God. I didn't hear the thunder roil, nor did I see lightning outside my window.

**The Bible is about  
people who messed up.**

No angel appeared, but talking to God as my parents had taught me allowed me the first night of peaceful sleep I had had in a long time. Peace led to understanding and understanding to stronger faith.

Like Joshua, there will be a day when our children will have to make that choice. Our example, our lives, our history—we are the legacy we give our children.

Children are a gift God gives us, an extension of our own lives, another chance to prove His love to all humankind, proof that He will not give up on us. We can let our children fall asleep (Acts 20:9) or bring them to Jesus (Luke 18:15-17). Our responsibility is to instruct them so that no matter where they go they will be true and others will know God (Dan. 3:26).

## **REACT**

1. How did David's life affect Absalom; Aaron's life affect his sons'; Gideon's life affect his children? Be specific.
2. Name three biblical children who exemplify the goodness of God-centered parenting. How did they exemplify this characteristic?
3. What are some of the traits you have inherited from your parents? Are these ones you would like to pass on to your children? Explain your answer.
4. Is it as important for children to encourage and motivate parents? What are some subtle and creative ways of doing this?
5. A primary concern of evangelism should be to introduce children and youth in our own families and churches to a loving, life-long relationship with God. Whose responsibility is it for the spiritual direction and nurture of children and youth within the church? Support your answer.
6. Compare Proverbs 22:6 with Deuteronomy 6. What are some biblical principles of child training?
7. From your own observations, what are the most effective and least effective methods for teaching children about God?
8. What (or who) had the greatest impact on your own faith development?

## TESTIMONY

1 Samuel 1; 2; Prov. 22:6

The first great influence in children's lives is undoubtedly the home. Commenting on this fact, Ellen White affirms: "Children may be trained for the service of sin or for the service of righteousness. The early education of youth shapes their characters both in their secular and in their religious life. Solomon says, 'Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.' . . . This embraces more than merely having a knowledge of books. . . . It comprehends the practice of temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love to God and to one another."<sup>1</sup>

"Not until parents themselves walk in the law of the Lord with perfect hearts will they be prepared to command their children after them."<sup>2</sup>

Talking about the example of Hannah and Eli and his sons, Ellen White says: "From Shiloh, Hannah quietly returned to her home at Ramah, leaving the child

**"There are few who realize how far-reaching is the influence of their words and acts."**

Samuel to be trained for service in the house of God, under the instruction of the high priest. From the earliest dawn of intellect she had

taught her son to love and reverence God and to regard himself as the Lord's."<sup>3</sup>

"There are few who realize how far-reaching is the influence of their words and acts. . . . Everyone is exerting an influence upon others, and will be held accountable for the result of that influence. Words and actions have a telling power, and the long hereafter will show the effect of our life here. The impression made by our words and deeds will surely react upon ourselves in blessing or in cursing."<sup>4</sup>

## REACT

1. It has been said that healthy families make for healthy churches. Explain why you agree or disagree.
2. How can your church do a better job of: (a) supporting parents and facilitating strong Christian families? (b) supporting and building up families in your community at large?
3. Reflecting on your own upbringing, what did you learn from your parents—through their words or actions—about God (or His existence) and His character?

1. *Child Guidance*, p. 297.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 143.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 572.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 556.

# Candles in the Wind

## EVIDENCE

Ps. 127:3

Jews traditionally light candles before sundown Friday to welcome the Sabbath in their homes. For them the Sabbath is the center of the week, the day that gives every other day its meaning. They light two candles to represent the two forms of the Sabbath commandment: "Remember" (Exod. 20:8, KJV) and "Observe" (Deut. 5:12, KJV). But over the years many Jews have made a habit of lighting an additional candle for each child in the family. After doing this they bless their children, who are considered a reward from God (Ps. 127:3). They're a reward that, like a candle, lights a home.

Many children never learn about a loving God. Some never hear His name. Others are taught that He is harsh and unloving. Irish author Frank McCourt describes his childhood: "We didn't hear much about a loving God. . . . Our God had a stern face. . . . He had His priests preaching hellfire and damnation from the pulpit and scaring us to death. . . . We were told shut up, drink your tea, stop asking questions."<sup>1</sup>

One of Garrison Keillor's fictional Minnesotan characters complains of a similar upbringing: "You have taught me to worship a god who is like you, who shares your thinking exactly, who is going to slap me one if I don't straighten out fast."<sup>2</sup>

It's all a long way from the Jesus who loved children and pointed to their simplicity and trust as essential for becoming part of the kingdom of God. The harshest words He ever spoke were directed at those who hurt children: "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matt. 18:6, NIV).

**Children should be raised  
in Sabbath-candle hope.**

When we see children abused, molested, and discarded, it's easy to understand Jesus' words. Children should be raised in God's love, in Sabbath-candle hope. The Bible consistently repeats the importance of sharing God's ways with children. "Teach them to your children," (Deut. 11:19, NIV) and "Impress them on your children" (6:7, NIV). The *Midrash* says children should be taught God's teachings as soon as they begin to speak. Not doing this is like burying the child.<sup>3</sup>

To mistreat a child is to extinguish the flame on a Sabbath candle. We need to show children God's love. And we need to learn from their genuine faith, their openness, and their willingness to learn.

1. Frank McCourt, "When You Think of God What Do You See?" *Life* magazine, December 1998, p. 63.

2. Garrison Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 254.

3. Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *Judaism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), p. 140.

## HOW-TO

John 5:19, 20

Each weekday when I come home from work, I walk up the stairs, take off my coat, and sneak into my daughter's room to watch her sleeping. On the weekend, I take her hands in mine, and we take small unsteady steps together. At those moments I feel life, I feel love, and I feel God. I am a father.

More than a mere word, *fatherhood* is a feeling—a feeling based on a lifetime of experiences of fatherhood, from watching our fathers, mothers, teachers, and friends, and seeing the image of God portrayed in the Bible. Fatherhood does not describe a father; rather it reflects the feelings that a father gives his child.

Jesus said, “‘Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 18:3, NIV). He alluded to those special qualities of children that parents are responsible for creating. In telling us to become like children, Jesus was also telling us to become good guardians by treasuring these special attributes in our children and the children of the world.

Since fatherhood is about a relationship rather than a person, enjoying fatherhood does not depend on being a father or having a child. The fatherhood God has inspired us to emulate is about nurturing and being a mentor and role model.

Parents aside, one of the most memorable mentors I had as a child was a junior high school teacher who each week took time after school to coach my basketball

**More than a mere word,  
*fatherhood* is a feeling.**

team, drive us to the local competition, and encourage our trust and self-respect. We each need mentors just as much today.

You can help someone develop the childlike qualities Jesus speaks of in Matthew through your example as a parent, teacher, colleague, neighbor, friend, or spouse. In the same way, God invites us to trust in Him and follow His lead!

## REACT

1. What thoughts and feelings does the word *fatherhood* bring to mind for you?
2. How does this impact on your relationship with your “heavenly Father”?
3. What qualities did Jesus see in children that we should emulate and be guardians of?
4. What are the most enjoyable aspects of your relationship with God that you would like to share with your “child”?
5. Did somebody play an important role in your spiritual life while you were a child? What do you appreciate about him or her?
6. What would Jesus specifically do to fight against Satanic strategies, like dangerous video games, cartoons, movies, etc.?

# The Future of Our Society and Church

## OPINION

Matt. 19:13-15

As members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we have the responsibility of guarding the children and teenagers who attend our churches. We have the task of helping them in their Christian life and of creating and working in all those activities that will help them to be nearer to God every day.

"There has been altogether too little attention paid to our children and

youth, and they have failed to develop as they should in the Christian life, because the church members have not looked upon them with tenderness and sympathy, desiring that they might be advanced in the divine life."<sup>1</sup>

"There ought to be those whose hearts are touched by the pitiable situation in which our youth are placed, and who realize that Satan is working by every conceivable device to draw them into his net."<sup>2</sup>

Satan is working constantly to keep the mind of children away from God. He creates cartoons, video games, toys, music, and many other things so their minds will be filled with ideas and concepts that do not agree with God's will for us. Satan knows he can impress their minds. It is for that reason that we need to alert our children to the dangers that exist and present to them the great plan that God has for us.

"God requires that the church arouse from her lethargy and see what is the manner of service demanded of her at this time of peril. The lambs of the flock must be fed. The Lord of heaven is looking on to see who is doing the work He would have done for the children and youth. The eyes of our brethren and sisters should be anointed with heavenly eye salve, that they may discern the necessities of the time."<sup>3</sup>

"The future of society will be determined by the youth of today. Satan is making earnest, persevering efforts to corrupt the mind and debase the character of every youth; and shall we who have more experience stand as mere spectators, and see him accomplish his purpose without hindrance? Let us stand at our post as minutemen, to work for these youth, and through the help of God to hold them back from the pit of destruction."<sup>4</sup>

**We need to alert our children  
to the dangers that exist.**

1. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p.41.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

## Little Keys to the Kingdom

### EXPLORATION

Ps. 127:3

### CONCLUDE

Children First. A slogan often heard from the lips of politicians and educators. For Christians however, it is more than just a slogan. It is the way to live. Jesus conferred on children great importance when He presented them as models for the kingdom. Knowing also that they are the future, we need to nurture and train them both by precepts and example. This responsibility rests on parents and nonparents alike. Children are God's gift to us. To prepare a generation to love and serve the Creator would be our gift to Him.

### CONSIDER

- Listening to the song, "What About the Children" by Yolanda Adams from her album *More Than a Melody*.
- Reading or telling a story to a child or group of children. Opportunities abound in Sabbath School, Junior AY, or Vacation Bible School.
- Offering to babysit. Single parents especially need a break. Learn a few knock-knock jokes, or be prepared to draw, sing, or just clown around to entertain the children. You might be surprised how good you feel.
- Signing up to be a Big Brother or Big Sister or contact other agencies that offer opportunities for mentoring.
- Tutoring a student, especially one who may be having difficulties. If you don't know any personally, check your local library for tutoring opportunities.
- Using computer graphics, calligraphy, or some other special lettering to write a child's name. Make a bookmark out of it or frame it and present it as a gift.
- Taking a pet to a gathering of children, presenting some facts about it and then allowing the children to pet it (if appropriate) and ask questions. Young children especially love animals.

### CONNECT

Luke 9:47, 48; Isa. 44:1-5; 49:25; 54:13; Ps. 128:3.

*The Adventist Home*, chap. 23; *Child Guidance*, chap. 8, pp. 63-69, 72.

# The Facilitators



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“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace” (Isa. 52:7, NIV).

## INTRODUCTION

John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 14-17

The story is told of a famous monastery that had fallen onto hard times. Once known as a place of hospitality and servanthood, it was on the verge of oblivion. Some of the elderly monks dreamed of the old days, when the buildings were filled with life and many monks joined the monastery. Now there was only an abbot and a handful of monks, who inhabited the cloisters and gave praise to God with heavy hearts.

Nearby, an old rabbi had built a small cabin. Once in a while he left the big, noisy town behind and traveled to that peaceful place to fast and pray. Whenever he was

**He explained that they weren't allowed to repeat orally what he was about to tell them.**

there, the monks felt touched by his praying presence. One day the abbot decided to visit the rabbi. Standing in the doorway, they embraced

each other and the rabbi gave his guest a warm welcome. They sat down at a table on which an opened Torah lay. They had just sat down when the abbot covered his face with his hands and began to cry like an abandoned child.

"You and your brothers," the rabbi began, "you serve the Lord with a heavy heart. I will share with you a thought, which you are only allowed to repeat once. After that no one is allowed to pronounce it again." The rabbi was silent for a moment. Then he continued saying: "Listen carefully, 'The Messiah is among you!'"

The next morning the abbot called the monks together and told them about his meeting with the rabbi. He explained that they weren't allowed to repeat orally what he was about to tell them. Looking at each one, he said, "The advice is: In one of us is the Messiah!"

The monks reacted with dismay: Who is it? Brother John or Father Mark? Or even Brother Thomas? The monks began to treat each other totally differently—more friendly, sincere, respectful. They lived now together like men who had found something precious. The occasional visitors were affected and appealed to by the new spirit that went out from the monks. Word spread and it wasn't long before people began visiting from near and far, and soon the cloister was full of life and love again.

Facilitators should be forerunners. Often, especially among Christians, we have a misunderstanding of our mission. In reaching out to people, we often forget that everything begins in our homes and churches. If we aren't able to practice Christian virtues among Christians and experience its positive influence, all our outreach will be worthless. Our outreach is the consequence of a practiced Christian lifestyle that will have an enormous, life-changing influence for and in the world.

"We can't show Christ our love, because we can't see Him. But daily we meet our neighbors—we can do for them what we would like to do for Christ" (Mother Theresa).

# Through the Roof

## EVIDENCE

Mark 2:3-12

"Shout it from the rooftops!" was more than just a nifty phrase in first-century Palestine. Roofs were an important extension of the house, and of course the room with the best air conditioning. People worked on their roofs and camped out there during hot nights. For greeting neighbors and watching a village's comings and goings, there was no better spot than a housetop.

There are perhaps no characters in the Bible more determined than the four friends of the paralytic who lowered him from the ceiling to meet Jesus. With the house Jesus was meeting in packed and overflowing with admirers and spectators, they had no way to go but up—and down again.

In such a boisterous crowd, perhaps no one noticed them climbing the outside stairway of that Capernaum house, hoisting their paralyzed friend with them. Everyone inside the house would notice them soon enough, their arrival officially announced by scattered showers of dirt and broken clay.

Made of clay packed over branches supported by beams, roofs kept out the elements but were still easy to paw through. As the men lowered their friend to Jesus, the Master marveled at their faith. What a sight it must have been to Jesus, One who came down from above to reach these people, to see such faith given in return.

**They had no way to go but up—and down again.**

Another paralyzed man sought healing in the best way he knew how—the pool of Bethesda near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. Archaeologists believe the pool may have had a shrine to Asclepias or another pagan god believed to heal, so people came to the site in hopes of health.

In this superstitious atmosphere, a myth developed that when the waters stirred (because of changes in water pressure), the first person in the water would be healed. When Jesus found the paralytic lying there helpless after 38 years of paralysis, He didn't condemn him for putting his hopes in superstition. Rather, Jesus saw the man's desire and asked, "Do you want to get well?"

The man lamented that he had no one to help him reach the pool. *Would this man help me?* he doubtless wondered. To Jesus this was answer enough. "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk," Jesus instructed him. The man was cured instantly, and he left that day a transformed man. Putting his faith in Jesus was enough.

## REACT

What extreme measures do people go to today to find peace and healing? How can we bring them to Christ?

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*Tompaul Wheeler, Berrien Springs, Michigan*

Monday  
May 21

## If Not You, Then Who?

### LOGOS

Eccles. 4:10; Matt. 9:37; 10:7, 8; 11:4; 2 Cor. 1:11

Tonight I listened to a story of a fellow student here at Andrews University. I was shocked, yet at the same time blessed. Patty's story told of the heartache she endured through childhood into young adulthood. She watched from the window of kindergarten as her mother was taken away in handcuffs by the police. From there on she was subjected to the abuse of her father's girlfriends and wives. She moved back and forth from her father's house to her aunt's house. What more could she endure before she hit bottom? What more could any of us endure? For Patty, the answer was "nothing."

Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10 says, "Two are better than one. . . . If one falls down, his friend can help him up" (NIV). Patty had no earthly friend to help her up, but she had a heavenly Friend. Strangely, Patty heard about the Adventist message through her stepmother's friend. She began attending a local Seventh-day Adventist Church, quickly embraced the message, and developed a personal relationship with Christ.

With all the award-winning ingredients of a Hollywood blockbuster movie of good overcoming evil, Patty's story does not stop at the climactic conclusion. Like the leper Jesus healed (Mark 1:40-45)—who when told not to tell anyone what Jesus had done for him but immediately told everyone he saw—Patty could not contain her joy. From the depths of despair Christ renewed her and made her clean again. She began telling her family one by one about what Christ had done for her.

First, she convinced her cousin to come to church, then her brothers. Today, they are Adventists because of Patty's witness to them. Satan threw a lot at her,

**I was shocked, yet at the  
same time blessed.**

but she has a power stronger than Satan. She has Jesus Christ and she witnesses for Him. Patty was not and is not afraid to share her faith in the face of adversity. As soon as you meet her, you know she is a child of God. She is bubbly, cheerful, always smiling, and is constantly singing His praises. She cannot contain her happiness in Christ. Just being in her presence makes you desire what she has.

Patty is a facilitator for Christ. Does Satan try to thwart her? Yes, he does. Satan throws everything at us that he can. He drags up the past and clouds the future. But there is a power much stronger than he, who ultimately wins out. Patty clings to the promise in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (NIV).

Like Patty, you can come to the feet of Christ loaded with baggage of all sorts. He will take that baggage from you and claim you for His own. He renews your spirit and recreates you in His image.

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In Matthew 9:37, 38, Jesus uses the illustration of the harvest as a call to action. When the harvest is ready, it takes many skilled laborers to reap the harvest. But if there are not enough laborers, much of the harvest is lost.

Jesus told His disciples to pray over the harvest, not only because the harvest is ripe, but to be sure that they themselves be ready and able to reap the harvest. The disciples needed “to bring to their own hearts conviction of their personal responsibility”<sup>2</sup> to meet the needs of the people.

This is a prayer to pray each day that our hearts are in complete cooperation with Jesus Himself. “Through sincere prayer we are brought into connection with the mind of the Infinite.”<sup>3</sup> As you spend time with God in prayer, He will fortify you with a renewed spirit to handle what Satan throws against you.

Regardless of who you are and what you bring to His feet, Jesus will fill you with His Spirit and facilitate His mission through you. Jesus calls you to commune with Him daily. He calls you to work side by side with Him in reaping the harvest. Will you join Him today?

## **REACT**

1. Name at least two opportunities you missed last week to share Jesus with someone.

2. In your own experience, what was the most effective witness that helped you to accept Christ as your Lord and Savior?

3. As Christians, we are Christ’s ears, mouths, and hands to the world around us. How can we communicate the love and acceptance of Jesus to: (a) those who have never heard? (b) fellow Christians?

4. Which is more important: meeting the physical and material needs of others or addressing their spiritual needs? Why?

5. It can be easy for new and growing Christians to look at long-time Christians and believe that they seldom struggle spiritually. How can talking about our relationship with God and sharing our spiritual struggles and blessings help others in their faith journey?

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1. Patty is a pseudonym.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 372.

3. *Steps to Christ* (Youth Edition), p. 99.

## The Testimony of a Witness

### TESTIMONY

Isa. 43:10; Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 1:7

Today Christ's commission has no less validity for us than it did for the disciples. "To us also the commission is given. We are bidden to go forth as Christ's messengers, to teach, instruct, and persuade men and women, to urge upon their attention the word of life. And to us also the assurance of Christ's abiding presence is given."<sup>1</sup>

Many times our notion of evangelism is that it must have its genesis in a church initiative (e.g., crusade, church Bible seminar, worship program, etc.). Actually,

**Evangelism is more than  
just handing out tracts.**

many of Jesus' best witnessing encounters were one-to-one. One noticeable characteristic about Jesus is that He did not remain in

His "comfort zone." He was visible in His community. He was willing to witness to people who were ostracized by society because of physical deformity or racial prejudice (Matt. 8:1-4; Mark 5:1-20; John 4). Throughout the gospel are narratives of those whose lives were transformed as a result of their encounter with Jesus. These people responded to Christ's activity in their lives by testifying to others what God had done.

Evangelism is more than just handing out tracts; it is sharing one's living experience with Christ. It is revealed in our actions toward others. Acts of kindness are one of the best ways to testify of God's love in our lives. In college it could mean helping someone with their homework, visiting a sick dorm resident, or volunteering to help with dorm duties. Further, it could mean calling someone who was absent from class to ascertain his or her well-being, or volunteering to babysit the children of a single parent who is trying to work and further his or her education. Good grades are also a testimony to others. This will create opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus.

This does not mean that everyone will appreciate your effort or will accept the gospel invitation. Yet it testifies to humanity about the love of God. Love is the most effective witness. For many people, Christ's ambassadors are the first witness they have of Jesus.

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Evangelism*, p. 15.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

# Four Friends

## HOW-TO

Mark 2:5

They faced the impossible. The house was packed—standing room only. Crowds of people surrounded the small house, making it impossible for anyone to reach the door, much less four men carrying a cripple. But that didn't stop them. They were determined to bring their sick friend to Jesus, and nothing would stand in their way. In a bold move, they climbed to the roof of the house, made an opening, and lowered the paralyzed man to the very feet of Jesus. The story has a happy ending: Jesus healed the man, and the man's healing was based on the faith of his friends.

Let's think about what it means to be a friend. Can we truly care about someone and not share with him or her the treasure we have in Jesus? The friends in this story did everything in their power to bring the paralytic to Jesus. In today's world this might have included an

**The man's healing was based on the faith of his friends.**

invitation to a Christian concert, the gift of a Bible or a devotional book, maybe a prayer offered before an exam, or godly counsel in the face of a difficult situation.

Today witnessing takes on many shapes and forms, and that's OK. What doesn't change is the underlying principle of loving someone to Jesus, caring enough to want to see that person in heaven. Most of us struggle with the role we have to play in bringing others to Jesus. Maybe we ought to think more about these four men and the faith that saved their friend. Here are a few lessons we can learn from them:

**1. Take the initiative.** People around you may need a word of encouragement, an invitation, or a prayer. Don't let the opportunity pass you by. Seize the day. Your efforts will be blessed.

**2. Work with others.** Ask someone else to pray with you and share the experience of bringing a friend to Jesus.

**3. Don't give up.** There will be obstacles, problems, and disillusionment along the way. But be assured that God is much more interested than you in your friend's salvation, and He will do His part. Don't let slammed doors or rejections discourage you. Be creative, and press on.

**4. Believe.** Your faith can make the difference for someone you know.

It is our privilege as well as our duty to share Jesus with others. Let's do something for our friends; let's give them Jesus.

## REACT

If witnessing scares you, how can you turn your fear into faith?

**OPINION**

Rev. 3:17

I have another god besides God. It's not money, a new car, or a big house. No, those are too obvious. I grew up reading about idols. I understand that when I value objects more than God I break the first commandment. The new god I've discovered, however, isn't an object. It's time.

Everyone has the same amount of time and it's never enough. Already I've had it with telemarketers who steal valuable minutes of my rushed supper. I hate the official-looking letters I take time to open only to find they aren't. If I could, I'd probably stop eating, because I consider it a waste of time. I have things I want to do! Type A? In the worst sense.

Now that I recognize my other god, I want to change it. But that's hard since I live in a world that values unbalanced people like me. We're praised for coming to the office early and staying late. We're considered efficient when we eat lunch at our computer. People think we're dedicated when we go to bed late and get up early just to keep up. They understand when we break the speed limit to accomplish our agenda. They think we're generous when we tithe, drop money in the offering plate, or fling a quarter at a homeless person. They think we care because we belong to a church that says it cares. But Adventists, in spite of the values we tout, often walk hand in hand with the world in valuing such unbalanced behavior.

**Type A? In the worst sense.**

The truth is, I'm not dedicated. I'm not efficient. I'm not generous. Most days I don't even care the way I ought to—at least not about the people and values that matter most. If I were dedicated, I'd worship, exercise, and eat breakfast before going to work, even if it meant I couldn't get there early.

If I were efficient, I'd quit work in time to spend the whole evening with my family. If I were generous, I would take the homeless person to lunch, talk to him, and help in a more permanent fashion. If I really cared, I'd tell my neighbors about Jesus instead of feeling I'd done my duty by sending money across the ocean.

Oh, I know what's important. I'm writing this article, am I not? Still, nine times out of ten, my arrogant "Urgent" snatches precious time from the desperate fingers of my "Important." The devil makes sure it happens, and he has society-at-large on his side. The instances when I have the courage to stand against the values of modern life-in-the-fast-lane seem rare.

I don't like my new-found god. I don't want it. Yet I cling tenaciously to it because of peer pressure, stress, ambition, pride, and habit. What's it going to take for me to slow down and pay attention to God's balanced ideals for life? Why, when I reflect on the calmly focused life of Jesus, doesn't it change me? God, help!

# A Story to Tell

## EXPLORATION

Matt. 28:16-20

## CONCLUDE

As Jesus prepared to leave His disciples, He left them with a charge that represents the ultimate act of love a human can render to God. We are called to make disciples of those who do not know God, to venture out of our comfort zones and share with others the difference only Jesus can make (Matt. 28:16-20). We share our faith by the way we live, the words we speak, the little acts of kindness we perform that go unnoticed. In sharing our faith we show our love for others and, more importantly, our love for God.

## CONSIDER

- Writing a letter to someone whose Christian witness has made a profound difference in your life. Thank them for allowing God to shine through their life.
- Organizing a special witnessing excursion to a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. Helping others in need opens the door to sharing your faith.
- Thinking of three people you would like to reach for Christ. Ask God to use you to bring them to Him.
- Recording a special song for someone who is going through a difficult time in their life right now. Ask them to listen to the song, then call and have prayer with them.
- Carving the following in a piece of wood: "Beautiful feet bring good news" (Isa. 52:7).
- Painting or drawing a picture of Jesus as He walked through the streets of Jerusalem healing and helping people as mobs of other sick people buffeted Him.
- Making a list of the times when you felt awkward about sharing your faith and a list of your witnessing triumphs. Analyze both lists to find the things that made your witness successful. Consider the following questions: How do you define successful witnessing? What role does God play?

## CONNECT

John 21:15-19; Acts 2; Ephesians 3.

*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, chap. 4.

Andy Nash, ed., *Unleash the Dream*, chap. 9.

# Powerful Pray-ers



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“You must help us too by praying for us. For much thanks and praise will go to God from you who see his wonderful answers to your prayers for our safety!” (2 Cor. 1:11, TLB).

# Warrior or Wimp?

## INTRODUCTION

James 5:16

Which has the power?

**Prayer #1:** O God of the universe, the Alpha, the Omega, Creator of all, come divinely near to us. Rid us of any secret sin that may stand in the way of our communicating with You, and help us to hear Your voice . . .

**Prayer #2:** I don't know what to say Lord. I never really do. I just know I need You—we need You. Help us to feel You especially near as . . .

**Prayer #3:** Help me, Lord. What I am cooking is not coming out right (door bell), and our guests are arriving now (closing the pot), it's in Your hands, Jesus . . . \*

**Prayer #4:** Jesus, today is the presentation and people are depending on me. Please give me the words . . .

In truth they all do, for it is not only the content, but the context that determines the power. It is the heart from which the prayer is uttered, the motives, the innermost self that only God truly knows, when coupled with the desire for God's will to be done, that determines the power. So are you a prayer warrior or a prayer wimp?

**Jesus is concerned with every aspect of our lives.**

Jesus is concerned with every aspect of our lives. He's there with us as we prayerfully struggle with major decisions that literally change the course of our lives. He knows and helps us to deal with, and understand, the feelings that we can't even put into words in order to share with another. I sometimes imagine a twinkle in His eyes as I bring to Him those things that seem insignificant to others, but are important to me!

This week we're going to talk about and visit with powerful players in the arena of prayer. We will learn anew of the power that is available to each of us. This week see the possibilities and unlimited power—if . . . we were all to become powerful pray-ers.

\*Rose Otis, editor, *From the Heart*, pp. 124, 125.

## LOGOS

Exod. 32:3-35; 2 Kings 20:1-21; Psalm 51; Dan. 9:1-19; Acts 12:1-17

We understand prayer to mean speaking to God humbly, reverently, with adoration, confession, supplication, or thanksgiving. The Egyptians, who held the descendants of Israel captive, had perverted this kind of divine communication, directing it to natural and inanimate objects. After some centuries of watching this kind of perversion, many of the Israelites must have taken up the same idolatry.

It's not so strange then, to find the Israelites asking Aaron to make them a gold statue as an object toward which they could direct their prayers. "Come, make us gods who will go before us," the crowd said to Aaron (Exod. 32:1, NIV). Unbelievably, the people looked at the golden calf Aaron made for them and said, "'These are [our] gods, O Israel, who brought [us] up out of Egypt'" (verse 8, NIV).

One cannot imagine a worse misapplication of prayer. No wonder God became angry and told Moses to leave Him so that He could destroy the Israelites. The people had the right concept but the wrong object of prayer. They wanted to slip back into old habits of thinking about the supernatural. Prayer would then be a pseudo-sacred ritual rather than a sacred conversation with God.

## Assumptions and Presumptions

Hezekiah had some correct assumptions that the earlier Israelites completely missed. He knew that people who have "wholehearted devotion" (2 Kings 20:3, NIV) for God and do what is good in His eyes are able to carry on a meaningful conversation with the Lord of the universe. Hezekiah also correctly assumed that God had the power to change the course of his life and bless him with things he asked for. He understood that the living God is the only One worthy of prayer. His connection to God was a genuine relationship.

Hezekiah's prayer brought a clear answer. He got 15 years more *and* a miraculous sign of his own choosing (verses 8-11), which proved that God's word was going to happen. We might fault Hezekiah for requesting a reward for faithful devotion, but we can't criticize his faith. He asked, and he received.

If God granted Hezekiah's prayer request in part to give him an opportunity to witness for Him, then Hezekiah got the chance and blew it. Word of the healing spread to Babylon, and the crown prince sent messengers with "letters and a gift" (verse 12, NIV). Hezekiah responded by showing them every last shekel and spice of his treasures (see verse 13). There is no mention that Hezekiah paid any kind of testimony to the source of his good fortune. This fact makes God's generous answer to Hezekiah's prayer all the more remarkable. God honors the prayers of His devotees in spite of their tendency toward selfishness.

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## Rebuke and Correction

Like Hezekiah, David knew God personally. All his psalms portray a conversation between a living God and His subject. Psalm 51, the prayer of David following his bout with adultery and murder, is one of the most open, intense communions between the two.

David is not trying to flatter God when he appeals to His “unfailing love” and “great compassion” (Ps. 51:1, NIV). He is praying the prayer of tribute to God. “This is what God is like,” David tells us. “He is the Loving One who cleanses away sin and makes pure hearts.”

Beyond the praise implied in his prayer, David shows us what we should do if we fall and commit a sin. We not only repent, we also pray very seriously to God that He will forgive us and wash the sin away. “A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (verse 17, NIV). Our damaged witness is restored as our Father heals us of the hurt we have caused ourselves and others.

## A Nation in Trouble

Daniel lived among a set of Israelites similar to the band that Moses endured.

Because he knew God and understood the prophecy of 70 years’ desolation, Daniel prayed to confess the sin of the entire nation and to ask forgiveness and restoration. He knew that God was justified in sending His

**One cannot imagine a worse misapplication of prayer.**

people into exile because they had “‘not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets’” (Dan. 9:10, NIV).

Just as Moses asked God to spare His unworthy people, Daniel also prayed the ultimate intercessory prayer. He pleaded for God to turn from His anger at the whole nation’s rebellion. “‘O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive!’” this righteous man pleaded (verse 19, NIV). He was blessed with a far-reaching answer: a prophecy that promised the Messiah and predicted Israel’s history until its disintegration.

## How Much to Ask For

The apostle Peter was the spiritual leader of God’s Israelite followers in the first century A.D. as Daniel and Moses had been before. His imprisonment might have discouraged some groups or prompted them to violence, but the early Christians responded to it by “earnestly praying to God for him” (Acts 12:5, NIV).

The church had a clear petition for God: free Peter. God came through with a miraculous rescue, but the people were still praying when it happened (see verse 12). They kept on praying. They understood that the way to ask God to make things happen is to pray until they happen.

## Talking Things Over With a Friend

### TESTIMONY

John 15:15, 16

"Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him."<sup>1</sup>

"Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your

**"There is no chapter in  
our experience too  
dark for Him to read."**

head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. 'The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy' James 5:11. His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them.

Take to Him everything that perplexes

the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He upholds worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest."<sup>2</sup>

### REACT

1. The great pray-ers of Scripture all seemed to be pretty good friends with God. How would you rate your relationship with Him?

2. If "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend," why do you think we so often find it hard to pray?

3. How does the idea of God as a friend affect your thinking about the problem of so-called unanswered prayer?

4. Think of your closest friend and the way you communicate—how often you talk, what you talk about, and the balance between speaking and listening. Compare this with your relationship with God. Who are you more intimate with? Why? What can one do to deepen one's relationship with God?

5. Prayer is communication with God. Human beings were created as communicative beings. We communicate through our verbal and written words, but also through our actions, music, art, gifts, use of time and money, etc. What do you communicate nonverbally to God through your daily choices? What would you like to communicate through your life?

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

2. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

# A Man Like Me?

## EVIDENCE

James 5:16-18

In the life of Elijah we see prayer, God's promises, and seemingly impossible situations melded powerfully together to prove that there is only one true and living God. As a matter of fact, there is only one recorded time that God chose not to answer one of Elijah's prayers. Understandable, considering Elijah was asking for God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4).

Many components contributed to the success of Elijah's other prayers. Our key text points to his righteousness, while others mention his persistence and the fact that his prayers were specific. Scripture also gives us insight into Elijah's faith in the promises of God. For example, in his prayers recorded in 1 Kings 18 he claims personal and conditional promises.

Interestingly, the Bible does not say that Elijah was "a mighty prophet of God, and he prayed," and it does not say that he was "a mighty worker of miracles and he prayed." It says "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours" (James 5:17, NKJV). In the original language, the word "like" is *homiopathes*, which stresses Elijah's humanity.

**A human being  
like us!**

A human being like us! Why then did God choose Elijah for such awesome tasks? Maybe he asked for it. Ellen White puts it this way: "It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask."\* Basically, if you don't ask, you won't receive. "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (4:2, NKJV).

Read today's key text again. Elijah's prayer for no rain was not something he imagined or even something God dictated to him, but rather, he was acting on the truth of the word, which he knew from his study of it. His statement to King Ahab was the result of knowing and believing the promises of Scripture. (Compare Deuteronomy 11:8-32; 28:23, 24 with 1 Kings 18:18.)

Elijah was a powerful pray-er because he was convinced and confident of God's person, committed to being God's representative, and confident of God's promises.

Read 2 Kings 2:11. Maybe God did answer *all* of Elijah's prayers!

## REACT

1. If I already have faith in God's promises, why do I need to pray for their fulfillment?

2. What might have happened had Elijah not run from Jezebel? (See *Prophets and Kings*, page 160.)

\* *The Great Controversy*, p. 525.

## HOW-TO

2 Kings 20:1-21

Scientists are beginning to recognize the power of prayer. In San Francisco a study was conducted in which individuals with AIDS were prayed for. A comparison was made between the individuals who were prayed for and those who were not. The results have been promising enough to prolong the study and increase its size. This is basically a double-blind control study of prayer.<sup>1</sup>

Another scientist has examined prayer and found it to benefit one's health. He says "that prayer operates along the same biochemical pathways as the relaxation response. In other words, praying affects epinephrine and other corticosteroid

**This is basically a double-blind control study of prayer.**

messengers or 'stress hormones,' leading to lower blood pressure, more relaxed heart rate and respiration and other benefits."<sup>2</sup>

But is this the point: to dissect prayer and to explain its workings? In the many stories in the Bible, prayer is always an intensely personal communication with God. "It is a wonderful thing that we can pray effectually, that unworthy, erring mortals possess the power of offering their requests to God. What higher power can man desire than this—to be linked with the infinite God?"<sup>3</sup>

When Hezekiah became ill (2 Kings 20:1-21) and learned that he would not survive his illness, he prayed to the Lord to heal him. He was healed. Was this because prayer had a positive effect on his health or because he was "linked with the infinite God" through prayer?

## REACT

1. What is the purpose of prayer to you?
2. What is your concept of God? How does this understanding of God affect your prayer life?
3. What understanding of God do you think Moses, David, Daniel, and the early church pray-ers had?
4. Is it wrong to express negative emotions to God, such as disappointment, anger, or bitterness? Why or why not?
5. What can the Christian learn from Hezekiah's encounter with God?
6. If a non-Christian, having heard about the studies mentioned above, wanted the benefits of prayer, how would you respond? If they asked you to teach them how to pray, what would you tell them?

1. Wallis C., "Faith and Healing," *Time* 147 (26) 1996; pp. 44-50.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Messages to Young People*, p. 250.

# Is Prayer a Matter of Focus?

## OPINION

Deut. 4:7

Every so often I have the opportunity to pray with someone who seems to have a direct line to God. As I listen to the heart-felt prayer, it is as if I am transported into another world to be right where God is, and I can almost see the psychedelic colors of the throne, hear the angels praising, and feel the awesome presence of Majesty. It is hard to say why this happens. Perhaps it is the earnestness of heart in which they pray.

King David suggested that God requires a contrite and broken heart. Perhaps it is their sense of human sin and real confession of it. Moses, Daniel, and David certainly confessed their sin and the corporate sins of the nation. Earnestness and confession are great values, but as I reflect on those special times in the presence of people I believe have the gift of intercession, the outstanding attribute of their prayers was their real and deep concept of God. God was holy and beyond comprehension, yet God was listening as a gracious Father and in His absolute power He would act on human's behalf and for their good. This faith response is evident in the faithful prayer warriors I have had the privilege to pray with. Their experience encourages me to keep developing my prayer life.

I sat in a Sabbath School class and was challenged by the views of the presenter and those who were agreeing with him. The more I listened, the feeling of being challenged changed to one of anger yet sympathy. The young adults were speaking of their experience of prayer. The class participants recited times when they were struggling with life and burdened with various pressures. Then they decided to pray and were able to unload these burdens on God. It seemed their

**I can almost see the  
psychedelic colors of  
the throne.**

burdens lifted as they prayed. I had had similar experiences, and that is where I had sympathy. However, as the discussion continued, it was evident that none of them had ever had a miraculous answer to prayer and they doubted if God ever answered prayer this way. This is what made me angry. They were reducing God to a divine counselor, and prayer was nothing more than a psychological or spiritual release. The lifting of burdens is one of the benefits of prayer but God is bigger than that (Phil. 4:6, 7).

These experiences have challenged my prayer life. Neither group used an exact formula for prayer, for it is talking to a real Being. But the concept of God differed. The Sabbath School group saw God as just a divine counselor; the prayer warriors saw God as a willing and powerful intervener. One group had a very human understanding of prayer; the other had a clearer focus on the Supernatural One they were talking to.

Friday  
June 1

**“What a fellowship!  
What a joy divine!”**

## EXPLORATION

2 Cor. 1:11

## CONCLUDE

The power of prayer is in direct proportion to the relationship of the pray-er to the God who hears. We can't just insert our coins as in a rigged slot machine and be showered with riches, but we hit the jackpot even when things seem to be spinning out of control. We are made whole even in a hurting world—in spite of tragic circumstances—in spite of our own inadequacies—because prayer connects us with the God who heals. We can have confidence no matter what, because prayer binds us to the God who is faithful—no matter what.

## CONSIDER

- Beginning a prayer journal in which you record your prayers of intercession, of petition, of praise, of confession, of dedication; and in which you record answers, whether they are inner workings of your heart or outward changes that you see.
- Asking one or more friends to join you in regular prayer for a specific purpose, such as the mission and members of your Sabbath School class and church.
- Composing and/or performing a prayer song to serve your congregation as a call to prayer, a response to prayer, or a prayerful meditation.
- Exploring <[www.eprayer.com](http://www.eprayer.com)>. This Web site offers electronic prayers that you can send to friends, family, and loved ones, a place for prayer requests, and other creative features.
- Researching the objective effects of prayer as reported in scientific literature and presenting the results to your class.
- Writing stories of answers to prayer from your own life or the lives of friends.

## CONNECT

Psalms 5:2; Matthew 4:10; Luke 23:42; Acts 7:59; Ephesians 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:5; Hebrews 10:19.

Crosby, Jacobsen, Melashenko, *A Passion for Prayer*; Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*; Frederick Pelser, *Prayer Made Practical*; Roger Morneau, *The Incredible Power of Prayer*; Steven Mosely, *If Only God Would Answer*; Celeste Perrino Walker, *Prayer Warriors*.

# Martyrs and their Murderers



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“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”  
(Matt. 5:10, NIV).

## INTRODUCTION

Matt. 10:22; Rom. 5:7, 8

Ever played a game called truth or dare? Friends ask each other the question: truth or dare? If you choose truth, you will be asked an embarrassing question that you must answer truthfully. If you choose dare, you have to perform a prescribed act. Being a stouthearted child, I usually requested "dare."

The game reminds me of being a Christian martyr. To be a Christian martyr, one claims the truth of the Bible. Being a Christian martyr is also daring, for one chooses death rather than renouncing Christ. I cannot help asking myself, *Would I do the same?*

Donald was escorted in shackles to the witness stand. In this court there are no defense attorneys. All accused were subject to prosecution. "Donald, the jury has heard enough testimony to pass a sentence, but I'd like to give you a chance to redeem yourself. You can walk away from this building unscathed, unshackled, no one to harass you. Or you can make the walk of your hardheaded friends."

**"We made a hard decision today."**

"We will give you \$10,000 to help you get back on your feet. All you have to do is be a law-abiding citizen. That's all! What do you say?"

Donald responded, "Your laws have killed so many people; how can I follow something that produces death?"

The attorney replied with indignation, "There's only one part of the law that you people can't follow. We are a world united now, and if we are to stay united we must be of one accord. That includes the Sabbath that the whole world celebrates. What will it be? Life or death?"

Donald felt the coolness of the air as he walked out of the courthouse. He was led to a group of men and women waiting to file out. The man sitting next to him put his hand on Donald's shoulder and said, "You did the right thing. We won't have to worry about them anymore after today."

Each person received a stamp on their right hand and got in the tram. They soon arrived at the execution chambers. Before the door was opened, the man spoke to the people. "We made a hard decision today. Don't be sad because of what you did. We chose *everlasting* life."

Does the word *martyr* still have an antique ring to it? More Christians were killed for their faith during the twentieth century than in all previous centuries.\* What will it take to risk one's life for an unpopular belief? Truth or dare?

\*John Foxe and Harold J. Chadwick, *The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (North Brunswick, N.J.: Bridge-Logos Pub., 1997), p. 323.

# A Christian Must Expect Martyrdom

## EVIDENCE

Rev. 12:13

It has been suggested that pastors be charged with preparing their congregation for persecution. We hear more and more frequently of inhuman persecution of Christians in the Sudan, China, and elsewhere. It may seem far removed presently, but the Bible tells us that the day is coming when we will have to decide if we are willing to die. Will you obey God when a gun is pointed at your head?

What makes the difference between standing for Christ and wavering? Clearly, as one reviews those lives sacrificed, from Old Testament Abel to 17-year-old Cassie Bernall of Littleton, Colorado, one finds some common characteristics.

**1. Submission to God's will.** Martyrs know in whom they believe. They have made their decision to die for Christ long before it is required of them. They have developed such a relationship with their Friend and Savior that they have confidence that He will be with them through anything. They know that this course has been selected for them, and they accept God's will even unto death.

**2. Faith.** "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6, NIV). Martyrs (and that means every Christian) must develop an unshakable faith in Jesus now. Believers of today, as of old, must build a foundation of faith in good times that will carry them through trying times, a faith that might just thwart murderous goals. (See Daniel 3:19-30; Esther 3; 8:3-17.) Here we see submission and faith combined. Fortifying our minds with Scripture and submitting ourselves to God's will *now* will build our faith for the future.

**3. Prayer.** Prayer brings us into the presence of God. An active and powerful prayer life allowed these servants to face death knowing that God was ever with them. Christians have the assurance that God will never leave them or forsake them (Heb. 13:15), even when the last breath is breathed. The assurance that God will restore this mortal body to immortality is the hope of those who give their lives for Christ. The martyred Christian knows that the glory of God is worth the sacrifice. Communion with God through the Holy Spirit is the martyr's comfort. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17, KJV). What is gained is infinitely greater than what is given up. This is also the confidence that the God we serve—and may be asked to die for—will save us and restore us once again to Himself after death. Don't we all long to hear these words: "'Well done, good and faithful servants'" (Matt. 25:21, NKJV). "'Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life'" (Rev. 2:10, NIV).

What makes the  
difference between  
standing for Christ  
and wavering?

Monday  
June 4

## Portrait of a Witness

### LOGOS

2 Chron. 24:17-22; Jer. 26:20-23; Matt. 14:1-11; John 21:18, 19; Acts 7:54-8:2

The Greek word *martus* from which we get “martyr” is generally translated as “witness” in the New Testament. Paul conferred martyrdom on Stephen (Acts 22:20).

**“Preach the gospel  
and if necessary  
use words.”**

Tradition holds that Stephen along with Philip, was one of the seven deacons chosen by the multitudes in Acts

6, as well as one of the Seventy sent out by Jesus in Luke 10. This witness knew Jesus firsthand and could boast like John or any other apostle that “that . . . which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, NIV).

### Chosen to Lead (Acts 6:1-7)

The saying, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14 NKJV), helps to set the tone for the process of identifying Stephen as a martyr. It takes quite some effort in a church setting to find individuals to take on spiritual responsibility. The qualifications needed were clearly stated: “‘Men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom’ ” (Acts 6:3, NKJV). Integrity, sound judgment, and the manifestation of the fruit of the Holy Spirit were considered necessary qualifications to be servants for God. Therefore we see that the choice of Stephen to become a deacon was one that involved much prayer and thoughtful consideration. God is looking for workers, and He is counting on you to respond to His call to become a servant in His field.

### More Than Just a Deacon (Acts 6:8-15; Mark 16:17, 18)

Stephen's job description involved serving tables. The word *deacon* comes from the Greek word that implies servanthood. But deacon Stephen did more than serve tables; he was a bold minister of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit in power and great glory. He preached the Word of God with so much power and faith that miracles and wonders accompanied his preaching. His ministry unsettled those who preferred to maintain the status quo, those who preferred to operate in the business-as-usual mode.

The issue of compartmentalization and specialization prevalent in society today has found its way into the church; whereby pastors are paid to do the preaching and the deacons are elected to open and close the doors of the church. This was not the case in the early church. There were roles and functions in the body, but everyone was, first and foremost, a witness. This was the realm within which deacon Stephen was operating in Acts 6:8.

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## Defender of the Faith (Acts 7:1-55)

How much of the Bible do you know right now? In the sermon that Stephen gave in response to the question in Acts 7, he chronicled the complete history of the salvation of humankind from Abraham to Jesus Christ. One would have thought that Stephen was just an ordinary deacon. But his answer showed that he was an ordinary deacon who was “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; . . . full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people” (Acts 6:5, 8, NIV). How will you fare if called upon to defend the gospel without prior preparation? A witness is one who knows who he or she is in the Lord without having to go back home to consult a pastor.

## A Person Like Jesus (Acts 7:55-60)

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60, NIV). The only other event in the Bible in which a similar statement is recorded is at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Luke 23:34). Those who stood by and watched Stephen in the last moments of his life testified that his face was “like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15, NIV). He spoke the truth in love and with so much passion that the hearers knew that he cared about them.

How are you perceived by those who hear you share the Word of God? Are you considered to be judgmental and critical or as loving yet firm? Are you Christlike in your dealing with the people in the church and those outside the church? A church marquee reads as follows: “Preach the gospel and if necessary use words.”

## A Name With a Meaning

It is noteworthy that Stephen lived up to his name, which could be translated “wreath of victory” or “coronet.” The statement that Paul makes in 2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (NIV), could easily be attributed to Stephen. He was a winner to the very end. He was a witness to the very end. His death was a testimony to Saul, who later became Paul, the apostle to the Gentile world. It is not how one dies that counts, but in whom one dies.

## REACT

1. What is the relationship, if any, between my role or office in the church and my calling to be a witness for Christ?
2. Why did the record sales of John Lennon and Kurt Cobain soar after their deaths? Is there a Christian equivalent in martyrdom? Explain your answer.
3. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “A man who has not found something worth dying for, has not really found something worth living for.” What does someone’s death for a cause say to people?
4. Every year thousands of people are killed just for being Christians, mainly in totalitarian countries. So why is Christianity growing faster in these countries than elsewhere?

Tuesday  
June 5

# The Body Versus the Soul

## TESTIMONY

Rom. 1:17

The words and fortitude of the three Hebrew worthies ought to be an inseparable part of our lives (Dan. 3:16-18). Martin Luther's faith during the Reformation was also one of courage and dedication to God. "He stood firm, trusting in Christ to be his support and shield. With a martyr's faith and courage he wrote: 'What is about to happen I know not, nor do I care to know. . . . Let the blow light where it may, I am without fear. Not so much as a leaf falls, without the will of our Father. How much rather will He care for us! It is a light thing to die for the Word, since the Word which was made flesh hath Himself died. If we die with Him, we shall live with Him; and passing through that which He has passed through before us, we shall be where He is and dwell with Him forever.' ""

The book of Revelation admonishes us that Roman power will one day rule the world again. The papacy has already set the stage for a Sunday law that will

**A Sunday law will  
eventually take effect.**

eventually take effect in this country and around the world. On July 7, 1998, the pope sent out a 104-page apostolic letter emphasizing Sunday as the Lord's day of worship. In the

end it will boil down to who we will choose to worship and on which day. God or beast? Saturday or Sunday? The third angel's message clearly states, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Rev. 14:7, NKJV). Notice the connection in Exodus 20:11. When we keep the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, we recognize God as our Creator.

In heaven there are going to be millions of people who were killed being faithful to God. We must be faithful in our everyday life if we're going to be faithful at the point of death. Have you been faithful to God by being a witness in keeping the Sabbath holy?

## REACT

1. Imagine that a Sunday worship law has just been passed, and a TV reporter asks you for a comment. What do you say?

2. Ellen White talks about people who "bring the time of trouble upon themselves." What does she mean by this?

3. Would it be easier to live 60 consistent years for God or to die for God? Are the two related? Explain your answer.

\**The Great Controversy*, p. 141.

# A State of Mind

## HOW-TO

Luke 9:23; Rev. 12:2

I see martyrdom as a state of selfless love for Jesus. It is a constant poise that is ready to choose faithfulness to God even if it means losing our lives. This passionate love for Jesus grows out of abiding in His presence like Mary. Then it will not matter if it is pouring out a priceless perfume or our blood. Our intimate love relationship will be the motivating factor. So how can we attain martyrdom?

**1. Enter into a love relationship with Jesus.** We love Him because He first loved us. When we respond to His love and daily invest in that relationship, our selfless love for Jesus will deepen. Take out the formalities and come to Jesus as a friend. Talk to Him in prayer about your everyday stuff. Wait to hear Him respond in the Bible or in the still, small voice within you. Knowing Him is loving Him. The more you love Him, the stronger will be your trust in Him and His power to deliver you from evil or keep you in the midst of it.

I began putting  
scenes about heaven  
in my mind.

**2. Rehearse the scenes of the Cross daily.** This keeps our appreciation of the supreme sacrifice fresh in our minds. Ellen White suggests that an hour a day at the Cross keeps the soul in love with Jesus.

**3. Daily overcome sin by the power in the blood of the Lamb.** Practice the denial of earthly pleasures for the sake of Christ, e.g., reading the Bible versus watching a favorite television program; witnessing to a friend versus hanging out at the mall; eating a carrot versus a candy bar. When we daily practice dying to self, we are poised for martyrdom. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself" (Luke 9:23, NKJV).

**4. Keep heaven in focus.** When I was addicted to the mall, I could not stop thinking about new dresses, even in prayer. When I began putting scenes about heaven in my mind, the things of this world grew "strangely dim." Martyrs saw beyond the grimness of their immediate environment and caught glimpses of glory bright.

## REACT

1. Religious clichés aside, what does it really mean to "die to self"? What parts of yourself would you like to just drop dead?

2. What part of yourself would the people closest to you wish would drop dead?

3. In the real world, if you were "dead to self," how would your relationships change? Would you need to turn into a doormat? Explain your answer.

4. How would you stand up for your rights at work if you were "dead to self"? How would you manage office politics better?

## So, You Want to Be a Martyr?

### OPINION

Matt. 10:39

"To all the testing time will come. By the sifting of temptation the genuine Christian will be revealed. Are the people of God now so firmly established upon His word that they would not yield to the evidence of their senses? . . . Satan will . . . entangle them with earthly treasures, cause them to carry a heavy, wearisome burden, that their hearts may be overcharged with the cares of this life and the day of trial may come upon them as a thief. . . . But many . . . will be cast into the most unjust and cruel bondage."<sup>1</sup>

Let's personalize this scenario: You have no job, no money, no family, no friends. All you've worked for must be left behind. Imagine walking away from that new car, that perfect house with a pool, that closet of Armani suits, or your self-attained sense of security. What if your own family became tired of you speaking of Christ and turned you over to authorities, as was Stephen's case? Would your opinions change before you were ushered into a jail cell to await torture for Christ?

A martyr chooses to give up things he or she finds useless to hold on to that which is priceless. Often the problem is that these two choices are incorrectly

**A martyr chooses to hold  
on to that which is  
priceless.**

prioritized, and the desire to follow Christ is betrayed for selfish, pathetic fears. Christ risked heaven, a place so magnificent we cannot comprehend it, yet we foolishly stand afraid to lose these

measly earthly possessions that God allowed us to have in the first place.

"Have you ever thought of persecution as a blessing, as something worth rejoicing about? . . . If you are . . . persecuted for your faith it isn't because you're doing something wrong, but because God has counted you 'worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.'<sup>2</sup> "Heaven will be cheap enough, if we obtain it through suffering. We must deny self . . . die to self daily . . . and keep His glory continually in view."<sup>3</sup> When our personal relationship with Christ is genuine, we will think of Him as our Friend, Comforter, Deliverer, and Life Support. We will become so aligned with God's will that giving up our lives in the name of Christ will be a joy.

1. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 625, 626.

2. *Life Application Study Bible*, NIV (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub.), p. 1955.

3. *Early Writings*, p. 67.

# Persecution: By-product of the Good Life

## EXPLORATION

Matt. 5:10

## CONCLUDE

Not limited to the Middle Ages, persecution and martyrdom are a natural part of following Jesus. Inhuman persecution of Christians takes place in far-off places like the Sudan and China; however, what about the scorn of coworkers or your boss's sarcastic remarks about your religion? The Greek word *martyr* is the basis for "martyr" and usually is translated as "witness" in the New Testament. How would you answer if someone asked if you were willing to die for your faith? Submission to God's will, unshakable faith, and powerful prayer life are hallmarks of living the Christian life to the fullest.

## CONSIDER

- Following Ellen White's advice for a week that "it would be well to spend a thoughtful hour each day reviewing the life of Christ from the manger to Calvary. . . . Let the imagination vividly grasp each scene" (*Testimonies for the Church*, p. 374). Each day write a response to the question, "What have I witnessed today that transforms my life?"
- Reading Luke 7:19-28. Then create a skit that demonstrates that submitting to martyrdom is a positive act of faith, not simply giving in or following the path of least resistance.
- Finding an opportunity to explain your beliefs to someone who has strong beliefs that are different (e.g., Jehovah's Witness, Buddhist, Muslim). Then listen to that person's testimony.
- Browsing through the Web site for Amnesty International at <[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)>. Explore the information and opportunities for involvement that this organization provides to battle religious martyrdom worldwide.
- Participating in an experience that would be the complete opposite of comfort (e.g., volunteer at a nursing home).
- Visiting a museum display relating to persecution (e.g., the Holocaust).
- Writing a job description for a witness as described in the New Testament.

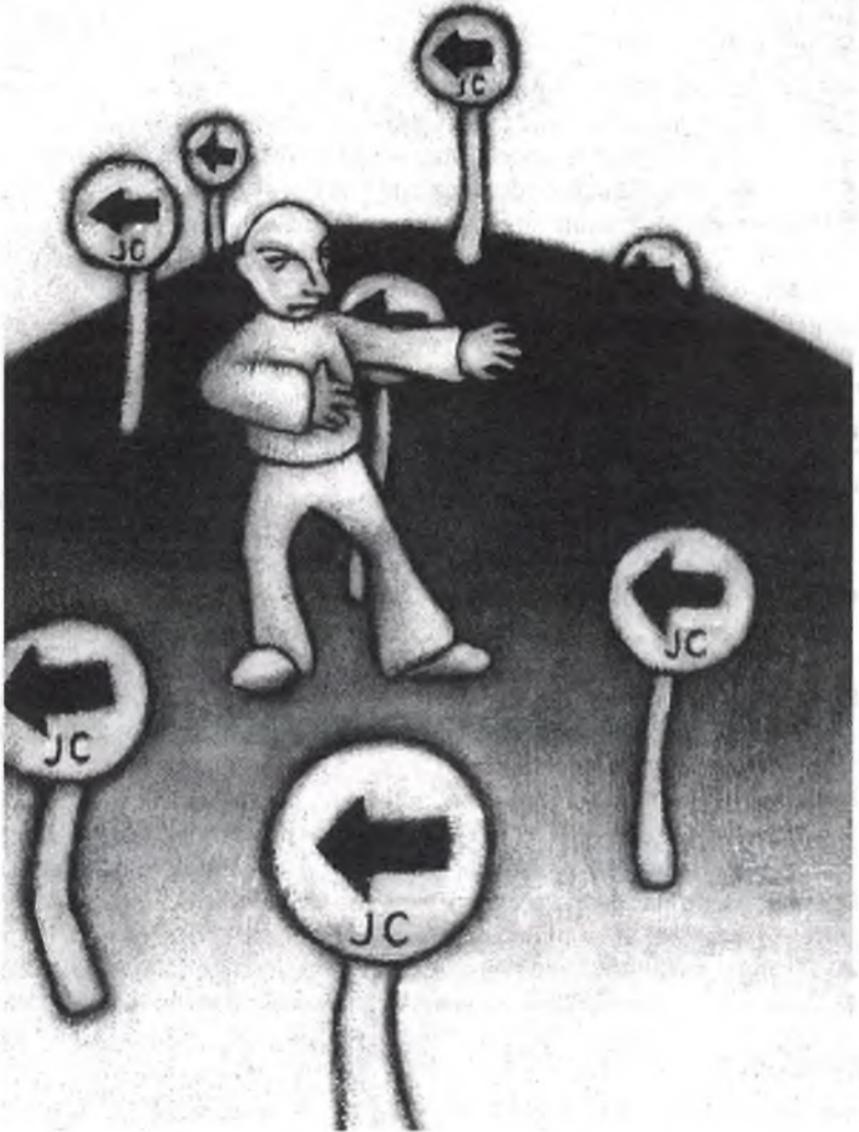
## CONNECT

Matthew 11:1-11; 14:1-11; Mark 6:17-28; Luke 7:19-28.

*The Desire of Ages*, chap. 22.

Dorothy Kelley Patterson, *Be Attitudes for Women*, chap. 8; Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven*, chaps. 16, 17; C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress*; John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

# Giants of Faith



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“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, NKJV).

# Tried, Tested, and Proven?

## INTRODUCTION

Matt. 17:20

There is no food in the house, and you call the family together to pray. Is this an act of faith? A moment after there is a knock on the door, you open it, and there is someone you do not know who has brought food. Is this your faith at work?

You are on the road with the entire family very late in the night, no spare tire, and you have a flat; but then you notice a man coming with a spare. He gives it to you and walks away.

Faith? Maybe.

"Faith is often the child of fear, it was the reason for Peter walking on the water, because Peter knew what the storms could do. He'd heard the stories. He'd seen the wreckages, and he wanted to get out. For nine hours he'd tugged on sails, wrestled with oars, and searched every shadow for hope."\*

Sometimes our lives are pretty much like this; sometimes problems come in all forms from everywhere. But a lesson we can learn from Peter that I share with Max Lucado is if the sea was calm Peter would not have had any reason to put His faith to the test by walking on the water.

Very often if there is no problem in our walk with Christ, we do not seek Him as we ought to, hence there is no growth in our faith. Problems cause us to seek God, "a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1, KJV). In seeking God, we anticipate His reply and in anticipation our faith grows. Our faith grows each time we have problems if we can look back and see how God has led in the past. Our faith also gives the power of overcoming obstacles.

As Christians, we need to be reminded that God has already mapped out our road for us. But lacking faith, we do not "let go and let God." We pay no attention to the signs that God has provided. There is no telling what is coming around the corner, and God did not promise it would be easy.

**God has already mapped  
out our road for us.**

That's why He gave us the power of choice. Like Peter we can put our faith to the test through prayer and, with an eye on Jesus, step out on the water. Faith is an act developed through belief and trust in God.

"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move" (Matt. 17:20, NIV). Faith is not bought; neither is it inherited, but it is a practice that is developed over time.

\*Max Lucado, *In The Eye of the Storm: A Day in the Life of Jesus* (Dallas: Word Pub., 1991).

## LOGOS Hebrews 11

Faith: an attitude of mind, a pattern of conduct, leading to faithful deeds.<sup>1</sup> This characterized Abraham and the faithful chronicled in Hebrews 11.

God's Hall of Fame had some unlikely people who, by human considerations, wouldn't be called Christian, much less faithful. Yet there was sufficient evidence by God's rules to warrant their inclusion. There were some people whom we would nominate without hesitation, while there were others that we would question.

Abel obeyed God and offered the correct sacrifice. Enoch did God's work wholeheartedly and pleased God, providing an example of those who by faith and righteousness will be translated. Noah endured scorn and showed endurance in preaching the Word of God for 120 years (longer than our present life expectancy). He didn't give up, and he was saved.

Abraham had what we would call blind faith. A billionaire, he left most of his earthly possessions behind and went on a journey with no destination. He had to believe that the voice that initially spoke to him would continue to give him directions. God told Abraham what He wanted and Abraham obeyed. Abraham, as good as dead, and Sarah his wife, postmenopausal, initially laughed then believed, and she gave birth to Isaac, the progenitor of Christ. Abraham's faith was counted for righteousness. The covenant given in the Garden of Eden was renewed to Abraham. Abraham understood that promise (Gal. 3:8,16) and demonstrated faith and righteousness.

It was a great trial of Abraham's faith when he was commanded by God, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac. . . . Sacrifice him . . . as a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:2, NIV). Abraham did not distrust God or question His command. He believed that if

**A billionaire, he left most of his earthly possessions behind.**

Isaac should die, God would raise him up, even from the dead (Heb. 11:19). Abraham's unquestioning obedience and unwavering faith was demonstrated when he took his only child—the son of promise—to offer him as a sacrifice, a

type of the Savior. Isaac could have overpowered his father and escaped; but he too had faith in God, and showed himself a type of Christ, being "obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:8, KJV).

Joseph could have cried foul when he was sold into Egypt, but he believed God would protect and keep him, and he became the deliverer of the Israelites (Exodus 14). The Lord brought Moses and the Israelites to the mountain and the Red Sea with the Egyptian army to test their faith and to show how He would deliver them from enemies. "The greatness of the deliverance reflects the magnitude of the crisis, and the magnitude of the crisis is a measure of the degree of faith needed by God's appointed representative, Moses."<sup>2</sup>

In his sermon on suffering and persecution, John Calvin stated, "When we are

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commanded to follow the Lord Jesus, His guidance is too good and honorable to be refused.”<sup>3</sup>

The Bible is replete with examples of faith and the faithful (Num. 13:30; Josh. 6:1-24; Judges 4; 5; 6:36-40; Dan. 3:17,18; Heb. 11:4-32; Mark 2:5; 5:34; Luke 7:2-9; 8:41, 42). Noah preached to the antediluvians for 120 years, warning the world of certain peril.

Rahab, the harlot. Who would have thought that she would be named as one who was faithful to God’s kingdom? Yet she established her faith when she asked the spies to remember her when they returned to the city. She was rewarded for hiding the spies (Josh. 6:23-25).

Our faith must be manifest now as it was in the time of John the Baptist, Calvin, Wesley, and Luther—ready to stand alone. The unnamed persons of Hebrews 11:35-40 remind us that although our name may not be on a plaque, yet our faithfulness will be rewarded. Modern humanity, too, needs faith in Christ’s plan of salvation. He needs to take faith as the “title deed” and be confident in the promises of God, leaving no uncertainty as to their fulfillment in due time and have the faith to lay claim to promised blessings, receive and enjoy them now.<sup>8</sup>

As we get closer to the end of time, Satan encourages unbelievers to ask, “Where is this “coming” he promised?” (2 Pet. 3:4, NIV). We need to have faith and remember the signs given to the people of Noah’s day and the warnings of Luke 17:26, 30; 2 Peter 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:3, because the day of the Lord will come as a thief and the unprepared will not escape.

## **REACT**

1. List instances in your home, school, or work when you have needed that “extra” faith to get through the day.

2. Is there need for more faith in the twenty-first century than was required in biblical times? Explain your answer.

3. From Hebrews 11:1, identify the two parts of the Bible’s definition of faith. How does the unseen reality fit with the future hope?

4. What does Hebrews 11:39 tell us about faith?

5. What does “faith,” as described by the author of Hebrews, mean to you? What are the difficulties of your definition? What are the encouraging aspects?

6. Verse 59 talks about the Hebrews 11 hall-of-famers not receiving what they were promised, but verse 40 says that God will provide something better than what was originally promised. What does this tell us about God and promises?

7. In what ways do we today display faith in our day-to-day living? How does society make it difficult to rely on faith in something or someone?

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1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 470, 471.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 477.

3. *The World’s Greatest Speeches* (New York: Dover Pub., Inc., 1958), p. 67.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 471.

**TESTIMONY**

Heb. 11:6; 12:2

“Faith is the gift of God, but the power to exercise it is ours. Faith is the hand by which the soul takes hold upon the divine offers of grace and mercy. . . .

“When we trust God fully, when we rely upon the merits of Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour, we shall receive all the help that we can desire. Let none look to self, as though they had power to save themselves. Jesus died for us because we were helpless to do this. In Him is our hope, our justification, our righteousness. When we see our sinfulness we should not despond and fear that we have no Saviour, or that He has no thoughts of mercy toward us. At this very time He is inviting us to come to Him in our helplessness and be saved.”<sup>1</sup>

“While God has given ample evidence for faith, He will never remove all excuse for unbelief. All who look for hooks to hang their doubts upon will find them. And those who refuse to accept and obey God’s word until every objection has been removed, and there is no longer an opportunity for doubt, will never come to the light.

**“Distrust of God is the natural outgrowth of the unrenewed heart.”**

“Distrust of God is the natural outgrowth of the unrenewed heart, which is at

enmity with Him. But faith is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it will flourish only as it is cherished. No man can become strong in faith without a determined effort. Unbelief strengthens as it is encouraged; and if men, instead of dwelling upon the evidences which God has given to sustain their faith, permit themselves to question and cavil, they will find their doubts constantly becoming more confirmed.”<sup>2</sup>

**REACT**

1. Are there reasons in your life to harbor elements of doubt? Explain your answer.
2. What are your reasons for belief?
3. Is it wrong to doubt? Why or why not?
4. What is the difference, if any, between doubts and questions?
5. Unlike the confident statement in Hebrews 11, the Genesis account of Isaac as a sacrifice does not mention Abraham believing God would resurrect Isaac. What accounts for the added detail in Hebrews 11? How does this change the “faith” Abraham displayed in the Genesis account?
6. What makes Christianity a “selfless” way of belief and practice?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 431.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 527.

# Mr. Eternity

## EVIDENCE

Heb. 11:8-10

"Born in poverty; a ward of the state, a drunkard and petty thief; served in WWI [and] fell into drunken dereliction thereafter."<sup>1</sup> In 1932, Arthur Stace discovered a piece of chalk in his pocket as he walked out of a church, his mind echoing the words of the evangelist, "Oh, that I could shout and sound Eternity all over the streets of Sydney!"<sup>2</sup> Arthur bent down right there on the pavement and wrote it for the first time. *Eternity*. Over the next 35 years he wrote this one-word sermon half a million times. An eccentric, some called him. "Not exactly homeless,"<sup>3</sup> certainly a little unkempt. He died in 1967, but even today he is considered a cultural icon.

The rules of eternity  
are different.

The writer of Hebrews has a similar concern for eternity. In chapter 11, he lists the faith heroes, men and women who had long inspired the Jewish people. Chapter 11 superficially follows the traditional historical Jewish sermon format that we also see in Acts 7:1-53; 13:13-23. The high points of Israel's history are the political and military achievements. Christians recounted the history and genealogies of Israel in order to connect with their Jewish listeners.

Hebrews 11, however, takes a decidedly different slant. The writer focuses on the elements of Jewish history in which the traditional heroes are landless, aging, dying, and persecuted. Rather than emphasizing how the heroes eventually prevailed against difficult circumstances, he emphasizes their stubborn belief in the midst of difficulty that God would keep His promises to them.

This history highlights that, even in Old Testament times, there were hints at a New Order. Yes, Jesus brought a New Order. His parables outlined a Jewish history of unbelief and persecution of God's prophets. He contradicted laws (Matt. 5:38-44) and was seen as a Sabbath breaker (12:2). He even denied the common perception of the Messiah as a political liberator and unpatriotically recommended cooperation with the regime and a focus on love even for enemies (John 18:36; Matt. 5:41; 7:12). Jesus taught a reordering of priorities from an emphasis on earthly things to eternal things (Matt. 6:19-21).

What can we learn from Arthur Stace, the faith hero, and Jesus Himself? They were vulnerable, unpopular, and died without seeing concrete results. Yet they found strength in their weakness. The rules of eternity are different. Those who live by them may be seen as fools for Christ (1 Cor. 1:18).

1. *The Australian*, Nov. 3, 1990, in Les Nixon, *Eternity on Sydney's Harbour Bridge*, undated, unpublished leaflet.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

## HOW-TO

Gen. 6:5-9; Heb. 10:35-39; 11:1, 6-9; 12:12

The people of the twenty-first century often have the notion that their era is the only one that posed a big challenge for Christian discipline and consistency. We excuse our shortcomings and rationalize our sins. Then we discredit the faithful and consistent life of patriarchs of old by saying that they were exposed to less corruption. The apostle Paul, however, calls us to follow the patriarchs' example as we approach the end of this earth's history.

**Use history as a guide against corruption.** The patriarchs and spiritual giants of the world were not supermen; neither did they live in an era devoid of wickedness and temptations. They were people with weaknesses like ours. They were exposed to evils that were as deceptive as those we witness and encountered situations

“They came to regard the human life with astonishing indifference.”

that are even more challenging than what we face in this era. Ellen White describes the situation under which Noah had to preach. “Polygamy had been

early introduced, contrary to the divine arrangement at the beginning. The Lord gave to Adam one wife, showing His order in that respect. But after the Fall, men chose to follow their own sinful desires; and as a result, crime and wretchedness rapidly increased. . . . They delighted in destroying the life of animals; and the use of flesh for food rendered them still more cruel and bloodthirsty, until they came to regard the human life with astonishing indifference.”\*

Amid increasing corruption, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8, KJV). “Moved with godly fear, [Noah] prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Heb. 11:7, NKJV).

**Be steadfast in your faith.** Twenty-first century Christians must become like Noah. Paul writes, “Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward” (Heb. 10:35, NKJV). Keep your eyes on Jesus, the “author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2, KJV), and with a persevering will and diligent effort move forward in Christian uprightness. That was the secret of the lives of those faithful men and women of old: they had *faith*. Faith is what we need in these last days, the substance (confidence) of things hoped for, and the evidence (conviction) of things not seen (Heb. 11:1).

## REACT

To what extent should faith be guided by common sense?

\**Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 91, 92.

# Faith Demands Patience

## OPINION

Heb. 11:1

She had been going through a rough time. The job held no more interest for her. It had become routine, and she needed something to do that was more challenging. She prayed about it and deliberated seriously about resigning her job. What would she do if she stopped working? She wanted to continue working for the church. She eventually gave up her job, not sure of what lay ahead. Then one day she received a phone call from someone she did not know, offering her work. She suggested that she be sent all the necessary information. It came, and then the telephone conference interview. That went well.

The immigration leg of the new venture was to be a challenge, but she was convinced that it was time to move on and also that God had something more challenging for her to do. She was all packed by the time she took the interview at Canadian immigration. The interviewer told her to collect the visa the following day, but by the time she arrived home she had a call to say that the visa would not be ready at the time it was promised. The employers were waiting. She called to apprise them of her dilemma and was assured of their prayers because they were sure that she was the person for the job.

She cried and fasted for several months. She did not understand what God was telling her but she decided to trust Him. All this time the suitcases remained packed.

The time came when she had to inform the employers that the visa was not forthcoming. They expressed their disappointment. She continued to pray. Some weeks later a telephone call came, inviting her to serve her alma mater. She was not very anxious but wondered whether her ship would come in. It did! Faith is the evidence of things not seen!

**She was convinced that  
it was time to move on.**

She accepted the invitation and went to her alma mater to serve. The day she set foot on campus she realized that *this* was where God had wanted her. When she began, she was not sure what would happen, but she was confident. She received promotions in quick succession. The suitcase that had been packed for more than a year had at last been opened! Her faith was rewarded.

Sometimes when you feel the need to take risks, tell it to Jesus and ask Him to guide. Sometimes you may not always understand His will for your life; but if you simply trust and be patient, He will bring your request to pass.

## REACT

1. How does patience affect our faith in God?
2. What are you doing to help your friends understand the faith concept?

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Gloria Roberts, Mandeville, Jamaica

## EXPLORATION

Eph. 6:16

### CONCLUDE

When we look back on hardships in our lives, we will likely recall feeling a closeness and dependence upon God unlike at other times. Without these difficulties, we would sail along with little desire to increase our faith. Satan puts doubts in our minds to diminish our faith. If we dwell on doubts, we will find more reasons to question God and ultimately decrease what little faith we have. The Bible describes personalities of great faith for us to draw encouragement from. Sometimes just waiting patiently on God is how we can demonstrate our faith.

### CONSIDER

- Contacting someone who has gone through great trials and stayed close to God. Ask them how their experience made their faith grow.
- Photographing someone who is demonstrating faith in action (e.g., someone stepping onto an airplane, a child holding their parent's hand as they cross a street).
- Charting your lifetime growth in personal faith. Horizontally mark years on a piece of paper, specifically noting periods of distress, and diagonally graph your level of faith. Has it steadily grown or have you had ups and downs? At what level is your faith now?
- Writing a personal letter to God about an area of your life in which you need more faith. Pray about it.
- Looking in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* for songs about faith. Count them and compare that number to other topics. What does this suggest? Sing or play your favorite faith hymn.
- Reading Luke 17:5, 6. Look up how small a mustard seed is in an encyclopedia, plant identification book, or the Internet. Draw it on a piece of paper, cut it out and tape it to your bathroom mirror to remind you daily of your need for faith.
- Listing some of the things you do each day that takes faith in human devices (e.g., turning on a light switch, turning a key in the ignition, setting an alarm clock, etc.). Then list ways you have faith in God each day.

### CONNECT

Mark 4:40; 11:22; Galatians 5:6, 22; Ephesians 6:16.

*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p.163; vol. 5, p. 75; *Steps to Christ*, p. 96; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 389, 431; *Education*, p. 257.

Morris L. Venden, *Faith That Works*, pp. 69, 77, 140, 141; Andrew Murray, *How to Strengthen Your Faith*; Charles R. Swindoll, *Simple Faith*, pp. 221-252.

# A Woman's role



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“God created man in His own image; in the image of God  
He created him; male and female He created them”  
(Gen. 1:27, NKJV).

## INTRODUCTION

Esther 4:14

One of the first things I learned when I was introduced to physics is that water finds its level. And you may be asking, "What has this to do with our week's lesson on women in Scripture?" A lot.

Plans for ethnic cleansing were set. Just a command from the king and the Jewish nation would become history. It was at this hour that Esther came into the picture. She risked her life to be an instrument of salvation. God had placed her in a position for "a time like this" (Esther 4:14, TLB). And she measured up to the task. She found her level in ministry.

Right from the onset of this world, there has been a form of ethnic cleansing orchestrated by the devil. Modern Esthers have not remained silent. Just as Esther responded to Mordecai's appeal, Jerusha Muga has responded to the call of Jesus Christ. An administrative secretary for the president and the executive secretary of the East African Union in Kenya, she has stretched herself to the limit to be an instrument of salvation. Apart from her secretarial duties, she is an author and accomplished speaker.

For Jerusha 1999 was a very busy year. She conducted an evangelistic campaign, a week of spiritual emphasis, two camp meetings, and a number of women's ministries meetings. During these meetings more than 500 souls have given their lives to Jesus.

She has found her level in ministry.

Ellen White writes, "Women of firm principle and decided character are needed, women who believe that we are indeed living in the last days. . . . They should feel that they are engaged in an important work in spreading the rays of light which Heaven has shed upon them."<sup>1</sup> Further she says, "Our sisters . . . may act a part in the closing work for this time. . . . By training the mind in this direction they will learn how to bear burdens for Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

Consider some of these women in the Bible. Eve has mothered all humankind. Deborah, apart from her duties as a prophet, freed the Israelites from the jaws of Jabin. Ruth's insistence led her to be in the genealogy of Jesus' birth. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, believed in prayer despite being misunderstood by her priest. Rahab, though a harlot, earned her place in the gallery of the heroes of faith. The virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus. Mary of Bethany had insight to choose the best. Dorcas used her hands to save the less fortunate. Priscilla became a coworker in preaching the gospel.

These women found their levels in ministry.

1. *Welfare Ministry*, p. 149.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

# "Real Man" Versus God's Woman

## EVIDENCE

Judges 4; 5

Freedom is something many people in the world take for granted until they have lost it. Can you begin to imagine being a captive for 20 years? And that during the period of your captivity you have no freedom of speech and conscience? Your movements are generally monitored. Your religious rights controlled. Most of us would shudder at such a thought. But this is exactly what the Israelites experienced. For 20 years they were slaves under Jabin, king of Canaan. To make things worse, Jabin had a tough dude as his army commander by the name of Sisera. And the name Sisera means *a real man*. Can things get worse than this? Do they?

Is it any wonder that Barak refused when Deborah approached him to fight Jabin. How could he fight *a real man* who had 900 iron chariots? If he had to, it was on one condition. Deborah had to accompany him. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Deborah accepted the challenge.

At the peak of the battle, things soured for the *real man*, Sisera. Running away from one woman, Deborah, he landed in the hands of another woman, Jael, who inflicted on him the final blow. The *real man* was destroyed by the woman of God. And the children of Israel regained their freedom. In God's sight *real men* are those who place themselves in His hands for Him to use them.

How could he fight a  
*real man* who had 900  
iron chariots?

## REACT

1. How can you be a Deborah or a Jael for God today?
2. How can you help some people to know that there are Deborahs today who are able to go where modern Baraks are afraid to go?
3. Do you think God has different expectations of men and women? Why or why not?
4. How can different perspectives and approaches, such as those of males and females, be beneficial in solving problems and disputes?
5. Why do you think Barak wanted Deborah with him in the fight against Sisera? What strengths did each bring to the enterprise?
6. God has promised us, as to Deborah, victory even before the outcome can be determined. Like a predictable movie plot, we know the ending but wait to see how that ending will materialize. What does the knowledge of eternal life give us as we face day-to-day trials?

## LOGOS

Judges 4; 5; Ruth 1-4; Esther 4:14; Luke 1:30, 31; 7:36-50

The world has generally believed that women are inferior to men. This kind of thinking is not theocentric. It is anthropocentric. It is a concept that originates from the devil, the architect of lies. If we study the Bible, we find that women are of great theological significance in the plan of God. Just like men, they also have a great part to play in the work of saving souls for the heavenly kingdom.

### In the Image of God

When God created man and woman differently, it did not imply that the female sex was inferior. Following the Bible account, we are explicitly told that man and woman were both created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27). If we were to pursue to its end the logic of the concept of the inferiority of women, we would be implying that there is a part in the image of God that is inferior. The Bible indicates that all that God had made was good (verse 31); therefore, there can be nothing inferior about women.

Hence this week's lesson explores how God has used women throughout history in fulfilling His mission. Consider these examples:

### Deborah (Judges 4; 5)

God has used women in leadership positions from time immemorial. When the Israelites were under bondage for 20 years, God raised a woman by the name of Deborah. In her life, several things stand out in significance:

*She was a married woman.* Deborah was a wife of Lappidoth. Her family responsibilities, however, did not prevent her from doing the work God had entrusted into her hands. She balanced the delicate work of motherhood with the mission God had for her. Motherhood ministry should not necessarily impede a woman from other kinds of ministries God may have for her.

*She was a judge.* As a judge, she presided over the political affairs of the Israelites. People came to her for advice and to have disputes settled. As one reads her account, it is easy to note that she executed her work with God-given excellence.

*She was a prophetess.* As such, she spoke to people on behalf of God. God used her as His mouthpiece.

*She was a woman of faith.* When she challenged Barak to stand up and face Jabin and Sisera, Barak refused. He begged Deborah to accompany him, and through her leadership, the Israelites triumphed. Her bravery signifies that she was a woman of faith who greatly depended upon the Lord.

*She knew who deserved glory.* Judges 5 records the song of Deborah after they had triumphed over Jabin and Sisera. She attributed all the success to God. Humility was her strong characteristic.

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## **Ruth From Moab (Ruth 1–4)**

Ruth had never worshiped the God of heaven until she became married to one of the sons of Naomi. As the story unfolds, Naomi lost both her husband and her two sons. This tragedy became an impetus for Naomi to return to her homeland, Judah. She tried to persuade Ruth to return to her gods. But Ruth, who had been captivated by the love of God she had seen in this family, declined to return to her old ways of life. God allowed Ruth to move from this godless background to becoming part of the genealogy of Jesus.

## **Esther (Esther 4:14)**

Just as God did with David, who slaughtered Goliath, God worked with Esther. Esther had many things working against her: she originated from the tiny tribe of Benjamin; she was a woman, a gender with little respect in that culture; she was a slave; and she was an orphan. Despite all this, the Lord used her. Her name is believed to be of Persian origin and

**We would be implying that there is a part in the image of God that is inferior.**

means “a star.”\* Truly she became a star when she risked her life by breaking a Persian custom and walking into the presence of the king without the king’s invitation. At the end of it all, through her tact, she was able to override the king’s decree and save the entire Jewish nation. Salvation came to God’s people from a perspective least expected.

## **Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Luke 1:30, 31)**

Probably the most terrifying responsibility ever placed on the shoulders of a human being was Mary’s. It must have been a very scary feeling when the angel told her that she was going to be the mother of Jesus. Can you imagine that? It was she who would raise Jesus and prepare Him for His ministry on earth.

## **The Street Woman (Luke 7:36-50)**

The woman who is called the sinner in this passage signifies how the love of God works. God looks at the heart and not on the outward appearance. God respected the token of appreciation and the humility demonstrated by this woman. While other people at the banquet despised her because of her background and probably because of her gender, what mattered to Jesus was her contrite and repentant heart.

One thing the Bible has made very clear is the spiritual symbolism of a woman. As early as Genesis 3:15, the symbolism of God’s church has been a woman. Women have a great theological significance in the sight of God. Humankind has been deceived by the devil.

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\**The Link*, vol. 4, No. 1, 1999 (Kampala, Uganda), p. 17.

## TESTIMONY

Luke 7:39

Talented, outgoing, and beautiful, Mary had it all. Probably many young women in Bethany secretly wished they were she. But unfortunately, these positive qualities led her into an adulterous life. Simon, one of the elders of the church, triggered in Mary a path to prostitution.

As days ticked away into years, what began as a life of fun and pleasure became a life of pain, shame, and guilt. Probably in an attempt to get rid of this heavy burden, she moved to the town of Magdala. But change of place did not change her heart. It was not long before she was nicknamed Mary of Magdala. Society ostracized her. She could no longer go to the well to fetch water with other women for fear of ridicule. In a society in which women were not counted, it was double jeopardy for Mary. She associated with men she sinned with, but she was lonelier and angrier than before. She never got peace of mind. Then Jesus came into her life.

She heard of a Man who was giving people a new lease on life. *What will people think if they see this acclaimed man associating with me?* Mary must have

**To her pleasant surprise,  
Jesus treated her  
differently.**

asked herself. But she purposed in her heart to meet Jesus. To her pleasant surprise, Jesus treated her differently. He did not condemn her. He was patient with her imperfections. Seven times Jesus

cast demons from her. Soon Mary was a transformed person.

At a feast hosted by Simon, Mary heard Jesus speak of His impending death. She recalled all Jesus had done for her. She decided to express her gratitude to Jesus for redeeming her from sin. Mary anointed Jesus' feet with a very expensive perfume. Interestingly enough, Simon, the very man who had led Mary into sin, was the one who was in the forefront in judging Mary.

"Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away. He does not tell to any all that He might reveal, but He bids every trembling soul take courage. Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration."\* This is how Jesus works. In a culture in which women were looked down upon, Jesus treated Mary with dignity.

## REACT

1. If Jesus accepts sinners, what should our attitude be when we repeatedly sin?
2. If Jesus forgives us of sin, what ought to be our attitude toward those who trespass against us?

\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

# How to Become an Esther

## HOW-TO

Esther 4:14

“Through Esther the queen the Lord accomplished a mighty deliverance for His people. At a time when it seemed no power could save them, Esther and the women associated with her, by fasting and prayer and prompt action, met the issue, and brought salvation to their people.”\*

It is important for every woman to realize that God places her in certain positions or allows certain circumstances to arise so

**Look around and see how  
you can become an Esther.**

that she can be His witness. Should you experience unexpected eventualities—the sun around you seems to set suddenly—instead of despairing, look around and see how you can become an Esther. Here are some suggestions:

**1. Pray.** Make it a priority just as Esther did to pray and fast for your people. Your prayers—if it is God’s will—will bring deliverance to your people. Just as the psalmist sings, “In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation” (Ps. 5:3, NIV). If you will always turn your eyes upon Jesus, He will grant your petitions according to His wisdom.

**2. Take time to study the Bible.** Seek the Lord in His Scriptures. You will learn more of Him and will be able to learn how to claim His promises. It is only through the study of the Bible that you will learn what the Lord requires of you and the purpose He has for your life and the lives of others through you.

**3. Do not look down on yourself.** In whatever position you are—homemaker, professional, or student—the Lord wants to use you. He can use you only if you are willing to be used by Him. Have confidence that He will work out His will in you. If you are not confident of who you are and what the Lord can do through you, how can you help to bring deliverance to God’s people?

**4. Remember that you are made in the image of God.** In whatever position you find yourself, remember that you are made in the image of the Creator.

## REACT

1. What reasons can you find for God’s placing you in your circumstances?
2. What ingredients are necessary within us for us to place ourselves in God’s hands and become His instruments?
3. How do we know that the decision that seems right to us is the best one to make? How can God use a bad decision for the good?

\*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1140.

# They Were Ordinary Women

## OPINION

Judges 4; 5; Ruth 1-4; Esther 4:14; Luke 1:30, 31; 7:36-40

*Deborah.* When Barak feared to handle the situation, it was Deborah, an ordinary woman, who led the armies of Israel to victory.

*Ruth.* Because she could not be persuaded by her mother-in-law Naomi to return to her former life of idol worship, this Moabite woman with a heathen background is found in the lineage of Jesus.

*Esther.* She came from the small tribe of Benjamin. Coupled with the facts that she was a woman and a slave, she may have felt that she amounted to nothing. Such an ordinary and humble background did not deter God from using her.

*Mary, the mother of Jesus.* God has always used ordinary human vehicles to accomplish great things. In her teenage simplicity, Mary mothered Jesus.

*The sinful woman from the city.* Even though it was likely that she knew what people may have been thinking about her at the banquet that Simon had prepared for Jesus, she was willing to bear all the ridicule for the sake of thanking Jesus for what He had done for her. At the end of it all, her action ministered to Simon as well as the others at the banquet.

*My grandmother.* As a pastor's wife, she was a victim of the famous Adventist movement. Though

**My ordinary grandmother saw every transfer as an opportunity to do something for Jesus.**

simple and not highly educated, she used these frequent transfers as opportunities. When my grandfather was out

itinerating, she traveled to nearby villages and conducted Bible studies. And because of this spirit, she planted many branch Sabbath Schools. My ordinary grandmother saw every transfer as an opportunity to do something for Jesus.

God is not looking for great women with unusual abilities to serve Him. He is looking for ordinary women who are willing to be used by Him to accomplish great things. Are you ready to be a vessel for Jesus?

## REACT

1. What kinds of "great things" can a so-called ordinary woman accomplish? Be specific.

2. We generally think of God as He, but what characteristics of God may more closely resemble those of women and mothers? Think of examples from the Bible.

3. The characters mentioned in today's lesson had some level of confidence in their decisions/actions. How can we feel confident that we are doing what God would want us to do?

# Two Images Reflected

## EXPLORATION

Gen. 1:27

## CONCLUDE

Just as man was created in God's image, woman also reflects His likeness. Jesus set us an example by treating all people—including women—with dignity. Women have always played an important role in God's work. The Bible offers numerous examples of women who displayed leadership, courage, and consecration. All over the world, modern women continue to spread the gospel and make a difference in their own unique ways. God is willing to work in the life of any person who is truly dedicated to Him.

## CONSIDER

- Choosing a man and a woman whom you respect and admire. Divide a sheet of paper in half. Place a picture (or drawing) of one individual on each side, with the heading, "I see God in \_\_\_\_\_." Then list the characteristics of each that reflect God's image.
- Exploring the Web site for Women in the Biblical Tradition at <[www.acs.appstate.edu/~em21771](http://www.acs.appstate.edu/~em21771)>.
- Making a sculpture or other visual display that illustrates both men and women as reflections of God.
- Writing a "Top 10" list of Bible women who were heroes in God's eyes. Think of something you can learn from each of them.
- Locating several texts that emphasize the personal value God places upon every individual. Write them on a card and give the card to someone who may need encouragement.
- Memorizing Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55), or Hannah's song (1 Sam. 2:1-10).
- Making an acrostic, word search, crossword, or logic puzzle with names of Bible women and/or facts about them.

## CONNECT

*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 46, 47, 569-574; *Prophets and Kings*, chap. 49.  
Alice Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*; Ava Covington, *They Also Served*;  
Denise Carmody, *Biblical Women*.

# Tiny sins— Humongous results



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“Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark”  
(James 3:5, NIV).

# It Takes Only a Spark

## INTRODUCTION

James 3:5

While walking from their car to their house, the family of a prominent beautician in my community was struck with tragedy. The kindhearted hairdresser was killed by the crossfire of a gang crime. This victim of sin was a dear friend of the community, a beloved wife, and a cherished mother. She worked hard to be a success and was killed by a terrible act of violence at the age of 39. This story is terrible yet true. One's heart goes out to the suffering family, but it has much more impact on my community because this woman was so well-respected and admired here.

It's true that her death was an accident, and 75 miles away, no one had even heard of this woman, but in my town everyone knew and loved her. Everyone in town was demanding justice. Because of a few pulls of the trigger, a boy was held accountable for his sin. One small act that would have meant very little in Dallas set my whole community on fire.

This is a big example, but don't our own "little" sins have the same kind of impact on our lives and those close to us? You think, *It won't hurt to cheat on my diet just this once*. Next thing you know, you've gained twice as much weight as you wanted to lose. "Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark" (James 3:5, NIV). Even the slightest of sins can cause an enormous impact on our lives. As Christians, we know that "the wages of sin is death"

**The kindhearted hairdresser  
was killed by the crossfire.**

(Rom. 6:23, KJV), that every little sin is seen (Num. 32:23) and has its consequence. As Christians, though, we can also accept the salvation that comes through the death of Jesus Christ. As ready as we all are to sin, Jesus is equally able to forgive those sins, no matter how small or large they may be.

This week's study will concentrate on the large result of a "small spark."

## Has Satan Been Right All This Time?

### LOGOS

Gen. 19:26; Lev. 10:1, 2; Judg. 16:17; 2 Kings 5:20-27; 1 Chronicles 13

Is our God unjust, unfair with sinful humanity? As Christians, we hold true that God is merciful, just, and fair. The character description given us by God Himself includes those words (Exod. 34:6, 7). In attempting to understand the biblical texts for study this week, in that merciful character context, I admit that Lucifer's sultry tones—suggesting that God was unfair—did crop up several times. I began to understand what the angels must have been battling in their minds when they were deciding whether Satan or Christ was right.

Satan used deception and flattery to put his point across, but Christ could use only truth and love, which was and is the foundation of the government of heaven. From the beginning God had to prove that He was merciful. Yet in each study text for this week, we are told a story, an incident in which one act was the downfall of the individual. Does that not prove Satan's point?

Lot's wife, out of longing for home, ignores the warning and turns into salt. Nadab and Abihu, out of laziness, take unholy fire before God, and are burned to a crisp.

**Samson lets down his hair  
once, and he is cut from  
God's team.**

Samson lets down his hair once, and he is cut from God's team and allowed to rot in jail. Gehazi, in order to benefit his master Elisha, tries to get some pay for Naaman's

cure, and receives as his reward a death sentence of leprosy. Uzzah tries to steady the ark of the Lord, and for his carelessness dies without a trial.

Is this mercy? Is this justice? Is this fair? Has Satan been right all this time? Have we been bamboozled into believing God's merciful character a mere press release? Fact is, our understanding of the character of God is what *He* has told us. Might His self-description of all that mercy be a little suspect? Or are we allowing several thousand years of Satan's negative press releases of God's unfairness to confuse and deceive us?

At first glance these stories seem to suggest that God *is* unfair in His judgments. On closer examination we notice two points that help God's innocence:

1. In each instance, our main characters were given explicit details on what would happen if they did things improperly or if they knew what they were doing was contrary to the law of God.

2. In each instance, God's character was being called into question; therefore, radical measures were invoked.

We know what each individual did, but what aspect of the character of God was being torn asunder by the participants in our Bible texts? Here is what I came up with; hopefully you will find others:

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● For Lot's wife it was His character of mercy. He could have let them die in that city for they were just as evil as the rest, but he told them to get out, and only one small condition was given.

● For Nadab and Abihu it was the holiness of His character. No unholy fire could be allowed to represent the purity of God.

● For Samson the power of God in the form of a gift was called into question. Once the hair grew back, there still was no power, no gift, until God gave it back in the temple just before Samson's death.

● For Gehazi, not only did he lie to Naaman, but he also demeaned the character of God by suggesting subtly that Elisha and the prophets were not being cared for by the all-powerful God.

● For Uzzah touching the ark undermined the ability of God to take care of things in His own way. Was God really in control? Was God really omnipotent? Uzzah did not think so, and therefore attempted to intervene on behalf of God. In each instance, God's recourse was to bring immediate judgment on the situation.

"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10, NIV). Breaking the law brings death. Judgment was swift to those who, when it came to representing the character of God, failed to do Him justice. Judgment was swift when instruction had been given and not followed, or when the law was broken. The New Testament has the story of Ananias and Sapphira; the Old Testament includes Achan, Adam and Eve, Moses. Each story depicts its own swift judgment. Each story with its main character bringing the character of God—the foundation of heaven—into question.

What are the implications for us today? As ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven, are we placing ourselves in jeopardy with each word and action that we say or do? Tiny sins, terribly huge results?

The Bible makes clear that each sin has death as its consequence. No matter how small it appears to us, it offends God greatly. If it were not for the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf, we would be judged by the jury of the universe as deserving death, and rightly so. Is it fair? Yes, by the law of God each sin has only one penalty. That is as fair as He can get. It is not like a tax code for which everyone has his or her own interpretation. If you sin, you die. If you have Christ, you live.

Has Satan been right all this time? You decide as you read Hebrews 12:1, 2.

## **REACT**

1. Why was God harsh with Moses and others, but with the adulterous woman he said, "'Go and sin no more' "? (John 8:11, NKJV).

2. How can we understand the concept of a loving God when viewed through the biblical texts for this week?

3. How can it be fair that stealing is considered as terrible a sin as murder?

4. Think of a tiny sin. How might your view of this sin weaken your walk with God?

5. How does grace relate to our accountability for sin?

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*Terry Johnson, Killeen, Texas*

## TESTIMONY

James 2:10

Tiny sins. Is there really such a thing? Is any sin insignificant? In *Steps to Christ*, we are told "however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God."<sup>1</sup> "These may seem to be little things, unworthy of notice, but the seed thus scattered brings forth a sure harvest. It is these little sins, so common that they are often unnoticed, that Satan uses in his service."<sup>2</sup>

We can "not come in contact with sin without becoming polluted."<sup>3</sup> Much like any other addiction, sin can begin as an experiment with a fairly harmless introductory temptation, but it cannot be left alone at that point. Each time it is revisited, it grows. "No man can tell how far he may go in sin, when once he yields himself to the power of the great

**The idea of a "small sin" begins with Satan and ends with us.**

deceiver."<sup>4</sup> "Common sins, however insignificant they may be regarded, will impair your moral sense, and extinguish the inward impression of the Spirit of God."<sup>5</sup>

"It is transgression in the little things that first leads the soul away from God. By their one sin in partaking of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve opened the floodgates of woe upon the world. Some may regard that transgression as a very little thing, but we see that its consequences were anything but small."<sup>6</sup>

"Many who would shrink with horror from some great transgression are led to look upon sin in little matters as of trifling consequence. But these little sins eat out the life of godliness in the soul. The feet which enter upon a path diverging from the right way are tending toward the broad road that ends in death. When once a retrograde movement begins, no one can tell where it may end."<sup>7</sup>

The idea of a "small sin" begins with Satan and ends with us. God is not fooled and neither should we be. It may be easy for us to think of Christ dying on the cross for our salvation, and in light of His sacrifice, all sin should seem as a tremendous evil. It is easy to think of Him dying for those sins that we see as big, but are we also willing to crucify Him anew each time we commit those small sins?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 32.

2. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 14, p. 293.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 419.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 103.

5. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 195.

6. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 573.

7. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 92.

# But He Lied to Me . . .

## EVIDENCE

1 Kings 13

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost.  
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost.  
For want of a horse, the rider was lost.  
For want of the rider, the message was lost.  
For want of the message, the battle was lost.  
For want of the battle, the war was lost.  
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.  
(Old English nursery rhyme)

Such a drastic result for such a small item. A horseshoe nail shouldn't be so costly. The Bible has several examples. A quick glance shouldn't make you the Morton salt poster girl (Gen. 19:26). Drunks are amusing to watch, and it leads us to excuse some of their actions. Surely a bad choice—when your brain chemistry has been altered—shouldn't lead to a fiery demise (Lev. 10:1, 2). A little greed is what allows you to get ahead in society, to look out for your future, and if you get caught it should be a fine or something, but it shouldn't cost you everything (2 Kings 5:20-27; Josh. 7:1, 19-26; Acts 5:1-10). And surely, an attempt to save a holy symbol from destruction should be rewarded with something better than death (1 Chron. 13:9, 10). Wouldn't reason dictate that a prophet of God should get a break? When you play golf with friends at least you get a mulligan; but apparently, on God's course, all strokes count (1 Kings 13).

**When you play golf  
with friends at least  
you get a mulligan.**

Let's take a moment to consider this last example. God's man, forever unnamed, would seem to have a great excuse. "Look, God, I didn't go to the palace of Jeroboam, and this prophet that came to me said that You changed Your mind." God's reply was: " ' "You have defied the word of the Lord and have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you" ' " (1 Kings 13:21, NIV). I might have argued, "But, he lied to me! He told me . . ."

"If, after disobeying the word of the Lord, the prophet had been permitted to go on in safety, the king would have used this fact in an attempt to vindicate his own disobedience."\* To excuse sin can lessen how others view their own sin. This excuse can minimize our own guilt and not allow the Holy Spirit to do the work He is sent to do. The sizing of sins is to make us feel less guilty in our minds.

\**Prophets and Kings*, p. 107.

# Quenching the Fire

## HOW-TO

Rom. 12:2

It is difficult to apply an experience like Uzzah's to present life. We can gain some insight if we look closer. Uzzah paid the price for the mistakes of others. Yes, he put his hand on the ark, but he wouldn't have had to do so if it had been transported properly: an ox cart versus poles in the rings of the ark—no big deal. Well, it was a big deal for Uzzah.

We each do the same thing when we adjust our standards in accordance with those around us instead of always holding God's law at face value. The smoldering sin we fail to extinguish can have drastic results in our lives and the lives around us.

It is one thing to say one must turn completely from sin and another thing actually to do it. Whether it is a so-called tiny sin or a lifelong struggle, the formula for success in overcoming is the same.

**The smoldering sin we fail to extinguish can have drastic results.**

How is it that we go about extinguishing this fire?

**1. No fuel, no fire.** In order for a fire to exist, it requires fuel. Take away the fuel, no fire. What is fueling the sin in your life? Are you hanging out in places you shouldn't? Are you abusing your body with dangerous substances? Are you running with the wrong crowd, or are you allowing your mind to dwell on impure thoughts? All these are fuel for Satan's fire. The more fuel you supply, the higher the flames roar. Cut off the fuel supply (Rom.12:2; James 4:7).

**2. Call 911 (Dan. 6:27; Col. 1:13).** When we see the flames of sin, we need to get away from the burning building and call God to put it out. Pray for strength to resist the temptations that will surely come. As soon as one fire is out, Satan will look for another weakness: those greasy rags in the basement.

**3. Don't let the fire begin.** Temptation is the match. The same match can be used to light a candle that provides a wonderful glow or it can burn your house down if held to the drapes. It is not a sin to be tempted. Temptation is Satan appealing to our old nature, our physical being. But, we must remind ourselves by the reassurance of the Holy Spirit. We are not just physical; we are also spiritual (Col. 2:1), and He that is in us is stronger than that which is against us (1 John 5:18). God always provides a way of escape. He will give us the strength to blow out that match (1 Cor. 10:13).

## REACT

1. What other parallels between fire and sin can you think of?
2. Whose job is it to extinguish sin, God's or yours?

# Our Choice

## OPINION

Phil. 4:8

Ever since God told humanity to "have dominion" over the earth (Gen. 1:28, KJV), humankind has explored the universe. Beginning with things that are visible, humanity began the process of classifying items based on size, shape, composition, and interaction with other elements. Newton, Galileo, and Da Vinci introduced us to the universe, building the laws of physics. These and others established that natural relationships exist among various elements. Each in turn built upon other's studies and experiments. Duplicating and expanding knowledge, each generation of science has increased the field of knowledge. As they continued to synthesize facts, their focus changed from the visible object to that object's composition. Science changed with the discovery of the atom. The power contained in that small element has changed our lives unimaginably.

In 1945, the United States of America split the atom, changing forever the path of the human race. A miniscule element, yet the result of its use demonstrates a dramatic continuing effect with uncounted ramifications on the environment around it.

The same God who developed the relationships in the natural elements has left a path of discovery for us in life. He promises to call every act into account (Rom. 14:12), but He has also promised that temptation will not be more than we can stand (1 Cor. 10:13) when we are connected to the power of the Holy Spirit. He challenges us to have the faith of a mustard seed. Armed with just this mustard seed of faith, He has promised to move mountains to complete the gospel commission. No effort will be spared on heaven's part if we call on Him.

If every act is to be called into account, then the tiniest sins that I harbor in the deepest part of my life will have a direct bearing on my eternal soul. The psalmist expressed a need for God to create a new heart [mind] within him. We also should invite God to create this new mind within us, one that replaces the desires of this world with a desire for eternal things.

**Rarely does God reach down and grab us by the scruff of the neck.**

Philippians 4:8 identifies a standard by which we should judge our life and make changes. This is our choice. Only we can begin the process. Only the Holy Spirit can complete it through our continual choice to participate.

Rarely does God reach down and grab us by the scruff of the neck. Instead, He knocks at the door of our hearts. He is ready to impart to us that same power that created the atom to provide us the same energy that Paul used as he traveled the world as an ambassador of heaven.

## Hazardous to Spiritual Health

### EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 5:6

### CONCLUDE

Wouldn't it be great if big sins like adultery and murder and even little ones like white lies were required by law to wear warning labels? "Danger! Contains experiences hazardous to spiritual health." Or, "Not recommended for children under God." Thankfully, the Bible has placed a warning label on sin that we can read in James 3:5. Even the tiniest, quietest, most unobserved sin is like a hand grenade. Once you pull the pin out, it is explosive.

### CONSIDER

- Designing your own warning label for a specific sin you are battling with, such as overeating, impatience, etc. Tack your label on the refrigerator or scan it onto your computer as a screen saver. Or make it into a bumper sticker and affix it to your car or a notebook as an inspiration to you to say No to yourself and Yes to freedom.
- Writing a poem in the voice of the woman caught in adultery or any other Bible character whose small sin created havoc. Let your poem be an exercise in gaining a fuller understanding of the mercy and justice of God.
- Staging a pantomime for your class of Lot and his family fleeing Sodom. Set it to music with deep pathos, such as Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings."
- Organizing a potluck-costume party. Invite everyone to bring a dish of food and come dressed as one of the Bible characters studied in this week's lesson, without revealing who he or she is. Let each person give a short monologue in character, revealing what he or she has done.
- Journaling about an experience from your own life in which a tiny sin resulted in major consequences. Reflect upon what this teaches you about this particular sin, asking God to remove its power from your life.
- Reading the parables of Jesus and create your own modern parable(s) that illustrate(s) the theme of this week's lesson of how small sins have huge repercussions. Explore how you can tell a modern parable about the dangers of smoking, drug use, child abuse, pride, etc., in language relevant for today.

### CONNECT

Matthew 5:27-32; John 8:1-11; James 1:12-16.

*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 156-170; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 456-462.

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*; "Lot and His Daughters" and "Life Against Death" in *The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible*.

## Next Quarter's Lessons

### THE END AND THE BEGINNING

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for third quarter 2001, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

#### **Lesson 1: The Lord Our Righteousness**

*Logos:* John 14:6; Rom. 1:1-5; 3:24; 4:16; Eph. 2:8, 9; Heb. 11:1, 6; James 2:14-26

*Key thought:* "Adventism was born with its eyes on Jesus." So states an Adventist theologian. Having its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century advent awakening, the seed-bed of Adventism was the expectation and proclamation of Jesus' soon appearance in the second advent. Apart from Him, then, there can be no Adventism.

Biblical truth is personal because it connects us to a Person. "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NIV). Jesus is not one of the pillars of our church. Rather, He is the foundation for the pillars. The heart and core of the Adventist faith is a Person, not an ideal, a philosophy, nor a lifestyle; and developing and maintaining a trusting, loving, and obedient relationship with that Person is the essence of the Christian life. We must view the distinctive beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in light of how they enhance such a relationship. That is the goal of this quarter's Bible study guide, and that is why we begin the quarter with a lesson on "the Lord our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6, KJV).

#### **Lesson 2: The Sabbath**

*Logos:* Exod. 16:4, 5, 13-30; 31:12-18; Isa. 56:1-7; Matt. 12:12, 13; Mark 2:27, 28; Luke 4:16; Rev. 11:19

*Key thought:* An eternal memorial. In giving us the Sabbath, God gave us an eternal gift that describes and anchors our relationship with Him. As such, it is a day filled with meaning, a pointer to our eternal rest. The Sabbath is uniquely a day He has reserved for Himself. Throughout biblical history, up to today, His people have celebrated it as a special day. The Sabbath remains God's particular 24 hours, and it will become a special testing point before the second coming of Jesus. We will continue to observe it in the new earth.

Ellen White records the following statements about the permanence of the Sabbath: "I was shown that the law of God would stand fast forever, and exist in the new earth to all eternity. . . . The Sabbath was instituted in Eden before the fall, and was observed by Adam and Eve, and all the heavenly host.

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God rested on the seventh day, and blessed and hallowed it. I saw that the Sabbath never will be done away; but that the redeemed saints, and all the angelic host, will observe it in honor of the great Creator to all eternity" (*Early Writings*, p. 217).

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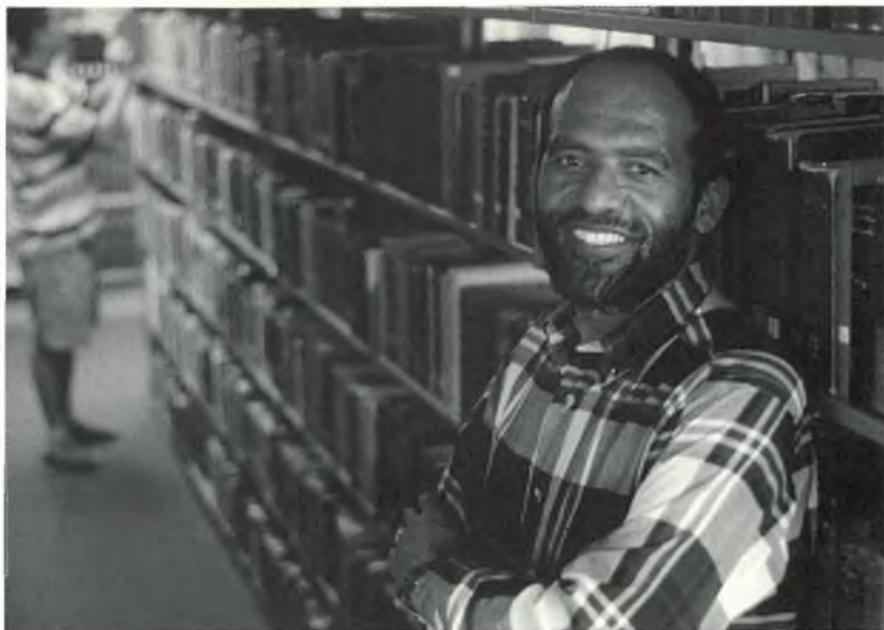
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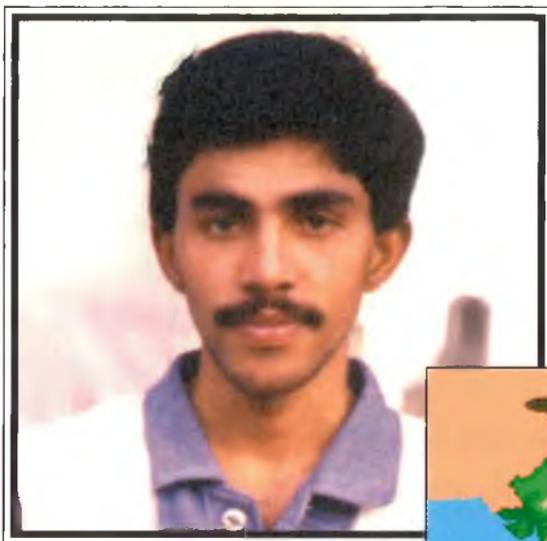
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**NAME:**  
Narendra Babu,  
Andhra Pradesh, India

Southern Asia  
Division

**BACKGROUND:**

Narendra's family tried hard to live a good life so that when they died they would be reborn into better circumstances. Narendra carefully kept the festival days and made gifts to the gods his family worshiped. But in his heart he felt there must be more to life, more to worshipping the gods than he knew. Then one day as he walked along a street in his city he heard singing. The open door of a simple Christian church seemed to invite him to join the worshipers. He stepped inside. Narendra began searching for the true God and the true way in which to worship and obey Him. Read *Mission* to learn how, in spite of opposition from his family and friends, Narendra has set his course in a new direction since he met Jesus Christ.

**THE THIRTEENTH SABBATH OFFERING:**

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide 500 prayer chapels in the Southern Asia Division.