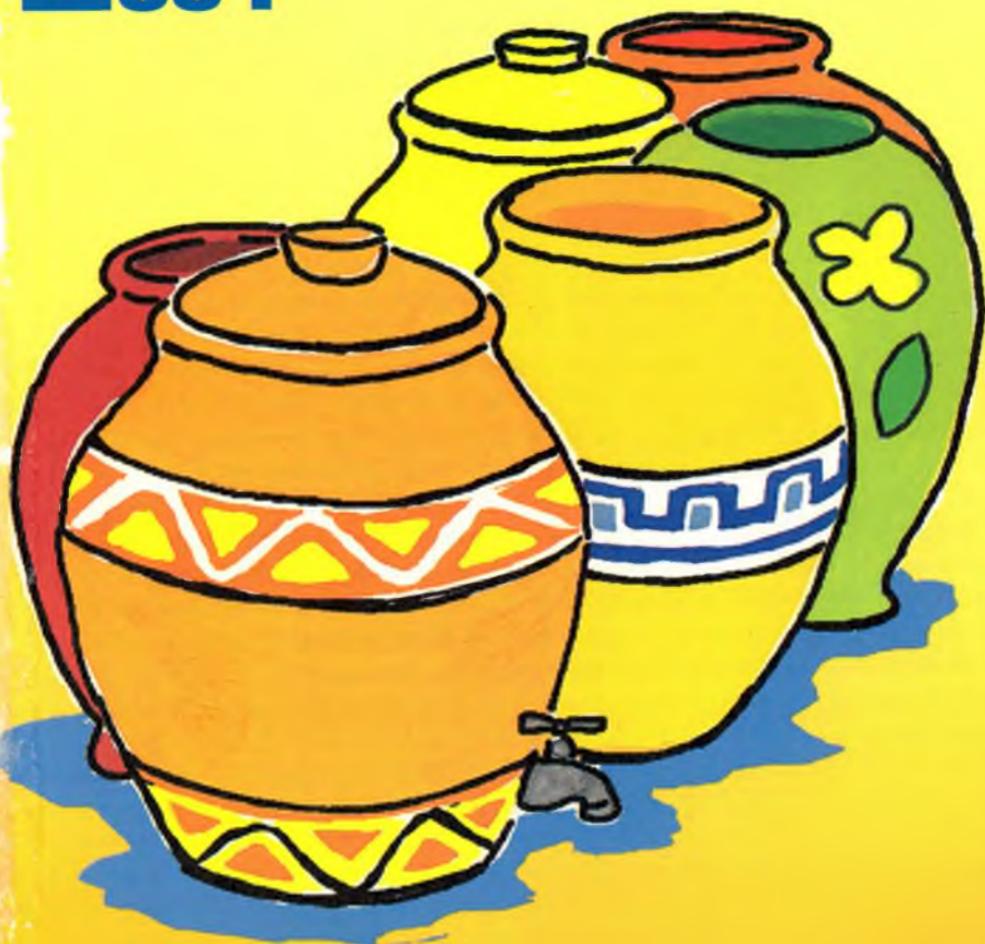


JANUARY-MARCH

Q
2004

John: The **Beloved Gospel**



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



<http://cq.adventist.org>

John: The Beloved Gospel



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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 reflect the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Indonesian, and Finnish.

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Ever think about writing for *CQ*?

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This Quarter's Illustrator



Born in Bacolod City, Philippines. Johanna Cordero Gallermo completed a degree of bachelor in fine arts major in advertising. Since graduation, she has worked at Philippine Publishing House as a layout artist, where for the past two years she has designed books, created illustrations, and designed and laid out *Health & Home*, the flagship magazine of Philippine Publishing House.

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.

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Circulation of CQ is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

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

CQ AND THE CHURCH

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

Lesson 1
December 27–January 3

The Gospel in everyday Clothes



“Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ ” (John 20:29, NIV).

Face to Face With Christ

INTRODUCTION

John 20:29

Our pastor told us about an incident that took place while he was on a regular visitation. On this particular day he had gone to a new area where there were no members of his church.

He went to a few homes and prayed with new families that he had never met before. In one of the homes he was told to visit a small neighboring house. He was further informed that the occupant of that house was a paralyzed woman who had spent her life in bed.

When he came close to the entrance, he could feel the loneliness that filled the room, which had nothing except a bed and an old dirty blanket. He almost turned to go because he could not see anyone. But as he turned, he heard a weak voice from the bed.

After greetings the pastor informed the frail woman that he was there to tell her that despite the fact that she was in that state, there was Somebody who loved her very much—Someone who died for the sins of humanity.

He was pleased to see that she was becoming interested in the story of Jesus. He took time to explain plain truths about Jesus. After listening attentively for a while, the woman said that she was happy that Someone loves her despite the fact that she was paralyzed and isolated.

The pastor told her that Jesus is coming back again and that when He comes back to establish His kingdom, there will be no sorrow, there will be no paralysis, and all saints will be rewarded.

At this, she told the pastor to remove something from a black plastic bag hanging in a corner of the room. To his amazement he found that there were a few coins, probably given to her by a previous visitor. Taken aback by this, the pastor asked the woman what he should do with the coins.

He was pleased to see that she was becoming interested.

“That is all I have at the moment. Please take them to Jesus as a gift for dying for me and for loving me despite the fact that I am the way I am. Today I feel as if I have met Him face to face.” She concluded by thanking him for bringing a message of hope to her.

The gospel of Christ is changing lives every day. Great transformations take place in people's lives when they accept Jesus. Wouldn't it be nice if you became a channel through which somebody can accept Christ? What else can you give to your Savior for dying for you?

Sunday
December 28

The Gospel Is Never Veiled

LOGOS

Luke 1:1-4; John 15:1-8; 17:20; 20:24-31; 21:20-25

A Clear Definition (Luke 1:1-4)

In presenting the story of Jesus, the testimonies of the four writers of the Gospels report to us what they saw, heard, touched, and experienced in a very intimate way. Through the influence of the Holy Spirit, we have a compact story retold by four writers, each endowed with his unique style. In the short prelude to his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4), Luke writes to clarify that the gospel is not a made-up story but a reality that he has experienced. He reminds us that it is not enough just to believe. He underlines the need of fully understanding why and what we believe.

As followers of Christ, we should know that "Christianity is a religion built upon facts. Let us never lose sight of this. It came before mankind at first in this shape. The first preachers did not go up and down the world, proclaiming an elaborate, artificial system of abstruse doctrines and deep principles. They made it their first business to tell men great plain facts."¹

The Purpose of the Gospel (John 15:1-8)

Jesus is the hub around which every Christian should revolve. The rugged terrain of this world offers no greater challenge than what Christ endured. If we follow

**Jesus is the hub around
which every Christian
should revolve.**

Him, we can endure. Thus He says that like the vine and its branches, we must maintain our hold. Otherwise, as branches, we cannot live detached from the vine. "A continuous abiding in a living connection with Christ is essential for growth

and fruitfulness. Occasional attention to matters of religion is not sufficient. Riding high on a wave of religious fervor one day, only to fall low into a period of neglect the next, does not promote spiritual strength. To abide in Christ means that the soul must be in daily, constant communion with Jesus Christ and must live His life (Gal. 2:20). It is not possible for one branch to depend upon another for its vitality; each must maintain its own personal relationship to the vine. Each member must bear its own fruits."²

Foresight and Prayer (John 17:20)

Jesus prays not only for the writers of the gospel, but also for all who will believe in Him through the gospel in all generations. His prayer also reminds us that we

have the same responsibility as that of the disciples. It reminds us that there is no other way to bring people to Jesus than through the gospel. In regard to this Peter wrote: "Be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior" (2 Pet. 3:2, NKJV). It is only through this that we must reach out to others with love. It's our ultimate mission and responsibility.

The Never-ending Barrier to the Gospel (John 20:24-31)

We often find ourselves in conflict with some issues that our rationality deems inconsistent. Thomas was in this kind of situation. His presence when Jesus performed many miracles did not give him what he required to believe that what the Savior had said would come to pass. Here he found himself in the deep valley of doubts, thus declaring, "'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe'" (John 20:25, NKJV).

This brings us to a very important point. It is not presence in the church that matters. It is the experience that we have with Jesus that is of great value. We might have stayed in the church for so long, but unless and until we embrace the truth and live it, we will be mere spectators.

Then comes the issue of dealing with those who have weak faith. We should be able to follow Jesus' example. "In His treatment of Thomas, Jesus gave a lesson for His followers. His example shows how we should treat those whose faith is weak, and who make their doubts prominent. Jesus did not overwhelm Thomas with reproach, nor did He enter into controversy with him. He revealed Himself to the doubting one. Thomas had been most unreasonable in dictating the conditions of his faith, but Jesus, by His generous love and consideration, broke down all the barriers. Unbelief is seldom overcome by controversy."³

The Snare of Misinterpretation (John 21:20-25)

Even as Jesus was doing rounds, giving first-hand information, perverse misinterpretations were doing rounds at the same time. This is a problem that still confuses many. True followers of Christ, however, cannot be carried by the deluge of misinterpretations. We know whom we believe, and His message to us is clear in the Gospels and in the whole Bible. Other side stories derived by the wicked disciples of Satan to counter Christ's story should not find a place in our minds.

1. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts*, <<http://www.iserv.net/~mrbill/exp/lk010104.html>>

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*: Logos Bible Software.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 808.

Monday
December 29

The Oracle of Living Miracles

TESTIMONY

Luke 1:1-4

Many books are currently published that outline how to live a successful life. There are far too many manuals than we can afford to read these days. With every writer claiming to be an expert, we who believe in Jesus find ourselves in a fix as we try to marry these with what we strongly uphold.

"Human minds vary. The minds of different education and thought receive different impressions of the same words, and it is difficult for one mind to give to one of

"The sunlight falling upon the different objects gives those objects a different hue."

a different temperament, education, and habits of thought by language exactly the same idea as that which is clear and distinct in his own mind. Yet to honest men, right-minded men, he

can be so simple and plain as to convey his meaning for all practical purposes. If the man he communicates with is not honest and will not want to see and understand the truth, he will turn his words and language in everything to suit his own purposes. He will misconstrue his words, play upon his imagination, wrest them from their true meaning, and then entrench himself in unbelief, claiming that the sentiments are all wrong."

"The Lord God, the Creator of the worlds, at infinite cost has given the gospel to the world. Through this divine agent, glad, refreshing springs of heavenly comfort and abiding consolation have been opened for those who will come to the fountain of life. There are veins of truth yet to be discovered; but spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Minds beclouded with evil cannot appreciate the value of the truth as it is in Jesus. When iniquity is cherished, men do not feel the necessity of making diligent effort, with prayer and reflection, to understand what they must know or lose heaven. They have so long been under the shadow of the enemy, that they view truth as men behold objects through a smoked and imperfect glass; for all things are dark and perverted in their eyes. Their spiritual vision is feeble and untrustworthy; for they look upon the shadow, and turn away from the light."²

The impact of the gospel varies. It is in this diversity that we are supposed to shine. "The sunlight falling upon the different objects gives those objects a different hue."³

1. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 19.

2. *Christian Education*, p. 86.

3. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 22.

Truly Grafted to the Master

EVIDENCE

John 15:1-8

The Gospel of John endeavors to explain the mystery of the person of Christ by using everyday life to illustrate spiritual realities. He uses common things like water, bread, light, and sheep—as well as the grapevine and its fruit—to emphasize the gifts of eternal life and love that come only through Christ.

The verses in John 15:1-8 were intended to teach us about Jesus' relationships with His Father (verse 1); with Christians (verse 5); and with the rest of humankind (verse 6).

The vine is a spreading plant that bears fruit. Its growth is not spontaneous. Once planted into the earth, its growth depends on the amounts of water and sunlight that it receives.

The vine has many different branches. Some grow to the right, some to the left. Some branches creep up while others grow down. No matter how far the vine spreads or how big it gets, however, all the branches are still dependent on the vine, for it is the only rooting system.

God chose a simple and common metaphor to explain this reality. In this analogy

humankind are represented by the branches and Christ is the Vine. In order for us to be alive and fruitful, however, we must be grafted into Christ, the True Vine.

We must be pruned daily as we constantly cling to the Vine and draw from it. If we draw from Christ's love, it will circulate through us until it reaches every part of our being, making us fruitful.

Coming to Christ, the grafting process, is often a painful one. It is very difficult to give up your own will and your own ways. But for you to abide in Christ, your will must become an extension of His will. When that happens, you become meek and pure in heart. Your whole will becomes a constant love sacrifice, every action a manifestation, every word an utterance of love.

**Coming to Christ, the
grafting process, is often a
painful one.**

REACT

1. What does remaining in Christ really mean? Be specific.
2. If Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches, how do we characterize the leaves, twigs, and fruit that grow from us? Why do you think Jesus didn't carry this metaphor forward to this next step?

How to Live the Gospel Doubtlessly

HOW-TO

John 20:29

**Prayer is a prerequisite
of a believer's every step.**

The Gospel of John has some of the most profound statements about Christian faith. It summarizes the mission of Jesus Christ and gives short declarative statements that define the Savior and His relationship with all who believe in Him. One of the prime factors that made Jesus take a human form was to demonstrate to us that we can endure challenges of this life. John's Gospel gives a pragmatic approach to these difficulties with statements from the words of Jesus Christ.

With our limitations, we can emulate Christ by taking the following simple steps prescribed in the Gospel of John:

1. Acknowledge our state and invite Christ into our life. Life spent away from Christ is a wasted life. It's a life accustomed to darkness. Christ says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12, NKJV). Our reference on every circumstance should be the life and teachings of Jesus. We know that He overcame, and if we depend on Him, we shall overcome.

2. Be confident in our testimony. We have the truth as it is in Jesus. Throughout the Scriptures, we find remedies for all kinds of problems and answers for all occasions and situations. What Christ has made known to us is tremendous tidings viable to all ages and to people of every caliber. In a message of encouragement to every doubting believer, Jesus says: "All things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (15:15, NKJV). In going about our daily activities, our lives should focus on and reflect that of Christ. Hence, we will become living testimonies, and our evangelism will be more effective than ever before.

3. Shun all doubts. In His answer to Thomas (20:29), Jesus blessed those who believe without seeing. Commenting on this verse, Spurgeon says, "The richest blessing falls to the share of those simple minds who believe the Word of God, even when surrounded with difficulty and unsupported by signs and evidences. The more childlike the faith, the happier the heart."*

4. Pray ceaselessly. Finally, we should remember that prayer is a prerequisite of a believer's every step. Pursuing any evangelistic activity or trying to witness with your life void of prayer is a futile endeavor. Jesus' prayer (17:20) accompanies every believer today as we struggle with life's perils.

*C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Devotional Commentary*, John 20:29.

Withered Branches

OPINION

John 15:1-8

In the year 2001 I lived alone away from my family in a foreign country. It was my first experience of being so far from my loved ones. It was a very lonely experience, one that forced me to seek a substitute to take the place of my family. I found myself going to church more often than I used to when I was back home in my own country.

Things began to change, however, when I began getting used to the new place. Gradually, the urge to go to church ceased, and I felt comfortable doing other things even when I was supposed to be in church. I remember that often I did weird things without feeling any uneasiness about it. It was as if I never cared whether I was doing something that was not acceptable by my God. Finally, I did not see the need to go to church anymore at all.

The more I went my own way, the more my spiritual sensitivity went numb.

Today, I have a different feeling altogether. After deep introspection, I have realized that the more I stay away from what I believe, the more I indulge in unacceptable practices—hence I drift away from my God.

Being in church does not make our faith and our stability perfect. It's not just a matter of being in church, but it involves experience with Christ. It requires the oneness of a branch with the True Vine. As Christians we are supposed to depend solely on Christ the way branches depend on the vine.

Care should be taken lest outside influences deprive us of the nourishment that comes from Christ. If we depend on other influences, we may dry up and fall away from connections with the True Vine. When fully attached to Christ, one's life reflects that of Christ. Being in Christ transforms a person to be Christlike.

"Union with Christ by living faith is enduring; every other union must perish. Christ first chose us, paying an infinite price for our redemption; and the true believer chooses Christ as first, and last, and best in everything. But this union costs us something. It is a relation of utter dependence to be entered into by a proud being. All who form this union must feel their need of the atoning blood of Christ. They must have a change of heart."*

"Christ first chose us."

REACT

If we are like branches, can we as the members of the church prune fellow branches that tend to infect other branches? Explain your answer.

*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, pp. 1143, 1144.

Friday
January 2

The Bottom Line, According to John

EXPLORATION

John 15:1-8; 17; 20:29

CONCLUDE

The Gospel of John is deeply concerned with connecting to Christ. This is not surprising, considering John's close attachment to this Friend of friends. Through John's eyes, we see Christ as vitally necessary as water, bread, light, and the connection between the vine and the branch. He is the very Foundation of life. But to have a true connection, two parties must participate. Christ blesses those who trustingly make this connection with Him without the benefit of seeing Him face to face.

CONSIDER

- Creating a composite picture of the symbols Christ used in the Gospel of John to illustrate how vital He is to our life. Draw your own pictures or create a collage of magazine pictures.
- Listing the number of animate and inanimate objects used in John to symbolize Christ and His work. Create a table listing the two sets and their characteristics.
- Writing a dialogue between Christ and yourself in Thomas's role concerning your attempts to connect with Christ despite your doubts.
- Clapping a 4/4 rhythm as you repeat John 15:5-8. Arrange the verses as a rap or assign them pentatonic notes to create a song.
- Using pretzel dough to construct a vine, branches, and grape clusters on a cookie sheet. Bake and serve with grape juice and fruit salad for a light supper, with the Gospel of John as the theme.
- Reading John 17 during a special supper or worship. Have others repeat "Your love endures forever" after each verse.
- Imagining yourself in Christ's presence as you read John 17:20-26. Respond to Him after each verse. Pray or write out your responses.
- Carrying a list of items that symbolize Christ as you take a devotional walk. As you find an item on the list, pause to meditate on the lessons it illustrates about a relationship with Christ.

CONNECT

Psalms 96-98; 103; 104.

The Desire of Ages, pp. 463-465, 674-677.

Web sites on the Gospel of John: <<http://www.ntgateway.com/john/>> and <<http://clawww.lmu.edu/faculty/fjust/john.htm>>.

The undisputed Champion



“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NKJV).

Sabbath
January 3

Is Jesus Really the Best?

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 28:20; Rom. 5:8; Heb. 4:14-16

One bright sunny day I woke up and began to thank God for it—not realizing that Satan heard my prayer and was determined to turn my joy into sadness. As

“Mother, Charles has been shot!”

I was about to go for my daily walk, the telephone rang. On the other end I heard the voice of my

daughter, “Mother, Charles has been shot, and the doctors believe that the bullet hit two or more organs. They have to do emergency surgery.” I couldn’t say a word. Everything seemed to have been erased from my mind as my daughter’s voice echoed, “Mother, do you hear me?”

“Yes, honey, I hear you. We will be there as soon as possible.”

To my surprise she said, “No! Mother, you and Dad just wait by the telephone and pray. I don’t want you to drive this distance right now.”

I immediately called my husband with the news, and he hurried home. We prayed earnestly. We knew Satan wanted us to ask Jesus why, but we were determined to ask Jesus only for our son’s life, for His mercy and grace. I thought about the promises of God: “‘Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete’” (John 16:24, NIV); “‘Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matt. 28:20, NIV). I knew I needed to trust Jesus, so I began to sing “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way / To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” Jesus comforted my soul by reminding me that He didn’t care about the distance between me and my son. Jesus could heal over land and sea.

Some hours later the telephone rang and my daughter was shouting, “Mother, he’s going to be all right. The doctors are amazed that the bullet didn’t hit any organs even though it looked like it on the X-rays.” But we knew it wasn’t luck. Only a loving, kind, generous Savior could have performed a miracle like that. The bullet went straight through his body. What a mighty God we serve! My husband, my daughter, and I began to pray and thank Jesus for keeping His promises.

Jesus is the best. He will be a pillar for you in any situation. He is a loving Creator (John 1:1-14), our eternal God (Col.1:16, 17), our Divine-Human Savior (Isa. 7:14), our sinless Life-Giver (Isa. 60:1-20), our Substitute (2 Cor. 5:21), our forgiving Lord (Rom. 5:8), our sympathetic Intercessor (Heb. 4:14-16), our ever-present Savior (Matt. 28:20).

The Undisputed Champion

EVIDENCE

John 1:3, 4

In any category imaginable we humans want to compare and rate each other and label one better than the other. We have become so consumed with who's the best dressed, who's the best looking, who makes the best grades that we seem to have lost focus of our mission on earth.

Fortunately we humans are not the originators of this evil. The first such competition dates back to Lucifer and Michael. Lucifer was "the anointed cherub that covereth" (Ezek. 28:14, KJV). He held the highest position of all created beings; however, Lucifer was not content with his status. Isaiah 14 states that Lucifer wanted to "ascend into heaven, . . . exalt my throne above the stars of God" (verse 13, KJV). "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (verse 14, KJV).

These were fighting words. The first fight took place in heaven with Michael defeating Lucifer and his angels. After only one round, the losers were cast out of heaven and found a new home on earth, which they thought to claim as their kingdom.

Throughout history a cosmic war has been going on. Because of Adam's sin the war moved to planet Earth. Michael, who had once defeated Lucifer in heaven, had to leave heaven, leave His Father, leave His divinity, to be born of a woman, to be named Jesus—all to battle Satan again here on earth. It has been said that knowledge is what you know and wisdom is what you do with what you know. If Satan had used his knowledge properly from the beginning, all this would have been avoided. But because of his delusion, he wanted a rematch. He thought he could battle Jesus again—this time on his turf—and be victorious.

John 1:3, 4, gives the reason that Jesus is the best: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life" (NIV).

After Satan had usurped dominion of earth and life from Adam, God the Son—Michael the Archangel, Jesus the Christ—had to come down and restore life to His created beings. Without His life being sacrificed, without His blood being shed, the life we live today, right now, would all be in vain. The blessed hope which we all are awaiting and which our forefathers have died for would all be in vain.

These were fighting words.

Monday
January 5

Who Is This Man Named Jesus?

LOGOS

John 1:1-18

It is interesting to note that many people are poor historians when trying to recall great world leaders, especially from the Roman era. Many, however, remember a poor Jewish carpenter who launched a great social movement in love.

In speaking of Christ's identity, some believe Jesus was only a good man and/or a prophet, but not the Messiah. Others believe He had divine powers like angels and could be addressed as a Son of God, but that He was and is not God. John wrote his Gospel in part to respond to the idea in his day that Jesus was merely a man.

Many have claimed to be Jesus Christ, the mere man. But none can say, "I am the Word." To say that would be to say, I am the Life-Giver, I am the Creator, I was before the created, I was with God, I am God. Clearly that is blasphemy. It would be most absurd even to form those words with human lips. What separates Jesus from other great and well-known men such as Gandhi, Buddha, and Mohammed? The answer is found in John 1:1-18.

**Some believe Jesus was
only a good man.**

In the Beginning (John 1:1)

"The world was from the beginning, but the Word was in the beginning. . . . He that was in the beginning never began, and therefore was ever." Who else can make such a claim?

The Word (John 1:1)

Word in the *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* is defined as: (1) a speech sound, or series of them having meaning as a unit of language; and (2) the written or printed representation of this. "Word is two-fold: word conceived and word uttered. Word conceived is the same as thought. Thought is the first and only immediate product and conception of the soul thus making it one with the soul. The second person in the Trinity is fitly called the word, for he is the first begotten of the Father.

"There is the word uttered, and this is speech, the chief and most natural indication of the mind. [Jesus] has made known God's mind to us, as a man's word or speech makes known his thoughts."² Hebrews 1:2 says, God "in these last days [has] spoken to us by His Son" (NKJV).

One and the Same God (John 1:1, 2)

"The Word was with God, . . . in respect of essence and substance; for the Word was God."³

The Forerunner (John 1:7, 8, 15)

The coming Redeemer of the world was introduced in the first book of the Bible. Beginning with the first family, the sacrificial offerings were performed as an acknowledgment of a sacrifice to come. But before Jesus was to begin His ministry, John the Baptist prepared the way for the long-awaited Messiah. God foresaw the need of John the Baptist to give a testimony of the approaching light.

Declined/Not Approved (John 1:11)

But when that word of truth comes, how ready are we to receive it? The Jews had formed many sects. All had their beliefs on how the Messiah would come into the world and what He would do. What a surprise to hear that Jesus came from Nazareth.

Accepted/Approved (John 1:12, 13)

There were some, however, who received and believed and He gave them power. A few of the disciples came from the sects who wanted to destroy Jesus; even some Gentiles accepted Him. Hence the true meaning of what it means to be a Christian: to receive Christ and believe on His name. Grace is given to every person.

Dwelling In and Among the Flesh (John 1:14)

One of the mysteries of godliness is that God was manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Those who do not believe this are not of God (1 John 4:3). As predicted, His life on earth was to be temporary. During His short ministry Jesus not only influenced the world with great works, but He is the reason that any human being is in existence today (John 1:3, 4).

Understanding who Jesus is, is crucial to gain proper understanding in whom we place our faith for salvation. For someone to die on the cross for our sins, it would take more than a man, more than a mere prophet. Our lives are not our own. We are to glorify God in our thoughts, speech, and actions. Like John the Baptist and prophets of old, we are to bear testimony of the One who died for us. Christ is to be taken to school and to work.

1. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 304.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Tuesday
January 6

Priceless Transformation

TESTIMONY

John 1:4, 14

John 1:4, 14

“Always only ever upward” reads a popular motto taught today. A drive always for prosperity drives this earth with such power that it is rare to find one with the humility necessary to sell willingly all they have and follow.

What a contrast with Christ is lived today!

“Christ gave to humanity an existence out of Himself”¹ to destroy the barrier erected between God and humanity. He wholly possessed humanity through His incarnation and His ministry on earth that humanity may have life.

What an exceptional way to bridge the ever-increasing gap between humanity and Divinity. If we consider what humanity has become in contrast to what Divinity is, we would understand that Divinity’s sacrifice is beyond our imaginations.

Master-Communicator that He is, God was able to reach a mind that was being continuously deceived. Can you imagine trying to communicate a message to someone who has been conditioned to reject? Can you imagine mediating

**God was able to reach a
mind that was being
continuously deceived.**

between two parties when one believes there is no need for mediation? That is in fact the task that Christ performed through His selfless sacrifice. “Through faith human nature is assimilated with Christ’s nature.

We are made one with God in Christ.”²

Even without speaking a word, the act performed by the Creator of the universe conveyed the message that was too profound to ignore: I Love You!

Today Christ is not only our Creator, Savior, Redeemer, Advocate, and King—but also our Example. Through the message of the gospel, Christ shows us the immense victory wrought through selfless sacrifice. This then provides a medium through which we are equipped to fulfill the purpose of the gospel—the reaching of hopeless humanity with a message of hope.

REACT

How would you answer someone who expresses His belief that Christ took on only part of human nature in His incarnation?

1. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 251.

2. *Ibid.*

Christ Our Eternal Legacy

HOW-TO

John 1:12, 13

As human beings, whatever the parents possess is a legacy for the children. In our Christian life Christ became our legacy. He became legacy not only for a few people but for everyone who accepts Him. Here are three steps to make Christ fully our own:

1. Claim Him. By publicly expressing our faith in Christ through baptism we are legally eligible to claim Him as our inheritance. This newborn experience can make our Savior come into our life as a special package. Thus we become partakers of the heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1).

Even though we are born into this world, our ultimate aim should not be to continue in it forever. Instead, we must realize that our aim is to live a life in heaven, where we are spiritually connected to our heavenly Father, and thus we are also linked to one another in this earth. Once we can understand this reality, we really treat others as equal to us. Our prejudice, pride, envy, and all other malice will be cleansed when we claim Him as our inheritance.

2. Be infused by Him. The principle of osmosis is applicable in our relationship with Christ. After we accept Him into our life, then we should allow Him to permeate our bloodstream. By doing that, Christ grows in us. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV).

If our blood is impure, we become weak. Only pure blood can give us energized life. That is true in our Christian life also. Once we allow Christ to be infused in us, we have pure thoughts and actions.

3. Reflect Him. "Before ascending to heaven, Christ gave His disciples their commission. He told them that they were to be the executors of the will in which He bequeathed to the world the treasures of eternal life."¹ "What we shall be in heaven is the reflection of what we are now in character and holy service."² By and large many of us are not serious in reflecting Christ in our lives for others to see Him in us. It is necessary for us to show Him in our speech, in our actions, and in our life as a whole.

The principle of osmosis is applicable in our relationship with Christ.

1. *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 27.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 361.

Thursday
January 8

The Gift of Love

OPINION

1 John 3:1

In my newborn Christian status, I often wondered why God in His infinite wisdom created humankind—knowing we would fail Him. I soon learned we were not the only created beings and we are proof, to others, that Satan's charge against God's fairness and love is false. But to back up further, why create any of it? The hosts of heaven, the other beings, the universe as a whole—did God need us? Quite the contrary! God is complete and whole and exists without a need. He is the only Being in the universe who is totally self-contained.

The answer to the question Why did God create us despite all our faults? is found in 1 John 4:8. It states "God is love" (KJV). God and love are synonymous. He created us because of love and in order to love us. "We love Him because He first loved us" (verse 19, NKJV).

So many times Satan has deceived us into believing that the God of the Old Testament was an angry ruler waiting to wipe sinners out of existence as soon as

What greater evangelistic tool is there than love?

they slipped. By contrast, God is merciful and ever faithful. Eve was not destroyed; rather she was given the first indication of the plan of redemption. Cain, who killed his brother, was

allowed to live. God was ever faithful to the Israelites throughout their journey despite their continuous disobedience. And He is the same today.

It boggles the mind to try to comprehend the enormity of the love of God when we contemplate creation. We are to commemorate that love each Sabbath. And if we keep that love as our focus, we will not falter in our walk. But creation is just the beginning of this everlasting love. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (verse 10, NKJV). What greater love can there be?

In accepting this love, there is this charge: "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (verse 11, NKJV). Jesus came to redeem us and to teach us how to love. He told His disciples, "'As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love. . . . This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you'" (John 15: 9, 10, 12, NKJV). God is love. So He gave Himself to His Son, His Son gave Himself to us, and we are to give God to one another. "'These things I command you, that you love one another'" (verse 17, NKJV). What greater evangelistic tool is there than love?

When we give love, we give God.

From Creator to Created

EXPLORATION

John 1:14

CONCLUDE

Because our minds are finite and human, we find it difficult to wrap our imagination around the idea of God becoming human. Why would anyone give up heaven—perfection in its most ideal setting? Why risk everything to save a people whose main goal was to destroy and kill you for trying to save them? Only a God of amazing love and grace can give such a gift. Once we realize what God has done, how do we even begin to show our gratitude?

CONSIDER

- Painting a picture that expresses absolute joy for you.
- Singing the song “Amazing Grace” by yourself in an empty room with your eyes closed. As you sing, imagine God sitting before you as your only audience.
- Visiting a nursery or a friend with a newborn baby. Think about the newness and beauty of the creation of a child. Imagine what it must have been like for the Creator to become the created.
- Writing a Thank-You letter to God. In your letter be very specific about why you are glad God chose to save the human race and what it has meant to you in your life.
- Reading chapters 2 and 3 of Athanasius's *On the Incarnation*, translated and available online at <<http://www.theologywebsite.com/etext/athanasius/incarnation.shtml>>. Think about how this document relates to your own concept of the Incarnation.
- Studying a map of Jerusalem and creating an imaginary walk through Jerusalem in a field or park near your home. As you walk, try to visualize what it must have been like for Jesus to walk the streets and towns of His day—knowing He had once walked the streets of heaven.
- Talking with someone you know who seems to give unconditional love in the toughest circumstances. Ask what gives him or her the ability to love through heartache, pain, and disappointment?

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 55.

Max Lucado, *God Came Near*.

Something Better



“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’ ” (John 2:19, NKJV).

This Is Love

INTRODUCTION

John 3:16, 17

Many people, when approached about God or the church, will respond with fear and dread that they're not good enough to approach God or that He is such a cruel taskmaster with a long and impossible list of rules. If they don't dot every *i* and cross every *t*, He's just waiting to cause them pain. This is not the case, however. God wants

**That very best changes us
from a sinner to a saint.**

them to come to Him just the way they are and become a member of His family. He wants only to give them His very best (Matt. 22:2-4, 9, 10). That very best changes us from a sinner to a saint. That very best gives us a new love in life. Like the water in the jar, we are changed to the best that was saved for last.

The book of John is filled with many examples of how Jesus reached out to those who had been considered unworthy by society. Jesus demonstrated over and over that God loves people even though He may hate their actions. He is always waiting to give them love (Isa. 1:18; Rev. 3:20).

God showed His love for us by sacrificing His Son for us. Through Jesus we may come to God without fear and trembling or waiting until we get ourselves right (John 15:13; 1 Cor. 13:4, 5).

The wedding in Cana marked the beginning of Christ's ministry here on earth, but it did not mark the beginning of the love that He has for each of us. It is the love that wants to give each of us something better, to tell us that we are valuable to Him. It is the love that offers us something better even before we were born. Jesus is love. He is something better!

Sunday
January 11

Conflicting Concepts About Christ

LOGOS

John 2:1-22

Conflicting Concepts About Christ's Dealings With Problems (John 2:1-11)

Jesus and His disciples were invited to attend a wedding in Cana of Galilee, where the embarrassing situation of "no more wine" arose. Jesus was aware of the problem. In fact, He was in the midst of the problem, as He is with all our problems.

Mary did what we all should do when we encounter problems: Take it to the Lord first. As Jesus Himself would phrase it, " 'Seek first the kingdom of God' " (Matt. 6:33, NKJV).

This was like having six miracles in one because "there were six huge jars nearby, each holding about thirty gallons of water intended for ceremonial use" (John 2:6, The Clear Word). Thirty gallons of water miraculously turned into grape juice, repeated another five times!

This was Jesus' first miracle. Mary put Jesus first, in helping to solve the problem. Jesus put His Father first in terms of whom He took orders from. Instead of

This was like having six
miracles in one.

the traditional way, in this wedding the first wine was followed by the best wine. Similarly, what the world offers humanity is followed by what Jesus offers humanity—the best was left for last. Only what Jesus

has to offer can truly satisfy the deep longings of our hearts. Salvation the "Jesus way" is the best and only way to satisfy our souls.

Conflicting Concepts About Christ's Church-Temple (John 2:12-17)

In John 2 we find a clash of concepts as to what should transpire in the church. The Jerusalem temple was entering the Passover season, and the moneychangers and sellers were out in full force to do a roaring trade for the ceremonies. Jesus arrived on the scene, and stands almost amazed at what church worship and the sanctuary had come to. Could this be the house of the Almighty God? This was a clear case of the contrast between God's way of thinking and our way of thinking: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways'" (Isa. 55:8, NKJV).

In righteous indignation, with a passion that we have rarely seen displayed by Jesus, He overturns tables. Birds and coins fly and roll in every direction. Unscrupulous sellers and extortionists run for cover. Sheep scatter in panic, and oxen lumber through the church courtyard as people scramble to get out of the way.

In loud tones that could be heard above the noisy commotion, Jesus shouts in clear, unmistakable terms: “Take these things out of here! Don’t turn my Father’s house into a marketplace for extortion”! (John 2:16, *The Clear Word*). Few misunderstood Jesus’ comments, no one misread His passion, and, most certainly, many felt the heat of His righteous indignation. The message was clear that not every thing that we feel like doing in God’s house was going to be acceptable with sweet Jesus.

Conflicting Concepts About Christ’s Body-Temple (John 2:18-22)

Have you ever wished that members of the Godhead would express Themselves more clearly when They speak? The Jews wanted to know from Jesus who gave Him the authority to act in the temple, to disrupt trade for the Passover. Jesus answered by saying, “‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’” (verse 19, NKJV). Very strong words when you consider how passionately the Jews felt about their temple, which took years of toil, sweat, blood, and tears to build. Jesus was standing right there in the temple when He said “this temple,” so for the Jews this appeared to be an insult to their most revered site.

The Bible illuminates for us the unspoken thoughts that were in Jesus’ mind by saying that He was “speaking of the temple of His body” (John 2:21, NKJV). Only after the Resurrection did the disciples understand that Jesus’ comments were laced with concepts of salvation and not destruction. Jesus was indicating that He was going to give His body-temple for your sins and mine, and in three days rise from the dead victoriously. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15, NKJV).

REACT

1. If Christ were here today, what activities in the Seventh-day Adventist Church might prompt Him to righteous indignation, or to say “Take these things hence”?

2. Think of an example from your life in which you clearly put Christ second, or where you and Christ had vastly different ideas on how things should be done.

3. Think of an incident in your life or in your church in which it seemed that Christ was saying to do something, and it was done, but it turned out to be completely wrong and not what He was really trying to say.

4. Why do you think Jesus worked His first miracle with an inanimate substance rather than on a person—healing someone or raising someone from the dead, for instance?

5. Why did Jesus exercise righteous indignation at the Jews’ desecration of the temple, but then submit to their abuse when they crucified Him, the Living Temple?

6. Why did Jesus allow it to appear as if He were speaking about the Jewish temple when He said, “‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’”?

Monday
January 12

The Mysterious Ways of Jesus

TESTIMONY

John 2

Miraculous Wine (John 2:6-10)

"In saying to Mary that His hour had not yet come, Jesus was replying to her unspoken thought—to the expectation she cherished in common with her people. She hoped that He would reveal Himself as the Messiah, and take the throne of Israel.

"But though Mary had not a right conception of Christ's mission, she trusted Him implicitly. To this faith Jesus responded. It was to honor Mary's trust, and to strengthen the faith of His disciples, that the first miracle was performed."

Cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13-17)

"With a zeal and severity He has never before manifested, He overthrows the tables of the money-changers."²

"Overpowered with terror, the priests and rulers had fled from the temple court, and from the searching glance that read their hearts. . . . Christ looked upon the fleeing men with yearning pity for their fear, and their ignorance of what constituted true worship."³

Destruction of the Temple (John 2: 18-22)

"In these words [in John 2:19] His meaning was twofold. He referred not only to the destruction of the Jewish temple and worship, but to His own death—the destruction of the temple of His body."⁴

"Christ did not design that His words should be understood by the unbelieving Jews, nor even by His disciples at this time. He knew that they would be miscon-

strued by His enemies, and would be turned against Him. . . . It was for the sake of those who should believe on Him that these words of Christ were spoken. He knew that they would be repeated. Being spoken at the Passover, they would come to the ears of

**"To this faith
Jesus responded."**

thousands, and be carried to all parts of the world. After He had risen from the dead, their meaning would be made plain. To many they would be conclusive evidence of His divinity."⁵

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 147.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 164, 165.

Low-flying Faith

EVIDENCE

Matt. 17:20; 19:26; John 2:11, 22; 15; Heb. 11:6

Depending upon the direction of the wind, a large, white bird often soars over the huge pine trees outside my bedroom window—sometimes as frequently as every few minutes. Not being an avid bird watcher, I can't even tell you its species. But to my untrained eye, and with a little assistance from the sound it makes, I'd be pretty confident in predicting that it belongs to the "Jumbo"

family. Jumbo—as in jet! *Jumbo* is a word used in our family to indicate somebody misunderstood a joke, or (often unkindly) to point out someone's lack of knowledge on a particular topic.

What seems obvious to one person can often become a jumbo for another. The second chapter of John has provided its fair share of jumbos in the minds of its readers—including mine. Was Jesus' anger in the temple righteous anger? Was the wine at the wedding feast alcoholic? Was the miracle at Cana gospel-oriented, and, therefore, a justifiable miracle? There are plenty more jumbos in there too!

And apart from the jumbos, there are also plenty of side issues here, including Jesus' apparent approval of the institution of marriage; the transforming power of the blood of Christ; the virtues of a Christian socializing in the community; the abundance of God's grace; and the necessity of self-sacrifice and denying the lust for worldly things.

Dig a little deeper, and maybe you'll discover a simple message—the same one, twice! It's a low-flying missile that, rather than sail jumbolike overhead, should strike us in the forehead, bounce through to the heart, and forever continue to flow through our bloodstream. It's the message from Jesus' beloved disciple, who recalled these two stories for their impact potential.

So what is the missile of John 2? Like the captain of a highly trained company of soldiers suiting up for battle for the first time, Jesus needed to arm His disciples. In John 1 we learn that Jesus is truly the Son of God, the Lamb of God, and the promised Messiah. In John 2:11, 22 we learn why Jesus' beloved disciple chose to recount these two events at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. To equip His followers, Jesus had to demonstrate the power of a faith relationship, the almighty power of a friendship or alliance with our Father.

Jesus did many miraculous things, many of which John had to cut from his record of Jesus' life on earth (John 21:25). The miracle at Cana and the clearing of the temple, though, are two stories that "made the cut." In all that He did, Jesus was promoting *faith* as the key, not only to effective gospel work and, ultimately, earthly satisfaction, but the key to everlasting life.

Jesus needed to arm
His disciples.

Wednesday
January 14

The Snowflakes and You

HOW-TO

Ps. 139:13-15; Matt. 10:29-31

I'm told that there are no two snowflakes alike. Each is unique, designed by the Creator, the same Creator, the same loving, patient, and merciful God, who made

No two snowflakes are alike.

each of us. Even though He is the Author of all creation, there is something about humankind that is different.

Scripture tells us that we are made in His image (Gen. 1:26, 27). Have you stopped to dwell on the fact that we are very valuable to God? Do you realize that Jesus would have come to this earth for you and you alone?

Yes, you are valuable and special to God. These truths found in the Bible are very powerful, and when we realize the relevancy of the Scriptures, it will make a difference in our everyday life. Do you know how much the Bible talks about your value as a person? You are very special to God and should never be afraid to set your goals high. You should never be afraid to reach for the stars, for you are valuable to God.

Do you realize that you were special before you were born? (Ps. 139:13-15). God knew every organ, every bone, even the hairs on your head before your birth. You are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (verse 14, KJV).

But guess what? That was not enough. He wanted to have a relationship with Adam and Eve; He wants to have a relationship with us. Before the Fall, God would walk and talk with Adam and Eve. He wants to do the same with you today. Even though He is not here in person, we can still have a relationship with Him that will lead to eternal life.

Try incorporating these ways into your life so that you can develop a relationship with God and walk with Him in the "cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8, KJV):

- Make the spiritual part of your person a priority. Set aside time to read your Bible on a daily basis. Talk to God in prayer and be obedient to His commandments.

- Learn to listen to God and hear what He is saying. This is vital because we need to be ready to respond in faith to what He says in spite of what we feel or do not feel.

- Commit your life, goals, and dreams to God. Make sure that He is included in all parts of your life. You have to want to have a relationship with Him. He wants to have one with you!

Today is the first day of the rest of your life. What will you do with it?

Something Better

OPINION

Luke 13:30; Rev. 1:17

Many people use the phrase “save the best for last.” There were many prophets in the beginning, but Jesus was the fulfillment. He brought something better to the world. He brought salvation. Not only did He bring better wine, a better temple, or a better birth, He brought a better life.

Jesus says, “Indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last” (Luke 13:30, NKJV). Jesus’ pain was prophesied in the beginning. In Isaiah 53 it is written: “He was bruised for our iniquities. . . . He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (verses 5, 7, NKJV). Jesus bore our pain and our suffering. He is our “Something Better;” He is our Everything, and He is the First and the Last.

**Jesus’ pain was prophesied
in the beginning.**

“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’ ” (Rev. 1:8, NKJV). Justifiable in everything the Lord says and does, He was, is, and will be our “Something Better.” That’s the focus of our study this week: Jesus is our “Something Better.”

REACT

1. Why do we so often need the water-into-wine event to wake us up and turn our thoughts heavenward?
2. Is faith a gift, a decision, an ever-evolving level of commitment—or all these? Explain your answer.
3. If it is impossible to please God without faith, and we can do nothing without it, what role should faith play in daily devotions and prayers?
4. What does the context (the previous 8 verses) of Luke 13:30 tell us about who will be first and who will be last?
5. What if someone decided that they wanted to be first in the kingdom of heaven, so they made sure they were last on earth in order to achieve that? Would it work? Explain your answer.
6. The word translated “last” from Revelation 1:17 is *eschatos*, which carries the idea of fulfillment or completion. Of what is Jesus the fulfillment or completion, in the personal sense, in your life? In the broadest sense?

EXPLORATION

Matt. 7:7-11

CONCLUDE

The Gospel of John is all about something better. In John 2:1-11, we discover a better wine and a better style of rule. In verses 13-17, we discover a better temple and a better object of worship. The better wine is Christ's blood (Luke 22:20), poured out for our salvation. The better style of rule is the governance of an everlasting Father, a Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). The better temple is the body of that Prince, which even though it would be destroyed, would be raised again after three days, having defeated sin and our fall into it. Rather than the worship of sheep and oxen (idols of our devising), this same Prince, the Savior, becomes the better object of our worship.

CONSIDER

- Sketching a visual representation of our relationship with Christ based on the elements of the grapevine metaphor in John 15.
- Reflecting upon six miracles that best define the miracle of you, based on the concept that turning six thirty-gallon jars of water into the best wine was like six miracles in one.
- Reviewing the vine/branch/fruit metaphor in John 15, then researching the cultivation of grapes, particularly the pruning process. How does such cultivation help us to understand our relationship with Christ?
- Singing or reading the words to hymn number 145 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*. Why are you thankful that Jesus manifest His divine power by changing ordinary water into the best of wine?
- Working with a child to sculpt with modeling clay a vine, its branches, and some grape clusters. Explain to the child during or after the process how the vine, branches, and grapes represent our relationship with Christ.
- Organizing an agape supper to celebrate with friends or family. Include grape juice and bread—the blood and body of Christ—and have your guests share their thoughts about why Christ is the better object of our worship.

CONNECT

Psalms 95; 96.

The Desire of Ages, p. 189.

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, pp. 158-174;

Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, pp. 177-179; William Barclay, *The Gospel of John, Part 1*, rev. ed., pp. 95-117.

You can make the Team!



“ ‘God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ ” (John 3:16, NIV).

Just Not Good Enough

INTRODUCTION

Deut. 10:17; Isa. 55:8, 9; Acts 10:34, 35; 2 Cor. 5:19

Have you ever felt left out? Really left out? Have you ever felt not good enough? I have.

Growing up I was never the athletic type. Throughout infancy, primary, and high school, I was always among the last or the last one to be chosen for a team, no matter what the sport was. I dreaded physical education classes because I knew no one looked forward to having me on their team. Not even my friends would choose me. I guess they never thought I could contribute to the team. I often felt neglected and wanted the ground to swallow me. I wasn't good enough. Just not good enough. Even today I am still not good enough to make the team.

I dreaded physical education classes.

I'm glad with God there is no such thing as "not good enough." You may not be a good singer, speaker, student, or an athlete of any kind, but He loves you just as you are. You might have broken all the commandments; He loves you just the same. Despite your weaknesses and struggles, He supports you and becomes your strength. He meets you at your level, and then takes you up to His level.

Such grace and love are often difficult to understand, but it is true. I am often in awe when I think of His power of forgiveness, His love for me; despite all the wrong I have done, He loves me just the same and extends open arms to me. With His love there are no boundaries, no restrictions, no list of criteria to meet, no bias. His love is unconditional and is extended to all.

His grace is extended to everyone in the same proportion. You never have to wonder whether you are qualified for His grace (whether you will make the team). God shows no favoritism, no prejudice.

When we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive. When we seek Him, we will find Him. When we trust and obey, He blesses us abundantly.

I didn't make the team throughout school. But I'm glad I have made the winning team, the team on which each member becomes most valuable player—Jesus' team.

Truly Living the Light

EVIDENCE

John 3:18-21

Light and darkness are two opposing forces that cannot exist simultaneously in the same space. Darkness gives way to light, but as the light dims, the darkness takes the space that was enlightened. A good illustration would be to light a candle in a dark room. As the candle is lit, the darkness subsides for the light; as long as the light-sustaining power in the candle feeds the light, the darkness will subside (Ps.18:28; John 1:5). We don't cover a burning candle; rather, we elevate it so that it replaces the darkness (Matt. 5:15; Luke 8:16). The light enables us to see, it prevents us from stumbling (Ps. 119:105; John 11:9, 10), it helps us with searching for the lost (Luke 15:8), and it leads us to life (Ps. 43:3; Prov. 6:23).

The eyes are the gateway of the light/darkness into one's soul. That which the eyes dwell upon, the body will be filled with (Matt. 6:22, 23; Luke 11:34-36). The eyes that turn from darkness to the light will receive a cleansing from all darkness, and the entire body will be cleansed (Acts 26:18).

One of the closest of Jesus' disciples, John, shed some light on the Light. He quoted Jesus: " 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life' " (John 8:12, NKJV). " 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world' " (9:5, NKJV). " 'I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness' " (12:46, NKJV). Jesus came to the world for a little while to show us the light, so that we can see and believe, so that we may be called the children of the light (John 12:35, 36).

The closer we get to the Light Source, the brighter our reflection will become (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:18; 5:18; 7:1). This implies that we will become the light of this dark world, as we become like the Greater Light. Take note: We never become the Great Light, where shall we then draw

Light a candle in a dark room.

our strength (Ps. 27:1)? Our old sinful selves will have to die, so that we can be fully filled with the True Light so that He can be glorified through us (John 3:30). The True Light will shine according to the law and testimony of the Greater Light, Jesus Christ, the Light-Giver of this world (Isa. 8:20).

The Light will not be with us forever, so make the choice whom or what you are going to fill yourself with (Rev. 18:23). Light and darkness have no relation. How long will you be torn between two masters (2 Cor. 6:14)? Let us be true bearers of the Light, so that we give glory to whom glory belongs.

Monday
January 19

The World . . . Whosoever

LOGOS

John 2:23–4:42

Jesus Christ died and rose again to save all the world through His grace. The vast majority of the world's population, however, belongs to religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, which neither teach nor promote salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. How can these billions whom Christ died for be saved if they have not had the opportunity to hear and embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ? See Isaiah 56:6, 7; Matthew 24:14; John 12:32; Romans 10:13-15.

God loves the world. His love is all-inclusive. It does not depend on the behavior, attitude, character, or kind of the recipients. He truly loves without hitches, without attachments, without conditions. He is the same God who teaches us not only to love those whom we like and are like us and who like us, but also to love

The world consists of people of varied hues, descents, tongues, cultures, and social orders.

those who are different from us and whom we may not like and who may even hate us! Such an unconditional love is heaven-born, and this love alone will fit us for the kingdom of heaven. It is a love that truly knows no boundaries, for it stretches from one end of the earth to the other and embraces the whole human family.

The world includes everyone in the world. It consists of people of varied hues, descents, tongues, cultures, and social orders. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ died to save every member of the human family, regardless of their race, kindred, language, or background. The apostle Peter testified that "God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34, 35, NKJV). Our God embraces the diversity of the human family, for in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, NKJV).

We often let differences of race, religion, ideology, and/or background divide us and separate us into factions and sub-factions. By nature we shun diversity. How do we, as different and diverse as we are, overcome our differences and put into practice the diversity embracing grace of God? We cannot truly appreciate God's grace and its universality without embracing and welcoming diversity.

Whosoever is all-encompassing. No matter who you are, you are welcome at this party. No matter who you know or do not know, you are invited. There is no cri-

terion to be part of this celebration except that you believe that Jesus is the Christ sent from God. God so loved all that He gave His one and only Son to die in our place so that we could have a place in His eternal kingdom.

Nicodemus and the woman at the well were as different as they could be. Nicodemus was a Jew by birth and by religion. The woman was of the Samaritan peoples, whom the Jews regarded as being racially, religiously, and culturally inferior. Of the Jews we know this to be the ugly truth, for, as the woman reminded Jesus, "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9, NKJV). Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, but Jesus openly and boldly engaged the Samaritan woman in conversation in broad daylight. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a devout and highly respected ruler in Israel. The Samaritan woman was living in adultery. Diverse as their backgrounds and circumstances were, Jesus freely and impartially ministered the words of life to both.

Jesus broke down the artificial barriers that separate and weaken the human family. John records that Jesus needed to go through Samaria and that He initiated the contact and conversation with the Samaritan woman (verses 3-7). He totally disregarded the superficially imposed cultural and social mores of His day to take the gospel to the people of Samaria, staying there for two full days (verse 40). His mingling with the Samaritans was neither casual nor incidental, but intentional and meaningful. Jesus took radical and bold steps like this because of His bold and radical love for humanity.

How intentional are we about tearing down the humanly constructed artificial barriers that keep us apart from one another? The love and grace of Christ received into our hearts makes us bold, proactive, even radical in loving and serving all different kinds of people without partiality.

REACT

1. What can you do to allow the radical love and inclusive grace of God to reach out to people you are uncomfortable with?
2. While God will not exclude anyone from heaven on the basis of race or culture, He will exclude some on the basis of how they lived. How are these two things different?
3. The concept of tolerance has become very popular of late. How does the secular concept of tolerance contrast with the Christian concept of unity in diversity?
4. When have you been secretive about your relationship to Christ, as Nicodemus was? When have you been bold and open, as the woman at the well was when she ran through town telling everyone that she had found the Messiah?
5. How can we minister to people who have been turned off by Pharisaism?
6. Sharing Christ with people can be an uncomfortable experience because of the potential for being rejected by some and latched onto by others. Are there certain biblical keys for overcoming these fears? What has worked for you?

Tuesday
January 20

Grace for Every Color

TESTIMONY

Luke 4:18

"Why do you stay up so late taking care of all these Chinese kids, Dad? Their parents do not even like us. They hate us."

"Jimmy, I am a doctor, and it doesn't matter to me what color the kids are. I want all of them to be happy, and I will do all I can to help them. What you need to understand is that we are Christians and we represent Christ, and we must treat everyone just as Jesus would."

That little conversation between Jimmy and his dad made me remember the little song I used to sing when I was a child: "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, / Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in His sight; / Jesus loves the little children of the world."

**God's love
has no boundaries.**

Our world includes hundreds of religions, many different races, and people of many classes. Some groups believe that theirs is the only one God will save. The Bible states it very clearly in John 3:16, where it tells of the love of Jesus' death on the cross. I am glad that the text does not single out a particular group to die for. Instead, it says in the last part, "Whosoever," yes, *whosoever* believes in Him.

As Christians, we need to let all others around us know that God's love has no boundaries. As the text suggests, He came to take care of all sorts of people. God cares for humans generally and individually; with Him there are no limits in spite of the race, creed, color, class, rich, poor, vagrant, or king. When Christ died, He offered His grace to all.

Ellen White supports the fact that Christ wants to save all. She says, "The heart of God yearns over His earthly children with a love stronger than death. In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift. The Saviour's life and death and intercession, the ministry of angels, the pleading of the Spirit, the Father working above and through all, the unceasing interest of heavenly beings—all are enlisted in behalf of man's redemption."^{*}

God's message is clear: All we have to do is believe His Word, open our hearts, and let Him lead our lives.

REACT

What other evidence do we have apart from the Bible that Jesus wants to save all—no matter the race, kind, or class?

^{*}*Steps to Christ*, p. 21.

Play No Favorites

HOW-TO

Eph. 2:4-8

"God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:4-8, NKJV).

We were not saved from sin merely so that we would qualify for heaven. God delivered us so we would nurture a vibrant relationship with Him through which He could carry out His mission of redeeming those who have been lost.

But we shouldn't be selective when we reach out. God desires to live His life in us so that each person we get along with would observe the amazing difference that comes with abiding in Him. We were called to be God's unprejudiced ministers.

God's grace abounds for all. A person's faith doesn't earn it any more than his or her foolishness loses it. God

doesn't love us less when we fail or more when we succeed. He died for all; He desires salvation for all. God plays no favorites.

In our daily Christian walk and dealings, shouldn't we care for each person just the same?

A person's faith doesn't earn grace any more than his or her foolishness loses it.

REACT

1. How can we help others realize their need for Christ without leaving them hopeless? Be specific.

2. How would *enemies* be defined in the Christian context?

3. What unique kinds of witnessing are necessary to reach the unskilled or the less educated?

4. Do you agree or disagree that a person's foolishness cannot cause him or her to lose the grace of God? Explain your answer.

5. Ephesians 2:5 says that we were "made . . . alive together with Christ" (NKJV). According to the context, when did this occur? How will this affect my life today?

6. While we should never hesitate to reach out to those of other races and cultures, are people more likely to be reached for Christ by those of the same race? Explain your answer.

Thursday
January 22

Christians as “The Powers of Hell”?

OPINION

John 3:16; Rom. 8:38, 39

Her name was Judy. Several years ago she attended and held membership in the local Adventist church—that was before she went astray. Since then she has had three children with different fathers, for which she was disfellowshipped. Currently, she wears excessive jewelry and sports radical hairstyles. After several years of attempting to encourage her return to the church, her friends left the situation in God’s hands, concentrating fully on praying for her.

God proved Himself once again, as she later expressed to her father her interest in returning to church. As the “upstanding,” self-righteous Christian that he was,

Satan succeeded in using him as a “power of hell.”

however, he expressly told her that she could not return to church and be seen with him until she replaced her pink hairstyle, an outright rebuke and not very Christlike. This was nearly a year

ago. Since then, Judy has expressed no desire to return to church. Apparently, Satan succeeded in using Judy’s father as a “power of hell” in an attempt to keep her away from the love of God (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Where have we as Christians learned to be selective in our dissemination of the gospel? Jesus certainly did not take this stance! He accepted us as we were, did He not? “Those who call themselves His followers may despise and shun the outcast ones; but no . . . condition of life, can turn away His love from the children of men. To every soul, however sinful, Jesus says, If thou hadst asked of Me, I would have given thee living water.”

This is a great lesson, but most of us feel as if it applies only to “bad” Christians. Ask yourself this question, “Am I really all-inclusive when I tell others about the good news?” Go ahead; ask yourself. What would your initial reaction be if a young female visitor comes to church in an extremely short miniskirt and a top that reveals a lot of her cleavage? What about the old homeless man who smells and chooses to sit next to you in church? Will you still be an effective communicator of the gospel?

Speaking more on Jesus’ example, Ellen White states, “The gospel invitation is not to be narrowed down, and presented only to a select few. . . . The message is to be given to all.”² Meditate on the perfect example Jesus has set before us as His followers, then endeavor to be more like Him. You can; He will help you.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 194.

2. *Ibid.*

EXPLORATION

Rom. 3:21-24

CONCLUDE

Grace is easier described than lived. We're all agreed that we're saved by grace, but it's difficult to believe that (1) God accepts us just the way we are, and (2) others deserve God's grace in spite of their outward behavior or appearance.

Our society is hopelessly oriented toward conditional acceptance. It takes a real leap to extend God's grace to someone without expecting him or her to look the way we do, eat what we eat, have the same likes and dislikes we do. Yet that's exactly what God's grace demands: love without strings attached.

CONSIDER

- Writing a journal entry in which you catalogue the specific events of the day that demonstrated how you were a recipient of God's grace. Dedicate another day's entry describing the specific ways you demonstrated God's grace to others.
- Choosing a song from your music collection that reflects the unconditional character of God's grace described in this week's lesson. "Amazing Grace" is out of bounds, but a "secular" song is not (as long as it describes unconditional grace).
- Doing a random act of kindness for someone without being caught. Make it really count by doing something for someone you're not particularly fond of.
- Choreographing a dance sequence based on the story of the woman at the well (John 4:1-42). The performance, over a bed of instrumental music, should have elements related to racial prejudice, guilt, immorality, grace, joy, etc.
- Cataloguing five examples of grace demonstrated in the natural, material world. Reflect: How is grace a natural act? How is it unnatural?
- Asking seven people to describe the most memorable act of grace ever done for them. Ask also how that act changed the course of their lives.
- Finding three problem situations described in a newspaper or news magazine that could be solved by a demonstration of grace. What specific demonstration would make the most progress in providing a solution?

CONNECT

Luke 15:11-32; Romans 5:1-11; Ephesians 2:1-9.

Steps to Christ, "God's Love for Man."

William G. Johnsson, *Glimpses of Grace*, chaps. 2, 4.

The Struggle to be Real



"Jesus replied, 'You may go. Your son will live' "
(John 4:50, NIV).

Come On, Let's Get Real

INTRODUCTION

John 4:48, 53

"Get Real. Get Smart. Get Going." This is the slogan for the Dr. Phil television program—a no-nonsense, get-to-the-honest-part-of-yourself-you-don't-want-to go-to attitude of telling it like it is.

But there's more to the philosophy than simply being brutally honest. Says Dr. Phil in an interview with *Entertainment Tonight*, "[This] isn't a talk show, but a stop-talking-and-start-doing-something show."^{*}

We rely on straight advice from friends, a significant other, parents—people who know us. (You're not going to take that internship because you're scared of failure. You're asking me to decide which movie to rent tonight because you don't like making decisions.) Whatever excuses we may be hiding behind, it's healing to recognize these for ourselves or even know they are transparent so we can move on.

**Jesus doesn't hold back
from frankness.**

Someone else who wasn't afraid to speak the truth was Jesus. We often marvel at His directness with the Pharisees, but He also told followers just like it is. Did it hurt to hear? Probably. Honesty usually does, especially if it's something about ourselves, our characters, our motivations. Was it helpful? At least to some degree. If nothing else, awareness of ourselves can help us determine what path we'll take, as in the case of the rich young ruler who realized he couldn't have all his possessions and eternal life too.

In the story of the royal official who went to Jesus to heal his son, Jesus doesn't hold back from frankness. He tells the official, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe" (John 4:48, NASB). I wonder what Jesus' tone was like. Was there a tinge of sadness? Of frustration? Or maybe it was just a statement of fact?

Whatever the case, Jesus told the royal official's motivation just like it was, yet He recognized that this man needed such signs and wonders to help believe and met this need at its basic level by healing the son (verses 51-53).

"Get real." It's something we said as children to our parents with a great deal of eye rolling. It's what we sometimes rely on friends and family to help us see. But another expert in the area is Jesus. The Bible is full of examples we can study, fine-tune through prayer, then apply to our lives and Christian experience.

^{*}*Entertainment Tonight*: "On the set with Dr. Phil!" Aug. 29, 2002,

<<http://www.etonline.com/celebrity/a12056.htm>>

Sunday
January 25

Show Me the Miracles

LOGOS

John 4:43-54

In this passage Jesus rebukes the people for always wanting a sign to bolster their faith. You could get the idea that Jesus is tired of being taken advantage of. What does it feel like to be taken advantage of? Does Jesus want us to take advantage of Him? In this passage are contrasted two ways of approaching Jesus.

The Samaritans' Faith Versus the Jews' Faith (John 4:43-45)

In the previous verses (39-42) John tells how the Samaritans believe because of what they have heard. Listening to Jesus is emphasized. Now in these verses the Galilean Jews accept Jesus because of what He has done; that is to say, His miracles. They welcomed Him, but between the lines you can hear them saying, "Show us the miracles."

The Request for Healing (John 4:46, 47)

The man who makes the request is called a "royal official" (verse 46, NIV). This man was probably a rich landowner connected to the royal families. It was no small trip for him to travel, probably walking the 15 miles uphill from Capernaum to Cana. When he arrived, he got right to the point—he begged for his son to be healed.

Jesus' Rebuke (John 4:48)

This rebuke comes right after the official's request for his son's healing and sounds like a cruel thing for Jesus to say to him. Based on the next verses, it appears that Jesus was speaking to the Galileans in general rather than to this one man. Two things suggest this conclusion: First, the father does not respond to the rebuke; second, Jesus immediately grants the father's request. It sounds as if Jesus was tired of the same old what-can-you-do-for-me syndrome and wanted to contrast the faith of the Samaritans with that of the Jews. Compare Jesus' rebuke of the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-27). In this story it also appears that the rebuke is meant more for the prejudiced disciples than for the woman.

Faith Exercises (John 4:50)

The father takes Jesus at His word and leaves, not insisting that Jesus come with him, as he first requested. This part of the story sounds a lot like the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt. 8:8). Both men say that the word of Jesus is enough! An illustration from American football helps me understand what exer-

cised faith is. Often the quarterback will throw to his receiver even before the receiver turns around to look for the ball. The receiver runs to a certain pattern on the field and then looks for the ball that may already be in the air. The quarterback and receivers practice and practice this kind of pass, aiming at timing perfection. The most critical factor in achieving this perfection is how well the quarterback and receiver get to know each other. In the same way when we as Christians run our pattern (life), we need to run with confidence. We know our quarterback (Jesus) will have perfect timing with His pass, and sometimes the answer or miracle will be on its way before we even ask!

Does Jesus want us to take advantage of Him?

The Faith-affirming Miracle (John 4:51-53)

The father believes that his son will live but has to wait until the next day to learn that his son is healed. It is important to note that the father believes first and then the healing happens—not the other way around. Is this order important?

The Second Miracle (John 4:54)

John is referring to the water-to-wine miracle as the first and the healing of the son as the second miracle. Compare the two miracles that took place in Cana. How are they similar and how are they different?

Miracles are tangible aspects of our relationship with Jesus. The net result of the father's encounter with Jesus was that his whole household believed.

REACT

1. Jesus seems to make the Samaritans the heroes in this story as He does in other stories. Who are the Samaritans today?

2. How do you answer a mother who truly believed but still lost her child? What is the relationship between faith and miracles?

3. When is the last time you felt taken advantage of? What are some Christian strategies for dealing with this problem—at home, at work, and at school?

4. How can you be positive an event is a miracle? Can an event have a natural basis and still be a miracle? Explain your answer.

5. A small but growing segment of the Adventist Church is conducting healing services. How comfortable would you feel at such a service? How comfortable would you have felt around Jesus when He was healing (Matt. 8:16)?

6. What would you say to the person who concludes from this story that miracles are the proof of faith?

7. Are all answers to prayer miracles? Explain your answer.

Monday
January 26

One-on-One

TESTIMONY

Col. 2:6

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col. 2:6, NKJV).

Many times in our lives we have gone through problems and difficulties. And in those moments we pray and ask God to get us through them. But as soon as we

**When Jesus abides in you,
He transforms you.**

are relieved of that certain situation, we forget God. In our worst moments we remember Him because we want Him to solve our problems; but when the problem is gone, our quest for God

has also disappeared. Were we really expressing faith, or was it just a showcase so we can witness a miracle in our lives? Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (NKJV).

We are sinful by nature. But when we truly seek the Lord with all our heart at all times, we can gain perfection through Him. "However imperfect and sinful we may be, the Lord holds out to us the offer of partnership with Himself, of apprenticeship to Christ."¹ In our daily walk we should seek a deeper and sincere relationship with Jesus. As we develop that relationship, we start to experience a faith that transcends simple prayers and worship. We begin to feel and be real with Jesus.

Friendship is one of the most precious gifts God has given us. We may have a lot of friends, but among those there might be a very special one. It may be a family member, a neighbor, or a roommate. You have developed a special relationship with that person, one that is different from the rest. That should be our relationship with Jesus.

John, Jesus' beloved disciple, experienced that relationship with Jesus. "The strength and patience, the power and tenderness, the majesty and meekness, that he beheld in the daily life of the Son of God, filled his soul with admiration and love. Day by day his heart was drawn out toward Christ, until he lost sight of self in love for his Master. His resentful, ambitious temper was yielded to the molding power of Christ. The regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit renewed his heart. The power of the love of Christ wrought a transformation of character. This is the sure result of union with Jesus."² When Jesus abides in you, He transforms you. You begin to feel that real faith, that real love that comes only from God. And then your prayers will not be a showcase, but a true expression of love and faith.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 297.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 73.

This Is for Real

EVIDENCE

John 4:43-54

According to my generation, Generation X, "keeping it real" suggests that one acknowledge the present for what it really is. In essence, the phrases "Don't front" or "Don't put up a front" aptly suggest that one not pretend to be what one is not or pretend that things are not the way they really are. The ability to keep it real is popularly articulated and is seemingly, increasingly coveted.

As a Christian keeping it real suggests that we acknowledge things as they are from a different perspective. The struggle to be real in Christ perpetuates a different *modus operandi*, or method, from that of the world:

Of Christ = For Real	Of the World = Oh, Really!
1. In Christ we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).	1. Self-made men and women exist by fate.
2. Living for the hereafter preoccupies our main focus (Rom. 8:18; Titus 2:12, 13).	2. The here and now dominates our energies (talk about stress!).
3. The welfare of our neighbor is as important as ours (Lev. 19:18).	3. Maximize self-indulgence and self-satisfaction primarily.
4. We live by faith (Hab. 2:4; Matt. 9:29).	4. Live by past experience and human and/or scientific predictions.

A look at the story of the nobleman of Capernaum (John 4:43-54) signifies most, if not all, of these. He desired a request of Jesus. The Bible does not say what type of life this man lived outside of meeting Jesus but that he sought Jesus to heal his son.

The Bible seems to insinuate that this man was struggling with attribute #4 above (under "Of Christ"). Jesus specifically said to the man, " 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe' " (John 4:48, NKJV). In other words, this man's faith was dependent on evidence directly contrasting the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1. Jesus pointed this out. He did not, however, withhold the miracle. The nobleman's son was healed at precisely the time Jesus said he was, and the end result of this miracle worked out a far greater good. Verse 53 says that the nobleman "himself believed, and his whole household" (NKJV).

Wednesday
January 28

What Is God Worth?

HOW-TO

John 4:48

In John 4 we see Christ challenge the foundation of the official's faith when he comes to Him for the healing of his son. Jesus asks: "Must I do miraculous signs and wonders before you people will believe in me?" (John 4:48, NLT). Let's take

**Our reaction to pain can
act as a barometer.**

a closer look at our own faith, and the foundation on which it stands.

Pain and hardship in our lives is one of the most trying tests of our faith. We have all experienced it in one form or another; indeed pain is such a universal experience that our reaction to it can act as a barometer for our relationship with God.

Of course no one but God can assess the true quality of our faith, and I don't intend to provide a checklist or a scoring system, but a few points can help us consider our own relationship with our Creator.

1. Remember a painful experience in your life. This could be an emotional experience such as the betrayal of trust or personal disappointment in your own shortcomings. It may be a more extreme example, such as the death or illness of a family member. Before reading on, do take a moment to relive what you have been through.

2. Consider your reaction to God at this time. People react to God in a number of ways when they experience pain. Probably one of the most common reactions is "Why me?" We see around us a sick world, but when the pain makes us cry out, we wonder why it happened. One way of answering this question is in the vein of Job's friends: God must be teaching you a lesson. I don't want to deny that God allows pain to resolve into some good through personal revelations, but there is the danger of seeing the experience as a reward system. Philip Yancey quotes Joni Eareckson Tada, paralyzed in an accident as a teenager: "I probably hoped that by figuring out God's ideas, I could learn my lesson and then He'd heal me." Yancey tells the story of another paraplegic, Brian Sternberg: He "recognized that faith in God was not a transaction: 'You heal me, God, and I'll believe.' He had to believe because God was worthy of his faith."*

I believe that this is what Jesus was referring to when He rebuked the official for basing his faith on "signs and wonders" (verse 48, NLT). God is Almighty and worthy of our faith; it is not earned by Him after He performs a miracle in our lives.

*Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), chap. 9.

Faith in Miracles

OPINION

John 4:50

The nobleman experienced a faith-affirming event with his son's healing, but Jesus asks us to believe without such signs. Why does He speak against something so desirable?

Faith is a mysterious thing. If we see and believe, we are rewarded; if we believe without seeing, we are rewarded. The reward isn't that our prayers are answered; it is in the strengthening of the faith that we had in the first place.

Many Christians experience signs and wonders in their personal lives. From answers to prayer to divine intervention, we look for signs that God is there and in control. But there are risks associated with basing our faith on such things. What happens to it when God is silent?

What God wants from us is a life of faith; He does not want a life of emotional enjoyment of His blessings. Being on the receiving end of an act from God is one thing; getting to know Him is something else entirely.

Faith is not some wimpy thing. It is confidence in God where we thrust ourselves on Him with reckless abandon. It is the deep certainty that He is, and that without Him we cannot be. We falter when we lose our daily connection to Him, and seeking Him only to get some tangible return is bound to cause disappointment.

Many of us have set ourselves aside as if to say, "I cannot do anything else until God appears to me." He will never do it. We will have to get up on our own, without any inspiration and without any sudden touch from God. Then comes our surprise, and we find ourselves exclaiming, "Why, He was there all the time, and I never knew it!"

Philip Yancey sums up the relationship between our faith and signs from God in one brief sentence: "A record of God's faithfulness in the past combines with hope in a better future for one end: to equip us for the present."²

Jesus says that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father. Yes, He performs miracles, but those miracles are the result of something much deeper than a mere desire to act. It is in His love for others that we find the Source for the signs and wonders, the very heart of God.

**Faith is not some
wimpy thing.**

1. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), May 1.

2. Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), p. 80.

Friday
January 30

Faith Without Sight

EXPLORATION

John 4:43-54

CONCLUDE

Jesus desires us to believe without signs and wonders but is always willing to honor even the smallest gesture of faith. Meeting Christ, the official found the faith he needed. When we exercise our faith, God will give it reason to grow. The result of the official's faith was not only a healed son but an entire household of believers. God desires us to live lives of faith, not merely enjoyment of His blessings. Faith is thus our confidence in God, with the deep certainty that He is, and we owe our lives to Him. Through faith we're willing recklessly to put everything in our lives on the line to serve Him.

CONSIDER

- Setting faith goals for the next six months or year. What will it take to achieve those goals?
- Listening to the song "Fight," by PFR. How is faith active? How do we exercise our faith for those we love?
- Creating a home video that explores faith. Perhaps act out the story of the Capernaum official and explore the moment when he exercised his faith. Was it there all along, or did he suddenly seize it?
- Skimming through the book of John. In contrast to the other Gospels, how many of Jesus' miracles in John involve touching the recipient, and how many involve Jesus merely "saying the word"? What does this teach about faith to those of us who have never met Jesus face to face?
- Graphing your faith journey. When was it easy to believe? When was your faith most challenged? When did it shrink? When did it grow?
- Throwing a party in honor of what Jesus has done for you. People Jesus healed often feted Him in their gratitude. Invite your friends to a party where you can toast God for His faithfulness to you.
- Watching a video of *Shadowlands*, the tale of C. S. Lewis's encounter with poet Joy Gresham. Think about how we hold on to faith in the face of great tragedy.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 26.

Lonnie Melashenko and David B. Smith, *A Suitcase Full of Faith*.

Putting the past Behind You



“Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you’ ” (John 5:14, NIV).

Sabbath
January 31

Broken Body, Wounded Heart

INTRODUCTION

John 5:1-14

Argh! I tried not to groan aloud. I sat in the emergency room, trying to elevate my swollen ankle on the chair opposite. But even the pressure from its own weight sent shards of pain racing up my leg. Tears sprang into my eyes, and I clenched my teeth in frustration. Was this my fault? Could I have prevented this? Doubt made me feel worse.

Earlier that evening, while playing volleyball, I had jumped to block a spike. A teammate went up as well and, as we came back down, my foot landed hard on his. SNAP! Rolling on the ground, through a fog of pain, I heard people gather around me. Gingerly, they lifted me from the floor and carried me off the court.

Finally, at about midnight, hospital staff told me that, although I had not broken

I sat in the emergency room, trying to elevate my swollen ankle on the chair opposite.

any bones, I had severely torn a ligament. Again, I questioned the wisdom of my act. Should I have gone for the block? But the hospital staff didn't want questions, explanations, or confessions.

They had patched up my physical problem as best they could and were shoeing me out the door.

As I read John 5, I'm reminded of how truly wonderful it is to be a patient of the Great Physician. Unlike the hospital staff, who didn't care about my emotional well-being, Jesus is more than willing to attend to and heal all kinds of pain—physical and emotional.

Jesus is the Great Body-and-Soul Healer. As we see in the life of the man by the pool of Bethesda, Jesus can help cure both the physical and the inner pain in our lives. In John 5:14, Jesus addressed the spiritual and emotional illness that plagued that man long after Jesus had cured his body. And Jesus can do the same for us!

We have all, at some time, doubted the wisdom of a choice. We've all hurt others or been hurt. Jesus cares just as much about those pains as He does about the physical ones. When we take our lives to Him, He doesn't just fix up a sore ankle here or a sick kidney there. He does more. He reaches in and places a healing, loving hand around our hearts and minds, enabling us to put all past pain behind us and move forward in Him.

Trial and Retrial, Guilty or Innocent?

EVIDENCE

John 5:10

In biblical times the first Christians came from a legalistic view of the Sabbath. One was not to work (Matt. 12:1, 2). Walking to the temple, if more than a mile, was work. Preparing a meal was work. Helping someone (in any way) was also unlawful, especially if one had to touch a sick person on the Sabbath. It is ironic that individuals could rescue an animal, such as an ox, if it had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath. Why then could humans not be rescued?

The Pharisees had made these Sabbath laws to assure that the Sabbath remained a holy day, but the wonderful, restful day had become a burden. Is this what God had intended at Eden when Sabbath was first created?

The beginning of John 5 discusses a sick man lying beside the pool of Bethesda. It was the belief that an angel would sometimes touch the water, and the first person to jump into it would be healed. This man, we'll call him Eric, was crippled from the waist down. He had struggled for many years to get into the pool, but someone always made it there before him. Doctors had given up on these people, and now here they were, clinging to their last hope of healing. Not even the pastors (priests) at that time would touch them because illness was looked upon as punishment for sin. To touch a sinful person would contaminate the holy.

Jesus looks at all these people, the outcast, the wretched, the dirty. He walks over to Eric. Jesus speaks to him. Surely this is not allowed! Eric is being punished for some sin; Jesus must move away or become guilty by association. "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6, NIV). A simple question—a no-brainer.

"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" (verse 8, NIV). A simple command. So crippled Eric gets up, folds his bed, and walks away.

But it's not so simple. It is Sabbath and several laws have just been broken. Jesus spoke to a sinful man. Jesus healed the man. The man is walking a great distance on the Sabbath. The man is carrying his bed, a burden, on the Sabbath. Eric was on trial for his sin before, but now he is on trial again for working on the Sabbath. Is he guilty or innocent?

Jesus came to break unimportant laws. John shows us that He cared more for people than for rules, since the generation of people living at this time never met Jesus personally. So are we guilty of breaking laws to help people? Can we be put on trial for our love of others? Jesus was.

**Jesus came to break
unimportant laws.**

Monday
February 2

All Eyes on the Father

LOGOS

John 5:19, 20

John 5 is divided into two parts. The first deals with healing; in the second Christ explains His authority. Both parts reveal Jesus in partnership with the Father.

The Healing Event (John 5:1-15)

The pool of Bethesda was a sight nobody wished to behold. People with failing bodies who had lost all human hope saw this as their last chance for healing. Here it was rumored that an angel stirred the waters, so the first to jump in would be healed.

They waited and watched. When the waters rippled, the lame and sick cast themselves headlong into this ten-meter-deep miracle pool. We are not told how many died in this attempt or while waiting for the water to move.

The panoramic view of the pool at Bethesda was a reminder to Jesus of His mission. From birth it had been declared, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21, NIV). As He gazed on the spectacle before Him, He saw those whom He longed to redeem, not only from physical ailments but the spiritual disease of sin that ate away at their birthrights as children of God. Christ longed to heal them all, but to do so would interfere with His mission.

As Jesus viewed this, His eyes fell upon the worst case: a man paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus looked at him and asked, "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6, NIV). Sometimes humans have a tendency to have their personal identity equal their infirmity or sin. If Jesus healed the man, 38 years of his identity might be swept away. Would he really want to be healed?

The man spoke of his plight, as if he were devoid of any hope except for that pool. Jesus simply commanded the man to pick up his bed and walk—and he was healed. As the man walked in the rebirth of his life, religious leaders confronted him on violation of the Sabbath traditions. His answer was simple and eloquent: "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk'" (verse 11, NKJV). When the religious leaders discovered it was Jesus, they confronted Him. Jesus then explained His authority for all generations to hear.

Christ's Authority (John 5:16-47)

Jesus proclaimed to these religious leaders that He possessed unfettered communication with God, which was the basis of His authority. God revealed to Jesus His desire to heal the paralytic, so Jesus healed Him. God has always revealed His

work on earth as an act of love to His people. Jesus seemed incredulous that the religious leaders did not recognize God's hand in this healing.

Jesus openly declared that His loving response to the Father was to do whatever He saw the Father do. He stated that God had told Him He would raise the dead. This relationship between Jesus and the Father was an example of the unsevered connection we all could have with God. Jesus was frustrated with the religious leaders because they did not know that God was available to heal bodies, souls, and self-esteem. Ultimately their need for affirmation from one another distracted them from a personal connection with God.

Jesus then cites witnesses who verify His authority: the Father, the works He has done, John the Baptist, and Moses. He states that those who search the Scriptures will see Him there; the Scriptures testify of Him (verse 39). He then declared that those religious leaders were lost. Why? Because they honor one another and they do not honor God. His last words of the chapter are, "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (verses 46, 47, NKJV). As spiritual witnesses, we too must make a decision about Jesus' authority to heal, forgive, and redeem. Jesus' authority came from His relationship with the Father. Our only true authority comes from our relationship with the Father.

Are our eyes on the Father?

REACT

1. Why didn't the healing of the man convince the leaders that Jesus was the Messiah?

2. Are miracles or lack of miracles a good way of determining truth or rightness of one's position? Explain your answer.

3. Is there any sickness (physical, mental, or spiritual) that you or your church does not want to have Jesus heal because it would affect your identity?

4. God reveals His love to us when He shows us what He is doing in our community. What has God shown you that He is doing in your community?

5. We return love to God by joining Him in His work in our community. How will you draw near to God and join in His work in your community?

6. If you do not see what God is doing in your community or life, what can be done to make your relationship with God deeper to correct this?

7. If all you had was the Old Testament, would you have recognized Jesus as the Messiah? Why or why not?

8. What are the criteria for determining whether someone's point of view is legalistic?

9. Describe a time you or someone you know has been persecuted or criticized for doing good on the Sabbath.

Tuesday
February 3

The Faith Paradigm

TESTIMONY

John 5:7-10

"I have no one," was Zaid's daily lament. Being HIV positive, his family disowned him, and his conservative Muslim community ostracized him. AIDS has such an intense social stigma that similar response came from his non-Muslim and Christian friends as well.

Zaid spent the rest of his life living in regret, guilt, and loneliness. It is true, his past indiscriminate lifestyle had brought him into that mess. He died alone. But he always did think of Mecca as the answer for physical and spiritual cleansing—if only he had the money or friends to help him go there.

Zaid spent the rest of his life living in regret, guilt, and loneliness.

The condition of the paraplegic in John 5 resembles Zaid's. But Zaid's fate could have been his if Jesus had not met him that day. He lived in guilt and loneliness for 38 years. His physical disability was proclaimed as a testament of Divine judgment for his past sin. He thought that the miracle pool and people were the solution to his physical and spiritual disability.

When Jesus appeared to him and said, "Rise, take up your bed and walk" (John 5:8, NKJV), Jesus gave him a paradigm shift: from looking to people and the magic pool to undo his sorry fate, to a dependence on faith in God. He asked him to have faith and act on that faith to walk again.

The paraplegic story ended on a happy note because he had a new paradigm to depend on Divine command. He was made whole because he had faith. This same spiritual and physical healing would be ours if we would have the same faith.

"The man might have stopped to doubt, and lost his one chance of healing. But he believed Christ's word, and in acting upon it he received strength. Through the same faith we may receive spiritual healing."*

REACT

1. To what degree, if any, do we still depend on emotions and feelings to justify whether God has forgiven our sins whenever we ask Him in prayer?

2. How does one respond to a friend or family member who is plagued by paralyzing regret and guilt over their past mistakes and pre-Christian lifestyle?

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 203.

Do Not Give Up

HOW-TO

John 5:1-14

The man at the pool of Bethesda had every reason to lose hope. He had been forgotten if not rejected by his family, his situation never improved, and nobody seemed to care even to whisper a word of encouragement. Surprisingly for 38 years this man never gave up the hope of being healed; he was still waiting for a time when he could be the first to enter the pool and be healed. What faith!

**We must have a desire
for something better.**

This man clung to the hope that it is possible to be healed, and he waited patiently for that moment. You and I, if we are determined, can do the same by clinging to the hope that it is possible to be saved no matter what situation we are in. All we need is to find Christ, to respond to His seeking after us through self-surrender to Him. But how do we surrender? Morris Venden outlines four steps:*

1. We must have a desire for something better than we are presently experiencing. The man at the pool did not enjoy waiting for this chance for 38 years. He wanted to be well. Seeing this response Jesus drew near to him.

2. We must gain knowledge of the plan of salvation and place ourselves in the environment in which that happens. The man at the pool was faithful to what he knew. Healing was found in the pool, so he waited nearby if opportunity arose. We can gain knowledge of the plan of salvation wherever God's Word is read, spoken, or taught.

3. We must admit that we've been running from God, trying to escape from Him through all sorts of ways.

4. We must acknowledge that we have no ability to change ourselves. "Do you want to be made well?' The sick man answered Him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up' " (John 5:6, 7, NKJV). He knew that he needed help and he admitted it. That's all we need to do and Jesus will work out the rest.

Jesus is seeking the soul in need to heal, save, and restore. Does He find a place in our hearts?

REACT

1. How do you explain the word *faith* to someone who is not a Christian?
2. What if Jesus came to your community this week and asked, "Do you want to get well?" What disabilities and illnesses might He encounter?

*Morris Venden, *The Reasons for the Season* (Arkansas: Concerned Communications, 1986), pp. 46-48.

Thursday
February 5

Complete Forgiveness

OPINION

John 5:5-8

For those I never knew—
who responded with silence
or a blank stare.

You never knew me at all, either.

Did you ever wonder?

Or were you too consumed to come closer?

Maybe you didn't really care at all.

What was I to you?

Another odd passer-by with a strange storybook—
or a mere existence who occupied a corner?

Perhaps had the corner been round
we could have found compromise.

How often do we make judgments on others based on differences such as appearance, lifestyle, situation in life, hobbies, and morals. It's easy to do. However, 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (NKJV).

The response of the invalid man by the pool to Jesus' question (see John 5:7) reveals that he was a lonely soul, desperate for healing. When Jesus asks him if he wants to get well, he gives a long explanation as to why he was worse off than others, and why he'd been there for so long. He'd been living in a corner for 38 years, bound by his physical disability, which went hand in hand with his sense of worth and spiritual health.

Jesus didn't dwell on the issues the man had. According to what Jesus told him in verse 14, this man had lived a sinful life. Jesus didn't sit down with him and make him confess and work through his past sins. It was simply, "Stop sinning."

This story teaches so much about how God wants us to treat one another. It's easy to judge others based on their appearance, and often we do this without really knowing the bigger picture. Sometimes we may know the extent to which others have sinned, and we can't get past the sins. They taint for life our views of the person. This wasn't the case with Jesus.

REACT

1. How can we learn to tolerate others who are different from us?
2. When is forgiving the most difficult? Why?

Healing Hands, Caring Hearts

EXPLORATION

John 5:14

CONCLUDE

To experience a sense of physical and mental well-being is a natural desire. Yet, sadly, despite the abundance of health information and resources available to us today, few people achieve such a state. Jesus came so that we might have the abundant life. He's just waiting to bestow the blessings of health on us—if only we would ask, believe, and claim. But that's not all. Even more profound are the spiritual blessings God wants to bestow—not just for ourselves, but for others through us. Just as Jesus was a channel through which His Father's love flowed, God wants us to be channels of His blessings—physical, emotional, and spiritual—as well.

CONSIDER

- Helping to plan and organize a community health outreach event in your neighborhood.
- Dividing a piece of paper into two columns. Make a list of people with various health problems (physical or mental). Then write one practical idea for ministering to each person. For example, you could provide a "first aid" basket of goodies including herbal tea, a mug, vitamin C, and small packs of tissue for a friend with the flu.
- Exploring the Internet for information on research that has investigated the relationship between physical and spiritual health.
- Starting a get-well-card ministry in your church. You could make your own cards, using your artistic talent or purchase a computer program for creating original greeting cards.
- Getting together with friends and sharing the gift of music with someone who's sick or confined at home or an institution. Even if you don't sing or play an instrument, you can share a tape or CD player along with recorded music.
- Praying regularly for God's blessings on those who are ill and for creative ways to give the gift of health and healing.

CONNECT

Luke 11:1-13.

Heal the World: Begin With Yourself; Christ's Object Lessons, "Asking to Give."

Don't Just Fill My Plate, Lord

INTRODUCTION

John 6:51

Some years ago, I was invited to a formal wedding. Although at the time this young woman and I were not very close, we had been childhood friends. Judging from the fact that she had managed to climb the social ladder, I knew that a lot of important and fancy people would be present. But I had no idea what to wear! It wasn't that there was

**Jesus is interested in our
daily situations.**

nothing suitable in my closet; it's just that I didn't want to be the "ugly guest." So I broke down my options to two dresses—extravagant red and passive ivory.

For days I debated over which dress to choose. I even asked other friends for their opinion and got all kinds of answers. One girl told me that it was rude to wear any color similar to white at a wedding, because it was like stealing attention from the bride. I was just about to rush out to buy something new when I decided to pray about it.

On the afternoon of the wedding, I went to my closet and with a strong conviction, selected the ivory dress.

I blended into the crowd nicely. Every other woman present seemed to be wearing something quite similar to my choice. I realized how awful I would have looked had I decided to wear my extravagant red dress.

The lesson I learned? Jesus is interested in our seemingly meaningless, daily situations. Too often we feel that He is too busy to be bothered with our petty needs, or maybe, like His disciples, at times we are too self-confident to seek His guidance.

We need to realize that Jesus desires to be included in our everyday happenings. Many times our devotional life becomes packed with rituals in which we say the right words and read the right books. But all this is unfulfilling unless we are able to sense the presence and power of Jesus through our study.

After witnessing the miraculous feeding of the 5,000, Jesus tried to show the people that He was capable of supplying their needs; but that He wanted to give them more than just food. They missed the point. They seemed to be interested only in a full plate and overlooked the gift of eternal life He wanted to offer.

Jesus wants to be our Friend and Companion. He wants us to consult Him about all the little details of our lives that we waste time worrying about. He wants us to trust Him as the Ultimate Giver of good gifts. He wants to be real to us. That's what our study this week focuses on.

Sunday
February 8

What You Want; What You Get

LOGOS

John 6

What We Need (John 6:1-15)

Think about it. You're at a Youth Congress where there is a large crowd. And best of all Jesus is in town. You've enjoyed good music, you've worshiped, you've praised, and you've taken the Word. Now it's late, and the children are getting weary perhaps, and your stomach is starting to rumble. You try to keep focusing on the sermon, but it's difficult once your mind wanders off. Jesus with His kind heart sees your need and figures you need a break to eat, fellowship, and continue to worship Him.

Something similar happened while Christ was on earth and He fed five thousand. You may be thinking, *What does one have to do with the other?* But the fact

**The truth of the matter is,
we need not worry.**

is many of us—if not all—tend to lose our focus on godly things when we divert our attention to day-to-day problems and situations (trouble at home, at school, at work, for example). Many of these problems make us forget our main focus in life. The truth of the matter is, we need not worry. "The Saviour imparted earthly blessings of healing so that He might incline the hearts of men and women to receive the gospel of His grace."

Jesus always sees our needs and does His best to give us an answer to them to get our attention back on Him, as He did with the feeding of the five thousand. "Christ never worked a miracle except to supply a genuine necessity, and every miracle was of a character to lead the people to the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations."²² Yet as we see in Scripture, if we do not ask humbly for a solution to our needs, we'll want to do what we want and not see what God intended for us. "If men today were simple in their habits, living in harmony with nature's laws, . . . there would be an abundant supply for the needs of the human family. There would be fewer imaginary wants, and more opportunities to work in God's ways."²³ In Bible times it was the people's blind and selfish goal to be superior to the Romans that led them to want to crown Christ an earthly king. They did not wish to center their thoughts on the reality that Jesus had arrived in this world to save rather than to reign.

In our times Jesus comes to our lives to save rather than for us to establish ourselves permanently on this earth. "Jesus did not seek to attract the people to Him by gratifying the desire for luxury. To that great throng, weary and hungry after the long, exciting day, the simple fare was an assurance not only of His power, but of

His tender care for them in the common needs of life. The Saviour has not promised His followers the luxuries of the world; . . . His word is pledged that their need shall be supplied, and He has promised that which is far better than worldly good,—the abiding comfort of His own presence.”⁴

What We Get (John 6:25-40)

Miracles occur every day. But what do we do after them? Do we just say thank You, or do we see the lesson that God may want to teach us? We do “not seek Him from any worthy motive; but as [we] had been fed with the loaves, [we] hoped still to receive temporal benefit by attaching [ourselves] to Him.”⁵

We must not look to be satisfied on a material level. We must look forward to the way of broadening our spiritual life. “ ‘God wants you to . . . believe in the one he has sent’ ” (John 6:29, NLT). “Wherever hearts are open to receive the truth, Christ is ready to instruct them.”⁶

The Bottom Line (John 6:60-71)

Many times we ask the Lord for things and we do get them. We get to see God working in us, through us, and through others. Half the time we are not ready to receive these answers and then don’t bother to work for God. We are just cold spiritually and do or ask for things through repetition and habit. When we reach this point, we need continually to commend and commit our lives to Christ to keep our spiritual journey alive—if not we rebuke the answers of God from under our noses and run on the thin line of losing our salvation.

“While we cannot now comprehend the works and ways of God, we can discern His great love, which underlies all His dealings with men. He who lives near to Jesus will understand much of the mystery of godliness. He will recognize the mercy that administers reproof, that tests the character, and brings to light the purpose of the heart.”⁷

REACT

1. Why is it difficult for us to focus on Christ even after He has supplied our needs?
2. In John 6 Jesus repeatedly tells His disciples that if they want eternal life they need to eat His flesh and drink His blood. What does this mean to you, a modern-day disciple?

1. *Heal the World: Begin With Yourself*, p. 6.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 366.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

6. *Heal the World: Begin With Yourself*, p. 9.

7. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 394.

Monday
February 9

Bread, Flesh, Blood

TESTIMONY

John 6

The first part of John's Gospel presents various miracles that show that Jesus is the promised Savior, the Son of God. John 6 recounts a series of events that teach that Jesus is the Bread of Life that can supply all our needs.

It presents the miracle of Jesus' feeding of the 5,000. The immediate objective of this miracle was to supply the needs of His people. "The miracle of the loaves teaches a lesson of dependence upon God."¹

**"We must receive the word
for ourselves."**

But beyond this, there is a deep spiritual lesson within this miracle: As we receive from Christ the bread of life, which is

His Word, we should share it with others, as Jesus shared with His disciples and the multitude the loaves of bread. And this results in unity in Christ because as we continue to share, the more we shall receive from Christ.

After the disciples had witnessed Jesus' wonderful works that day, a violent storm arose, and they cried out to the Lord for help. Here we see again how Jesus is able to supply the needs of His followers. "As a mother in tender love watches her child, so the compassionate Master watched His disciples."²

Jesus is the Bread of Life. If we study His Word and put it into practice, we shall have eternal life. That is what Jesus meant when He told the multitude to eat His flesh and to drink His blood (John 6:54, 55). They, of course, didn't understand the symbolism. "As our physical life is sustained by food, so our spiritual life is sustained by the Word of God. . . . As we must eat for ourselves in order to receive nourishment, so we must receive the word for ourselves. . . . We should carefully study the Bible."³

Among the self-designations of Christ, that of the Bread of Life is especially meaningful. This vivid symbolism of bread was familiar to Christ's audience. He tells them clearly that the loaves and fish with which He had fed the multitude satisfied only momentarily their physical hunger. They would hunger again and again. But eating the Bread of Life is different; this gives permanent satisfaction (verse 58). In the Bread of Life are contained all the nutrients necessary for spiritual life, health, and vitality.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 368.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 390.

A Little Is a Lot

EVIDENCE

John 6:5-9

Since my earliest Sabbath School attendance when I was about eight-years-old, I've been intrigued when I heard the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. The part of the story that caught my attention from the very first was when my teacher told us that it was a little boy who gave his bread and fishes to feed the multitude.

The specific word the Bible uses is "lad" (John 6:9, KJV), which means "youth" or "boy,"¹ but it does not mention anything else about this person. Just imagine the morning of the miracle. Maybe his mom prepared a basket or bag with the fishes and the bread. When he left home, he never imagined that he was about to become an important part of one of Jesus' greatest miracles.

When Philip looked around and saw the multitude, he said to Jesus, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little'" (verse 7, NKJV). A denarius was worth about 20 cents, but back in those days it was a good amount of money and it was the daily salary of a journeyman.² When Andrew saw this boy, he thought that it was going to be impossible to feed all the people with five loaves of bread and two fishes.

This young boy did not have a lot to give, but he was willing to give all he had to the Master. Even though we do not know a lot about him, we surely know that what he did was enough for God. As a result of his generosity, this event is registered in all four Gospels. Sometimes we think we have too little to offer to God, but what seems to be not enough for us is enough for God.

We have only to remember that we cannot do this on our own; we need the strength that only Jesus can supply for us. "Christ is the great center, the source of all strength. His disciples are to receive their supplies from Him. The most intelligent, the most spiritually minded, can bestow only as they receive. Of themselves they can supply nothing for the needs of the soul. We can impart only that which we receive from Christ."³ Without Him we are nothing, but with Him in our lives what little we have becomes a lot.

**This young boy did not
have a lot to give.**

1. *The New Bantam English Dictionary*.

2. William McDonald, *Commentary of the New Testament* (Spain: CLIE, 1995), p. 375.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 370.

Wednesday
February 11

The Everlasting Bread

HOW-TO

John 6:27

**Benefits are never to
become our object.**

Jesus Christ is revealed in John 6 as the only way to God. The crowd looked as if they were seeking Jesus, but they were actually trying to use Jesus to seek their own welfare. These people had no true commitment to God, but they wanted Jesus as their king for their own selfish reasons. It is true that many personal benefits were to be reaped through serving the Lord, but the benefits are never to become our object. In all things Christ must have the pre-eminence (Col. 1:18).

In our daily life we seek all kinds of material and trivial things, worrying daily about our future. One of our most common preoccupations is our physical bread. At times we forget that our spirit needs nourishment, which comes from God. Jesus demonstrated His power to meet spiritual and physical needs. By feeding five thousand people, Jesus showed us this.

Here are some ways to seek spiritual bread:

1. Recognize that God is our only eternal bread. Humankind is so destitute that we can't even seek God on our own. God has to draw us to Himself through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11). This is why Isaiah admonishes us to "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isa. 55:6, NKJV).

2. Make a commitment to God, not to the benefits He can produce. Jesus exposed the true intent of these people's hearts by preaching a strong message of commitment. Those who were self-centered were offended and left (John 6:66); those remained who were willing to lay down their lives so that they could experience God's abundant life (Luke 9:24; John 10:10). Commitment to God Himself (not what He can produce) is what always separates the true worshipers of God (4:23) from the false.

3. Make a daily connection with God through His Word. Studying His Word every day will keep our spirit nourished because, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NKJV).

4. Look to Jesus as God's image. We may easily apply all this to Jesus Christ who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6, NKJV). He is the express image of His Father, the truth of the Father; whom the Father has confirmed.

Divine Bread in the Twenty-first Century

OPINION

John 6:32-35

Food is part of the daily life of all. In their pilgrimage through the desert, the people of Israel learned well the importance of food as they depended on the heavenly blessing that was given through manna (Exodus 16). Thus “the figure which Christ used was a familiar one to the Jews.”¹

As they heard reference made to “ ‘the bread from heaven’ ” (John 6:32, NKJV) from Moses’ time, it was not difficult for Jesus to establish the difference between food sent from heaven and the true Divine Bread. But Jesus noticed that it wasn’t easy for them to understand the difference between the two.

“The giver of the manna was standing among them. It was Christ Himself who had led the Hebrews through the wilderness, and had daily fed them with the bread from heaven. That food was a type of the real bread from heaven.”²

It wasn’t easy for the people who knew Jesus to understand His divine nature and accept it in their minds and hearts. And so it was impossible for them to understand, with their weak and confused hearts, that “the life-giving Spirit, flowing from the infinite fullness of God, is the true manna.”³

Most of the people sought Him out because of some need they had at the time. But Jesus realized that their hopes would not be fulfilled by what He was offering. Ironically, He had come to give them a gift that was even greater than what they were looking for.

The same is true for many of us. We run to Jesus to ask Him to supply some need, without remembering that He is more than our Problem-

**“The giver of the manna was
standing among them.”**

Solver, that He is our Creator, our Father, and our most faithful Friend, who takes pleasure in living each of our experiences, both good and bad, right by our side.

We need to learn to receive all the blessings that God gives to each of us, and thus allow His Holy Spirit to enter our hearts. If we do this, we will finally learn to receive the divine bread, and we will take pleasure in doing His will day after day.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 386.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

Friday
February 13

Eternal Nourishment

EXPLORATION

John 6:5-13

CONCLUDE

Just as Christ took a small amount of fish and bread and turned it into a miraculous feeding, He will do the same with the seemingly insignificant life problems in which we find ourselves. He is waiting for us to turn them over to Him. When it comes to those whom He loves, nothing is too small for Him to work with. Just as the physical bread gives us the nutrients that our body needs to function, feasting on Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, provides us with the heavenly bread that nourishes our spirits and supplies us with eternal satisfaction.

CONSIDER

- Reading John 6:5-13 and then writing an imaginary eyewitness report of what you saw, the reaction of those who were there, and the attitude of the disciples regarding the feeding of the 5,000. Include what you think your reaction would have been.
- Reflecting upon a time in your life when you had a problem that you thought was too little or not important enough to take to Jesus. Share with a class member how it was resolved. What have you learned from this week's lesson about your importance to God?
- Writing a poem or a song that tells what Christ, the Bread of Life, means to you.
- Praying for Jesus to lead you to someone with whom you can share how important they are to Him and how He wants to supply their needs.
- Drawing a picture depicting Peter walking on the water toward Jesus. Put yourself in Peter's place. Place the picture where you can see it as a reminder to keep your eyes on Jesus.
- Viewing the video *Contact*. Consider what role faith plays in the experience of Dr. Ellie Arroway. Does her faith in the possibility of life in outer space relate in any way to a Christian's faith in God?
- Devising a daily to-do list of your activities for the day, scheduling time to meet with Jesus through prayer and Bible study.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, "Growing Up Into Christ."
Jerry D. Thomas, *Messiah*, chaps. 39-41.

The good Shepherd



“ ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep’ ” (John 10:11, NKJV).

Does God Still Talk to People?

INTRODUCTION

John 10:11

As a shepherd takes care of his flock, day after day, month after month, so is illustrated Jesus' role in keeping us, His sheep, safe and sound. He is not snobbish, not One who cares about Himself. Instead, He cares about us. Rather than staying on His throne of glory, He came all the way down to this small speck of dust, called earth, to deliver us from the devil.

A story is told of a young man who had attended a Bible study about listening to

God. He wondered, *Does God still speak to people?* As he drove down the main street of his town, he had the strangest thought to stop and buy a gallon of milk. He said out loud, "God, is

"I was asking God to show me how to get some milk."

that You?" Though he received no clear answer, he stopped and bought some milk.

As he passed 7th Street, he felt the urge to turn down a side street. He drove several blocks then felt that he should suddenly stop. He then sensed, *Go and give the milk to the people across the street.*

"Lord, this is insane. Those people are asleep, and if I wake them up, they're going to be mad and I will look stupid."

Again, he felt as if he should go and give them the milk. He rang the bell. A man's voice yelled out: "Who is it? What do you want?"

The door opened before the young man could get away.

"What is it?"

"Here, I brought this to you."

The man took the milk and spoke in a foreign accent. "We were praying," he said. "We had some big bills this month, and we ran out of money. We didn't have any milk for our baby. I was asking God to show me how to get some milk."

His wife came to the door. "I asked God to send an angel with some milk," she said. "Are you an angel?"

The young man pulled out all the money in his wallet and put it in the man's hand. He walked back to his car; tears were streaming down his face.

This story has touched me in a certain way. It shows that God answers prayers in mysterious ways. It also shows that God really cares for people on this doomed planet earth—as He gave life to us by sending His precious Son to die for us. It's really amazing to know that Jesus is indeed our Shepherd.

A Shepherd's Work

EVIDENCE

Psalm 23; John 10

When Jesus proclaimed “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11, NKJV), we are reminded of the words of David in the oft-quoted and much-loved Psalm 23: Jesus’ proclamation that He is the Good Shepherd was effectively a declaration of His identity as the Lord God. By using the metaphor of the shepherd, Jesus was able to reinforce and expand on the beautiful imagery in Psalm 23 of God as Provider, Comforter, Deliverer, Guide, and Protector. Moreover, through John 10, we are able to delve deep into the heart of Jesus to find Someone who loves us so much that He would lay down His life for us (John 10:15).

To be able to truly appreciate the use of the shepherd as a metaphor for Jesus and the sheep as a metaphor for His people, we must examine the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep in biblical times. Sheep are mentioned in the Bible more than 500 times. They were the most important domestic animals back then as they provided for most of the necessities of life—milk, meat, hides, and wool (which was also a precious trade object). For all they were worth, however, sheep were demanding creatures to keep: They were stupid, defenseless, and wandering. Accordingly, sheep were wholly dependent upon their shepherd for guidance, protection, and provision.

The shepherd’s profession was often grueling, requiring the utmost diligence and endurance. The search for pasturage and water sometimes required the shepherd to take his sheep afar, where he was exposed to the elements and survived on the most basic of food and lodging. The shepherd also had to guard his sheep from thieves and wild animals. Because sheep were prone to wander, the shepherd had to keep close watch and continually account for his flock. When sheep became lost, the shepherd’s duty was to find and rescue them. It was common for a shepherd to be with his sheep for years, to develop affection for them and to name them. In turn, the sheep recognized their shepherd’s voice and went to him when they were called (verses 3-5).

**The shepherd had to keep
close watch.**

Just as sheep are lost without their shepherd, we are completely lost without the guidance and love of Jesus, even though most of us do not realize it. And although we cannot even begin to imagine why, Jesus loves us and longs for us to love Him back. We should contribute to this symbiotic relationship by being good sheep who listen to our Good Shepherd’s voice and never go astray.

Monday
February 16

Knowing the Shepherd

LOGOS

John 7:1–10:21

Between courage and adversity, faith grows or dies. Conviction defies logic, trust dares skepticism, and courage defeats opposition.

Controversy

Jesus' family were skeptical of His mission (John 7:5) but recognized His gift (verse 3). At the feast, the religious leaders discounted His virgin birth (verse 27), His Galilean origin (verses 41, 42, 52), His homegrown rabbinical teachings (verse 15; 8:5), His divine miracle in the previous year (5:8, 17), and His relationship with His Father-God (7:29, 36, 38; 8:19). The Pharisees expected Him at the compulsory feast for all male Jews since the uproar He had created around the country had left their theology wanting.

Healings, cleansing the temple, converting Samaritans, feeding multitudes, walking on water, and claiming to be the Creator were just a few of the news headlines. This time the Pharisees were determined He would not escape. But it had to be an overwhelming public judgment that He was a blasphemous rebel to avoid the backlash (7:12, 13, 40, 41, 46-48).

Each escape (7:30, 44; 8:59) only revealed God's control of the fulfillment of prophecy (Dan. 9:25-27). For Jesus to state that His time had "not yet come" (John 2:4, NKJV) showed that His mission was already clear and that He was just marking time. Until then Jesus was building the infrastructure for His ministry among the people from whom would be chosen the core of His infant church.

Jews claiming the Abrahamic descendancy were convinced of their eternal life, and spiritual freedom (8:33, 41). They claimed their genetic right to salvation with-

**His mission was
already clear.**

out considering their spiritual responsibility (Gen. 12:2, 3). Self-glory played a more important factor than upholding God's reputation (John 8:50). More often than not, in the history of the Jews, they had always managed to seek God under oppression,

but in times of prosperity and freedom, they failed to choose to follow Him consistently. Neighboring kingdoms must have wondered about their fidelity and spiritual allegiance. God had a solution.

The Conversion

To overcome disbelief, a personal confrontation with the truth is required. Truth is neither a bribe nor bait; it is a vision of eternity. For each individual the moment

of truth is neither convenient nor rehearsed. The adulterous woman (8:7), Nicodemus (3:2), and the blind man (9:38), experienced the warmth of Jesus' personality, the human face of a divine, forgiving God. There were challenging thoughts for any level of human intellect, spiritual condition, and social standing.

For the crowds (7:12,13), the guards (verse 46), His brothers (verses 4, 5) and even the Pharisees (9:16), there were mixed reactions. For those not fully grounded in their beliefs, it was the ideal situation for confusion, division, or apostasy.

Group dynamics use camaraderie, ridicule, or ostracism to gain control over others. Peer pressure can cause individuals to act unwillingly against their immature belief system. Mind control is not a method that God uses to persuade people to join His side. He has too much respect for His creation and the freedom of choice He freely gave to humans to take it away on a whim. Was this the frustration in Jesus' voice when He tried to reason with the Jews? (8:44-47).

Truth is not cold, hard facts; it is the character known as God. It is not an ethereal, philosophical term; it is a living entity (6:63). Through Jesus' touch of love and grace, they all encountered the deciding moment of truth that would forever change their path to eternity. Based on their "success" stories, others identified with the Savior as the Son of God rather than the Son of Man (7:40, 41; 8:10, 11; 9:16). Blessings come to those who believe the truth, even if belief is only the size of a mustard seed. Christ is Truth.

The Christ

Of all the titles given to Jesus (Isa. 9:6), none are more humble than the ones He claimed for Himself. He called Himself the "bread of life" (John 6:35, NKJV), "light of the world" (8:12, NKJV), "door of the sheep" (10:7, NKJV), and the "true vine" (15:1, NKJV) among others. In the agrarian society of the time, these were the common things of daily occurrence, examples from the natural world. It would be safe to assume that Jesus would have been sent to look after sheep at some time, and He would have contemplated David's experience with sheep. Being a protector of so fragile and trusting a creature laid great responsibility upon the shepherd's alertness, judgment, and leading.

Would it not be normal for sheep to follow their shepherd? This was the kind of relationship Jesus wanted with His followers: complete trust in the calling of the shepherd (10:3). Contrast this with the voice of the imposter (verse 5). The protecting, self-sacrificing hand of the shepherd is the foundation of the trust (verses 12, 14, 15) because he is not an employee, but family. Intimate knowledge of the shepherd, as John said later (1 John 1:1-4), nurtures the growing relationship. Experiencing Christ with all our senses completes the joy. That which we have seen, heard, and touched is now within us. We need never fear if our joy is complete. •

Tuesday
February 17

Love Is More Than a Feeling

TESTIMONY

Isa. 53:4-6

God has shared with the world and the universe His heart and soul when He sent Jesus to live and die for us. When Jesus showed us that His Father is the kind of Friend who laughs and cries with us, and truly understands what it is like to be one of us, we realize His love is for real.

"I have endured your sorrows, experienced your struggles, encountered your temptations. I know your tears; I also have wept. The griefs that lie too deep to be breathed into any human ear, I know. Think not that you are desolate and forsaken. Though your pain touch no responsive chord in any heart on earth, look unto Me, and live."¹ Check out Isaiah 54:10.

"Because we are the gift of His Father, and the reward of His work, Jesus loves us. He loves us as His children. Reader, He loves you. Heaven itself can bestow nothing greater, nothing better. Therefore trust."²

Jesus says that His life is to be relived in us each day. "We are forming characters for heaven. No character can be complete without trial and suffering. . . .

**"We are forming characters
for heaven."**

Christ bore the test of character in our behalf that we might bear this test in our own behalf through the divine strength He has brought to us. . . . Imitate your Redeemer in these

things. . . . Do not let self arise, and lose your self-control because you fancy things are not as they should be. . . . Two wrongs will not make one right. . . .

"Christ . . . was not indifferent to the woes of men. His heart was ever touched with the sufferings and necessities of His brethren, as though He Himself was the one afflicted. He had a calm inward joy, a peace which was serene."³

"It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour's matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice, and they follow Him."⁴

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 483.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *This Day With God*, p. 263.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 480.

How to Hear Your Shepherd's Voice

HOW-TO

John 10:14

My friend Sharon has had two Siamese cats, Sasha and Suet, for almost 15 years. The cats sleep with her every night, and she treats them as if they are her children. Over the years, Sharon has accumulated many stories to tell of the feisty cats, but this particular story has stuck in my mind.

The incident happened when a friend had been staying in Sharon's apartment to babysit the cats. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, both cats were meowing and scratching furiously at the front door, trying to get to the other side. Moments later, the door opened, and it was Sharon returning home. Apparently the cats heard her car in the driveway and knew immediately that their owner had returned.

It is clear that the cats knew their owner well.

Sharon lives in an apartment complex where many cars are driven in and out of the same driveway all day long. It is impossible to differentiate all the engine sounds and be able to pinpoint the exact pitch of Sharon's car. It is clear that Sasha and Suet knew their owner so well that they knew every sound associated with her.

Do we know Jesus, the Shepherd, well enough to hear Him clearly? This would depend on how much we know Jesus and how much time we spend with Him.

Here are the three basic Cs that can help:

1. Commitment. This is a huge step in any relationship, human or spiritual. It is important that you recognize Jesus as your Shepherd and accept His presence in your daily life and personal battles. It is a mind-set change in which "I can do it by myself" becomes "I can do it through Jesus."

2. Communion. Designate a time out of your daily schedule and spend it by knowing Jesus. It could be any activity, for any length of time, and anywhere you want it to be. It could be walking in the park, quietly meditating in your room, reading in the library, fellowshiping in a member's home, volunteering work at the shelter, or even witnessing at your school or office.

3. Communication. Praying is not a one-way communication. It is a two-way dialogue between you and Jesus. So don't rush through your prayers and don't just stop at Amen. Wait, open your heart, and listen closely. You will be surprised at what Jesus has to say too.

REACT

Is prayer primarily for getting answers? Explain your answer.

Thursday
February 19

All the Freedom Not to . . .

OPINION

John 10:11

I imagined myself being one of the sheep in a grazing herd on a beautiful hilltop. After I read John 10:11, a strange thought came to my mind: Suddenly I was curious to know what the cry of a sheep sounds like.

A pack of wolves emerged from some thick brush, intending to devour us. As my fellow sheep and I ran for our lives, our shepherd appeared from nowhere to block the advancing wolves. The shepherd tried to attract the wolves' attention, and

What does the cry of a sheep sound like?

they attacked him, tearing his clothes as he rolled on the ground, fighting with all his might. Gradually our shepherd began to lose ground. The wounds on his body reflected the

horrifying situation he was in. The voracious wolves outnumbered him. With my own eyes, I witnessed my owner's killing by a pack of wolves. He laid down his life in exchange for ours.

I know that sheep do not have the emotional intelligence to cry for their shepherd, who laid down his life in exchange for theirs. If they did, I believe it would be a heart-wrenching cry. Did the shepherd have a choice not to protect the defenseless sheep? Yes, he did. He chose, however, to sacrifice his life for theirs. His heart could not withstand the pain of seeing the sheep he had raised since their infancy dying in such a brutal manner.

Jesus had all the freedom in the universe to choose not to lay down His life for this hopeless human race, yet He became one of us, went through the whole process of suffering, to exchange His life for ours. The hopeless human race finally had a solution, and the solution was found in the crucified body of Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

No one else can take over this sacred responsibility from God. Had He not chosen to die for our sins, our only fate would be the road to hopelessness. Think about the significance of this verse carefully: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11, NKJV).

REACT

1. How do you know the Good Shepherd's voice? Be specific.
2. Give two practical suggestions of ways someone can broaden his or her spiritual life.

The Good Shepherd

EXPLORATION

Psalm 23; John 10:11

CONCLUDE

In a living word picture as a Good Shepherd, Jesus illustrates His role in our life as Provider, Comforter, Deliverer, Guide, and Protector. As we encounter Him in these roles and experience the warmth and strength of His personality, we are drawn to trust Him. Our hearts are softened and love awakens. We accept Him as our own dear Shepherd and follow Him.

CONSIDER

- Sketching several sheep in different attitudes: relaxed, anxious, energetic, exhausted, fussy, grumpy, excited, loving, frightened. Imagine yourself in each of these situations: how you would respond to Christ as your Shepherd, and how He would respond to you.
- Studying John 7:10–10:21. Compile a list of characteristics of a sheep without a shepherd and a list of characteristics of a sheep with a shepherd, using the Jewish leaders as models of leaderless sheep, and Jesus' disciples of sheep with a shepherd.
- Going to one of your favorite spots in nature and writing your own psalm. Describe the physical, emotional, and social comforts and supports of the area, following the model of Psalm 23.
- Tearing a sheet of paper in the shape of a sheep, and gluing on curled torn strips of paper for its coat. Find a stick in the shape of a staff, and arrange it with the sheep. Choose a verse from Psalm 23 or John 10 about the Good Shepherd to wrap around the staff, and share your creation with someone who needs a lift!
- Memorizing one of the songs based on Psalm 23, such as No. 546 or 552 in the *SDA Church Hymnal*. As you sing, accompany yourself with soft shakers.
- Contemplating John-Francois Millet's painting "The Sheepfold" at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/paintingtheweather/csv/painting/sheepfold.shtml>. Think about the sheepfold Jesus describes in John 10.

CONNECT

Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 3:15; 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34:1-31.
The Desire of Ages, chap. 52.

The tardy Carpenter



“ ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain’ ” (John 12:24, NKJV).

The Carpenter Who Came Four Days Too Late

INTRODUCTION

John 11:1-44

It got really irritating, the way she talked about Him day in and day out. I can understand admiring a Pharisee, a governor, maybe even a Scribe, but come on. He's a Carpenter! He wasn't wealthy, He had rags for a robe, and He had no power or authority. And to top it off, they say He's at odds with our religious leaders in Jerusalem! So He's a prophet! Big deal! We have a glut of them over at my place.

But this Carpenter gave Mary something that wasn't there before: Her gait was livelier, her smile was brighter. She looked so happy. I had a feeling this was the Carpenter's doing.

And now I know this Jesus character wasn't your ordinary Joe.

A month ago Mary's brother, Lazarus, became ill. They knew Jesus would come and heal him. That was elementary for Him. But He didn't come. And Lazarus died.

He could have dropped by and healed Lazarus; He was in the neighborhood anyway, wasn't He? He could have even just said the word, wherever He was, and Lazarus would just

**The battle He fought was
not just of flesh.**

pop up from bed. There was no need to make the trip. So what's with Jesus? Did He not care? Was He angry with Mary? With Lazarus? I didn't understand, and neither did Mary. This was how He treated friends?

Four days later Jesus arrived. I waited to see what would happen. Usually Mary would be the first to jump up and greet Him. Today she was the last. " 'Lord,' " she said, " 'if You had been here, my brother would not have died' " (John 11:32, NKJV). The look on her face really hurt. You could see the questions right through her. *Why weren't You here? I thought You cared.* Yet through it all, a trusting conviction shone through.

And He did the miraculous. He raised Lazarus from the grave.

Now I'm a believer.

This truly was the Son of God. The battle He fought was not just of flesh. It was beyond this world. And suddenly it hit me. This Man. This God. He saw a bigger picture. And I'm going to have to trust Him the same way Mary did. Because it may be four days too late for us, but it'll still be perfect timing for Him.

Sunday
February 22

One Miracle, Two Reactions

LOGOS

John 11:1–12:50

Jesus came to the earth the first time to usher in His kingdom of grace. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus terminated Satan's right to rule over this world. To signal the arrival of the new kingdom, Jesus preached and performed great miracles. In performing miracles, Jesus intended not only to alleviate human suffering but to provide proof of His divinity so people would

He was cluing people in to the spiritual nature of His mission.

turn to Him for salvation. In demonstrating the power of God, Jesus sought to inspire faith in those who witnessed the events as well as in those who would later hear about them. Some loved Jesus for His miracles; others hated Him for them.

The Miracle: Jesus Resurrects Lazarus (John 11:38-44; 12:31)

"Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days" (John 11:5, 6, NIV). After the two days, Jesus informed the disciples that Lazarus was already dead. Likening death to a sleep, Jesus announced that He was going to "wake him up" (verse 11, NIV). Upon arriving in Bethany, Jesus performed perhaps the greatest miracle of His entire earthly ministry—the resurrection of Lazarus from the tomb. The purpose for the miracle is clearly stated: "For God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (verse 4, NIV); and "For the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that [God] sent me" (verse 42, NIV). Jesus used the resurrection of Lazarus as an object lesson to point to salvation. He was cluing people in to the spiritual nature of His mission (12:47). Those, such as Lazarus, who would believe in Jesus and have a personal relationship with Him, would not be bound to the grave forever.

Response Number 1: Martha, Mary, and the New Believers (John 11:32, 45; 12:3)

Amazed by the miracle, "many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him" (verse 45, NIV). For Martha and Mary, who were already believers in Christ, the death and resurrection of their brother was an experience that tried their faith and then lifted it to new heights. Jesus arrived too late to prevent Lazarus from dying. But even then, Martha struggled to believe that Jesus could still do something (verse 22). Jesus asked

Martha if she truly believed that He was “the resurrection and the life” (verse 25, NIV). She replied in the affirmative. Mary responded to Jesus’ miracle and His forgiveness of her past sins (Luke 7:37-39) with one of the most touching acts of devotion ever recorded in the Bible (John 12:3).

Response Number 2: Caiaphas, Judas, and the Unbelievers (John 11:49-53; 12:10)

Some, however, did not appreciate Jesus’ miracle and refused to recognize Him as the Messiah (12:37). Of all people, it was the high priest, Caiaphas, who suggested that Jesus be killed, and it was the chief priests who determined to kill Lazarus too (verse 10).

Since Jesus was becoming popular, the Pharisees and Sadducees felt their authority was being threatened. His ministry was upsetting the status quo. They hated Jesus because, through the striking contrast between Him and them, people were beginning to see the hypocrisy of the leaders and the bankruptcy of the current religious system.

Judas typified the hypocrisy that existed among the religious leaders when he objected to Mary’s use of perfume for Jesus’ feet, pretending to show concern for the poor. But in reality, Judas “did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it” (verse 6, NIV).

The Heart of the Matter (John 12:23-28, 37, 43)

The resurrection of Lazarus evoked two very different reactions that polarized people. One group perceived the miracle as a great blessing; the other perceived it as a great threat. The difference in reaction had to do with the surrender of the will and the orientation of the heart.

When Jesus resurrected Lazarus, people were confronted with solid, undeniable proof that He was the Messiah. Through that special demonstration of power, God was speaking to the hearts of men, convicting them to surrender and believe. At that point every person had to make a decision to follow or not to follow. Those who followed allowed God to renew their hearts so that they would bring glory and honor to Him. Those who chose not to do so because following Jesus meant abandoning their sin, which they liked too much to let go of.

Jesus said, “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (verses 24, 25, NIV). If we continually resist submitting our wills to God, we will, one day, have to face the ultimate consequence of those little accumulated decisions. But if, like Mary, we learn to surrender continually and humbly, our faith and love for God will grow and we will gain eternal life. What will you choose?

TESTIMONY

John 12:1-7

“Martha served at the table, but Mary was earnestly listening to every word from the lips of Jesus. In His mercy, Jesus had pardoned her sins, He had called forth

“To human reasoning the whole plan of salvation is a waste of mercies and resources.”

her beloved brother from the grave, and Mary's heart was filled with gratitude. She had heard Jesus speak of His approaching death, and in her deep love and sor-

row she had longed to show Him honor. At great personal sacrifice she had purchased an alabaster box of 'ointment of spikenard, very costly,' with which to anoint His body. But now many were declaring that He was about to be crowned king. Her grief was turned to joy, and she was eager to be first in honoring her Lord. Breaking her box of ointment, she poured its contents upon the head and feet of Jesus; then, as she knelt weeping, moistening them with her tears, she wiped His feet with her long, flowing hair.”¹

“She had sought to avoid observation, and her movements might have passed unnoticed, but the ointment filled the room with its fragrance, and published her act to all present. Judas looked upon this act with great displeasure. Instead of waiting to hear what Christ would say of the matter, he began to whisper his complaints to those near him, throwing reproach upon Christ for suffering such waste. Craftily he made suggestions that would be likely to cause disaffection.”²

“To human reasoning the whole plan of salvation is a waste of mercies and resources. They are provided to accomplish the restoration of the moral image of God in man. The atonement is abundantly able to secure to all who will receive it, mansions in heaven. The supposed prodigality of Mary is an illustration of the methods of God in the plan of salvation; for nature and grace, related to each other, manifest the ennobling fullness of the Source from which they flow.”³

“Many there are who bring their precious gifts for the dead. As they stand about the cold, silent form, words of love are freely spoken. Tenderness, appreciation, devotion, all are lavished upon one who sees not nor hears. Had these words been spoken when the weary spirit needed them so much, when the ear could hear and the heart could feel, how precious would have been their fragrance!”⁴

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 558, 559.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 559.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1101.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 560.

The Scent of Glory

EVIDENCE

John 11:4, 40; 12:27, 28

"The raising of Lazarus in John 11 is the climax of the series of signs which dominates the first half of the Gospel. There can be no doubt that the resurrection of Lazarus is also presented as the sign of all the signs Jesus performed and as the interpretive center of the Gospel. Lazarus' resurrection prepares the reader for the resurrection of Jesus and is the prototype for resurrection life promised all believers (John 11:21-27)."¹ Jesus made an implication that the sickness and death of Lazarus was for the glory of God, as it was His chance to prove that, indeed, He is the Resurrection and the Life (verses 4, 40; 12:27, 28). "This crowning miracle, the raising of Lazarus, was to set the seal of God on His work and on His claim to divinity."²

This story gives us assurance that resurrection is not impossible for each of us who acknowledges Him as our Redeemer and Friend. Jesus not only raised Lazarus from the dead; He will also raise to eternal life believers in Him who died before the terrible and dreadful day of the Lord. Believers who have not yet died at that time will never die. That is our eternal hope!

The next impressive story is about Mary's act of anointing Jesus with a perfume that cost nearly a full year's wages for a manual worker. For Mary this is an act of total devotion to her Lord. She was willing to spend and be spent to give honor and glory to God as she prepares Jesus for His burial.

"As the alabaster box was broken, and filled the whole house with its fragrance, so Christ was to die, His body was to be broken; but He was to rise from the

tomb, and the fragrance of His life was to fill the earth. Christ 'hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.' Eph.5:2."³

Mary's was an act that even the present generation should cherish and emulate. The deep spiritual meaning of that action should help us realize our own personal devotion to Jesus. Do we have that eagerness to be broken, hurt, and tried as we influence people for the kingdom of God? Do we make our lives fragrant to others? Do we perform our jobs and responsibilities as an act of devotion to God and for His glory?

**Do we make our lives
fragrant to others?**

1. Joel B. Green, et al., ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 462.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 529.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 563.

HOW-TO

John 12:25, 26

In John 11 and 12, Jesus manifested His profound devotion to His mission (despite an impending cross). He very well knew that a plot had already been set

He went forward, regardless of what He had to go through.

against Him, and going back to Judea would mean imminent danger. But He went forward, regardless of what He had to go through, knowing that such action would be for God's greater glory.

That incident also shows us an example, that we, who desire to follow Him, may have a heart like His.

How then can we show our devotion to Him?

1. Commit to the Lord. When we desire to follow Christ, commitment is inevitable. And commitment comes with self-sacrifice, that is, giving up our personal desires and ambitions to become His true servant. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23, NKJV).

2. Abide in Him. The secret of Christ's victorious life here on earth was His constant communion with the Father. He never did anything apart from God's will. "He who does the will of God, who walks in the path that God has marked out, cannot stumble and fall. The light of God's guiding Spirit gives Him a clear perception of his duty, and leads him aright till the close of his work."

3. Trust His heart. A Christian's life is not a bed of roses. There are times when the roads are rough, and trials seem to hit us with crippling blows. But take heart. God never leaves His people. "To all who are reaching out to feel the guiding hand of God, the moment of greatest discouragement is the time when divine help is nearest."² As the song goes, "If you can't trace His hand, trust His heart."

REACT

1. How does knowing God's will help you in your daily decision making? Be specific.

2. Why trust God when there are so many Wait and No answers to our requests?

3. Should we place ourselves in danger (like martyrs) to prove our allegiance to Christ, knowing that there is certainty of the resurrection? Explain your answer.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 527.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 529.

Each of Us Is Mary

OPINION

John 13:20

Jesus loves us just as we are, and He showed that love at the Cross. If we realized just how big that act was, we would be greatly moved. We could not possibly do more than what Mary has done.

If we bear this truth always, obeying and loving God outwardly, we would have a heavenly perspective of our earthly struggles. If we know that Jesus accepts us—our mistakes, past, and everything—there would be no inhibitions or hardening of hearts to come to Him. It takes acceptance from the person we love to become devoted to him or her. Acceptance is a matter of perspective, no condemning or condoning of the past.

Like Mary the people around us are sinners. Not all of them are in good spiritual shape. Most of them are like us, presently undergoing spiritual struggles and turmoil. In some cases, we could be luckier because, unlike them, we know Jesus. If only we had this genuine compassion toward them or make them feel that they are important no matter how much they have sinned against the law, against others, or against us, maybe they would have a hopeful perspective on their situation. If we would only truly reach out and accept them, then the Holy Spirit would have a way of working things out in their lives no matter what. If we would not prejudge them, but consider them as potential candidates for heaven, then there would be no time to wound and tear them down. If we accept anyone Jesus sends near us, then we accept Him. And as we accept Him, we accept our loving Father in heaven (John 13:20).

If we accept anyone Jesus sends near us, then we accept Him.

Devoting ourselves to God isn't limiting our perspective and time with other people. It is channeling our energy and love through Him to our earthly brothers and sisters, supporting, forgiving, and accepting them. They will remember our loving deeds for them during dark periods in their lives. God would smile as He recalls it in heaven. As Jesus saw hope in Mary when she was filthy, we could show hope, too, in someone else's empty, aimless life.

Each of us is Mary. Each of us has a story. Each of us has a place in heaven.

REACT

What argument would you use to convince a person with AIDS, developed through promiscuous behavior, that Christ is willing to forgive and save?

Friday
February 27

The Fragrance of Death

EXPLORATION

John 12:24

CONCLUDE

The death of Lazarus has a twofold lesson. The first is that at times God does amazing, miraculous things in our lives. He can cast out demons that oppress us and cause a healing that will bring us to our knees with gratitude. The second lesson is that God does not always do amazing, miraculous things in our lives—when we want Him to. But as with the story of Lazarus, we should continue trusting His leading and keep this one thing in mind—death is never the end when God is writing the story.

CONSIDER

- Writing five alternative headlines for the *Jerusalem News*. Using no more than eight words for each headline, capture the readers' attention so they will be drawn into the stories of Lazarus, Mary with her perfume, and Jesus as He raises Lazarus from the dead.
- Listening to your favorite song that focuses on the resurrection and share with a friend why that song gives you such hope.
- Sharing with a friend what your favorite scent is and why. Perhaps it is a special perfume with special memories, or maybe bread baking because it reminds you of your mother. Whatever the scent try to remember what makes it so special to you.
- Planting a flower seed and watching it grow. Tape the text for this lesson (John 12:24) to the flower pot. Remind yourself of the truth contained in that text as you watch your seed grow and bloom.
- Comparing the story of Lazarus in several different versions of the Bible. Do any of the translations help you to understand better the people and the story?
- Researching the most costly perfumes in the world. What is the most expensive perfume you could find? Would you be willing to pay that much for a bottle of perfume and then pour it all over the feet of someone you knew was going to die?

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 58.

Max Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones*, chap. 19.

Real Greatness



“ ‘For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you’ ” (John 13:15, NKJV).

The Basin and the Towel

INTRODUCTION

John 13:3-5

If you have not fallen in love with the stories in the Gospel of John through the studies of this quarter, you may be in for a surprise this week. The Gospel of John's only parable is the one portrait of the life of Jesus while on earth, a life that accentuates a course of service and humility to be followed by us. While the disciples tried to figure out that Jesus was moments away from leaving them, "He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded" (John 13:5, NKJV). This was an act of humility the disciples are unable to understand.

The transformation of our lives to follow Jesus' course of service and humility is necessary to comprehend fully His love and care for us. Perhaps as you meditate on the events in the Gospel of John for this week's lesson, you may be able to discover once again what it means to take a basin and towel in your life. The following poem by M. Bentham-Edwards may be able to provide you with some guidance on how to go about following that course of service and humility:

A Child's Prayer

God make my life a little light,
Within the world to glow;
A tiny flame that burneth bright
Wherever I may go.

God make my life a little flower,
That giveth joy to all,
Content to bloom in native bower,
Although its place be small.

God make my life a little song,
That comforteth the sad;
That helpeth others to be strong,
And makes the singer glad.

God make my life a little staff,
Whereon the weak may rest,
That so what health and strength I have
May serve my neighbors best.

Training for Spiritual Greatness

EVIDENCE

John 17

Three decades ago Muhammad Ali was at the peak of his boxing career and also at the top of the world heavyweight rankings. His most memorable and noteworthy boast was this: "I am the greatest!" Having called beforehand the exact round of his opponent's defeat, he then proceeded to wreak havoc upon all his would-be challengers, thus fulfilling his swagger. Under the watchful eye of his trainer, Angelo Dundee, Ali breathed new life into what had been a dying sport.

Each sport, each discipline, has standards by which we measure high achievement—greatness if you will. These standards are definable, recognizable, achievable, measurable, and accepted. How then would we who spar in the religious arena measure spiritual greatness?

First and foremost, in Jesus Christ we have the Greatest Trainer the world has ever known. He has, for 6,000 years, trained spiritual champions whose names are registered in antiquity's Spiritual Hall of Fame—Abraham, Moses, Job, and David—just to name a few. He wants to make us champions as well, to see us attain spiritual greatness.

In the prayer of Jesus as recorded in John 17, we can identify several components that He has integrated into our training regimen that will help us achieve true greatness. Jesus prayed that God the Father would:

1. Keep us (verse 11).
2. Unify us (verse 11).
3. Fulfill His joy in us (verse 13).
4. Keep us from evil (verse 15).
5. Sanctify us (verse 17).
6. Glorify us (verse 22).
7. Make us perfect (verse 23).
8. Save us (verse 24).
9. Fill us with His love (verse 26).

The intercessory prayer of Jesus, mere hours before Calvary, was a prayer for God's glory, and for our spiritual greatness. In His hour of unequalled agony, our Lord was not concerned for His own suffering and humiliation. The objects of His concern were His mission—and His missionaries (verses 1, 9).

With the Master Trainer Himself in our corner, our victory is sure. We are eternal champions—not because we are the greatest, but because He is!

REACT

1. What are some other qualities of spiritual greatness? (See Matt. 23:11; John 15:13.)
2. Compare/contrast God's standard of greatness with the world's standards of greatness. Are there any similarities? Explain your answer.

Monday
March 1

A Farewell Message

LOGOS

John 13:1-30; 17

First Things Last

Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love (John 13:1).

If you had little time left to spend with those you loved, you'd focus only on essentials. A few hours before His arrest, trial, and execution, Jesus found a quiet place to be with His closest companions, and He then "showed them the full extent of his love" (verse 1, NIV).

First Things First

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God. He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist.

After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him (verses 3-5).

Rather than launch into a discourse on "the full extent of His love" (verse 1, NIV), Jesus chose to emphasize this final lesson for His disciples with a riveting illustration. He showed them by His actions what He wanted them to understand. Here was God Himself, in human form, fetching a bucket of water, tucking a towel in His belt, moving quietly from one to the next, and kneeling down to wash their feet as if He were the household slave.

Jesus chose to emphasize this final lesson for His disciples with a riveting illustration.

Ever after, when they closed their eyes, I suspect this image remained on the backs of their retinas: The Creator of the universe bending down to wipe between the grimy toes of sinful, human beings.

Last Things First

"Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth,

no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them' ” (verses 12-17, NIV).

His object lesson completed, Jesus sat down to unpack this lesson for His disciples. He delivered the entire sermon in less than 30 seconds. He has said it before, and now He reiterates it, underscored by an empty basin and damp towel: In the calculus of the kingdom of God, those we consider first on earth will end up on the bottom of the pecking order, and those we dismiss as least among us will be considered first (Matt. 19:30; Mark 10:31). True greatness is born of loving service for others.

Heaven turns the whole order of things upside down. Those we idolize for their right words, right moves, right clothes, right connections, right parties, right friends, and right stuff are not as “all right” as we blindly assume. It is actually those who reach out in humility to care for and serve well the very “least of these,” without worrying about who’s watching or who will get the credit, who truly understand Jesus’ love and who will genuinely find happiness and a sense of completeness in this world (John 13:17). That’s the bottom-line lesson for disciples then and now.

Last Things Last

“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them’ ” (17:13, NIV).

Jesus knows it is just a matter of minutes before the events toward which history has been hurtling through time and space and for which the conspirators are already assembling across town will transpire with blinding intensity. The prayer He prays at this moment forms His final lesson just before His disciples scatter into the night. Jesus prays that His disciples will come to know and experience His joy—the joy of self-giving love for others. “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent’ ” (17:3, NIV).

Jesus prays that His disciples will understand just how simple and free the gift of eternal life is and be able to embrace it in faith. “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me’ ” (verses 20-23).

Finally, Jesus prays that all who follow Him, that night and down through the centuries until He returns in glory, will experience the oneness that comes from receiving God’s marvelous gift of grace and living in harmony with one another as sisters and brothers of an entirely new kingdom.

Tuesday
March 2

Three Responses in the Upper Room

TESTIMONY

John 13:1-9

"The pitcher, the basin, and the towel were there, in readiness for the feet washing; but no servant was present, and it was the disciples' part to perform it. But each of the disciples, yielding to wounded pride, determined not to act the part of a servant. All manifested a stoical unconcern, seeming unconscious that there was anything for them to do. By their silence they refused to humble themselves."

"The love of Christ draws hearts together in a blessed unity."

As the group entered the upper room, all 12 disciples had the same hardened hearts. The Bible high-

lights three responses that night that made an eternal difference.

Jesus: "Their selfish spirit filled Him with sorrow, but He entered into no controversy with them regarding their difficulty. Instead He gave them an example they would never forget. His love for them was not easily disturbed or quenched."²

Judas: "When the Saviour's hands were bathing those soiled feet, and wiping them with the towel, the heart of Judas thrilled through and through with the impulse then and there to confess his sin. But he would not humble himself."³

Peter: "At the words, 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me,' Peter surrendered his pride and self-will. He could not endure the thought of separation from Christ; that would have been death to him."⁴

"As the Saviour's humiliation for us is remembered, thought links with thought; a chain of memories is called up, memories of God's great goodness and of the favor and tenderness of earthly friends. Blessings forgotten, mercies abused, kindnesses slighted, are called to mind. Roots of bitterness that have crowded out the precious plant of love are made manifest. Defects of character, neglect of duties, ingratitude to God, coldness toward our brethren, are called to remembrance. Sin is seen in the light in which God views it. Our thoughts are not thoughts of self-complacency, but of severe self-censure and humiliation. The mind is energized to break down every barrier that has caused alienation. Evil thinking and evilspeaking are put away. . . . The subduing grace of Christ comes into the soul, and the love of Christ draws hearts together in a blessed unity."⁵

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 644.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 644, 645.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 645.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 646.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 650, 651.

A Mama's Boy

HOW-TO

John 13:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 13

In the face of imminent death, Jesus generated strength to clear His mind, to find peace that His mission on earth was complete. Entrusting care for His mother to His closest disciple, John, Jesus demonstrated that this was very important to Him. John writes, "Jesus knew that everything was now finished, and to fulfill the Scriptures he said, 'I am thirsty'" (John 19:28, NLT).

The book *52 Simple Ways to Say "I Love You"*^{**} outlines ways to let a friend know how much you care, or add spice to your dating, or bring fun and romance to your marriage, or show your children how special they are. Since Jesus gave us the perfect example, here are three more ways to express our love to our families:

1. Mom's morning out/Dad's day away. Mothers/fathers have been providing for our basic needs before birth, so here is how to return the favor. Offer to chauffeur your mother/father to the beauty salon/barber shop. When you pick her/him up from the appointment, if possible arrange to pay for services—tip and all. At the end of the outing say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for making her/him with a beautiful spirit inside, the one she/he used to guide you along your path in this world.

2. Siblings are special. Whip up an after-work dinner for two at your sister's/brother's home. A favorite dish or, if culinarily challenged, a quick pickup of takeout dining will suffice. Serve the meal on your sister's/brother's "good china," along with a bottle of sparkling grape juice. At the end of the meal, wash, dry, and put away the dishes. Then offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for blessing you

Jesus demonstrates that this was very important to Him.

both with the ability to share the bonds of sisterhood/brotherhood forever.

3. Send some mail. Set up your computer to send emails to your closest friend for eight hours every hour of the day via computer or cellular phone. Tell them eight things you find endearing about your friendship, or a fruit of the Spirit that he/she exemplifies, or a memorable event that almost was forgotten. At the end of the day give your friend a call to recap the day and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for providing friends on this life's journey who will stick closer than a brother.

^{**}Stephen Arterburn and Carl Dreizler, *52 Simple Ways to Say "I Love You"* (Thomas Nelson Publisher, Oliver-Nelson Books, 1991).

Thursday
March 4

From Sole to Soul

OPINION

John 13:14, 15

Some probably attributed it to His lack of formal education. Though at a young age He had confounded the temple elders (Luke 2:47), those in the church's hierarchy knew He had not graduated from the religious institutions of the day.

He was unorthodox. Born of Jewish lineage, He was familiar with the traditions and customs of His day, yet Jesus seemed to violate every established precedent. He touched the unclean (1:40, 41). He had a conversation with a Samaritan woman (John 4:7). He agreed to pay tribute (Matt. 17:27). His greatest supposed offense might have been that He healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:14).

The day of His execution was set. The conspiracy would soon consummate with a kiss of betrayal. Jesus' life on earth was coming to an end.

The upper room was the place He had chosen to teach the disciples a lesson in humility. After Pentecost, under the auspices of the Holy Spirit, they would perform many wonderful works.

Jesus seemed to violate every established precedent.

Human praise was sure to come. They must stay grounded.

Nobody imagined that He would do what He did. Imagine Jesus assuming the position of a servant. With towel flung over

His shoulder, He methodically moves from disciple to disciple, washing and drying their dusty feet, creating a mosaic that would redefine conventional human wisdom: the concept of servant-lord.

The meek shall inherit the earth. Tasks that are deemed menial by humanity may be those that have the greatest eternal value. One should never rise so high above those he is sent to serve that he is unable to bend down to lift them up. "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 23:11, NKJV).

Jesus provided an example that they should do for others as He had done for them. There, in the upper room, was the hand of God under the sole of men, lifting the souls of men.

Following His example would bring glory to the Father, magnify the Son, and develop oneness "that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us" (John 17:21, NLT).

We serve, honor, and glorify God by serving others for whom Jesus died.

REACT

How does one remain humble when he is more intelligent, does better work, and outperforms those around him?

The Bottom Line

EXPLORATION

Matt. 25:31-46

CONCLUDE

In today's business world, the bottom line must be black, or people will lose jobs and companies will fail. For those, however, who are in the "business" of being a Christian, the bottom line must always be red. Washed in the blood of our Savior, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are to emulate His character, the hallmark of which is service. As we unselfishly serve family, friends, and foreigners, we will grow in our understanding of His love and care for us. And because we are ambassadors for Christ, our acts of lovingkindness will in turn teach others about Him. In fact, these acts speak more eloquently than any sermon.

CONSIDER

- Helping someone who is moving to a new house or apartment with furniture placement and other decorating necessities.
- Using Internet databases or a local library to find empirical research regarding the health and spiritual benefits of service. Use such words as "volunteer" and "service" to guide you.
- Reading a biography or autobiography about one of the world's great humanitarians. Compare/contrast his/her motives for service with your motives. In what ways does the life of this person inspire you to serve others?
- Playing the piano, keyboard, or guitar in children's Sabbath School divisions, nursing homes, or adult day-care facilities where singing is an important activity.
- Cooking or baking for a person who is ill or often short of time. Some examples would be people with arthritis, senior citizens, or busy single parents.
- Meditating on all the ways Jesus expressed His love for others. Reflect on how you can follow through on some of these ways. Set some goals and establish a timetable for implementing these goals.
- Training your pet to visit nursing homes, hospitals, etc. Search the Web for pet therapy organizations near you.

CONNECT

Isaiah 58.

The Ministry of Healing, "Saved to Serve."

John Ortburg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, pp. 97-118; Allen Luks, *The Healing Power of Doing Good*.

The Coming of the Spirit



“ ‘It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you’ ” (John 16:7, NIV).

Receive Your Promised Gift

INTRODUCTION

John 14:15-17, 26; 16:7-15

I sat there numb with a large ball in my throat and my stomach churning. Soon a tear fell down my cheek as I somehow, some way, mustered enough strength to stand. *I can't believe I am doing this*, I thought to myself. But I had to—I needed to. With my head hanging down in guilt and shame, yet at the same time a feeling of hope and freedom, I continued out of the pew and walked onto the platform. I no longer wanted to live my life as I had been. I surrendered my life to Christ that day. However, I wondered what those strange feelings were. I later learned that it was the Holy Spirit. But who is the Holy Spirit?

**I somehow mustered
enough strength to stand.**

The Word gives us plenty of insight and knowledge about the Holy Spirit. We know that the Spirit was present in the very beginning of Creation (Gen. 1:1, 2). "Before His death and after His resurrection, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to [His] disciples." Jesus told His followers before He went away that He would send a Helper to lead and guide them (John 16:7-12). He also told them that this Helper would prove many things.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to be a spokesperson for Christ. "The Lord Jesus acts through the Holy Spirit; for it is His representative."² The Holy Spirit guides and leads believers to the truth. He speaks the words of the Father and relays messages to His people (verses 13-15). The Helper also reminds us of all the things Jesus promised before His departure from earth (14: 25, 26).

"The promise of the Holy Spirit is not limited to any age or to any race. Christ declared that the divine influence of His Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end. From the Day of Pentecost to the present time, the Comforter has been sent to all who have yielded themselves fully to the Lord and to His service. To all who have accepted Christ as a personal Savior, the Holy Spirit has come as a counselor, sanctifier, guide, and witness."³

The day that I surrendered my life to Christ, I received my promised gift—the Holy Spirit. What a gift!

1. Garrie F. Williams, *Give the Holy Spirit a Chance* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1993), p. 11.

2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 55.

3. *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 49.

Sunday
March 7

Will Person Number Three Please Stand Up!

LOGOS

John 13:31–16:33

It is amazing how His first appearance went relatively unnoticed. “The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2, NKJV). Maybe it is because the “earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep” (verse 2, NKJV) that He doesn’t receive any credit for being there in the beginning. He certainly demonstrated power by producing light upon request and then each day instantaneously creating the beginning of everything that would ever live on earth.

What power! What an amazing scene unfolded. Yet one pays little attention to the fact that He is here until 4,000 years later. Pharaoh noticed Him (41:38);

**What an amazing
scene unfolded.**

Bezaleel, the son of Uri of the tribe of Judah, was filled with Him (Exod. 31:3); so was Balaam (Num. 24:2), and Saul (1 Sam. 11:6). Ezekiel claimed he was taken up by the Spirit (Ezek. 11:24). The Spirit was certainly around and available

before the Day of Pentecost. What now is so different? What has caused more than 120 souls to work through their many differences and come of one accord in one room to wait for one promise given by one Man? What has made this time so different from the 88 other times the Spirit was mentioned in the Old Testament?

To find the answer we must go to Calvary. “When the Spirit came it was in vindication of the character of the ministry and the completed sacrificial mission of the Son (John 14:23-26). It was based upon the finished work of Calvary. It was the glorified Christ who asked for, received, and sent the Holy Spirit upon the waiting disciples.”¹ “The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished.”²

Jesus Christ, the Son, the Second Person in the Godhead, had stood up, gone down under His own power (10:17, 18), stood back up, and completed His work down here on earth. He had been glorified, and it was now time for the Third Person of the Godhead to stand up. The Spirit is a gift to us for us to use. Too often He is placed on hold, waiting for us to call on Him. “The church has long been contented with little of the blessing of God; they have not felt the need of reaching up to the exalted privileges purchased for them at infinite cost.”³

He is powerful enough to put the world in motion. He is powerful enough to pay your tuition. He is powerful enough to give color to a flower. He is powerful enough

to solve any problem you may encounter no matter how big, and He is loving enough to solve any problem no matter how small.

The Spirit is awesome! He is just as awesome as—well, as God. But because He is the Third Person in the Godhead, we place Him in the last position and consider Him the lesser of the Godhead. *Au contraire*. Look at what He did at Pentecost. Fishermen, who previously had grasp of only two languages, Hebrew and the language Peter used in the courtyard, are now speaking in many languages. “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:9-11, NKJV).

Can He do it now? Can He do it in this age? Why not? He is the same Spirit waiting to dwell in you upon request. He is ready now to take hold of you and use you to glorify the Father just as Jesus did. Yet we come together in one place, the church, waiting for Him like the 120 did so long ago. Jesus commanded the disciples not to depart from Jerusalem until the Father sent the Promise (1:4). The command was for the disciples before Pentecost. After the arrival of the Holy Spirit, the command was to leave the room and witness in Jerusalem, Judea, and the uttermost parts of the world. “The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the church is looked forward to as in the future; but it is the privilege of the church to have it now. Seek for it, pray for it, believe for it. We must have it, and Heaven in waiting to bestow it.”⁴

Pray for the Spirit to dwell in you. He has given you a special gift that will help someone to say Yes to Christ. It can be as simple as a needed smile to a passer-by or as complex as the healing hands of a surgeon.

Prepare for the Spirit to dwell in you. “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13, NKJV).

Praise God for letting the Spirit use you. Once the Spirit is dwelling in you, you will testify of Jesus. People will look at you and marvel at the change that has taken place.

The completion of this earth's work is with you. But you need help. Why not ask the same Person who started this earth to help end it? The Spirit of God is upon the face of the earth. This time He is standing up, waiting on you to stop waiting on Him.

1. Leroy E. Froom, *Coming of the Comforter* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), p. 39.

2. *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 39.

3. *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 175.

4. *Evangelism*, p. 701.

Monday
March 8

Before I Leave . . .

TESTIMONY

Mic. 6:8; Matt. 6:34

The final admonition, the last-minute details to be reminded of, the departing words are usually reprimands or ego boosters. As Jesus bids His friends goodbye, He is aware of their sense of bewilderment and despair. He offers them encouragement, a rally cry still as stirring for us today as it was for the disciples back then.

The words "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1, KJV) and "I will send [the Comforter] unto you" (16:7, KJV) bolstered the flagging spirits of the disciples.

Christ has gone and He has left us, but we are not alone. We are not to be battered by every wind that blows. He left us with a tower of strength, a guide. All we have to do is be receptive and we will be productive and fruitful.

For the disciples and for us in this new era, we have nothing to fear. When the tough times emerge and the end-time trials prevail, we have an anchor and we will

Now is the time for us to say, "Come, Holy Spirit, I need thee."

not give up; we will be awake and working for the Master, not asleep and idle; we will be empowered and enthusiastic, not weak and listless. We who have accepted the Spirit's prompting to do the Master's bid-

ding have a new heart. We are transformed by the Spirit of truth, energized, eager, and fearlessly dispersing the truth in the highways and byways.

Now is the time for us to say, "Come, Holy Spirit, I need Thee."

Why?

Because "the Holy Spirit was promised to be with those who were wrestling for victory, in demonstration of all mightiness, endowing the human agent with supernatural powers, and instructing the ignorant in the mysteries of the kingdom of God. That the Holy Spirit is to be the grand helper, is a wonderful promise."*

REACT

1. What is revealed about the character of God the Father and God the Son in sending the Comforter after Jesus had returned to heaven?

2. In light of the tremendous assistance we are receiving from the Spirit, what is the hindrance to the latter rain?

3. When Jesus ascended to heaven, why did He send the Holy Spirit as a Comforter or Helper as opposed to a genie or magician?

*Selected Messages, bk. 3, p. 137.

Do You Have the Spirit?

EVIDENCE

Acts 2:1-4

How do you explain the Holy Spirit? This isn't easy. He has been compared to the wind. You can't see it. You just know it is there. You feel its presence.

The Greek word for God's Spirit is *hagios*, which means "awe-full" thing (pure, most holy, sacred). The Hebrew word is *ruwach*, which means to blow, wind, breathe. Acts 2:1-4 speaks of the first physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It speaks of "infilling" the believers with the Holy Ghost: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (2:4, NKJV).

The Holy Spirit has existed since the beginning of time. The Lord promised Moses that the 70 elders of Israel would receive the same Spirit that dwells in Him. They would bear the burden of the people with Him (Num. 11:17). Ezekiel 36:27 says: "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them" (NKJV).

No one noticed the Spirit while Jesus was here. Jesus went away because He knew that if He stayed the disciples would never recognize that the Spirit exists. Jesus went away and worked through the Holy Spirit (John 16:5-15).

To receive the Holy Spirit, we must first recognize God's call and be born again (John 3:5-8). Second, according to Acts 2:38, we must repent, be baptized, and then we shall receive the Holy Spirit. When we sin we separate ourselves from God; by repenting we are reunited with God. Baptism is a public confession that we are acknowledging the call of God. Third, we must ask for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives.

**No one noticed the Spirit
while Jesus was here.**

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. . . . If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:9, 13, NKJV). Finally, we must believe that we have received it. "Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them" (Mark 11:24, NKJV).

Galatians 5:22, 23 lists the fruits that are provided to us by the Holy Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (NKJV).

Do you have them?

Wednesday
March 10

The Spirit: Our Friend

HOW-TO

John 15:13, 26; 16:13

God sees us through all trials and tribulations; and although at times this sounds like a cliché, it is never more evident than when we are in need. The world seems to clamor for something more when a tragedy occurs. They look for something more than what this world has to offer. Is it not refreshing, then, for us as Christians, that we have God's promises to hold on to and His Spirit to guide us?

Jesus knew that His disciples would feel a sense of loss when He left them, but He comforted them with the following words: "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever. . . . I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:16, 18, NKJV).

We can also cling to this promise. We the people who never knew Him in the flesh can still know Him personally and take comfort in His Spirit. Jesus always knew what to say, even though He Himself was about to face trials and suffering, He did not ask for comfort but instead thought first of His friends and

**I've struggled to be
a good friend.**

gave them comfort. He wasn't going to leave them alone.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (15:13, NKJV). Jesus considers us as a friend. What a privilege! A friend's father once told me that "if when your time comes you can count more friends than you have fingers on your hand, then you would have led a very rich life." How true this rings, especially in times when we are feeling down and out, to have a friend, a comforter beside us.

Lately in my own personal walk I've struggled to be a good friend. Sometimes our selfishness or little hidden agendas (which come from our sinful nature) prevent us from the ideal of being a loving friend, a true friend. We need to ask Jesus for His Holy Spirit to guide us. This is specially so when our friends are non-Christian. "How little can men do in the work of saving souls, and yet how much through Christ if they are imbued with His Spirit!"*

As we study about the Holy Spirit replacing Jesus this week, let's think of ways that we can be comforters and better friends. Let not our hearts be troubled, but be thankful God sent us His Spirit to guide us into all truth and to give us the gift of peace of mind and heart.

* *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 144.

Relating to the Holy Spirit

OPINION

John 14:16, 18

"The Holy Spirit is given to be a helper, so that man may cooperate with the Divine, and it is given to Him to draw the soul."*

The book of John emphasizes Jesus' relationships with those He loved and those who would accept Him after He was gone. So the words John uses to convey Jesus' promise of sending us the Holy Spirit speak to the significance of establishing a relationship with Him. After all, I cannot be comforted by someone or truly taught by someone unless I know and trust that person. I certainly wouldn't let them dwell with me!

Yet I'd never thought of relating to the Holy Spirit the way I relate to Jesus and the Father. The idea of praying directly to the Holy Spirit the way I pray to the Father and to Jesus seemed foreign to me. In fact, I have sometimes asked God to send the Holy Spirit even though He is already here, waiting to be invited into our lives. Certainly I've been told that I need to listen to the Spirit and to do as He says, but to cooperate, to work in partnership with Him, requires more than just taking orders.

Relating to the Holy Spirit is essential to our spiritual life. After all, in addition to everything else that He does, He is the Member of the Godhead who has come to spearhead the preaching of the gospel throughout the world and usher in the end of time as we know it. He wants to move with us and through us in miraculous ways, especially when the latter rain comes. But He will be packing up and leaving as the earth draws to its close. So it is a matter of urgency that we learn to walk and talk with Him the way the disciples walked and talked with Christ. The closing events of this world will be rapid and chaotic. We will not be able to cope with them unless we learn to hear and know the voice of the Spirit and to trust His leading in our lives.

I'd never thought of relating to the Holy Spirit the way I relate to Jesus.

REACT

1. How can someone develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit? Be specific.
2. What does the Bible say about the relationship the Holy Spirit wants to have with us? See Matthew 12:32; Mark 13:11; John 14:26, 27; Acts 1:5; 4:31; Ephesians 4:30.

**That I May Know Him*, p. 57.

Friday
March 12

The Godhead's Silent Partner

EXPLORATION

John 14:15-31; 16:5-15

CONCLUDE

We don't have to be electrical engineers to use and appreciate electricity. Neither do we need to understand the lines of authority and responsibility between the different members of the Godhead to benefit from the Holy Spirit's ministry. The key is to know and understand that in the physical absence of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is God's instrument of grace, power, and conviction to help Christians live as Jesus would live if He were in our homes, schools, churches, and communities.

CONSIDER

- Taking a survey of some of the Christians you know. Ask them which of the following gifts of the Holy Spirit they feel gifted with: prophecy, serving, teaching, encouragement, leadership, generosity, mercy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, speaking in tongues, interpretation, etc. Ask them for practical examples of how they utilize their gift(s).
- Creating a graphic icon for each fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control [Gal. 5:22, NIV]).
- Composing in poetry or prose a list of ten things in the material world that remind you of the Holy Spirit's ministry.
- Surfing the Internet for Web sites that focus on the subject of the Holy Spirit. Evaluate two or three of these Web sites for their faithfulness to Scripture.
- Journaling five ways you know the Holy Spirit is active in your life. Write things for which you need more of the Holy Spirit's influence in your life.
- Writing a short story (500 words or fewer) about a superhero named Spirit Man or Spirit Woman who changes his or her world for the better by being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. (Don't be surprised if he/she is similar to Jesus in a modern setting.)
- Writing a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13 to highlight the Holy Spirit's greatest influence in our daily Christian experience.

CONNECT

1 Corinthians 12; 13.

Steps to Christ, "The Work and the Life."

Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*, "Practicing the Presence of Christ."

Putting ourselves at the **Scene**



“ ‘Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends’ ” (John 15:13, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

John 18; 19

"I know what happened! I was there! I was in Rangoon when we came to the end of the road. I saw the doctors and the nurses taking the patients out of the hospitals because the hospitals were already being bombed. I saw them putting the patients under the trees and on the sidewalks, and then I saw the doctors and the nurses flee for their lives. Nearby was an insane asylum and leper colony, but the keepers of these unfortunate people wanted to flee also. So they opened up the cells and they opened up the wards, and

"They let every criminal go free."

these wretched people came walking into town while their keepers fled for their lives. Just a few miles from our mission compound was a prison with over 3,000 criminals, but the jailers and the policemen wanted to flee for their lives so they opened up the cells. They let every criminal go free. And while the criminals walked into town to loot, to steal, and to destroy, the jailers and the policemen fled for their lives. I was there! I saw it!"*

We sat mesmerized, listening to Eric B. Hare's voice coming from the stereo speakers. The story we were hearing was about the escape of Europeans and others from Burma to India during World War II. There is no doubt that the account is an interesting historical event. If you were to read this account in a history book, however, it would probably be no more than a paragraph stating that "as the Japanese army advanced into Burma, all Europeans and other Asians were evacuated to British-controlled India." What made the story truly gripping was the fact that Pastor Hare had personally experienced this, had lived it. He had been there! (Of course, it didn't hurt that he was also an incredibly great storyteller.)

Jesus died for us. Most of us have heard this story since we were in kindergarten. But we've heard it for so long that it hardly touches us anymore. How can we see the story in a new light? How can we make the story real again? How can we make it personal?

John was there! He saw it! John is the only gospel writer in the inner circle, the only one who sat in the high priest's courtroom, the only one who was at the foot of the cross and witnessed the soldier pierce Jesus' side (John 19:34, 35). As we read and study John's account this week, we can put ourselves at the scene. We really are part of the drama. We're included in the story! We all are the reason this happened in the first place.

*From a sermon given by Eric B. Hare at camp meeting.

Power to Do Right

EVIDENCE

John 1:12

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary's definition of power: "1. ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something."¹ John, "the apostle whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, NIV), was moved by the Spirit to write, "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8, NKJV). By Christ's gift on the cross, He gave freedom from sin and power to obey His Father's law to all who would believe in Him. "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12, NKJV).

"It can never be repeated too often, that under the reign of grace it is just as easy to do right, as under the reign of sin it is easy to do wrong. This must be so; for if there is not more power in grace than there is in sin, then there can be no salvation from sin. But there is salvation from sin; this no one who believes Christianity can deny. Yet salvation from sin certainly depends upon there being more power in grace than there is in sin. Then, there being more power in grace than there is in sin, it cannot possibly be otherwise than that wherever the power of grace can have control, it will be just as easy to do right as without this it is easy to do wrong."²

"Men need to learn that the blessings of obedience, in their fullness, can be theirs only as they receive the grace of Christ. It is His grace that gives man power to obey the laws of God. It is this that enables him to break the bondage of evil habit. This is the only power that can make him and keep him steadfast in the right path."³

"The spirit which Enoch, Joseph, and Daniel possessed, we may have. We may draw from the same source of strength, and realize the same power of self-control; and the same graces may shine out in our lives."⁴

**"If there is not more power in
grace than there is in sin,
then there can be no
salvation from sin."**

1. *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*.

2. A. T. Jones, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Sept. 1, 1896.

3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 115.

4. *Our High Calling*, p. 278.

Monday
March 15

Am I Worthy?

LOGOS

John 18:1–19:42

“Logos” is defined as “the self-revealing thought and will of God as set forth in the Gospel of John, often associated with the second person of the Trinity.”¹

It is 5:49 A.M. on a Friday. I’m awakened by the sound of a rooster crowing.

For days I have been contemplating the story of the arrest of Jesus, His brutal beatings and death, but right now I feel unworthy to write about it. As I hear the rooster crow for the third time, I begin to sense how Peter must have felt as he denied his Lord. I try to put myself there on that Friday morning 2,000 years ago as He was being beaten and tortured.

I feel unworthy to write about it.

As He staggered up that bloodstained path to the hill where those vicious men nailed His outstretched limbs to the cross, and as His limp, dangling body hung from it, they slammed it into a hole in the ground, causing every nerve and muscle to jerk and writhe in excruciating pain.

He was being separated from His greatest Love, His true Source of strength and joy, His Father. He finally cried out, brokenhearted, one last time and gave up His spirit. For me?

When I feel unworthy, I have often turned to the words of Paul as He not only shares his failure but also the greatness of God’s gifts.

Paul says, “I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 7:21–8:4, NKJV).

Awesome! Now that’s really great news. Let’s try to find some more. I mean, here I am whining about myself when discussing the most monumental event that has ever occurred in the history of all creation!

The Lord has guaranteed our salvation. He said it Himself in His dying words in John 19:30, "It is finished" (KJV).

This unworthiness that I feel is quite probably a tool of Satan. He uses it to get me down and make me feel unmotivated to continue to resist him. My focus is taken off Jesus and put on myself. That is always a dangerous place for me.

"Even as a sinner, man was in a different position from that of Satan. Lucifer in heaven had sinned in the light of God's glory. To him as to no other created being was given a revelation of God's love. Understanding the character of God, knowing His goodness, Satan chose to follow his own selfish, independent will. This choice was final. There was no more that God could do to save him. But man was deceived; his mind was darkened by Satan's sophistry. The height and depth of the love of God he did not know. For him there was hope in a knowledge of God's love. By beholding His character he might be drawn back to God. . . .

"The law requires righteousness—a righteous life, a perfect character; and this man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God's holy law. But Christ, coming to the earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These he offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. God can 'be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.' Rom. 3:26."²

I love You, Lord Jesus. Thank You.

I am worthy in You!

The Cross is where human value and meaning are established. "Christ paid an infinite price for us, and according to the price paid He desires us to value ourselves."³

When we gain a sense of our value in the Cross, we can begin to avoid the ups and downs that come when our self-worth is based on performance or on the fickle opinion of others.

When we see ourselves in the light of the Cross, we develop the strength to overcome sin, the confidence to defeat Satan, and the joy that comes from knowing who we are. No wonder Paul said, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14, NIV).

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary*.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 761, 762.

3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 498.

Tuesday
March 16

“Unmistakable Evidence of His Love”

TESTIMONY

John 18:37; 19:30

When Jesus spoke the words “It is finished” (John 19:30, KJV) as He hung on the cross, He spoke of the tasks He came to earth to accomplish: “‘For this cause

God is the genuine One here.

I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth’” (John 18:37, NKJV). Not only did

He come to redeem us but also to reveal the truth about God and Satan.

“Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion.”¹

Though Satan used all his power to deceive us and the universe, God showed us all the truth—through Jesus. The truth is that He loves us enough to send His Son to die for us. But His love does not void His justice. “By His life and His death, Christ proved that God’s justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed. Satan’s charges were refuted. God had given man unmistakable evidence of His love.”²

God is faithful and unchanging, and He can be trusted. All along Satan has claimed the opposite, and even now he claims that God’s law itself is “faulty, that some specification has been set aside.”³ He wants us to believe that God Himself cannot be trusted, that He is inconsistent and makes unimportant laws. All this is another attempt to malign God’s character. But God is the genuine One here. He is revealing His true character to us through Jesus and the Cross. Someday everyone will see that true character without any further challenge, and the results of sin will run their course, giving those who choose to be apart from God what they want—eternal separation. “Then the extermination of sin will vindicate God’s love and establish His honor before a universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law.”⁴

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 758.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 762.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 763.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 764.

John and Peter's Guide to Grieving

HOW-TO

Ps. 37:7-11; Matt. 16:21-23, Luke 22:62; 1 John 1:9

I never wanted to hear the story of the Crucifixion. Maybe I was an oversensitive child, but for me the story was too sad. Add to that the idea that, in some way, the whole thing was my fault, and it was just too much to take.

Later in life, while slogging through college psychology courses, I discovered the stages of grieving. As I read John's account of Jesus' trial and death, I can see that John and Peter went through these stages that awful night and the next day. Maybe that's the secret for us as we go through the story with John this week.

Here, then, are the stages of grieving given us by those great psychology pioneers John and Peter.

Shock/denial. Grief counselors describe this stage as a "numbness; nature's insulation—a cushion against the blow."* I imagine that John and Peter were lost, frightened, and bewildered that night. Peter even denied his relationship with Jesus. By doing so he denied Jesus' power to save him by trying to save himself with a lie. Can our disbelief cause us to deny God's power in our lives? (Matt. 16:21-23.)

Anger. OK, so Peter cut someone's ear off. He wanted to be angry. He wanted someone to blame. Terrible grief demands a scapegoat. I'm angry with the men who mistreated Jesus. It's much easier to be angry with them. It helps hide the fact that I'm angry with myself for every time I've done something to hurt someone else, for not standing up for my faith, for not being more loyal to Jesus. (Ps. 37:7-11.)

Guilt. Just about everyone ends up with some feelings of guilt. Peter certainly did. So did Judas. So do I.

Sadness/despair. The Bible tells us that Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62, NKJV). This is an awful, painful place to be, but it's necessary to go through in order to finally accept God's great gift. Grief counselors agree that those who aren't willing to confront grief may never heal.

Acceptance. We can't get to this point until we go through the other stages. When we let go of our anger, admit that we're to blame, accept God's forgiveness, and come back to Jesus, then—and only then—can we accept His great sacrifice for us.

I never wanted to hear the
story of the Crucifixion.

*Amy Hillyard Jensen, *Healing Grief* (Redmond, Va.: Medic Publishing Co., 1995).

Thursday
March 18

Ready to Go?

OPINION

John 15:9

He has had this trip planned for millennia.

“Are we packed and ready to go?” That question can bring sheer enjoyment or terror to the mind of the person doing the packing. Getting ready for any trip can be exhausting, as well as exhilarating. One person’s ruggedly exciting trip to the Australian Outback may be another person’s nightmare. Imagine coming in contact with flies as big as cockroaches when you have forgotten to pack your mosquito netting. Or how about winding up on the beaches of the Caribbean and being scared to death of the water, and you have forgotten to pack a swimsuit and have never learned to swim.

We have a reprieve. Our heavenly Father is planning the greatest trip ever. We don’t even have to pack, that is if you’re thinking of your mosquito net or swimming suit. You see, He has had this trip planned for millennia. In the book of Genesis He first presented the itinerary. He even equipped us with a list of what we would need to do in the meantime. “‘As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love’” (John 15:9, NKJV).

Jesus wants you and me to remain in and never leave the safety of His love. How more assured can we be? We are being asked to go somewhere with the Lord, somewhere He has already been. What more of a tour guide could we ask for? He wants to love us unconditionally and take us with Him even though we are sometimes unwilling and unprepared travelers. We can get on board or sit waiting to be bumped and “maybe” get a free round-trip ticket to “somewhere exciting.” Check the itinerary. I see that the plane is fueled and loaded and waiting to be boarded with all of us who abide in His Love. He isn’t checking gate passes, photo ID (He already knows the number of hairs on our heads!), passports, or even Bible knowledge. Let’s all get on board, remain in His love, and see where we are going! Haven’t you read about it?

REACT

1. What should we be doing as a church to follow Jesus’ invitation to “abide in My love”? (John 15:9, NKJV). Be specific.
2. How can “abiding” in God’s love get us to heaven?
3. Love is the means and the by-product of the Cross. Explain.
4. According to Romans 6:23, what makes the Cross so important to humanity living in a world that believes obedience is relative and that everyone will live after death no matter what they have or have not done?

No Greater Love

EXPLORATION

John 15:13

CONCLUDE

The drama of Christ's sacrifice for us can come alive as we read the Bible's accounts. We are the reason the story took place. As we reflect on Jesus' selfless actions, we find power to live for Him. Christ' sacrifice freed us from sin, and through faith we can receive the power to obey His law. As we walk with the Holy Spirit, we are no longer condemned by the law and need no longer feel unworthy of God's love. We must focus on Christ, who loved us enough to give His life.

CONSIDER

- Composing a song about Jesus' love for us. If you can play and write music, perhaps make it only instrumental. Otherwise, explore the theme in words.
- Meditating on the story of Jesus' crucifixion in the book of John. Prayerfully read the account, considering its meaning to your own life.
- Talking about Jesus' sacrifice with a child. See it through fresh eyes. Or talking about Jesus' sacrifice with an elderly Christian. How has the story of redemption shaped his or her life?
- Watching the daily news or visiting a news site on the Internet such as cnn.com. Was this world worth saving?
- Weaving a crown of thorns with briars.
- Performing in a passion play. Which role do you find easiest to play? Which role is hardest?
- Photographing as you explore in nature, looking for crosses and other symbols of Christ's sacrifice.
- Donating time each month toward visiting a nursing or assisted-living home. Play games with the residents. Read to them. Talk with them. Work jig-saw puzzles with them, etc. Perhaps the facility might even need someone to drive the van for special outings.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 79.

Chris Blake, *Searching for a God to Love*, chap. 7.

Is seeing Believing?



“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31, NKJV).

Death Is Not the End

INTRODUCTION

John 20; 21

My dear friend Ruth is the kind of friend you can really count on. She exudes brightness and energy that bring happiness to everyone she comes in contact with. And Ruth always thinks of others' happiness first.

But Ruth's life hasn't made it easy to behave in a Christlike manner. More than five years ago Ruth was diagnosed with breast cancer. Since that diagnosis, she has endured a double mastectomy, countless rounds of chemotherapy, hair loss, and the high level of pain associated with Stage 4 cancer.

The Lord has guided throughout this time by allowing us to live within a few miles of each other. There hasn't been one occasion when I couldn't count on her to help me. One example of her unselfish character is how she chose to be at the hospital when my daughter was born—even as Ruth dealt with chemotherapy. She gave me great strength through a difficult delivery even as she was in great pain. She cites her sources of strength as her husband of 20 years, her two children, and, most important, her Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Ruth's life hasn't made it
easy to behave in a
Christlike manner.**

Recently, Ruth's cancer has spread to her lymphatic system. She is fighting for her life. She can no longer walk and talk at the same time. Her breaths are shallow and her prognosis is not good. But even through this, she is not bitter or angry with God. She is thankful for each day she spends with her family and shows patience and love to those around her. She frequently says, "This has been quite a journey."

Christ's life was a journey. It must have been painful for His mother, friends, and disciples to see Him dying on the cross. He also suffered with each breath He took. Yet He took time to counsel the thief next to Him. He took time to ensure that His mother was cared for. He demonstrated unselfishness though His body was wracked with pain and exhaustion. It is hard to imagine how those at the foot of the cross felt in those last hours. How hopeless they must have felt.

But Jesus rose again. His defeat of sin gave us the assurance that one day our lives will be renewed like His. No more sorrow. No more pain. No more cancer. No more death. All we must do is take hold of the gift of life Christ won for us. Life here on this earth is a journey. As long as we hold tight to the outstretched hand of Jesus, like Ruth, we have nothing to fear.

Sunday
March 21

Is Seeing Believing?

LOGOS

John 20; 21

Seeing in John (John 1:14; 11:45; 19:35)

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each told their Gospel in a different way. They had the same story of Jesus Christ. But the differences in their Gospels come from the different purposes each had for writing while inspired by the Holy Spirit. Each Gospel writer also wrote his version of the story of Christ with different themes in mind.

One theme in the Gospel of John is seeing, or observing. John saw the miracles of Jesus. He witnessed Christ's life, death, and resurrection. So it comes

**The events of the Cross
and the Resurrection
changed Peter.**

as no surprise that the theme of seeing should ring loudly in his account. From the beginning of his Gospel, John points the reader to the incredible fact that the Logos, the Word, became human and His glory was seen. Miracles

performed by Jesus are witnessed, and people believe in the incredible claims of a Son of a carpenter. In the midst of John's account of Jesus' death, he again calls upon this theme of seeing. He saw what took place on Calvary, and what he witnessed and shared with others is true.

What They First Saw (John 20:1-10)

Do these verses tell us what Mary was wearing? Does John relate the color of Peter's hair? No, the Bible writers leave many details out of their stories. Details are omitted because of their unimportance. Knowing this, when a minor detail is written in Scripture we should take note of its importance. John mentions the presence of the linen wrappings in the tomb three times (John 20:5-7).

At first glance at this potential crime scene, one would say that robbers ransacked the tomb. What these witnesses saw, however, disproves that theory. They saw the linen wrappings and the facecloth. Robbers would have taken the linen. Or at least they would not have taken the time to neatly arrange the facecloth. The linen testified to the Resurrection. John saw these details in the tomb. And even though he did not understand everything from the Scriptures, he saw and believed.

Choosing Not to See (John 20:11-18)

Two people may witness the same miracle, but only one may believe. Two people may hear the same sermon on a truth from God's Word, but one may

choose not to believe. Why does only one believe? It is hard to understand. But the same thing happened at the empty tomb. Peter was amazed by what he saw. But John saw and believed.

Mary, however, did not believe. She saw no resurrection and no hope through her grief. Even the presence of two angels could not break through her sadness. Mary was so consumed with grief that she even mistook Jesus for someone else. People's conditions can impede understanding and believing in Christ. The good news is that Jesus kept giving Mary reasons to believe. First came the empty tomb and linen, then the angels, and, finally, Himself. Jesus longs for us to know and believe in Him. He does not give up on those searching for Him.

Seeing and Believing (John 20:19, 20, 24-31; Heb. 11:1-3, 38-40)

Read John 20 again and take note of how many times the verb *see* or a form of it is used. Again this is one of the themes of John's Gospel. But now a change occurs. Thomas was not present when Christ chose to appear to the disciples. He would not believe their word on Jesus' appearance. He wondered for eight days, holding to the stance of not believing it until he saw it. Then Jesus appeared and showed Thomas his demanded evidence.

Now Jesus changes the basis for belief. Seeing will not be believing for God's followers, but rather blessed will be those who have not seen and yet believe. Today Christians must believe by faith, not by sight, just as the faithful followers of the Old Testament times (Heb. 11:1-3, 38-40). The basis for the true believer's faith stands on the Scriptures and the testimony of those who did see, hear, and touch (1 John 1:1-4).

Power to Change (Matt. 4:18-20; John 18:25-27; 21:3, 15-17)

The power of the Resurrection is the power to change lives. The cross of Christ and His resurrection contain the power to change those who truly witness them, even for those who did not witness them firsthand.

John emphasizes this idea of change in the last chapter of his Gospel. He has recorded Jesus' teachings and His life. He told of Christ's incredible suffering, death, and glorious resurrection. But he is not done; he has one more story to tell. He tells of how these amazing events can change a person.

Simon Peter and the other disciples decided to go fishing. But Peter is no longer a mere fisherman. He may have failed earlier when he denied Christ, but we encounter a different Peter in this chapter. Jesus gives Peter three times to declare his love. Here the reader sees Peter as a humble, repentant man. The brash and boastful words are gone, replaced by meek, humble responses to Christ's questions. Peter is no longer only a fisherman, but now a shepherd of Christ's flock—a fisher of men. The events of the Cross and the Resurrection changed Peter. They have the power to change us as well.

Monday
March 22

Unexplainable Recognition

TESTIMONY

John 21:6-12

“These saints contradicted the lie which the Roman guard had been hired to circulate.”

“After His resurrection Christ did not show Himself to any save His followers, but testimony in regard to His resurrection was not wanting. Those who were raised with Christ ‘appeared unto many’ (Matt. 27:53), declaring, Christ has risen from the dead and we are risen with him. They bore testimony in the city to the fulfillment of the scripture, ‘Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead’ (Isa. 26:19). These saints contradicted the lie which the Roman guard had been hired to circulate—that the disciples had come by night and stolen Him away. This testimony could not be silenced.”¹

“So those who had been raised were to be presented to the universe as a pledge of the resurrection of all who believe in Christ as their personal Savior. The same power that raised Christ from the dead will raise His church, and glorify it with Christ, as His bride, above all principalities, above all powers, above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the heavenly courts, the world above. The victory of the sleeping saints will be glorious on the morning of the resurrection. Satan’s triumph will end, while Christ will triumph in glory and honor. The Life-giver will crown with immortality all who come forth from the grave.”²

“The resurrection of Jesus was a sample of the final resurrection of all who sleep in Him. The risen body of the Saviour, His deportment, the accents of His speech, were all familiar to His followers. In like manner will those who sleep in Jesus rise again. We shall know our friends even as the disciples knew Jesus. Though they may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured in this mortal life, yet in their resurrected and glorified body their individual identity will be perfectly preserved, and we shall recognize, in the face radiant with the light shining from the face of Jesus, the lineaments of those we love.”³

1. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 305.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 305, 306.

3. *That I May Know Him*, p. 362.

Did Buzz Aldrin Walk on the Moon?

EVIDENCE

John 20:29; 2 Cor. 4:17, 18

It is often hard to believe in something we have not seen, touched, heard, smelled, or experienced. In all things it is human to seek evidence of things we are told to believe. And when confronted with something we must believe in faith, we each study and go through a series of personal decisions before we take a leap in faith and believe.

In September 2002, *Apollo 11* astronaut Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin escaped criminal prosecution. Aldrin had punched a conspiracy theorist who wanted him to swear on a Bible that he really did walk on the moon in 1969. According to the Reuters news service, “Los Angeles County prosecutors declined to file a misdemeanor battery charge against the 72-year-old ex-astronaut, who said he was defending himself and his stepdaughter when he clocked 37-year-old Bart Winfield Sibrel outside a Beverly Hills hotel.” As a conspiracy theorist, Sibrel claims that the *Apollo 11* astronauts faked footage of their 1969 voyage to the moon to fool the Soviet Union into thinking the United States had won the space race.

For most people who read *CQ*, the first moonwalk is only something they have read about in history books or watched on historical news programs on television. So in order for us to believe these historical events, we have to believe what we read and watch in historical archives. As young Adventist Christians, we must also do something similar. The record of Jesus’ walk on earth, His death, and His resurrection is in the New Testament Gospels. John in particular records a very personal perspective. But if we are to believe the record of Jesus’ saving ministry, we must take a leap of faith and believe the written record.

I encourage you
to be unlike
Bart Winfield Sibrel.

As we each continue our study of Jesus’ ministry and His character, I encourage you to be unlike Bart Winfield Sibrel. After all, Buzz Aldrin *did* actually walk on the moon. And Jesus Christ *did* die on the cross for you so you could have everlasting life.

REACT

1. How can we learn to be more trusting of what we read in the biblical record?
2. How can we improve our ability to discern between truth and fallacy in what people want us to believe in their interpretation of the Bible truth?

Wednesday
March 24

How to Make Jesus Real in Our Lives Today

HOW-TO

John 20:29-31

In living day-to-day, it's easy to get stuck in a routine. We can easily forget that Christ is living and yearning to take us home. Every day Christ is eagerly waiting to cultivate a loving relationship with us. He is not somewhere in outer space bidding time; He is carefully and lovingly calling us to Him.

Each day there is a spiritual battle fought over our souls; it is good versus evil.

**There is power in the
Resurrection.**

With every song we listen to, every movie we watch, or every thought we think—we are either moving toward Christ or away from Him. But don't be discouraged. There is good news. Christ died and rose again;

He paid for our sins in full. We do not serve a statue or a human idol; we serve a God who is alive and well. There is power in the Resurrection.

Here are three helpful ways to keep Jesus real:

Trust. Know that God is in control—even if it doesn't look like it or feel like it. Sometimes it's hard to believe something unless you see it. The disciple Thomas saw and so he believed. Yet Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29, NKJV).

Take Action. Continually look for opportunities to help others or lift one another's spirits. Get involved, volunteer, or go on a mission trip. When Peter assured Jesus repeatedly that he loved Him, Jesus told him "Feed my sheep" (John 21:16,17, KJV).

Testify. My friend Seth Pierce and I always would shout, "Testify," if we liked a sermon or agreed with a thought-provoking lyric in a song. It's OK to share what you've seen or heard with others. What use is good news if you can't share it with a friend? In John 20:18 Mary Magdalene told the disciples of the resurrection of Jesus as soon as she had spoken to Him.

REACT

1. There are five senses. How can you use each sense to make Christ more real in your life? Be specific.

2. How does testifying strengthen the faith of the person who shares as well as the person listening?

The Relationship Between the Vine and Its Branches

OPINION

John 14:20; 15:5

Imagine you are a single flower, resting peacefully, your roots firmly lodged in the ground. Suddenly you are plucked from the earth. The moist flesh of a hand closes around your stem body and you feel yourself being stretched and separated from your roots with violent snaps. You come out whole on top, but underneath you are burning from the pain that has disconnected you. You're a pretty flower. Your petals and aroma are breathed in. Then you are tossed to the ground. You are no longer needed. So what next? Unless you can reach your life source, somehow attaching yourself back to your roots, there is nothing left but death.

This is a simple concept: the need of a connection to a living source in order to sustain and continue life. With such a simple notion, something needing the help of something else, it can easily be taken for granted. It is easy to understand that a plant needs things such as soil and sun to make it grow. And a human requires food and water. But is that all we need? As Christians the answer is *No*, and it should not be so easily dismissed for it is a matter of life or death. It is only through our connection with God that we are sustained.

Now let's take it a step further. When we remain in Him and constantly seek His path, we are extensions of God. We share in the divine union between the Father and the Son (John 14:20). Therefore we should stay as close to the Source as possible if we are never to experience separation. Can you imagine a flower being so foolish as intentionally to dislodge itself in the hopes of finding better sustenance than its nourishing roots?

Life is difficult. The world offers no favors and provides even less room for mistakes. But the good news is that we don't have to worry about being severed from our Life Source. Jesus wants

us always to remember that He has never and will never leave us. If ever a doubt enters your mind that ques-

The world offers no favors.

tions your salvation, you need only to remember God's loving character. Find comfort in the fact that, though we may deny Him time and again, He is always trying, always hoping, and always loving us back to Him. The Vine does not desert its branches. Instead, God chose salvation through the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son.

EXPLORATION

John 20:31

CONCLUDE

It is amazing how eyewitnesses who observed the same incident often give very different accounts of what occurred. This is a very real illustration of how our perception of reality is often colored by our own thoughts, feelings, and viewpoints. Sometimes people even go as far as denying that they saw something that actually did take place. Faith, on the other hand, is not seeing and yet believing. Though we've never seen Jesus face to face, we must accept by faith the eyewitness accounts of those who did, and allow their testimonies to make a difference in our own lives today.

CONSIDER

- Pairing up with a friend and taking turns doing a blind trust walk, in which you each allow the other to lead you blindfolded along an obstacle course and up or down a stairway. Then, in a journal, write the feelings you experienced while leading and being led. Compare this experience with your faith walk with God.
- Getting together with a small group for a "Friday Night Live" event in which everyone shares testimonies of what God has done in their own or someone else's life.
- Taking a nature walk and observing as many examples as you can of God's care and creative power. Jot these down in a notebook and review the list whenever you are tempted to doubt God.
- Re-reading the story of Ruth in the "Introduction" article of this week's lesson. Then make a list of ways you could take a challenge in your life and turn it into a blessing for others.
- Purchasing copies of the witnessing book of the year and sharing it with as many unchurched people as possible.
- Conducting a videotaped survey of church members regarding their definition of and experiences with exercising faith. Share the results with your Sabbath School class or church family.

CONNECT

Hebrews 11.

Education, "Faith and Prayer."

Don Schneider, *One Heart Rejoicing, The Difference Jesus Makes*.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Isaiah: "Comfort My People"

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for second quarter 2004, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Crisis of Identity

Logos: Matt. 18:21, 22; Luke 5:18-20; Rom. 3:26; 5:20; 1 John 1:9

What was the spiritual state of Judah at the time Isaiah was written? Can we truly worship the Lord if our hearts are not right with Him? How did the choices the Judeans faced parallel the choices we face today?

Lesson 2: Crisis of Leadership

Logos: Isa. 6:1-13

When asked by one of his disciples about the ingredients of good government, Confucius answered: "Sufficient food, sufficient weapons, and the confidence of the common people." People do, indeed, want strong, trustworthy leadership. When a soldier was signing up for a second tour of duty, the army recruiter asked why he wanted to re-enlist. "I tried civilian life," he said, "but nobody is in charge out there."

This week we'll look at Judah's crisis of leadership and the sad results that followed.

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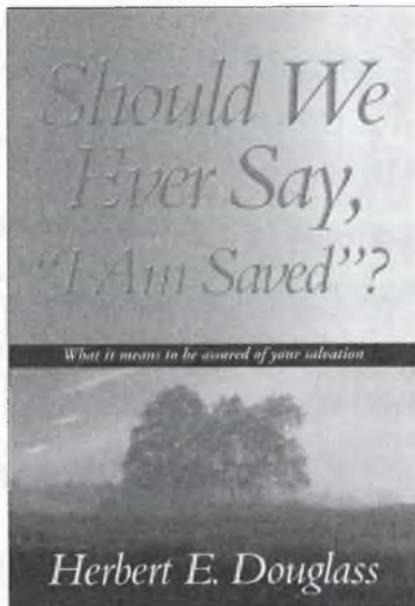
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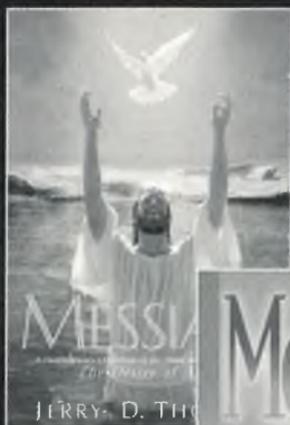
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Sahar lives in a village near Bethlehem, in Israel. She is a Palestinian Christian, though she had never had a personal relationship with God.



Trans-European

Sahar's father cannot work, so when her mother was diagnosed with cancer, Sahar found work while still in school. For three years she was the sole support of her family and still managed to complete secondary school and start college. She could not afford textbooks, so she took careful notes in class.

Then her mother needed surgery, but there was no money. Desperate, Sahar went to some friends for help. They always had money. She knew it was wrong, but she agreed to help them steal a car to get the money for her mother's surgery. Sahar was later arrested and sent to prison. Her friends had betrayed her, and her life seemed hopeless. But God never left her. Read Sahar's story in this quarter's *Mission*.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help build a church for Palestinian Christians in Israel.



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