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*Experiencing
Jesus Christ
as Lord:*

*The
Spiritual Life*

A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



<http://cq.adventist.org>

Experiencing Jesus Christ as Lord: The Spiritual Life



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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, approximately four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

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

The CQ Insiders for this quarter are

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This Quarter's Illustrator



Timothy Ford received his bachelor's degree in photography in 2004, from Pacific Union College, where he's currently pursuing a graduate degree in counseling. "Whatever I end up doing," he says, "it is my ultimate intent to use my life and all that composes it to the honor of God and in pointing others to Him in some way." He enjoys learning from music, writing, images, and great conversations with fellow servants of Christ. "The bulk of my free time," he adds, "seems to be taken up by reading in philosophy/psychology/spirituality, mountain biking, and trying to more deeply understand myself, the world I live in, and the God who is constantly guiding us all."

Getting the most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

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

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

Circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson 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.*

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ



“The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’ ”
(Luke 2:10, 11, NKJV).

Have You Found Him Yet?

INTRODUCTION

Acts 9:1–19; Rom. 3:9–26

Where would you go to look for God? Would you even know where to begin? Would you, for example, through sheer trial and error, be able to find Him and then shout “Eureka”? Because of Adam’s sin, we as human beings, regardless of color, culture, class, or country, have experienced separation from God and wouldn’t know, if left entirely to ourselves, where to find Him. But because of God’s marvelous grace, He naturally came looking for us. The Creator of the universe came down to our planet and, in Jesus, entered our space and time by becoming one of us. And now we can each embrace Him, Jesus, as both Savior and Lord.

Jesus meets each of us where we are, in all our circumstances. He sometimes uses what appear to be extreme measures to gain our attention as He did with Paul by flooring him on the road to Damascus; by literally knocking him off his “high horse.”

**Jesus meets each of us
where we are.**

Jesus can then opt for His preferred method of communicating with us, namely, through the still, small voice of the Spirit, which has the power both to convict and to convert. And as Christian young adults, we are comforted by the thought that He appeals to our intellect so that we can make an intelligent and informed decision to follow Him gladly as both Savior and Lord. Having saved us from all our sins, He now desires and deserves to be Lord, not only of everyone but of everything.

However, if we choose to go our own way, if we pursue a life without the Savior, we separate ourselves from the Lord and Life-giver with its natural consequence of eternal death. But by spending time with Jesus and getting to know Him, we will naturally be transformed into His likeness. It is a law of the orderly universe that by beholding we become changed.

Through prayer, a firm allegiance to Christ, the systematic study of His Word, and the serious and sometimes even silent contemplation of His created works, we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And in that state of being, we can then all confess that, indeed, we have found Him—found Him as both Savior and Lord.

Savior and Lord in Any . . .

LOGOS

Luke 1:5–38; John 1:1–18; Acts 9:1–19; Rom. 3:9–26

Titles, titles, and more titles—such seems to be the case these days. If it is not “His Excellency,” “Her Majesty,” “His Royal Highness,” or “Her Worship,” it might be “The Honorable,” “Mr. President,” “Professor,” “Pastor,” “Doctor,” “Sir,” or something else. Of course, such titles do have their place in both church and society and therefore should not be disparaged. But within the context of this week’s lesson, we need to place them all in their proper context. The truth is, none can compare with the majestic titles of “Savior” and “Lord” as applied to Jesus, the sinner’s Friend. He is Savior and Lord in any language; He is Savior and Lord in any church; and He is Savior and Lord in any book of the New Testament.

Savior and Lord—in Any Language

It matters not in which of the 6,000 or so languages in the world you say it. It amounts to one and the same: Jesus is both Savior and Lord. In supervising the

**“Jesus is the One who saves
and the One who leads.”**

translation of the Bible into the local languages of a number of countries here in Africa, I am acutely aware of this. In some cases a particular African language (out of a total of some

2,000!) might not use the actual nouns and titles like “Savior” and “Lord” but, instead, might favor an “action phrase” to express the basic concept and conviction—such as “Jesus is the One who saves and the One who leads.” But either way, He is still being confessed as Savior and claimed as Lord.

Savior and Lord—in Any Church

And among the myriad of churches and denominations we find in the world today, and amid the doctrinal disagreements and disputes for which they are known, there is at least one thing on which they all agree: Jesus is both Savior and Lord. They would all openly identify with the coded portrayal, in Greek, of Jesus as a fish in early Christian art. As an acrostic, the Greek word for fish (*ichthus*) was really a bold proclamation of Jesus as “Christ,” “God,” “Son,” and “Savior.”

So even in independent Africa today, where the titles of “Prophet,” “Priest,” “King,” “Healer,” “Helper,” and “Liberator” might seem quite popular and meaningful, it can still be said that Jesus is first and foremost “Savior” and “Lord.” He is Savior not only from sin, the basic malady, but also from all those life-threatening forces that seem to surround us, be they diseases, disasters, or even death itself.

And for that reason He desires and deserves to be Lord not only of some of us but of all of us; and not only of a part of us but of all of us.

Savior and Lord—in Any Book Found Within the New Testament

For one thing, our four texts above should remind us, at least, that the New Testament comprises different types of books, exhibiting different literary styles or genres. We have biographylike Gospels; the history-sounding book of Acts; the sermon (or homily) of Hebrews; the letters or epistles of Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and John; and the symbol-filled but no less significant Apocalypse (or Revelation)—also of John. And what is most noticeable amid all this is that, in spite of the differences in authors and genres, all the authors of all the books of all the New Testament readily agree that Jesus is both Savior and Lord.

It is little wonder, then, that He is portrayed as such in any language and in any church. We should not limit the title of “Lord” to the epistle of Philippians, for example, where Paul reminds the Philippians that the name given to the exalted Jesus by which He is known in heaven, on earth, and even under it, is Lord, and that, via our lips and languages, we should so declare Him (Phil. 2:5–11).

The truth is, even in the infrequently cited books of 2 Peter and Jude, the brother of Jesus, we find Him there as Lord as well—and Savior too (2 Pet. 1:11; Jude 25). And neither should we limit the title of “Savior” to the Gospel of Matthew in which we are told not only that Mary, Joseph, and little Jesus sought and found refuge here in Africa (Matt. 2:1–15) but also that, before His birth, both Mary and Joseph were instructed to call Him Jesus, or the One destined to save us—not with, or in, but *from* our sins.

The truth is, even in the homily of Hebrews in which we read so much about the heavenly sanctuary and earthly sacrifices; about Jesus as High Priest and Son; about Jesus being associated with both Moses and Melchizedek; and about His being far superior to anything the Old Testament had to offer, we still find Him depicted there in His role as Savior (Heb. 5:9, 10).

Granted, one book or other might refer to Jesus as Savior and Lord more often; another might seem to place greater stress on one title as opposed to the other. But in none is the bold confession negated that Jesus is Savior, and in none is denied the claim that He is Lord.

What, then, does this mean for us? It means that we should embrace Him as both Savior and Lord—not as one or the other (which is impossible), but as both.

REACT

1. Jesus is referred to in the Bible by many different names (e.g., “Rose of Sharon,” “the Vine,” etc.). Which one holds the most significance for you and why?

2. Why does the author of this “Logos” article say that we must embrace Jesus as Savior *and* Lord, and not one or the other? Do you agree or disagree? Explain what the titles *Savior* and *Lord* mean to you.

TESTIMONY

Acts 9:3–7; Rom. 3:24, 25

Saul-turned-Paul was en route to Damascus when he encountered Christ Jesus as Lord. “In Damascus the new faith seemed to have acquired fresh life and energy. The work of suppression must be begun there, and Saul was selected for this work.”¹ Paul came from a noble background, had been blessed with a good education, and sought to frustrate the work and will of God all the while thinking that he was in fact facilitating it (Acts 9:3–7).

We read that “Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist

Paul came from a noble background.

the power of evil. He was made captive by Satan, and would have remained so forever had not God specially interposed. It was the tempter’s purpose to thwart the divine plan in man’s creation, and fill the earth with woe and desolation. And he would point to all

this evil as the result of God’s work in creating man.”² “It is only through Christ that we can be brought into harmony with God, with holiness; but how are we to come to Christ?”³

Essentially, we are to embrace him as both Savior and Lord. And it is impossible to do either and not be altered. If you have an encounter with Christ as Savior and Lord, transformation will and must take place. “When the prophet Daniel beheld the glory surrounding the heavenly messenger that was sent unto him, he was overwhelmed with a sense of his own weakness and imperfection. . . . The soul thus touched will hate its selfishness, abhor its self-love, and will seek, through Christ’s righteousness, for the purity of heart that is in harmony with the law of God and the character of Christ.”⁴

Through his meeting with Christ as Lord, Paul had his work cut out for him. He was to be altered in order to ascend the altar to preach God’s Word to the then-known world. In the language of the youth newsletter I am currently editing for my church, Paul sought to “serve Christ on our planet” (SCOOP).

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1057.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 17.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Jesus: Light, Life, Son, and Savior

EVIDENCE

John 1:3–5

Jesus Christ is the Creator of life, and His life brings light to all humanity (John 1:4). This is one of the key themes in the Gospel of John, commonly referred to as the Gospel according to John because it is a personal, and even somewhat intimate, account of the life and times, the message and ministry, of Jesus—as seen through the eyes of John. It begins with the bold claim that “in the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1, KJV). The “Word” was a term used back then in many ways by both Jews and Greeks. In the Old Testament, for example, it functions frequently as an agent of Creation or as a reference to a God who speaks His creation into being (Genesis 1–3).

For John it is the Word that “dwelt among us, . . . the only begotten of the Father” (verse 14, KJV). The term “only begotten” is *Monogenēs** in Greek—and points to the life of Jesus, whose relationship with His Father was unique. His life was one of a kind, for only He could truly reflect and replicate the spotless character of God. Truly He is the Son of God and, for us, should also be our Light, our Life, and our Savior. And if we really believe in Him, we can also have the wonderful opportunity to establish a life-changing relationship with Him.

This is one of the key
themes in the Gospel
of John.

Some have noted that John, whether deliberate or not, seems to have placed little emphasis on terms and themes like *gnosis* and *sophia*, the Greek words for “knowledge” and “wisdom.” Of course, these too are important in our lives. We need to know Jesus as Savior and Lord, and we need the wisdom to know that it is through His power and His grace that we can embrace Him with enthusiasm as both. It takes much more than a mere sin-riddled human being like one of us to be a christ. It takes Jesus, who by His life, His teaching, and His saving power shows Himself in every age and to those of us of any age to be fully God—and therefore eligible to be our Light, our Life, our Savior, and our Lord.

We, as Seventh-day Adventists, should ensure by His grace that we don’t lose our sense of accountability as bearers of Jesus, the Light. John makes clear that it is through a personal encounter with Jesus as Savior and Lord that personal transformation can really take place.

**The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 895.

HOW-TO

John 1:1–9; Acts 9:1–19; Rom. 3:19–26

This week's lesson brings to our attention the fact (which now sounds like a cliché) that we have a Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. This is a concept that is easy to take for granted. It is easy to neglect one's relationship with Jesus and to forget what His place in life, and more specifically in your life, was, is, and should always be. It is easy to take for granted that the world and all that is in it was made through Him (John 1:1–4). It is easy to forget that He gives light to all who enter the world (John 1:9).

1. Do not take Him for granted. Could it be that, at times, we forget or even take such important facts for granted? And for that reason, God sometimes works in ways that will leave no doubt in our minds that He is still at the top of it all? Could it be that He chooses particular circumstances over others to remind us of His almighty presence, to remind us that no one has more power than He? Is there any particular reason that He chose to work through Saul-turned-Paul during that time and place and not through someone else who was more God-fearing (Acts 9:1–19)?

2. Keep Him at the center. There is a reason that all this is being brought to our attention. There may be several reasons, but what we can say for sure is that with God *through Jesus* anything is possible. This world was made through Jesus; we are given light through Jesus; and, most importantly, *we can be saved only through Jesus*.

God sometimes works in ways that will leave no doubt in our minds.

3. Acknowledge Him as both Savior and Lord. If we had any doubt in our minds, it should now be as clear as day, especially after reading the above passages in the Bible and giving some thought to life as a whole and to our relatively little role in the greater scheme of things, that Jesus is indeed Lord in every sense of the word. To add to that, unlike any earthly lord, Jesus is not only our Lord but also our Savior. And He can only truly be our Savior if we acknowledge and claim Him as such. We know that all have sinned according to the law and, therefore, ought to be condemned, but that if we choose to be, we are justified through Jesus Christ, our Lord (Rom. 3:19–26). Note the use of the word “choose.” The choice is for each of us to make personally. And in that choice lies one's decision to claim, or not to claim, Christ Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Balancing the Bicycle

OPINION

John 3:1–21

I have met some Christians who seem to be going through life and just existing. Then there are others who tend to quote, rather inappropriately it sometimes seems, a Bible verse for everything and every situation under the sun.

And you know what? I sometimes find this tendency manifesting itself even among some Seventh-day Adventist young adults and professionals—especially the drifting-through-life type. But how can we be so if, truly, Jesus is both Savior and Lord? It's all about balance, like balancing the bicycle. We all have challenges we must face—some more serious than others. But conquer we can and will if, truly, we live as though Jesus, as Savior and Lord, is alive and well; and that through the indwelling strength of the Holy Spirit, we can maintain our spiritual posture and balance—no matter what.

If Jesus is Savior, sins and systems meant to negate that must not be what propel us. And if He is Lord, nothing should be allowed to lord it over us by holding us captive in its grasp—not lack of focus, not lack of daring to dream, not lack of willingness to launch out into the deep by faith. Peter sought to do this but then lost sight of his Savior and Lord, only to end up almost dead in the water. And not like Nicodemus, who seemed willing and ready to discuss matters of life and death with Jesus under the cover of night but not to confess Him as Savior and Lord in broad daylight (John 3:1–21).

**Jesus expects us to be people
of passion and vision.**

And not like a South African young woman whom I once knew. She lived in beautiful Cape Town, the Mother City of the country, but never thought it necessary even to climb the majestic Table Mountain in the very heart of it and there contemplate the wonder of it all, to see and sense the awesome beauty of God's creation. Or not like another whom I also knew who lived in Johannesburg, the city of gold, working in a foreign exchange department but who has never left the city in over 30 years—not even to visit Durban, just 400 kilometers away!

In short, God in Jesus expects us to be people of passion and vision, to be in the world but not entangled in it, to aspire after our dreams, to maximize our potential, to aim for the stars. It's all about balance. More than that, it really is all about boldly confessing Jesus as our Savior and confidently claiming Him as our Lord.

The Name That Saves

EXPLORATION

Luke 2:10, 11

CONCLUDE

Scripture uses many names for Jesus, many that could refer to any devout person. But if ever there were a name that drew a line in the sand identifying the divinity of Jesus in our human lives, it is found this week: Lord and Savior. The concept of a god who saves can be accepted only in the context of admitting that we need saving. As we encounter this title and characteristic of God, lives are changed, priorities shifted; power is witnessed, and salvation appreciated. Whispering this name is in essence shouting a testimony that recognizes His worth of the title and His role in our lives.

CONSIDER

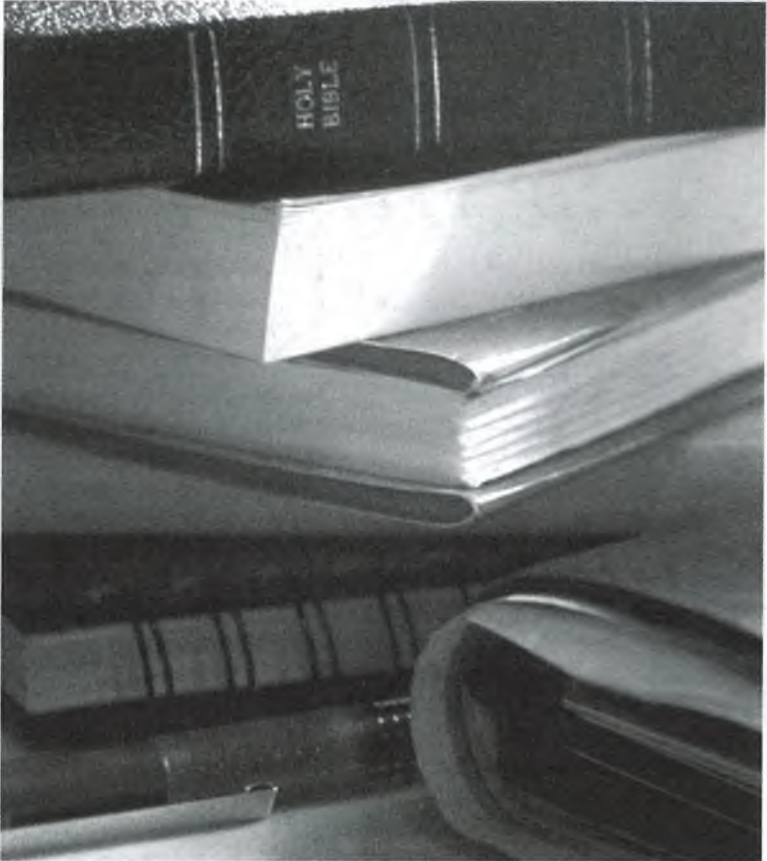
- Beginning a journal in which each day you write to God and express to Him how you encountered Him (various events, decisions, people) as Lord and Savior in your life that day.
- Studying how some people receive the earthly title “my lord” and identify how their worthiness of that title is similar and different from when we recognize that title in God.
- Praying to God today in the body position that seems most fitting when you think about Him as “Lord and Savior.” Intentionally think about how your hands, knees, face, head, feet, etc., might communicate different feelings.
- Interviewing several friends by asking “How have you seen God as your Lord and Savior this week?” What surprised you? How did they react? Was it a difficult question for them?
- Composing a piece of music that expresses how you recognize Jesus as Lord and Savior in your life.
- Brainstorming a list of ways that you see God as your Savior. So often we think of Him dying on the cross, but what else makes Him your Savior?
- Looking up “Lord” or “Savior” in a concordance and then taking the time to read each text that uses that term to identify all the different characteristics and contexts in which the word is used. How is your definition changed? What patterns did you see?

CONNECT

Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 3, pp. 148–179.

Ty Gibson, *Shades of Grace*; Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him Savior*.

Lord of our Priorities



**“ ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added to you’ ”
(Matt. 6:33, NKJV).**

Lost in Our Luggage

INTRODUCTION

Luke 16:13

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13, NKJV).

It's time to realize reality. As Christians, we are awed by so-called gods—the TV, the radio, the secular music, etc. We acknowledge the one true God only when life turns sour. In a world of temptation we have been blessed with free will. We cannot serve both the world and God; therefore, we need to realize that there is a life-changing choice to be made.

Believe our faithful Father. We tend to juggle our priorities, giving interest to the world and leaving God to times of convenience. We may have lost the Lord in our luggage of life, but all it takes is time to throw everything out and begin again. It's time you repack your priorities so that the Lord is on top.

top. Keep Him close to hand as you travel life's journey. It's never too late to recrown God as King of our lives.

Achieve. In all we do, choose God. We can go to our pastor or youth leader and ask him or her how we could go about putting the Lord first, or, better still, we could just ask the Lord. He speaks to us through Scripture and reminds us that, even in this era of controversy when we are often unfocused by gods, we can accomplish great things if before riches of this world we choose Him.

Receive a bountiful blessing. As Christians our duty is to seek the Lord at all times. Devotion reaches further than "I prayed in the morning and prayed before bed." We need to live in continuous acknowledgement of the Lord, thus receiving guidance and inimitable understanding. There are great rewards for those who consistently put the Lord first.

A New Era, a New Road of Thought

EVIDENCE

Matt. 6:33

Submitting ourselves to the authority of another is a stigmatized concept in the twenty-first century. There seems to be a worldwide drive for control—a drive in which Christian people should stand separated. Philosopher Richard Swinburne suggested that God is “the creator and sustainer of the universe, a free agent, able to do everything [i.e., omnipotent], knowing all things, perfectly good, a source of moral obligation, immutable, eternal, a necessary being, holy and worthy of worship.”¹ In such light how can we as Seventh-day Adventists justify failure to consistently put such a divine being first?

With the current influence of postmodernist thought, newfound secular interpretations of divine guidance reflect the subconscious actions of some of us within the church. Don Cupitt, a modern philosopher, states that “a modern person ought to be spiritually strong and healthy enough to live and die without superstition . . . the world is ours . . . there is only the beginningless endless flux, the human world of doings, meanings, and feelings.”²

Do we as Christians look on such a declaration as the delusion of an atheist or the intelligence of reality? When we repeatedly prevent the Lord from being our central priority, instead living independently for self, surely in ignorance we live within Cupitt’s statement.

Where is God in our lives? Where is God in our priorities? Born in 1844, the son of a Lutheran pastor, Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed, “God is dead.” Nietzsche argued that humanity had cut the world loose of God and was traveling without a sense of direction.

We need God for direction. We need Him as Lord of our priorities. Matthew 6:33 contains two key words. We are told to “seek” God “first” in all we do. The word “seek” derives from the Greek word *zeteo* and suggests a sense of yearning earnestly for God. The word “first” also has the Greek derivation *protos*, the first syllable, “pro,” being a superlative, meaning *before*. What does this word choice imply? *Before* we seek *anything*, we seek God. Allow Him to shape our choices, influence our convictions, and condition our values.

Where is God in our lives?

1. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*.

2. Don Cupitt, *Radicals and the Future of the Church*.

LOGOS

Gen. 2:24; Exod. 19:5; Job 1:1–5; Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 15:3

The Coronation of the Lord of Lords (Rev. 15:3)

“As if entranced, the wicked have looked upon the coronation of the Son of God. They see in His hands the tables of the divine law, the statutes which they have despised and transgressed. They witness the outburst of wonder, rapture, and adoration from the saved; and as the wave of melody sweeps over the multitudes without the city, all with one voice exclaim, ‘Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, thou King of saints (Revelation 15:3); and falling prostrate, they worship the Prince of life.’”

Who is the Lord God Almighty? Who is the King of saints? Who is the Prince of life? It is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. However, before Jesus can be our personal Lord of lords, is Jesus the Lord of our priorities and of the choices we make each day?

A “seed” was promised that would finally destroy sin and its author.

The Lord of Grace and the Forgiveness of Sin (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7)

It is the Lord's priority to save fallen humanity from sin and death. It was the perfect love of Christ that chose willingly to endure suffering, shame, and death in the hope that we would respond to His invitation of unconditional love. There was no other way for sin to be eradicated from the human heart. Hence, Jesus, Lord and Majesty, “made Himself of no reputation, . . . and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7, 8, NKJV). Jesus made us His priority.

The Lord of Our Marriages and Children (Gen. 2:24; Job 1:1–5)

When Adam and Eve chose the path of sin in the Garden of Eden, they were not left without hope. A “seed” was promised that would finally destroy sin and its author, Satan. To prevent our first parents from accessing the tree of life and immortalizing sin, they were driven away from the Garden. However, they took with them two major institutions from the Garden of Eden that still exist today: the Sabbath commandment and marriage.

The first pair became “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24, KJV) in marriage, Adam symbolizing the Groom Jesus Christ, and Eve symbolizing the bride—the church. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself

for it" (Eph. 5:25, NKJV). In addition, Adam was not only husband to Eve but her strong protector and priest that would bind his house or family together in morning and evening prayer, dependent upon Jesus his Lord to sustain them mentally, physically, and spiritually (Gen. 3:16). This practice continued through Adam's generations as it was also the custom of the kind and benevolent Job as a faithful priest, father, and husband to labor "earnestly for the salvation of his own family."² Given the increase in worldly amusements today, are we choosing the Lord Jesus Christ to be our priority at the beginning and at the end of each day?

The Lord of a Peculiar People Who Obey His Voice (Exod. 19:5)

The covenant that Jesus made with His people at Mount Sinai is to be our refuge and defense today, and these promises are of just as much force today as they were when the Lord made them with ancient Israel (1 Cor. 10:11). The promise is conditional: "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, *then* you shall be a special treasure to Me *above* all people" (Exod. 19:5, NKJV, emphasis supplied). By allowing Jesus to be the Lord of all our priorities and choices, using the theme of marriage, we are promised that we will become the Lord's precious bride, arrayed in the clean and white fine linen of the righteousness of Christ, "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27, NKJV). No spots, no wrinkles, no more sin! A clean heart, a new eternal life in Him! Amen.

REACT

1. In what practical ways can we ensure that the Lord has priority over all aspects of our lives?

2. What portions of the Bible help to inspire and encourage us in ensuring that Jesus remains the Lord of our priorities?

3. Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death" (NKJV). How is this an example for us? What are some practical ways in which we can follow Jesus' example in our daily lives?

4. Why do you think God chose marriage to represent His relationship to the church? What parallels can you draw between the ideal marriage and the ideal relationship between God and His church?

5. *The Great Controversy* describes the scene in which the wicked acknowledge Jesus as Lord—way too late. Do you know someone who has not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior? How can you help this person to know and accept Jesus while there is still time?

1. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 668, 669.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1140.

Tuesday
July 5

A Heavenly Habit

TESTIMONY

Matt. 6:24; Mark 12:28–30

MTV, BET, VH1, ESPN. Decisions, decisions, decisions! Did she want to “pop her collar” for Usher or “cry a river” for Justin? Perhaps laugh at Bernie Mac on comic view? Glue herself to the all-star game? I mean Iverson, LeBron, and Shaq—that’s entertainment!

But maybe not today. Mabel remembered she had to call Benita to arrange a date for a shopping trip, and perhaps, if time permitted, she would braid her sister’s hair. Suddenly a divine feeling came over her. It was as if her thoughts had been rechanneled as a gentle voice reminded her: “ ‘No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon’ ” (Matt. 6:24, NKJV).

In the midst of her busy life, she had become consumed by the things of this world. Instead of automatically ascribing the number one spot in her life to Jesus, she was pushing Him further down her “to-do” list. At best she would designate five minutes of her time to pray before going to sleep; but the Lord Jesus does not ask to be last in our lives, nor is He satisfied with being first among equals.

**We need to crucify
natural selfishness.**

Our God desires to be first *without* equal: “ ‘I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God’ ” (Isa. 44:6, NKJV).

“A 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.”* Christ died for us. He put us first though we are the lowest, yet we put Him last while He is the highest Being in the universe, the quintessence of perfection. Ellen White reminds us that the true believer chooses Christ first and foremost in everything.

And how do we do this, you ask? First, we must die to self. We need to crucify the natural selfishness that consumes our hearts, the desire continuously to place self and sinful desires before God. We must then make a decision to implore the Holy Spirit not only to live within us but also to strengthen us so we can consciously put the Lord first. By consciously putting the Lord first, we will establish a heavenly habit, and by His grace, with time we will unconsciously make Him paramount in our lives. In this way, in all we do we can live by the perfect example Christ set while on earth.

* *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 231 (emphasis supplied).

It Is Time to Be Real With God

HOW-TO

Gen. 22:1–18; Matt. 10:34–38

A friend of mine says Matthew 6:33 is more a piece of advice than a decree. Abraham, Esther, and Job are only a few of the characters within the Bible who put Christ first and prospered. Some things are easier understood than implemented, so here are four practical steps toward putting Christ first in our lives:

1. Be real with yourself. The first step to solving a problem is acknowledging that the problem is present in the first place. We need to let go of pride and humbly strip ourselves of anything that obstructs us from putting God first.

2. Be real with God. After having been sincere with yourself, it is time to be genuine with God. Prayer is merely talking with God. Matthew 6:6, 7 teaches us how to be honest when we do this: Find a quiet retreat and confess to God, asking Him for help. By doing this, you offer God an open invitation to come into your heart and guide you to a new beginning. This is one way of showing God that you want Him to have foremost priority in your life.

3. Nurture a relationship. You need to be familiar with the person to whom you give such a special place in your life; it makes things much easier if you trust Him fully. The more you know Him, the easier it will become to let go and allow Him to lead. This can be achieved by setting time aside to spend with Him, for example through prayer, through the reading of Scripture, or by just spending some quiet time in reflection.

We need to let go of pride.

4. Increase dedication. Putting Christ first is involving Him in everything we do, especially in decision making. When step three is successful, the next step is to offer talents/gifts, qualifications, and skills to Him. Ask Him to use them and to use you. Everything we do and everything we are will be filled with purpose. Knowing that you have a higher calling and are an agent of the Creator God can be one of the most fulfilling things this world could offer.

REACT

1. How often do I put God aside to go about my daily life?
2. Do you know anyone who handled a situation in disregard of God? What were the consequences?

Thursday
July 7

What Does It Mean to Put God First?

OPINION

John 6:27

John 6:27 tells us that rather than working for the food that perishes, we should instead work for that which endures unto eternal life. This ties in with the memory verse for this week taken from Matthew 6:33. Seeking *first* the kingdom means we should put God first in everything—not some things—*all* things. As Christians, sometimes it is hard for us to put into practice that which we know in theory. For example, a student has an assignment deadline that must be met in order to pass the course. Running behind, she chooses to skip church on Sabbath to complete it. I know that some of us can maybe identify with this situation.

God knows that we cannot fulfill a good life on our own—we need divine help. The devil has misled us into believing that we are capable of traveling life's journey

**When we put God first in all
we do, He will undoubtedly
bless us.**

in our own strength; still, God has made provision for us. When we put God first in all we do, He will undoubtedly bless us. Sometimes as Christians we can be in danger of

being extreme in our interpretations of Scripture, particularly those in relation to prioritizing God. Being a good Christian and prioritizing God is not solely measured by whether or not a person worships God at the times and places designated by the church. Prioritizing God is more a measure of continuous, heartfelt devotion.

In seeking the kingdom of God within day-to-day life, we need to search the Scriptures for ways in which we can live by God's guidance. The Ten Commandments are the place to begin. God's commandments give us a framework of basic principles, particularly beneficial in the fulfilment of a Christ-orientated life. The first four commands call us to love the Lord and put none else before Him. If our ultimate goal as Christians is to walk on the heavenly streets of gold, we need to remember the Lord as first and foremost in all we do and in all we say. Most important, we need to keep the Lord as first and foremost in our hearts.

REACT

What is your personal definition of the word "priority"?

Hide and Seek

EXPLORATION

Deut. 4:29; Matt. 6:33; 7:7, 8

CONCLUDE

Refocusing our daily walk into a direct relationship with Jesus Christ means rejecting the notion of living independently for self. We need to seek God first. He must be Lord of our daily priorities and choices before we can exalt Him on resurrection morning. Christ chose to suffer for our cause because we are His first priority. Adam went to the Lord in prayer for mental, physical, and spiritual sustenance. As Jesus becomes Lord of our lives, our actions and thoughts reflect His actions and thoughts. As our relationship builds, our dedication increases. Through these actions we will find the real "good life."

CONSIDER

- Looking at your calendar to see how often you have made God a priority in your day. During the coming week, pencil in times that you plan to spend with Him.
- Finding someone in your church that you admire spiritually. Find out how they make a priority of spending time with God and allow God to feed them each day.
- Writing a classified ad about yourself. Include any hobbies or interests that you may have. Are you a person whom God would like to spend time with? In how many activities can He accompany you?
- Listening to contemporary Christian musician Wayne Watson's song "The Urgency (of the Generally Insignificant)" from his album *The Way Home*. Think about what the lyrics to this song say about priorities.
- Getting a morning prayer time together with a prayer partner or group. This can be in person or on the Internet or over the phone. Make seeking Him first a reality and be accountable to each other.
- Visiting with the residents of a nursing home instead of doing your usual Sabbath activities. Or organize a program at your local prison. Be like Christ and share His love with those who aren't able to hear it very often.
- Drawing on a piece of paper all the things that fill your day. When you are finished, try to find room for God. What, if anything, is wrong with this picture?

CONNECT

Matthew 6.

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*; L. B. Cowman, *Streams in the Desert*.

Lord of our Thoughts



“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1, 2, NKJV).

The Right Way Around

INTRODUCTION

Rom. 6:13

Asthma is a disease in which the airways in the lungs are inflamed and sensitive. These airways can narrow down when exposed to certain things, making it harder to breathe freely. There are a number of things that trigger this narrowing, one of which is contact with animals such as cats. Let's investigate this.

We'll go out on the street and interview a whole lot of people, until we've spoken to 100 people who have asthma. We'll ask them if they have any cats at home, or if they ever had any cats at home.

We find out that 50 of these people used to have cats at home, but they got rid of them. So it could be that these people found out that they had asthma and realized that the cats were making it worse; so they may have sold their cats (or given them away) to help control their symptoms.

But what if we didn't think of that? Imagine what would happen if

**Imagine what would happen
if we decided that these people
got asthma because they gave
their cats away!**

we decided that these people got asthma because they gave their cats away! We could mount a massive public awareness campaign, warning people of the information we had uncovered. Imagine the posters in pet shop windows: "Buy a cat—prevent asthma!" We would have many unnecessary—and potentially detrimental—additions to asthmatic households.

It's just a matter of cause and effect, isn't it? Giving your cat away doesn't cause you to develop asthma—the fact is that one effect of developing asthma can be deciding to give your cat away! But it's easy to get things backward sometimes. Christians can fall into the trap of believing that doing good things causes God to accept them. It's even a source of comfort in some ways—as long as I keep doing this and that, God will have to love me, right? But that's all backward. When we are made right with God, we try to obey Him because we are grateful for what He has done. "Give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life" (Rom. 6:13, NLT). Because you have been saved, let Christ be your Lord. What better way to show our appreciation for the love and grace God has given us?

Romans 12:1 challenges: "When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?" (NLT).

Can God Read Minds?

LOGOS

Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 2:16; 2 Cor. 10:3–5; Eph. 6:10–18; Col. 3:1, 2

Romans 12:1, 2

God's will is for your happiness. There really is no denying it. God desires good things for us, pleasing things, and our duty is to seek His will and to give ourselves completely over to what Christ has for us. This is much easier said than done. As well, it is important to note that we are to offer our bodies (mind included) in view of God's mercy. It is not simply a blind act of faith but rather a beautiful reaction to what God has done for you. This is truly a response to the grace God has given us through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ.

How do we do this? By dying to ourselves every day. Simply put, we renew our relationship with Christ daily to continue His priority in our lives. It is a concept directly from the apostle Paul, who considered every day a new opportunity to become closer to Christ and to do more to forward God's work.

1 Corinthians 2:16

But we have the mind of Christ. Not only do we renew our relationship with Christ, but we actually take on His will and His mind as our own. Just as we accept His perfect salvation in place of our sin-tainted lives, we can accept His will and His mind as ours. As we continue to study the Word of God, we see the power that is within

**This is both a daunting
responsibility and a
great joy.**

these words, and we begin to conform our thoughts to His thoughts. The technical term for this is "sanctification," or, becoming more and more like the God we serve.

With this knowledge in mind, we can give ourselves over to a stronger trust in the mind God has given us and in its abilities to make good decisions based on the will of Christ. This is a process, but the tools have been given to us to create a desire to give our minds over to the thoughts Christ would have us think.

2 Corinthians 10:3–5

In this text we are reminded of a battle that is not of this world. It is a battle for the heart and the mind—those parts being inextricably linked. Verse 5 says "we take captive" (NIV), which is an allusion to the idea of discipline. This work we do with our thoughts is just that—work. We discipline ourselves and think of those things that are good and just and pure. The more we do think on these things, the easier it

becomes to hold the priorities of Christ in the forefront of our minds at all times.

For some of us, discipline is easy. But for most of us, it is difficult. For some of us, this might be the hardest thing to master in our Christian experience. We battle a lack of discipline by again going to the Word of God and seeking God's counsel on what is best for us. Proverbs 5:23 tells us "He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly" (NIV). So you can see that this is a point of no little importance. We must take captive our thoughts lest they be led astray.

Ephesians 6:10–18

Finally, in maintaining the theme of spiritual warfare and discipline, we see a list of those things that God would have us use as weapons and as armor in the battle for our minds and our hearts. An important note on this text is that it does state that there *will* be a time when you need to use all of this advantage. The text does not state that you *may* need it, but states simply that "when the day of evil comes" (Eph. 6:13, NIV). It is inevitable.

However, there is comfort in this text, as in all the others, that there is a power protecting us that we cannot imagine. We have a powerful ally in Jesus Christ. Not just an ally, but the Victor. It is our duty to live as if we have won, for truly the war is finished. Jesus Christ, the Master of our minds and our hearts, has already fought the fight, and now we follow His example for our lives. This is both a daunting responsibility and a great joy. In the end, it leads to happiness, and it is a result of eternal life, given to us by the grace of God.

Colossians 3:1, 2

Not only do we take control of our minds, but we learn to think on things of eternal importance. The old hymn tells us that "this world is not my home, I'm just a' passing through," and that remains true for us today. Let your mind wander to the eternal things, those things of love and God that are beyond our finite existence. Our hearts can be greatly comforted, worries can be quelled, when we take the time to ponder the eternal and to look to the awesomeness and the intimacy our Lord and Savior gives to us. Though we will never truly understand God, we are asked to spend time thinking, to set our minds "on things above" (Col. 3:2, NIV).

This is not a task to be taken lightly, for Christ made it His example to find the time to do nothing but pray and commune with God. You may remember an incident when the disciples were chastised for not taking the time to stay awake when Jesus was preparing for His spiritual battle by thinking on the eternal priorities for His life (Mark 14:37). This is a perfect illustration of what the text is saying. Because we don't belong here, we need to place our minds on things beyond this world and put this world into an eternal perspective. Having done this, we can truly take on anything this world has to offer.

Monday
July 11

Walking Away From Your Past

TESTIMONY

2 Cor. 10:5; Phil. 3:13, 14; Heb. 12:1–3

In the past we have all done, said, and thought things that we wish we hadn't. Even now there are times when the memory of our unholy actions, thoughts, and words make us cringe and wish to disappear. If our own sinfulness is so repulsive to us, then possibly, we may think, we are also repulsive to God.

Maybe God hasn't forgiven us. Maybe God won't hear our prayer for forgiveness. Not so! Sin is repulsive to God—but not sinners. God loves us so that He left the glory of heaven, came to earth through natural childbirth, became a human being (a creature that He originally created), lived on earth for 33 years, was tempted in every way that we are, yielded to death, conquered death, and

Sin is repulsive to God.

was resurrected! Our Creator went through all this so that forgiveness and salvation would be available whenever we, His dear children, would ask for

them. So, even though the memory of our sinful past may result in guilt and self-condemnation, "if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart" (1 John 3:20, NKJV). What an awesome thought! We truly can confess our sins to our loving and empathetic Father. He really is true to His word: He will "forgive us our sins" and clean up all our unrighteousness (1 John 1:9, NKJV)—even if our heart condemns us. Through Christ, you truly can walk away from your past actions, habits, thoughts, and words—no longer condemned.

"We are not to be so overwhelmed with the thought of our sins and errors that we shall cease to pray. Some realize their great weakness and sin, and become discouraged. Satan casts his dark shadow between them and the Lord Jesus, their atoning sacrifice. They say, It is useless for me to pray. My prayers are so mingled with evil thoughts that the Lord will not hear them.

"These suggestions are from Satan. In His humanity Christ met and resisted this temptation, and He knows how to succor those who are thus tempted. In our behalf, He 'offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears' (Heb. 5:7)."

**In Heavenly Places, p. 78.*

Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind

EVIDENCE

Rom. 12:2

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2, NKJV).

Many of us Christians have lost our sense of identity, mission, and direction. The result is that worldliness has filled the church to the extent that it is difficult to tell a Christian from a non-Christian by the way they talk, dress, eat, look, or behave. This is because we have not given full control of our minds to Christ; thus, we seem like the world.

Our thoughts often determine our actions. What our minds dwell on become visible in our actions. Thus Ellen White admonishes us to "keep the mind from wandering to forbidden themes or from spending its energies on trifling subjects. Those who would not fall a prey to Satan's devices must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts."* Solomon also says, "As [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7, NKJV).

**"Keep the mind from wandering
to forbidden themes."**

According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, *conformed* means "fashioning according to or conforming to a pattern or mold" and *transformed* means "changed in form."

Just as renewing a driver's license renders the old one invalid (we cannot use it anymore), so should we discard our old natures and take on the name of Christ and be not fashioned according to the pattern or mold of this world but be changed into the form (take a different look, behavior, thought-life) of Christ. When Christ becomes truly Lord and Savior, "Christ-mentality" replaces "I-mentality" and we weigh all our thoughts in His scale. He gives us the ability to overcome temptation and enables us to live godly lives. We will profess Christ with our mouth as Savior, and also let Him be Lord of our lives (obey and do His bidding).

How often have we sung the chorus, "The things I used to do, I don't do them anymore . . . since I have been born again. . . . There is a high, wide change, since I have been born again."

**The Adventist Home*, p. 403.

A Password for My Security Box

HOW-TO

Eph. 6:10-16

Some people used to have security boxes in their homes. If you had a security box for your personal use, what would you put in it?

The mind is a security box. It is the central processing unit (CPU) of your being, the command center of your soul. The only way to get access to it is by using the correct password.

What is the password for your mind? What is the password for your life? Do you have one?

Our five senses are the door of access to the soul (the mind). We must watch over our five senses because if the enemy captures them, we will be inviting him to pass on to the security box. Once there, he will decide what we think and what we do. If you don't know how to put a password/key on to lock your soul, here are some instructions that will tell you how to keep your mind and soul secure from the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11).

What is the password for your mind?

1. Identify your weaknesses. Think on those situations that make you fall. Don't write them; just identify them in your mind.

2. To keep your senses far from the devil's hands, you must wear the Lord's armor. Every morning before you leave your home, pray to the Lord and ask Him for the power to defeat your weaknesses.

3. Whenever the temptation comes, remember that Jesus, the Truth, always stands by you. No matter where the attack comes from, the Lord's justice will keep you protected.

4. The peace of the gospel will guide you through the path that God wants your feet to walk.

5. Talk to the Lord a few times each day. Talk to Him before your meal, talk to Him before the exams, talk to Him while you walk. If you do, your faith will grow and will create a shield against sin.

6. Every day think of Jesus and the salvation He will give you. This will work as a helmet that will allow your mind to concentrate on the things above, not on the things of this world.

7. Finally, in order to neutralize the enemy, let the Holy Spirit keep the key of your mind. This will work like a sword against the devil.

If you follow these instructions, you will create a password for your mind. The enemy will not gain access to your senses; only Jesus will know the password.

Be Stretched in God's Hands

OPINION

2 Cor. 5:17

A personal experience with the saving presence of Jesus Christ is the greatest need of humanity. The purpose of your life and His wonderful will for you will become clear and exciting after you come to know Him as your Savior and Lord. Once you are completely changed by a personal encounter with Him, finding His purpose is simple and uncomplicated. The Bible calls it being "born again," transformed by His blood, the Word of God, and His Holy Spirit. A personal experience with Jesus Christ always renews your mind to hear and understand the mind of God for you in every area of your life. His Spirit comes to dwell with you the very moment you are born again. You will be a new creature.

God is not satisfied when we know things about Him. He longs for us to know Him. He wants us to be connected to Him in a personal relationship. Knowing things about God without knowing Him personally is like being in a dark room, buying a lamp, and not plugging it in; or being in a cold room, building a fireplace, and not lighting a fire in it.

God longs to reveal Himself to us and in doing so, to bless us. He longs for us to really experience Him.

**There will never be the old
love of sin anymore.**

The day someone comes to Christ is a wonderful day in its effect upon his or her future. It is as when the helm of a ship is put right about; the man now sails in a totally different direction. His future will never be what his past was. There may be faults; there may be infirmities and shortcomings; but there will never be the old love of sin anymore. "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14, KJV). This is God's own promise to us, given through His servant Paul. When Christ comes to our soul, He so breaks the neck of sin that though it lives a struggling, dying life, and often makes a deal of howling in the heart, yet it is doomed to die. The cross of Christ has broken its back, and broken its neck, too, and die it must. Henceforth the man is bound for holiness, and bound for heaven.

Abiding in Christ is to be in the "being" mode. We are still doing the things that God has called us to, but we are doing it in His strength. Abiding in Christ is about having an intimate relationship with Him. The relationship is more important than the things we do or don't do. The more we are abiding in Him, the more we will be faithful. We will hear His voice clearer, not be works oriented, and have more peace in our life. To abide is to experience His presence.

EXPLORATION

2 Cor. 10:5; Col. 3:1, 2

CONCLUDE

As a man thinks, so is he, and so he becomes (Prov. 23:7). Behavior first crystallizes in the thoughts. We think, then we do. It is imperative then to bring all thoughts into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Studying and pondering God's Word captures the mind for Jesus. Meditating on His Word, the mind abides in Christ, the eternal Word of God. The thoughts conform to His; His ideals prevail, and new, Christlike behaviors emerge. "What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore. . . . A new life has begun!" (2 Cor. 5:17, NLT).

CONSIDER

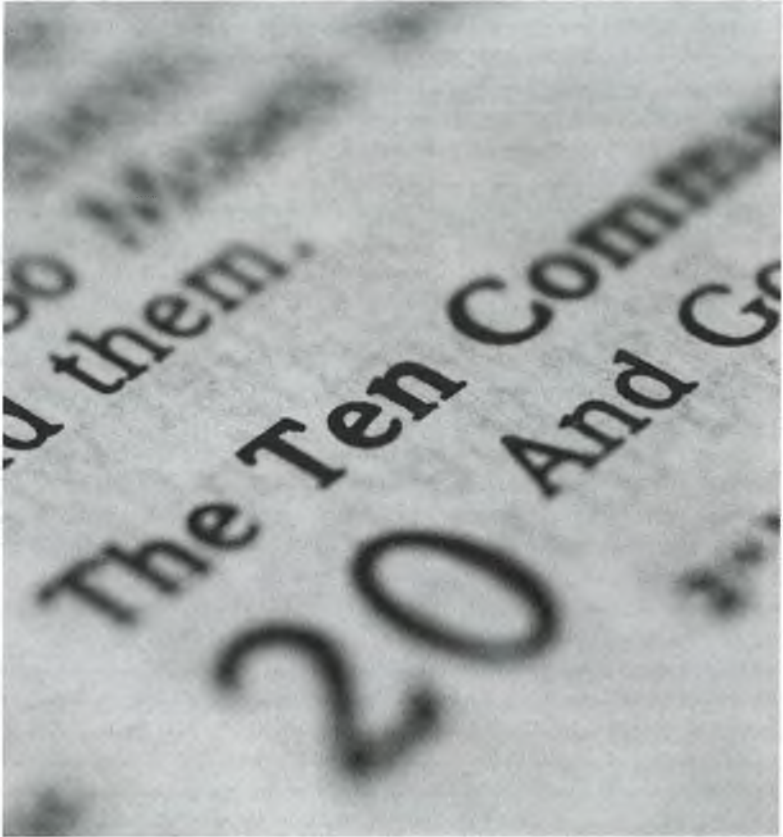
- Sketching a cartoon that in the first frame shows a man thinking with a word balloon describing his thoughts and other tiles showing him acting on his thoughts.
- Composing a song with words that use the phrase "As a man thinks" as a constant refrain. Emphasize the power of thought on behavior.
- Researching the word *thought* using a Bible concordance. Record your findings on the various usages of the word and the counsel Scripture gives on the topic.
- Interviewing Christians who are physically challenged in the following ways that affect the five senses: blind (sight), deaf (hearing), quadriplegic (touch). Ask them how their lack of that sense affects their thoughts and understanding. Ask them how it affects their relationship with Jesus.
- Thinking about this idea: In many societies the content files of a person's computer may be accessed and used against him or her by prosecutors. How similar—and how different—is this to how our thoughts will be accessed during the judgment?
- Comparing how much the brain learns from the different senses. Do research or interview a brain researcher. Which of the senses has the most informational impact on the brain? Do we learn more from hearing than from seeing?

CONNECT

Mind, Character, and Personality, vol. 2, chaps. 34, 35.

Dick Winn, *God's Way to a New You*, chap. 11; Elden Chalmers, *Healing the Broken Brain*.

Lord of our Desires



“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” (Rom. 8:3, NKJV).

Earthly Laws or God's Laws?

INTRODUCTION

Mark 14:36

I have lived close to a synagogue for a long time. Every Friday night, as I passed by on my way to choir practice at my church, I noticed many cars in the parking lot of the synagogue while all the building lights were off, giving me the impression that no one was there. That went on for several months. Questions began to rise in my mind: *Would they hold a worship meeting in darkness? Would they have another meeting hall in the basement that they used only on Friday evenings?* What was most intriguing is that when I would come back from choir practice (sometimes after midnight, for we prepared the church for the Sabbath

morning program), the cars were still parked there. And do you know what the strangest thing was? The cars remained in the parking lot of the synagogue throughout the night. But on Sabbath

The cars remained in the parking lot of the synagogue throughout the night.

morning all the worshipers would walk to the synagogue, and after worship, they would drive their cars back home.

Every week I grew more and more curious about that ritual, for I passed by the synagogue at the same time every Sabbath on the way to my church for worship. After some time, I made friends with a man who attended the synagogue, and guess what my first question to him was? That's right: "Why are so many cars left in the parking lot all night every Friday night, and why do the people drive back home after worship on Sabbath?" The gentleman answered: "The laws of my religious community say that we must walk to the temple on Sabbath, but they don't say anything about the way back home. That's why we leave our cars in the parking lot before sunset on Friday and drive back home after worship on Sabbath."

God sent His Son so that our relationship to the law would be clear. Despite our weak and sinful nature, we would see and understand God's plan of love for us, through Jesus Christ. He came to this world to live as one of us. He experienced all the temptations, pains, and joys that we go through, He had the same desires that we have, and He showed that it is possible to overcome sin when we submit our desires to God.

When this happens, the burdens that we carry disappear, God's laws become more clear, and our lives become meaningful as we fulfill God's desires.

"Not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36, NKJV). May this be our prayer.

The World Was Not Worthy

EVIDENCE

Phil. 2:8

Just imagine the scene: a convocation of irritated people gathering together at a mountainside to hold a complaint session with God. The first person to present his case is Moses. He firmly grabs his staff and looks at God, and vents: "God, we know each other very well. You did a great job at the Red Sea and with Pharaoh's army. But couldn't I have put my feet in the land of Canaan? My experience with You has not been totally pleasing. I have deliberately been exalted only to be humbled afterward. All I did was strike the rock! What's so bad about that?"

God smiles and in silence beckons to the next one in line.

John the Baptist begins his lamentation: "Lord, I know You are righteous and just, but I am annoyed, and the more I think about it the angrier I get. Have You ever eaten locusts? I have. And You made me run mountains and valleys announcing repentance, and what did I get for this? Imprisonment and execution!"

God smiles once more and beckons to the next in line.

His name is Job. "I was a defenseless victim," he says. "Without consulting me, You gave the devil permission to destroy me. I lost seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, my cattle, donkeys, servants, and children. And then my wife said I lost my integrity, and I might as well curse You and die. I don't understand how something like that should have happened to me. You sometimes seem unjust in your dealings, not only with me but with others."

"You ever eaten locusts?"

This may seem comic, showing human ways of evaluating situations. And to a certain extent it may seem theologically forced, but these were people who had forsaken worldly life and submitted their will to the will of God, independent of any consequence to which their choice would take them.

Referring to Job, God said: "'Have you considered My servant Job' " (Job 1:8, NKJV). It was as if He were saying, "Job's behavior is a living example of people who live according to My purpose." This is a noble feeling of God that respects human beings who live out the claims of His law in a world lost in sin. It is His appreciation for the integrity of character of those who decide to keep His commandments, even though the lights of the world seem brighter.

This same God spoke about Jesus, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), and His Son's life is the perfect example of submission to the will of God.

"The world was not worthy of them" (Heb. 11:38, NIV).

Monday
July 18

Lord, Count on Me!

LOGOS

Genesis 1; 2; 1 Kings 3:1–15; Rom. 1:3; 6:1–7; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 2:8; Col. 2:12, 13; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:13–16; 1 John 2:1

Solomon was a special young man: wealthy, powerful, and the son of David, the king of Israel. Just as all wealthy and influential young men, he could have accepted the good things that the world offers. But much to the contrary: “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David” (1 Kings 3:3, NKJV).

What a young man! Do you know what happens to a young person who decides to obey and honor his or her father and to love God? He or she has wisdom, longevity, and the respect of others. That was exactly what happened to Solomon: “The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, ‘Ask! What shall I give you?’” (verse 5, NKJV).

Solomon answered, “ ‘Give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil’ ” (verse 9, NKJV).

**They were saying:
“Count on us!”**

Because Solomon answered so wisely, God fulfilled his request—and a lot more!

Solomon said, “Count on me! Give me wisdom to do Your work,” and God heard

him and made him the greatest king Israel ever had. Solomon turned his desires into God’s desires and made God the Lord of his desires!

Luke 1:28–38

Mary was a young woman full of dreams just as any other young woman who is engaged, waiting for her wedding day. One day, however, the angel Gabriel arrives and begins to talk to her. He tells her, “ ‘You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus . . . the Son of the Highest’ ” (Luke 1:31, 32, NKJV).

Like any other young woman about to marry as a virgin, Mary must have had her moment of dread. Many questions must have crossed her mind. Questions like, “What shall I tell Joseph?” or “What will others think of me?” But instead of giving heed to the questions that arose in her mind, Mary said, “ ‘Let it be to me according to your word’ ” (verse 38, NKJV).

Mary was really saying to the angel: “Count on me!”

Luke 5:27, 28

Levi Matthew was a tax collector. In Jesus’ day that job was not considered a good one because the Pharisees saw tax collectors as sinners. But Jesus was concerned not so much with the job Levi was doing as with the job he *could* do.

Jesus extended him a simple invitation: “‘Follow Me.’ And he left all, rose up, and followed Him” (Luke 5:27, 28, NKJV). Levi meant: “Count on me!” and he became a great disciple of Jesus. And Jesus became forever the Lord of his desires.

Matt. 4:18–22; Luke 5:1–11

Peter and Andrew had not had a good fishing night. They had no idea that on that same day they would meet Someone very special. It was morning when the Master came, followed already by a great multitude, and asked permission to use Peter’s boat to preach. After delivering His message and dismissing the crowd, Jesus invited Peter and Andrew to let down their fishing nets again. If you inquire of someone who understands fishing, they will tell you that the best time to fish with nets is at night; so, it would be foolish to let down the fishing nets in the morning.

But, since Jesus was the Lord of their desires, they did not hesitate; they obeyed Him. And to their surprise, when they tried to pull the nets back into the boat, they were unable to do it by themselves; they had to call on their partners, John and James, for help.

Simon Peter “and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken” (verse 9, NKJV). If Jesus was able to transform an unsuccessful night into a blessed morning, just imagine what He would do in the lives of those fishermen!

When Jesus approached them with the invitation to become fishers of men, they immediately left everything and followed Him. James and John left their nets behind to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:18–22). In that gesture of leaving everything behind, they were saying: “Count on us!”

In considering these four stories, we find a few points in common:

- They were all young people.
- They were not perfect, but simple human beings.
- They all received an invitation or a call.
- They all turned their desires into the Lord’s desires.
- Their answer was always the same: “Count on me!”

Jesus is still calling young people to become another Solomon, another Mary, another Levi Matthew, and even other fishers of men. Jesus is calling *you* today! Make Him the Lord of your desires. This is the chance of your lifetime. What will your answer be to Jesus? If you accept His call, tell Him today: “Lord, count on me!”

REACT

Sometimes saying “Count on me!” sounds so easy since it’s the most honorable response we could give to Jesus, but what might you guess are some of the obstacles, fears, and hesitations that these Bible characters must have experienced before, during, and after their response?

Tuesday
July 19

Making God's Dreams Come True

TESTIMONY

Rom. 12:1, 2

"Pure religion has to do with the will. The will is the governing power in the nature of man, bringing all the other faculties under its sway. The will is not the taste or the inclination, but it is the deciding power, which works in the children of men unto obedience to God, or unto disobedience."¹

"It is for you to yield up your will to the will of Jesus Christ; and as you do this, God will immediately take possession, and work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. Your whole nature will then be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; and even your thoughts will be subject to Him."²

Ever since I accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord of my life, I have thought that if I strive to make God's dreams a reality in my life I will truly live according to God's pur-

poses. I believe that what matters is not only to strive to be pure and just but to allow purity and justice to dwell in my heart, for God, as opposed to what I may think,

A man asked me for a ride.

does not want me to become perfect by myself; He wants to make me perfect.

I have been working as a literature evangelist for 16 years, and one of the great challenges for the Holy Spirit in my life and work is my constant struggle with my will. As Paul said, "The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:17, NIV).

One morning I planned my work route, and then I prayed and left home convinced that it was all God intended for me on that day. But a man asked me for a ride, and through this man God changed the direction of my work.

To help the man, I ended up taking him to a city about 25 miles from where I was planning to work, so I visited two people in nearby suburbs.

In those two visits, by God's grace I was able to sell 16 subscriptions to our Christian magazines, schedule two talks in rural schools, and enroll three people in Bible courses. These people lived in a rural setting and would never have had any contact with the Adventist message had God not sent that man to divert me. I returned home very happy that afternoon, convinced that I had fulfilled God's desire. The man I gave a ride to also decided to study the Bible.

Through sincere communion with God it is possible to experience "his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2, NIV).

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 151.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Jump to Freedom

HOW-TO

Ps. 37:5; Prov. 18:24; 1 Pet. 5:7

In 1988 I was working as a Bible instructor in the city of Florianopolis, Brazil. Among those I met in that city was the Braga family, who had a four-year-old boy named Jonah. Sometimes his parents would let him go with me for a walk at the seashore, usually close to sunset. At the beach there was a place where people played volleyball, and one afternoon I placed Jonah up on a referee's platform.

As I looked at him, I asked, "Jonah, do you believe that if you jump I can catch you?" Without answering my question or thinking twice, he just jumped. Though I wasn't prepared, fortunately I was able to catch him. He looked at me and laughed as if nothing had happened. Then I asked him: "Why are you laughing? You almost got yourself hurt!"

In his unassuming way, he simply said, "Didn't you ask whether I believed you could catch me? That's why I jumped!" Without knowing, Jonah had taught me a great lesson.

We live in a world in which we are isolated precariously because of sin. Jesus comes to us and asks: "Do you

dare to jump? Do you trust I will protect you in My arms?" In other words: "Are you willing to subject your desires to My will?"

To respond affirmatively to this question, we must basically understand three concepts:

Without answering my
question or thinking twice,
he just jumped.

Friendship (Prov. 18:24). To have a friend, someone who can listen to us, someone who serves as a good companion, is certainly the best thing there is. We all have a good friend, but in order to jump to freedom, we need to have the One who is always with us, every day: Jesus.

Trust (Ps. 37:5). What is trust? According to this text, trust comes when you give something to someone. You give something of value to someone only when you trust that person. This is an important step for any relationship to work well, be it human or spiritual. Considering our carnal desires and our will, if we trust in Jesus, we will submit our desires and our will to Him, trusting that He will transform us.

Protection (1 Pet. 5:7). In talking about the importance of humility, Peter closes his considerations by giving us the assurance that Jesus cares for us. Isn't that wonderful? Only in Jesus will we be fully happy, even though His will may not be as we would like. He is the only One who knows what is best for us, and above all, we can cast upon Him *all* our care. Would you need a better promise?

OPINION

Ps. 37:5

"Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5, NKJV).

Have you ever imagined what the history of this world would be if all the people from the past had said No to God? If Noah had refused to build the ark? If Moses had declined God's call to leadership? If Jonah had ultimately refused to go to Nineveh? If the disciples had rejected Jesus' call to preach? If Jesus had refused to die for this world?

And what if young Ellen Harmon had not heeded the voice of the Holy Spirit? How would we have so much literature and so much counsel? What if young James

**What if young Ellen Harmon
had not heeded the voice of
the Holy Spirit?**

White had not given all he had to print the first Adventist periodical—*The Present Truth*—in 1848? Would we have so many publishing houses printing magazines, books, and papers throughout the world

in so many different languages? What if in 1868 Goodloe Bell had not accepted God's invitation and begun a class with 12 earliteens in the attic of his own home? Would the Adventist education that we have today, so complete and reliable, be among the major educational systems in the world?

This incredible multiplication occurred only because all of them accepted God's desire in their lives and said Yes to our Lord.

The Bible is full of examples of young people who allowed God to fulfill His desire in their lives. This week we have considered examples of young adults in our day who did the same.

If we give ourselves completely to our Lord and Sustainer, He will perform miracles and transformations in our lives, and we will become living witnesses of what He wants us to be on earth, taking God's message to others. Thus we will be preparing ourselves for life in the heavenly mansions. Isn't this God's greatest desire?

REACT

1. Psalm 37:5 promises that if we commit our way to the Lord and trust, then He will bring it to pass. Sounds good, but don't there seem to be many people trusting God to do things that never happen? How can this verse be understood?

2. If you had to name one thing that God might want you to be saying "Yes, Lord" in response to something He is asking you, what would it be?

Give It Up

EXPLORATION

Pss. 37:4; 40:8; Mark 14:36

CONCLUDE

Most Christians will tell you they definitely want to do God's will. But putting this desire into practice is harder than it sounds. Our flesh is weak, and our human nature wants desperately to do things the easy way. We also want to understand exactly what God is doing, instead of following in faith. Submitting the will to God is something that a Christian has to do every day. It does get easier—with practice. Follow God's leading and He will bless. Soon you will discover that your desires have turned into His desires!

CONSIDER

- Trying a short fast to get in tune with God's will. Fasts can include not eating desserts, turning off the TV, not buying unnecessary things, giving up fast food for a week, etc.
- Making a picture or collage of your desires. Put them in the form of the stones of an altar and show how you sacrifice your will on the altar.
- Playing a blindfold trust game with a partner. One of you wears a blindfold while the other gives oral instructions to get you through an obstacle course or around the house.
- Asking God to wake you up for worship time in the morning. Have Him help you make that a priority, and when you wake up—get up!
- Doing something you don't want to do for someone today. Put your desires aside and take your sick friend a new book, water your vacationing neighbor's garden, or spend some time at the nursing home.
- Listing your desires for your life. Next, list what you think God's desires are for your life.
- Writing the end of this story: Imagine what would have happened if Moses hadn't obeyed God at the burning bush. Write how you think God would have saved the Israelites from slavery.

CONNECT

Judges 6–8.

The Desire of Ages, chaps. 34, 73.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Lord of our Speech



**"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt,
that you may know how you ought to answer each one"
(Col. 4:6, NKJV).**

Be Careful Little Mouth . . .

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 4:29

The tongue—the only instrument of the body that holds the power of both death and life. As children we sang the line “Be careful little mouth what you say.” However, I wonder how many of us really took the time back then, or even now, to ponder the deep significance of what we were singing.

The Bible has much admonition for us about the use of our speech. In James 4:11 we are told to speak not evil of one another. Ephesians 4:29 says to let no corrupt communication proceed out of the mouth, but that which is good. The Good Book even advises us about when to speak and how to do it. Ecclesiastes 3:7 tells us that there is a time to keep silent and a time to speak. Psalm 100:4 says to enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His court with praise. In Proverbs 15:1 we are told that a soft answer turns away wrath, and in Matthew 5:44 we are even called to bless them that curse us and persecute us. It is therefore such a pity that too often we yield to temptation and allow our tongues to become, as Solomon says, “like the piercings of a sword” (Prov. 12:18, KJV). I often wonder whether the dumb, if blessed with the ability to speak, would use it more wisely.

His finances and emotional relationship were unstable.

The story is told of a young man who was deeply depressed. He had failed a major examination, and this was threatening his position on the football team. His finances and emotional relationship were unstable, and it seemed as though, when he needed them most, his friends could not be found. They were too caught up in their own affairs. He stood on the verge of suicide. While he was walking home one evening, a despondent look on his face, a passerby stopped him and said, “Son, whatever it is, it will get better. Remember that the airplane always takes off against the wind.” It took 18 words to lift him out of his gutter. Beautiful words. Wonderful words. Words of comfort and encouragement. Words of life.

This week should be a week of change, a week when we put away lying, gossip, slander, obscene language, and other such abuses of communication and, in their stead, speak words of life. As we study how we can make God Lord of our speech, let the prayer of our hearts be “Lord, take my lips and let them be filled with messages from Thee.”

On Languages and Dialects

LOGOS

Psalms 9; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:1–5; Eph. 4:15, 29; Col. 4:6; James 3:5–13; 4:11

Different countries speak different dialects and languages. By our speech in the Caribbean one can conclude whether a person is from a Caribbean island such as Trinidad and Tobago or Jamaica, and by extension in the world today our language and attitude can say whether we were from Europe, Australia, or Africa. Research shows that speech is a verbal means by which the speaker articulates the thoughts and images in his or her mind.

If our speech expresses our thoughts, we become what we say. “As he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7, NKJV). This is probably why the gospel writers stress our speech so much.

Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (NKJV). We are living

We become what we say.

in perilous times, and prophecy is fast fulfilling. Christ is even at the door. How should this affect my speech as a Christian? The cry “Maranatha” should be upon our lips and in our hearts, the song of Zion as we anticipate His return. Excitement should fill our very being—knowing our Master is to make His glorious manifestation. This should put us in a mood of thanksgiving to God the Father.

At this moment God is calling His people to wholehearted service. Our words—and by extension our lives—should be a manifestation of Christ’s grace. Total surrender can transform a person’s life, and this should be our testimony. A wise man once told me that when Jesus is at the center of your life, you worship; and when He is not, you worry. Is Jesus at the center of your life?

“Think on these things.”

In 1947 in Texas the Federal Bureau of Investigation blamed a cigarette for igniting an ammonium nitrate explosion causing the worst industrial disaster ever. The death toll was 600, and 380 more were hospitalized. This explosion damaged more than 90 percent of the city’s buildings at a cost of more than four billion U.S. dollars.

Could something so small and seemingly insignificant as a cigarette cause the death of so many? Could the lives of so many be turned upside down because of one person’s careless, insensitive act? The answer to these questions is Yes.

James, a man called by God, writes freely out of the fullness of his heart, touching subjects as they are impressed upon his mind by the Holy Spirit. James urges his fellow members to apply to their lives what they have studied and heard. He

then informs them that this will result in meekness, impartiality to rich or poor, and genuine faith. A proper understanding will give them the goal of Christlikeness. It will give an urgency to the necessity for control over hasty, ill-advised speech.

Have you ever considered how a small fire set ablaze a great forest? In France in 1999 a cigarette thrown from a moving car ignited Mont Blanc Tunnel, causing the death of 39 persons and a billion dollars in losses. All that could be said of the destructive power of a small flame can be compared to the potential power of the tongue. Church members are to avoid not just destructive speech but also fanning destructive sparks through negative speech (gossiping, lying, etc.). The tongue is a dangerous instrument, and as such, to the body, it's a world of wickedness. The evil-speaking tongue has the power to stain. The implication is that by the irresponsible speech of errant teachers, the whole church is stained. This could be compared to the Word of Christ that "'what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man'" (Matt. 15:11, NKJV). The magnitude of the tongue's destructive power is that the course of an individual's life or that of the church is often set aflame by angry or ill-chosen words.

James draws an analogy of four classes of animals that we control with our tongue, yet we can't contain our tongue. It is unruly and unsteady, and when not controlled by God, human thoughts and speech function as instruments of evil and are considered a deadly poison.

Is there hope?

Indeed no mere human being can tame the tongue, but we serve a God whose name is Emanuel ("God with us"). Through His sacrifice on the cross and the power of the Holy Spirit, the power to tame the tongue is available. We were created in the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). Even though the image has been tarnished by sin, God has made provision for us to be restored. Don't be like some of the members of James's day—cursing men while blessing God. If you are like that, God still regards you with affection, and He is calling you out of darkness into sweet fellowship and the marvelous grace of Christ Jesus. The Lord will work for us if we submit our wills to Him. As the fountain is the source, even so the heart is the source of words. Therefore be careful what you feed your mind. As with a computer: "Garbage in, garbage out." James implies that your speech marks whether or not you're a genuine Christian. He is not implying that a converted person will never lapse into sin, but what he shows is that a truly converted person will not practice engaging in un-Christlike speech. James shows clearly that it is impossible to have genuine worship come from an evil heart.

TESTIMONY

Psalms 9

It is extremely essential to lift the Lord up in our speech. However, is this as easy as it sounds? "David's prayer was, 'Make me to understand the way of Thy precepts; so shall I talk of Thy wonderful works.'"¹

We need to come to the realization that we have a responsibility—the responsibility of searching His Word and the responsibility of seeking a relationship with Him. If not, it will be as the saying goes: "Garbage in, garbage out."

"If the minds of our youth, as well as those of more mature age, were directed aright when associated together, their conversation would be upon exalted themes. When the mind is pure, and the thoughts elevated by the truth of God, the words will be of the same character, 'like apples of gold in pictures of silver.'"²

Gold in pictures of silver! What a remarkable contrast! This matter of speech has to be a very important one. Indeed, for "The power of speech is a talent that

should be diligently cultivated. Of all the gifts we have received from God, none is capable of being a greater blessing than this. With the voice we convince and persuade, with it we offer prayer and praise to God, and

**We have to be trained
in our speech.**

with it we tell others of the Redeemer's love. How important, then, that it be so trained as to be most effective for good."³

So, the underlying constituent is that we have to be trained in our speech. Why must we be so trained? What is the real importance of that? Simply stated, "When Christ is thus revealed in our speech, it will have power in winning souls to Him."⁴

"Wherever we are, we should watch for opportunities of speaking to others of the Saviour. If we follow Christ's example of doing good, hearts will open to us as they did to Him. Not abruptly, but with tact born of divine love, we can tell them of Him who is the 'Chiefest among ten thousand' and the One 'altogether lovely.' Cant. 5:10, 16. This is the very highest work in which we can employ the talent of speech. It was given to us that we might present Christ as the sin-pardoning Saviour."⁵ It was given to us that we might present Him as Jesus Christ, our Lord.

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 427.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 335.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 338.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

"Let the Words of My Mouth . . ."

EVIDENCE

Pss. 19:14; 34:13; Col. 4:6

Growing up, I can remember that my family worship sessions always ended with the Bible verse "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer" (Ps. 19:14, NKJV). It became so much of a custom to me that those words simply rolled off my tongue without my giving thought to their deep content.

Why is it so important that we watch the words from our mouths, and that we "bridle" our tongue (Ps. 39:1, KJV)? Many people do not realize the consequences of their words; they do not understand their effect.

Taking a look from the standpoint of physics, sound is an acoustic wave that results when a vibrating source (such as the human vocal cords) disturbs an elastic medium (such as air). When a sound wave reaches a

Many people do not realize the consequences of their words.

listener's eardrum, the vibrations are transmitted to the inner ear (cochlea), where mechanical displacements are converted to neural pulses that are sent to the brain. The result is the sensation of sound. The sound wave that is generated is a means of energy transfer, and, from the law of conservation of energy, it can, therefore, never be destroyed.

I once heard someone say that the words that we speak never leave the atmosphere—that they never totally vanish. The validity of this statement is not certain, as the law of conservation of energy also states that although the energy is not destroyed, it can change form. However, it does make you stop and think.

It may therefore be wise to "let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:6, NKJV).

Peter also recognized the implications of his speech. In Matthew 26:69–75, we read of his denial of Christ. Peter refused three times to acknowledge his association with Jesus saying, "I do not know the Man!" (verse 72, NKJV). But because of his speech, he was easily identified as a disciple of Christ (verse 73). His speech *betrayed* him. Peter learned the hard way of the power of the spoken word.

The next time you find yourself making a joke or a sarcastic remark about someone, think about how your words may affect that person. "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile" (Ps. 34:13, NKJV).

If we are to see a change and to make Christ the Lord of our speech, we must allow Him to create in us a clean heart and renew His spirit in us, so that whatever we do or whatever we say will all be to His glory.

How to Let Christ Rule

HOW-TO

Ps. 34:1–3; Titus 2:6–8; James 1:19

To allow Christ to be Lord of our speech is to understand accountability for our words. We will want every syllable to honor Him and to be a blessing to others. God is glorified when we praise Him. Lives are blessed when we tell of His goodness and His power to save.

For Christ to rule our speech, He must first rule our minds. Surrendering to Him is crucial, as is thinking on His Word and peerless love. Because our speech is the utterance of our thoughts (Luke 6:45), our words will be sound and our tongues laden with love.

Christ's rule of our tongues will be evidenced in each situation. Here are some everyday ways we may use our words to honor Him and bless others.

1. Tell of His goodness. How do you respond when someone asks, "How are you?" Seize the opportunity to praise the Lord! Before you mumble "cool" or "fine," pause to think about the goodness and faithfulness of your Father and of the hope

How do you respond
when someone asks,
"How are you?"

that you have in Him. Before you know it, you'll be enthusiastically saying something like, "I'm great. God is good to me" or "I'm tired, but God gives me hope and joy." We are to tell of the unfailing goodness of God in every situation (Ps. 34:1–3). Not only

do we glorify Him, but we gladden hearts, including our own.

2. Encourage and compliment others. Train your attention. Notice others around you. Meet their needs for hope and affirmation with your powerful gift of speech. It is worthwhile to memorize promises in the Bible to share with others who are discouraged. Build up others with your words and let your criticism be constructive and tactful. As someone has said, "Those who are lifting the world upward and onward are those who encourage more than criticize."

3. Think. Don't be wondering why you said what you did. Think about your words before they escape your lips: *Am I overreacting? Will my words offend others? Is my reasoning sound? Is my opinion based on biblical principles?* Let us be slow to speak (James 1:19) and blameless when we do (Titus 2:6–8).

REACT

Is it easier to say a kind word to a stranger than to a family member? Explain your answer.

Praise the Lord

OPINION

James 3:9, 10

Jesus intended for our speech to be used as a blessing to Him and to others.

Two weeks ago I lost a project that was worth 20 percent of my final mark. I searched for it for four days without success. Then, when I was at my lowest point, the Lord used the words of a total stranger to give me hope and encouragement. I remembered being at the bank the last time that I had it, so I went there in search of it. Although I did not find it there, I found peace, hope, and encouragement in these words of the attendant: "Don't worry! God will help you!"

I felt as if the 10-kilogram load that I had been carrying around was removed. I felt at peace for the first time in four days. Miraculously I received a call from home that same day, telling me that they had found the project. I thank the Lord for giving the attendant words of peace and comfort to speak to me so that my troubled soul could find rest in Jesus Christ.

By testifying of His goodness—what He has done for us and what He will do for others—we are indeed using our speech to bless others by giving them hope and encouragement as they go through this rugged pathway. We all need a little encouragement sometimes. Ephesians 4:29 states: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (NKJV).

**I felt at peace for the first
time in four days.**

Clearly, gossiping, lying, and backbiting have no place in our lives as Christians. We cannot continue to offer blessings to God while we curse others (James 3:9, 10). "There are men who are ever talking and gossiping and bearing false witness, who sow the seeds of discord and engender strife. Heaven looks upon this class as Satan's most efficient servants."* The Lord of our speech wants us to use this gift to testify of His goodness to us and to lift up others. So, instead of cursing others, bless the Lord—lift up His name.

As we allow Jesus Christ to be the Lord of our speech, our prayer should be: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad" (Ps. 34:1, 2, NKJV).

* *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 607.

Transforming the Tongue

EXPLORATION

Ps. 37:29–31; James 1:26

CONCLUDE

Our Creator gave us two eyes, two ears, and only one mouth. Of those five body parts, our mouth has the power to do the most damage to others. Because words follow thoughts that generate feelings that result in behavior, even the tone and attitude behind our words need to be kept in check at all times. It is essential that we ask Christ every morning to be the Guardian of our minds. We need to zip up our mouth unless we have something helpful, healing, or positive to say. Before we get out of bed, we can recite aloud or silently the following: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer” (Ps. 19:14, NKJV).

CONSIDER

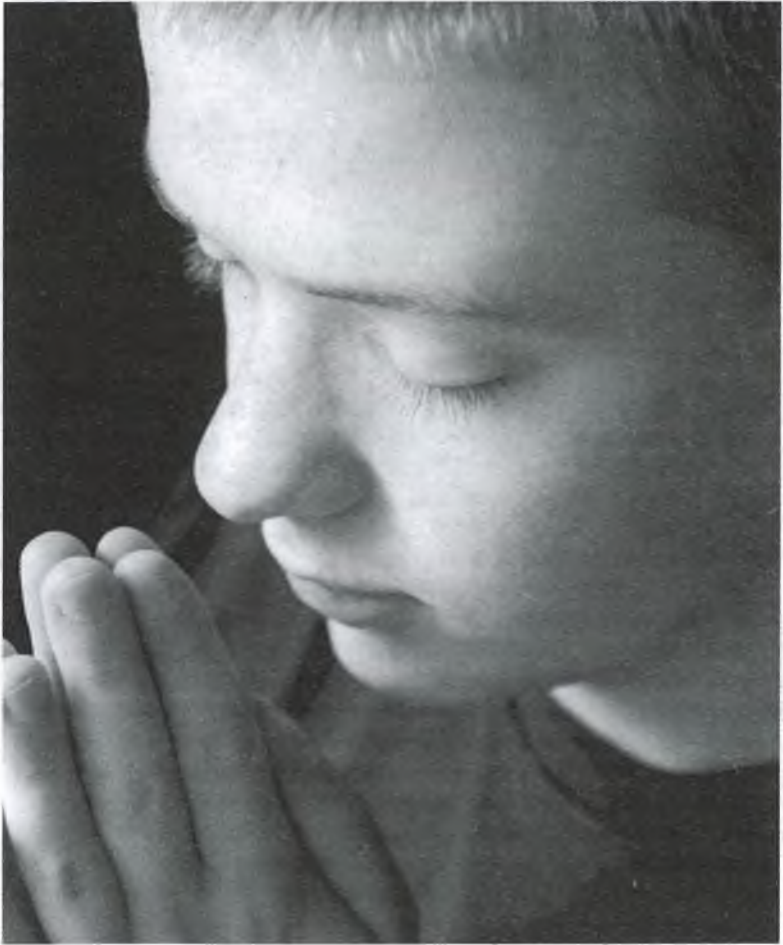
- Choosing several metaphors in the lesson to illustrate the word-picture in a doodle or drawing (e.g., feed the mind; bridle the tongue; garbage in, garbage out; etc.).
- Finding some scriptural texts in which the characters use words that are harmful to others. Then find texts in which characters use words that are healing and helpful to others. Think about the outcome of each scenario and its implication for us today.
- Sharing with a friend an experience you have had in which the words that someone has spoken to you have had a healing impact on your life.
- Evaluating a prime-time television program. Before the show begins, get a pen and piece of paper and make two columns. Label one column “Positive Impact” and the other “Negative Impact.” Write the following words in the positive column: compliment, praise, terms of endearment, encouragement. In the negative impact column write: criticism, gender-bashing, racial slurs, swearing. As you watch the show and the commercials, place a check mark beside the words that fall into the above categories. At the conclusion of the hour, determine which column has the most check marks and what implication that has on viewers’ minds. What is the opposite of “garbage in, garbage out”?

CONNECT

The Adventist Home, chap. 71.

Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, James 3.

Lord of our Prayers



“ ‘Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son’ ” (John 14:13, NKJV).

"A Little Child Shall Lead Them"

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 53:12

It was bedtime. A little girl rose from bed, knelt down, folded her hands together, closed her eyes, and said in a slow, sing-song manner:

Dear Jesus,
Thank You for all the blessings, for the things You gave me.
Thank You for the angels.
Thank You for keeping me healthy.
Thank You for the food we ate at dinner. It was my favorite.
Thank You for the new doll my uncle gave me.
Please bless Papa; bless Mama; bless my brother;
bless Grandpa; bless Grandma;
bless my uncles; my aunties;
bless my cousins;
bless . . .

And so went the long roll of all the family members, relatives from mother's and father's side whom she got to know and remember, and playmates, including the place where each of them stayed. This is the prayer I used to hear from my niece when she was still small. And we, who overheard her prayer, would smile at each other or snicker at every insignificant detail that would be mentioned.

We grown-ups say a prayer very different from that of this child. We sound earnest. We may be amused with the way she prayed, but we probably missed one important thing, that is, what is in the heart of the child. We did not realize that this child possessed something more than what we think it is, that what she has inside went beyond her words in prayer. At a very young age, we can see that she has the sincerity to thank God for the blessings, large or small.

Unselfishness is also manifest in her. She prayed for the people around her, those whom she loves, and those whom she barely knows. Our prayers sound mature, but we tend to be self-focused. We sometimes forget to intercede for others who need it. Our prayers may be perfectly structured, but is that enough? Prayers reflect character. Our character is formed by our habits, which are formed by what we think and do. Jesus gave us an example of living a prayerful life. This thought brings us to our lesson for this week.

As I now think of the prayer, the words we use may be different from that of a child, but it is what is inside that counts. Now that my niece has grown up a bit, we no longer hear how she used to pray. I miss that, but her simple and heartfelt prayer will always be remembered for it has taught me lessons that truly inspire.

Prayer: An Answer to Social Issues

EVIDENCE

James 5:16

As a stranger in a place where I have to conduct my college studies, I am full of doubts about the people I have observed. I feel out of place because I cannot keep in tune with their ways and fashions based on worldly standards. These sociological phenomena made me ask God, "Lord, what is my use in this place? What shall I do now to fulfill the promise I made to be used by You?"

I challenged God, expecting a positive reply. After a few days, God gave me one of the best answers I have ever received from Him. A good friend invited me to join a Christian singing group. I

found the group somewhat different from the usual singing clubs that I had joined before. They dub themselves the *Servi Domini* (Latin for "servants of God"). Members there come

from a wide range of different places and have exciting, unique personalities. But in spite of the diversity, each has one common aim: to serve God, not merely through music, but also through the sharing of God's love through other worthwhile endeavors, like the ministry of healing. I know that God is using this group to help me fulfill my promise of serving Him.

Problems can be conquered depending on how you cope with and manage them. But human beings are prone to be discouraged by the concerns in life. Some of these concerns may become such a burden that it can lead them to quit and think of ceasing their lives. Such a response is miserable and pathetic. That person never happens to find a needed outlet from carrying such a burden too heavy for their emotional baggage. They probably do not trust God, who is the best Solution to every problem, and the Savior is available to anyone calling on His name. Therefore we should give each worry—one by one—to Jesus. Confess your worries to Him through prayer, which is the most viable way to consecrate ourselves with our Lord and Savior. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6, NKJV).

Today's world adds to the burdens we carry. That is why an intimate relationship with our Lord includes a powerful prayer life. The more you practice praying out your cares to God, the more majestic it is to behold how God will handle the things that are impossible for you to do alone.

**An intimate relationship
with our Lord includes a
powerful prayer life.**

Power Up in Prayer!

LOGOS

Isa. 53:12; John 14:12–14; Rom. 8:15, 18, 34; Gal. 4:5, 6; Eph. 1:5; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 12:24

We oftentimes associate the name “Lord” with positive notions of respect and merit—a title exclusively accorded to a master, ruler, or sovereign. In the New Testament, the common term for “Lord” is the Greek *kurios*. At times this honorable designation is used in recognition of His deity—as the Creator, as the Omnipotent, as God. Hence, to be the lord of a subject means that such a subject must come under the superior authority of its lordship. If Jesus Christ is to be aptly recognized as our personal Savior, he should also be the Lord of one of the most essential components of Christian living: prayer.

All throughout His lifetime of ministry, Jesus lived a life of prayer. Learning from the example of our Lord, “it is noteworthy that Christ makes prayer the key to

“Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.”

obtaining the strength to withstand external pressures. . . . The reason why prayer is so essential is because it makes us more receptive and responsive to the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.”

Once the Holy Spirit dwells within, God’s power enables us to do His will in the name of our love for Him. Influences and worldly interests are then subdued to a higher calling of being His true sons and daughters. In fact He is willing to do what we ask in His name that “ ‘the Father may be glorified in the Son’ ” (John 14:13, NKJV).

The Process of Intercession (Isa. 53:12; John 14:12–14; Rom. 8:34)

The expression “intercession” appears infrequently in the Bible, though numerous examples of intercessory prayer may be found. Isaiah 53:12 foretells the intercessory ministry of Christ as He “poured out His soul unto death” and “bore the sin of many” (NKJV). In John 14:12–14, our Lord commands us to do also whatever He will do, meaning it is imperative for us to follow His example “ ‘because I go to My Father’ ” (verse 12, NKJV). All these verses highlight the ever-abundant love of God for us. For us all to be saved is Jesus’ primary concern, and only through the divine process of intercession shall such an aim be realized.

Therefore, Christians should develop the proper perspective in praying. Inasmuch as Jesus longs for every soul to yearn to pray to the Father, we should not focus on ourselves so much that our prayers become a one-direction conversation sounding like a shopping list of wants and requests. Our Lord deserves

more praises “for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Ps.107:8, NKJV). “Christ and Him crucified should be the theme of [our] contemplation.”²

Living Out the Spirit of Adoption (Rom. 8:15, 18; Gal. 4:5, 6; Eph. 1:5)

The spirit of adoption, found only in the New Testament, is used to describe “the process by which the believer in Christ enters into sonship to the Father. . . . [It] emphasizes God’s desire to bestow tender love upon His children.”³

If our lives are in accordance with His Word, He will fulfill every precious promise. Though we are undeserving of His mercy, He will receive us if we offer ourselves to Him, and He will work through us. Adopted as His sons and daughters, we just need to call on His name because He is more than willing to answer our calls. We are to be regarded as heirs of heaven through the privilege of prayer if we feel the need for help and faithfully believe in the promise that we shall receive what we humbly ask of God. Our prayers will be duly answered by the Lord who is enlightened to know all that we need for our spiritual growth.

Our Mediator in Heaven (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 12:24)

A mediator is a third party who reconciles two parties by bringing both to an agreement. Were it not for an agent to channel our human frailties, our plight would be hopeless. Salvation, moreover, becomes a lofty, unreachable aspiration. Fortunately, Jesus is set forth as the “one Mediator between God and men” (1 Tim. 2:5, NKJV). “Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.”⁴ We see that the gates of heaven are opened to receive our thanksgiving, adulation, and supplication because we have a Mediator, the Lord of prayers, to stand in between the Almighty and us.

We have seen that Jesus Christ serves as the Lord of our lives, particularly in the important aspect of prayer. Mere mental assent to that declaration, however, is void if our lives do not reflect its substance. Only by following His example of consistent prayer, continuously acknowledging Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and orienting our prayers to the divine will of God, can our lives be truly touched by the life-altering impact of prayer. In the field of astronautics, to “power up” means to increase the energy level of a spacecraft. Likewise, let us embrace the habit of earnest, sincere prayer, revitalize our spiritual energies with God’s supply, and power up our Christian lives!

1. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*, p. 368.

2. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 103, 104.

3. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 19.

4. *Steps to Christ*, p.107.

TESTIMONY

2 Kings 19:19; John 16:23, 24

Have you ever wondered why God answers prayers? Is it because He is a God of love and He loves you so much? Is it because you have been good and did nothing wrong so that you deserve a reward? Or is it really because you keep asking in faith? If you believe in Him and believe hard enough, is God *compelled* to give you what you ask for? Isn't there a promise in the Bible that says if you ask in Jesus' name, you'll have what you ask for? What must you do to get your prayers answered?

Some prayers are always answered with a burning Yes! Again, I said some, not

**Asking in Jesus' name
doesn't mean just hooking
these words onto the end
of your prayers.**

all. Sometimes, in our prayers, we command God as if He is obliged and has no option but to give us what we order Him to do. And if we do not get what we asked for, we grumble. We try to make Him feel guilty by telling Him He's not true to His promise. But who's the boss, anyway?

It is true that the Bible says "Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you" (John 16:23, NKJV). We must first understand, however, what "in My name" really means. In Bible times a name wasn't just a label. Names reflected character. Asking in Jesus' name doesn't mean just hooking these words onto the end of your prayers. It means asking for things Jesus Himself would ask for. It means asking for things that are not in disparity with God's character. It means asking for things that will glorify God.

"We all desire immediate and direct answers to our prayers, and are tempted to become discouraged when the answer is delayed or comes in an unlooked-for form. But God is too wise and good to answer our prayers always at just the time and in just the manner we desire. He will do more and better for us than to accomplish all our wishes.*

If you ask God to answer your prayers for His glory, there's a good chance He will say Yes. After all, He is the Lord of our prayers.

* *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 230.

Fellowship With Our Father

HOW-TO

Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5, 6; Eph. 1:5

Communication is vital for the growth of every relationship. Jesus lived His life on earth in constant communion with His Father in heaven. His life would have been a failure without that connection. Jesus gave us an example that we may also grow in our relationship with God, our Father. We are His children, and He longs to hear our voices through our prayers. Not only that, He wants to be best of friends with us too. It is not enough that we go see Him once a week at church. We need to talk to Him daily and share with Him all our life experiences.

There are many ways to develop a healthier prayer experience. Here are some helpful tips:

1. Have a private time with God. Make sure to allot a portion of your day for a private communion with God in a place where you can be alone with Him (Matt. 6:6). It can be several times a day. Choose a time when you can best concentrate on Him, not when you're already too tired. During this time, prayer can be combined with Bible study in order to have a "two-way conversation."

2. Give thanks. Many think of prayer as a list of requests to the Lord. Some pray only when they have problems and they need God's help. But God seeks our praises and thanksgiving, for He is glorified by them (Ps. 50:23). Let us praise Him for who He is and thank Him for what He has done.

**God answers prayers
according to His will.**

Focusing our thoughts on Him instead of on our problems will greatly benefit us.

3. Pray all day. First Thessalonians 5:17 admonishes us to "pray without ceasing" (KJV). How is that possible? This can be done by conversing with God while going about our daily activities. In this way we will be conscious of God's presence at all times, wherever we are and whatever we do.

4. Remember His promises. They never fail (1 Kings 8:56). God answers prayers according to His will (1 John 5:14, 15). The Bible is full of great promises waiting to be claimed. God never meant them to be broken—they are always certain and present, but it is up to us whether we redeem it or not. Then believe that He hears and will answer our prayers, for He promised, " 'Ask, and it will be given to you' " (Matt. 7:7, NKJV).

REACT

Amidst busy schedules, how can we be sure that we keep focused on God all day? Be specific.

The Prayer of Faith

OPINION

James 5:13–17

A prayer of faith is key to a Christian life. It's a privilege that God has given us. But do you notice sometimes that when you pray, it just becomes a routine? In such a case we may not be thinking of the words that we are uttering—how much more their meaning!

We also forget that prayer is “the breath of the soul.”¹ We can't live without air for five minutes. If we try to live without prayer, we will soon end up spiritually dead. Similarly, not all types of gases can be used for breathing life—there's a specific type of air (oxygen) that is needed by our body so that we can function normally and continue to exist. Like oxygen, there is also a certain quality in prayer that a Christian spirit can normally live with. But when we are not praying sincerely or

If we try to live without prayer, we will soon end up spiritually dead.

confessing our favorite sins, we are actually breathing polluted air. And God may not hear those that are impure. “If we regard iniquity in our hearts, if we cling to any known sin, the Lord will not hear us; but the prayer of the

penitent, contrite soul is always accepted.”² “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16, NIV).

Constant communion with God is needed. Like the exercise of proper breathing, prayer must be habitual. But it shouldn't be repetitious in a sense that we're taking it for granted.

Jesus is the best example of a prayerful Man. He is also the Lord of our prayers. He made prayer a top priority in His life on earth. As busy as His life was, He still communed with God. And because we love Him, we must follow Him. We must commune with God no matter how busy life is.

A Christian encounters many temptations. All we can do is pray and commune with God. When we pray, we should remember that it's a great privilege. Mean every word that you say, and do whatever you promised God that you would do. Remember too that a true prayer of faith is like the air that makes us alive. It's a requirement for survival that you can't live without!

REACT

How will you know if a prayer is not “polluted”? How can you differentiate it from a “quality” prayer?

1. *Gospel Workers*, p. 254.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 95.

Connect With Your Lord

EXPLORATION

John 14:13; James 5:15, 16

CONCLUDE

When Jesus is Lord of our lives, He is also Lord of our prayers. And our Lord delights in connecting intimately with us. By Jesus' power, prayer is so much more than just a time slot of structured sentences and phrases. With Jesus as Lord, prayer becomes so much more. It is about opening our hearts to our Friend, focusing outside of ourselves and sharing our deepest concerns. Jesus makes prayer powerful, both for ourselves and for those we pray for. Our Lord provides prayer as a privilege and a practical way to participate in our relationship with Him.

CONSIDER

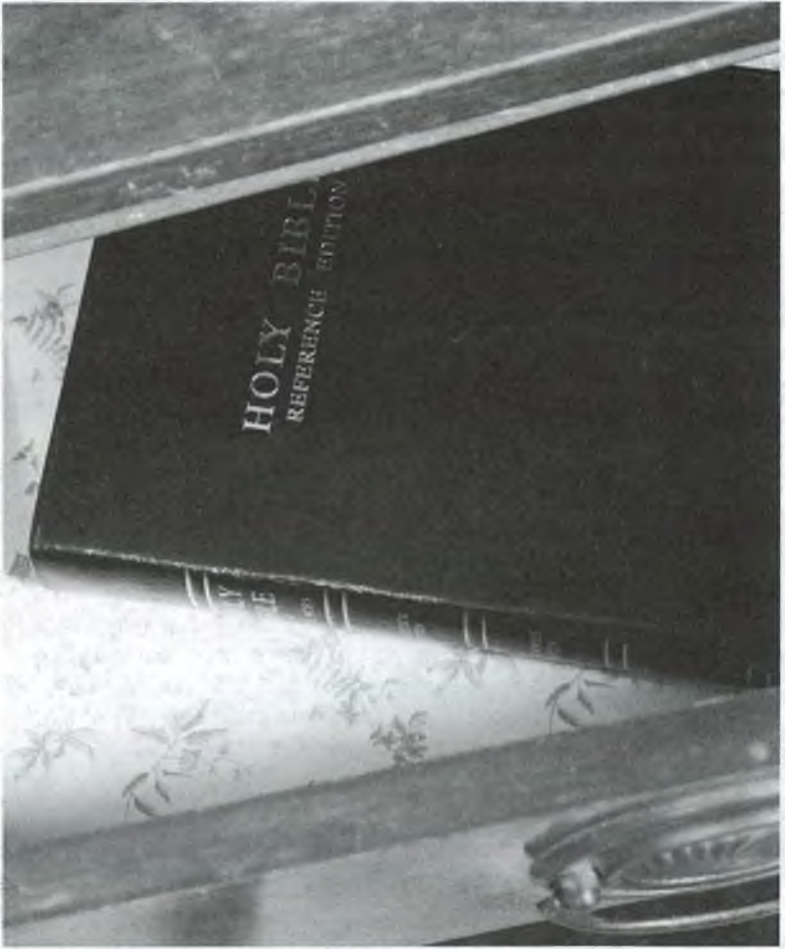
- Listening to Steven Curtis Chapman's song "Let Us Pray" from his *Signs of Life* album. Think about the prayer needs of your loved ones and offer to pray with them about those needs.
- Going on a bushwalk, or hike, and observing the way God answers the prayers of all creatures. Find a secluded place and pray aloud to God.
- Journaling your prayers over a period of one month, going back over them often. Record any answers you have received. Consider how your prayers change over time.
- Participating with friends in a "prayer conversation." Keep to one topic at a time, don't try to say everything at once but join in conversation as many times as you like, and allow natural periods of silence. Allow the conversation to flow as any other would and end when it's naturally over.
- Collecting pictures from magazines that represent people/things you pray about. Make a collage and surrender it all to God in prayer.
- Constructing a model of the Old Testament sanctuary, paying particular attention to the elements that symbolized prayer.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chap. 11; *Early Writings*, chap. 18.

Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, chap. 5; Thomas A. Davis, *How to Be a Victorious Christian*, chap. 13.

Lord of our Relationships



"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2, NKJV)

Is He Listening?

INTRODUCTION

1 Pet. 5:7

Jane grew up in a Christian home. Yes, they had their struggles, but she never doubted her parents' love for her. She remembered the times they would sit around the fireplace and sing songs to God, read Bible stories, and pray. Those were fond memories.

She was given more than she could have asked for. Her parents were successful in their careers, and she attended only the finest schools. From an outsider's view she appeared to have it all, yet Jane felt empty on the inside. Desperate to fill this void, she began to experiment with drugs and illicit relationships.

Jane tried several times to quit her destructive behavior and have a "conversion experience." Then she would eventually fall back into old familiar patterns, which gave her only temporary relief from feeling empty and confused.

One morning Jane awoke to find herself alone in a hotel room. She had no idea how she had gotten there, and this really scared her. In desperation she cried out, "Where are You, God? Are You listening?" There was silence.

Jane wondered how she had drifted so far away from the God she had known as a young girl. There had been a time when she felt close to God. She had loved spending time reading His Word and talking with Him.

She slowly got up from the bed and started to kneel down beside it. As she was kneeling, her clothing caught the drawer knob by the bed. She looked down and her eyes rested on the Bible that was lying in the drawer. As she stared down through the tears in her eyes, an overwhelming peace came upon her. In that moment she knew that God was listening.

God longs to have an intimate relationship with us where we can bring our joys and burdens to Him. First Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (NIV).

The question we could ask ourselves is: "Are we listening to God?"

**She had no idea how she
had gotten there, and this
really scared her.**

Lord of Our Relationships

LOGOS

Exod. 20:14, 17; Psalms 127; 128; Luke 6:27, 28; Acts 2:41–47; Eph. 4:32; 5:25; 6:1–4

God is a Person of relationships (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1; 2 Cor. 13:14).

Before the creation of human beings, before the creation of earth, and even before the creation of the angels, God lived in relationship. Three co-eternal Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—lived in perfect relationship with one another. God's very essence is relationships, and we use the word "love" to describe that essence (1 John 4:8).

The circle of relationships was multiplied as God began to create. Love is the foundation of creation because the impulse to multiply relationships lies at the heart of the creative instinct. Though love was the foundation for creating all persons and things, including inani-

God's essence is relationship characterized by love.

mate objects like the sand and the sea, it is best experienced within the context of a created being who has the capacity to return love to the Creator.

God has a special relationship with sinners (Gen. 3:1–13; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

At Creation human beings enjoyed a perfect, unimpeded relationship with God. When Eve and Adam chose to disobey God and follow their own wisdom, they introduced the first bitter strains of isolation to planet Earth. The first isolation was separation from God. When God pursued Eve and Adam, the fruits of that initial isolation were further exposed—isolation from each other. Their shame led them to blame, and a new emotional and spiritual distance from each other.

We should not forget, however, that God's essence is relationship characterized by love. Despite their sin, God did not turn His back on Eve and Adam but instead chose to pursue an ongoing relationship with them. In Romans 8:35–39 Paul asks a rhetorical question about who or what can separate us from God's love. The answer is "nothing." Like the hub of a bicycle tire, He is at the center of all relationships, and the closer we come to Him as the center, the closer we are to one another.

A perfect God is the *only* hope for our imperfect relationships (1 John 3:14–23; 4:7–21).

The isolation created by sin's essence, selfishness, reached a crisis point when

Cain killed Abel. Although the expulsion from the Garden of Eden must have been a traumatic experience, human beings had not yet experienced the natural result of isolation: death. When Abel died, human beings faced the ultimate horror of eternal separation for the first time. The reflection of this is seen today in every divorce, every murder, every racial slur, every unkind word, and every self-centered act.

Amazingly—or perhaps mercifully—humans live with a certain degree of naiveté regarding relationships. Although increasing numbers have succumbed to pessimism about marriage, choosing instead to engage in sexual intercourse outside of marriage, millions more marry every year in the hope that they have found that perfect person who will fulfill all their dreams. In hospitals around the world, prospective parents await the births of their children with high hopes that this new relationship will bring them fulfillment and an undying love relationship. Years, sometimes only months, later many of those hopes and dreams lie shattered.

Lack of marital communication, self-centered expectations imposed on unwilling spouses, and sometimes extramarital affairs are only a few of the reminders that isolation and separation still fight viciously against relationship. What greater pain can a parent know than to have a child sever the relationship that once brought so much promise? Again, our self-centeredness has taken aim at relationship.

Are we then hopeless? Are the inhabitants of planet Earth doomed to live lonely, isolated lives, devoid of meaningful relationships, haunted by a mirage of connectedness that has no basis in reality? Without Christ, yes. With Christ, no.

Into a world of broken relationships where people vainly struggle to experience connection with others, God sent His Son. If the problem had been to improve communication techniques, He might have sent an angel. If the solution were as easy as finding the compatibility of personality profiles, He might have authored a video-seminar complete with study guide. The problem, however, was our self-centeredness, our sin. In order to provide for us the option of choosing Him as the Lord of our relationships, He first had to free us from the tyranny of our self-centeredness. Jesus' agonizing crucifixion was the purchase price of that freedom.

God sets us free to choose relationships (Gal. 2:21).

The prison of self-centeredness and isolation has been opened by the grace God exhibited on the cross. Those who daily accept God's reconciling grace are drawn to Him like iron filings to a magnet. Our self-centeredness is crucified with Christ but we now live our lives in the love that is the foundation of all relationships. John is so certain of the connection between being a Christian (prison-released) and loving (being relationship-focused) that he plainly states that love is the litmus test of faith. One cannot claim to love God and be indifferent to the needs of fellow human beings. So that we might enjoy intimacy to the greatest degree, God that as we allow Him to be the Lord of our relationships, we may experience meaningful intimacy with Him and deeper relationships with other human beings.

God's Instructions for Our Relationships

TESTIMONY

Eph. 5:25

Many today feel a lack of godly instruction when it comes to boundaries within relationships. Did you know that there are even boundaries set between man and wife? "Yet because they are married they think they commit no sin."¹

"Passion of just as base a quality may be found in the marriage relation as outside of it. . . . It is not pure love which actuates a man to make his wife an instrument to minister to his lust. . . . How few men show their love in the manner specified by the apostle."²

No earthly relationship should ever be allowed to take priority over our relationship with Jesus Christ. Not everyone grasps this: "They have united themselves in

**"Because they are married they
think they commit no sin."**

marriage to the object of their choice, and therefore reason that marriage sanctifies the indulgence of the baser passions. Even men and women

professing godliness give loose rein to their lustful passions, and have no thought that God holds them accountable for the expenditure of vital energy, which weakens their hold on life and enervates the entire system."³

The claims of God are paramount even to the ties of human relationship. No earthly attraction should turn our feet from the path in which He bids us walk."⁴

Today we are called to follow His example. "Shall a wife feel bound to yield implicitly to the demands of her husband, when she sees that nothing but base passions control him? . . . She should, in a tender, kind manner, remind him that God has the first and highest claim upon her entire being, and that she cannot disregard this claim, for she will be held accountable in the great day of God. 'What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.' "⁵

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 473.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 472.

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

5. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 475, 476.

The Answer Is Christ

EVIDENCE

Eph. 5:25

While Jesus was here on earth, He demonstrated to us how we should live our lives. This was one of His main objectives. Christ taught how to love, to resist temptation, and to have stronger faith, and He showed us that He is the true Lord of relationships.

In Ephesians 5:25, Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (NIV). Here Paul uses Christ as the example for an ideal, true relationship. The deepest, most intimate relationship that two humans can share is the relationship between a husband and a wife. So this text

applies not only to a marriage relationship but also to any lesser relationship. We could plug in any two people here and this text would still hold true: mothers,

love your daughters; sisters, love your brothers; friends, love your neighbors. Christ loved every one of us and didn't give Himself up just for married couples, but for everyone. This text is the backbone for all relationships, because it centers on Christ.

This verse can alone prove that Christ is truly Lord of our relationships. When Jesus was alive, He told us that His commandment was to love one another, as He loved us, and that the greatest love was to die for a friend (John 15:12, 13). This points directly to Ephesians 5:25. We are to love our neighbor, the person sitting next to us at church, in class, or at work. Why? For one reason: because Jesus loved us first. It doesn't end there; He commands us to be willing to die for one another. Jesus not only has told us how to interact and have relationships with one another but is in one with us right now. The relationship that He has with us is unceasing, unlimited, and forgiving. His willingness to die for me and all people proves that He is the Lord of our relationships.

The deepest, most intimate relationship that two humans can share is the relationship between a husband and a wife.

REACT

Two homosexual partners, avowed followers of God, claim that Jesus' example of self-sacrificing love is the foundation of their marital relationship. How would you go about explaining to them that Jesus is not the foundation of their relationship?

How to Survive the Singles Scene

HOW-TO

Prov. 3:5; 4:23; Phil. 4:13

It's hard being single these days. When holidays like Valentine's Day roll around, one often gets the incurable urge to dress in black. This type of behavior should be avoided—not because it tends to label one with a poor reputation, but because hopeless romantics can at least be hopeful!

That's right; there is a cure for your lovesick heart! No more gagging at sappy chic-flicks; no more perusing the personal ads in the local paper (does anybody *really* do this?); no more (*considering*) signing up for those cheesy (not to mention annoying) Web sites for singles!

Hopeless romantics can at least be hopeful!

"But how is this possible?" you ask achingly. "I'm a lost cause!" Actually, you're not; but if you keep finding yourself face to face with mirrors that constantly

declare, "My, what an ugly little monkey you are," then contemplate these pointers:

1. Get a life! Stop worrying about when "the right one" is going to come along and get out there and do something useful! Go back to school (diplomas are good things), volunteer at the local animal shelter (if you don't like animals, try the hospital), take up a new hobby (I recommend rock climbing), write letters to government (pick a cause, any cause).

2. Find a mantra. Read some great books like the Bible, *The Unspoken Rules of Love* by Joel Brooks and Michelle McKinney Hammond, or *Why I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris; then underline a passage you really like and post it where you can see it every day. Psalm 139:14 is a classic. Repeat your mantra over and over again, and pretty soon you'll start to realize how awesome you really are! Once you see it, others will too.

3. Pray, praise, and prepare. God really *does* care about your happiness. After all, He loves you more than anyone, right? Obviously He has your best interests at the very center of His heart. As such, He will do whatever He thinks is necessary to help you find or be found by "the right one." So, knowing He is competent to finish what He started the moment you were born (Ps. 22:9, 10; Phil. 1:6), your job is to trust Him, communicate daily with Him, and prepare yourself for when you finally do meet the love of your life. Ask yourself: What do I want in my future spouse? Whatever you desire, strive—with God's help—to develop those qualities in yourself. Soon you'll be leading such a satisfying life that you won't notice you don't have someone to share it with until he or she is already sharing it!

Soda Pop and Relationships

OPINION

Matt. 25:31–46; Gal. 6:2

It is essential that human beings form relationships. Some we are born into, others we establish during the course of our lifetime, but all of these relationships impact our life, be it large or small.

James Robert Kennedy was different from the students who attended T. L. Hanna High School in Andersen, South Carolina, yet something made him walk past the school each day—in particular, the football field. “Radio,” his nickname due to an ever-present handheld radio, suffers from an unknown genetic disorder that originally separated him from society—until that fateful day in 1964 when Coach Harold Jones noticed Radio mimicking football practice at one side of the field.

So began an important relationship in Radio’s life, one that gave him a job as team manager, which he willingly performs both to his and the team’s delight. It’s a relationship in which his health is watched and needed medical attention is paid for. It’s a relationship in which someone on the fringe has become an

**This could have occurred only
because someone cared.**

integral part of society. Radio has been a central part of life at T. L. Hanna as a “perpetual” eleventh-grader—for 40 years!*

This could have occurred only because someone cared enough to form a relationship with one whom others ignored.

Two thousand years ago Someone at the center of it all noticed a world on the fringe, a world that was different from the others, a world that was less fortunate. That Someone put it all aside to form a relationship with us. If, then, Jesus was willing to do this, are we willing to “go and do likewise”? (Luke 10:37, NKJV). Often we do not wish to reach out to someone whom others overlook because they are different. Maybe we are afraid to extend ourselves beyond our comfort zone. Perhaps we feel we cannot make a difference. Jesus says, “I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40, *The Message*). Are you willing to step forth and be like Coach Jones—and Jesus?

REACT

What methods did Jesus use to build relationships with those around Him?

*Gary Smith, “Someone to Lean On,” *Sports Illustrated*, Dec. 16, 1996, p. 78, ff. (The entire article can be found on the Internet at <<http://radio.nateweb.net/>>; *Radio*, a Columbia Picture release, 2003.)

Relationships Are Vital for Us, Others, and the Church

EXPLORATION

Rom. 12:10; 1 John 2:10

CONCLUDE

People have relationships with other people and institutions. Relationships are probably the greatest source of happiness or unhappiness. They are even a factor in a long, healthy life (along with genes, diet, and exercise). There seems to be an innate need to develop positive relationships. What can foster this, and what can inhibit it? How can relationships affect our following Christ and helping others to do the same?

CONSIDER

- Contacting someone you have been intending to contact, but haven't (e.g., a former roommate, neighbor, teacher, etc.).
- Viewing one or two nature films or TV programs that explore the lives of animals that want to be together. Apply what is discussed to human-to-human relationships.
- Role-playing what can be done to develop a relationship with someone whose habits make us uncomfortable, like vulgarity, substance abuse, appearance, etc.
- Viewing the video *House of the Spirits*. Think about the relationships of the central character, Esteban Trueba, to his daughter, wife, and sister. This activity is not suggested as appropriate for the Sabbath.
- Thinking about the way in which basic senses (sight, smell, hearing, and feeling) affect the development and maintenance of a relationship.
- Drawing a picture that illustrates a positive, healthy relationship.
- Looking up "friend" and "brother" in a Bible concordance. In a page or two, summarize the main points that these references make.

CONNECT

Proverbs 18:24; John 13:34.

Lord of our Resources



“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 18:16

Josie came from very humble beginnings: a father who worked very hard to provide for his family, a mother who was very ill and died at an early age. After the death of her mother, Josie's father took to alcohol and neglected his children. They had very little in the way of worldly possessions; however, Josie and her siblings began to work hard toward pulling themselves out of their situation.

Their education was limited due to the fact that they had to work to provide themselves with necessities. Yet Josie never gave up; she found every possible way to continue her education, utilizing every resource available to her. In the process she became a Christian, accepted Christ into her life, and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Josie began reading her Bible, studying God's Word, and attending church regularly. She became involved in worship services and leading out in programs. As

Josie's father took to alcohol and neglected his children.

her skills developed, she was made a leader in many departments of the church. In the meantime she studied diligently in her schoolwork, taking extra classes that

benefited her education. Year after year she involved herself with the work of the church. The more involved she was, the more her skills improved.

She took a job at the church school when she became qualified to work there. She worked tirelessly to make sure her students learned the skills she taught. She was very sensitive and caring, and all who knew her loved her. In addition she won over her brothers and sisters to Jesus. She also took care of her father, doing all she could along with her other siblings to make sure his needs were met.

Josie continued to use her talents for the local church until she moved away to Britain, where she went to further her studies. She continued to serve God there and became very active and involved in the church she attended. Today Josie is still very active and working for Christ.

We all have talents, like Josie. Once we become a member of God's church, we should recognize that we are to be involved and use our talents for God. Many times we are too afraid to be involved and decide that it is more comfortable to sit and let others do the work. By using what talents we have, we are improving ourselves. We are letting God know that we can be entrusted with more, because we are thankful for what He has given us.

Ask God to give you the courage to build upon whatever talent you have and watch God improve and multiply it.

Giving a Gift of Love

EVIDENCE

James 1:17

Everything good in life is a gift from heaven above and was bestowed on the human race from the beginning. The book of Genesis is of origins. The word *Genesis* means "origin, source, or beginning." Genesis takes the reader to the moment when the omnipotent Creator spoke into being the matchless wonders of sun, moon, stars, planets, galaxies, plants, and moving creatures, and the one whom He made in His image. At the end of the sixth day of Creation week, God looked back. "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Gen. 1:31, NKJV). Then He gave all to the human race.

"Good" is descriptive of God, perfection is of God, and all gifts are from God. Besides all these blessings, God has given us the most perfect of gifts—the gift of His dear Son Jesus Christ. God sent His only Son to redeem a race that was doomed to die. But there are other gifts that we often take for granted. Throughout the Bible there are evidences that God is willing to bestow on us, His children, numerous gifts. Some of these are found in the following texts:

Material Gifts	Spiritual Gifts
Food (Matt. 6:25, 26) Rain (Matt. 5:45) Health (Phil. 2:25–30) Sleep (Prov. 3:24) Rest (Deut. 12:10) All things (1 Tim. 6:17) All needs (Phil. 4:19) Glory (1 Pet. 5:10) Eternal life (John 10:28)	Christ (John 3:16) Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) Grace (James 4:6) Wisdom (James 1:5) Faith (Eph. 2:8) New heart (Ezek. 11:19) Peace (Phil. 4:7)

God provides many things, including the basic necessities of life. But when such things are lacking, God still provides what we truly need. Jesus tells us to concern ourselves with the kingdom of God: our most important need. We have no need to worry ourselves with the provision of our physical needs. In the end Christ received grace to live and die so as to honor God. Whether we face trouble, hardship, persecution, or danger, we can always depend on Jesus, and that will always be more than enough.

Monday
August 15

Lord of Our Resources

LOGOS

Deut. 8:7–18; Matt. 6:19–21; 24:45–51; 1 Cor. 9:11–14; Phil. 4:11–13; Heb. 13:5; James 1:16, 17

Our Physical Needs Satisfied (Deut. 8:7–18)

God has promised to bless us in abundance to satisfy all our physical needs. Sometimes instead of having a heart full of thankfulness, we go about our daily lives thinking that we are the recipients of these blessings because of our own merit. We should instead praise God who gives all the blessings for the things we now enjoy.

Treasures in Heaven (Matt. 6:19–21; 24:45–51)

The treasures that we acquire on this earth are but for a time and can satisfy us only temporarily. We should not place strong significance on things attained, as these earthly treasures will often blind us from our Creator. Instead, we should place our treasures in a more permanent place, using our resources to spread the gospel, to bring relief to human suffering, to enhance God's work.

As God blesses our lives, so are we to be a blessing to those around us. We

**The treasures that we
acquire on this earth are
but for a time.**

should always consider those who are less fortunate than ourselves and respond in ways that will help to bring a blessing to their lives. We should never be weary of doing good, in fact we should find great pleasure in helping others. The acts

of kindness shown, the smile we share, the time we take to lend a helping hand will go a long way. By so doing we are laying up treasures that will last for eternity.

Supporting Our Ministers (1 Cor. 9:11–14)

"The claim for material support appears strongly justified from the fact that the compensation to which the laborers are entitled involves something much inferior to that which they impart. Not only is it a very small thing for the Christian community to serve the minister in 'carnal things'; it is their joyful duty, by which they may partially demonstrate their appreciation of what the Lord has done for them."

"The Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14). The men and women who are committed to full-time work as ministers, Bible workers, missionaries—to name a few—should be supported by the church. As members we are the church, and as God blesses us so we should be faithful in returning to Him so that His work can be hastened.

If all of us will faithfully do our part in giving as the Lord blesses us, there will never be a need of funds to continue His work. Always remember to be faithful in giving back a portion of what you were blessed with. "The Christian worker imparts blessings of infinitely more value than the material support that he receives. He proclaims the gospel, with all its blessings and consolations. He acquaints people with God, with the plan of salvation and the hope of heaven."²

Contentment (Phil. 4:11–13)

Paul recognized Christ as his only source of strength. He fully understood that all he needed to accomplish was found in Christ alone. As he followed the commands of Christ and did what He commissioned him to do, Paul knew that the responsibility for the outcome was the Lord's. Paul endured hardship, suffering, and trials, and so it will be for all who labor for Christ. But in Christ will be found sufficient strength to overcome each trial, power to resist temptation, a constant supply of energy to keep motivated, and an attitude of thankfulness to praise God even in the toughest of times.

When we are confronted with trials and we fully depend on God, He will give us grace for daily growth, our ability to find courage will be multiplied, and He will provide all that is needed to complete His work.

Being an Example (Heb. 13:5)

When a person is committed to a life of working in God's service, it is a life of commitment. One does not always find oneself enjoying all the luxuries that this life may offer. Contentment shown in a spirit of thankfulness, however, will go a long way in helping to accept the things life has to offer. We should never murmur, complain, or look at others and compare their lives with ours. God promises that He will never leave us or forsake us; we just have to hold on to those promises.

God's Bestowal of Gifts (James 1:16, 17)

Everything that is given to us comes from above. All our resources come from Him, and we are His steward's placed on this earth to be faithful in that which is entrusted to us. Whatever our task, we are to show that we can be trusted to use and build upon. We must accept the responsibility and work that we have, so that it could be increased and multiplied. Our Master expects us to increase our talents, to recognize what He gives us, and to act in His behalf. By doing His will, we would have accomplished His purpose for our lives today.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 729.

2. *Ibid.*

The Best Gifts Come Unwrapped

TESTIMONY

Matt. 25:14–30

"All, both high and low, rich and poor, have been trusted by the Master with talents; some more, and some less, according to their several ability. The blessing of God will rest upon the earnest, loving, diligent workers. Their investment will be successful, and will secure souls to the kingdom of God, and for themselves an immortal treasure. All are moral agents, and are entrusted with goods of heaven. The amount of talents is proportioned according to the capabilities possessed by each."¹

"God calls us servants, which implies that we are employed by Him to do a certain work, and to bear responsibilities. He has lent us capital for investment. It is not our property; and we displease God if we hoard up, or spend as we choose,

**"All are moral agents, and
are entrusted with goods
of heaven."**

our Lord's goods. We are responsible for the use or abuse of that which God has thus lent us. If this capital which the Lord has placed in our hands lies dormant, or we bury it in the earth, be it only one talent, we shall be

called to an account by the Master. He requires, not ours, but His own, with usury."²

When we use our talents for God, we become messengers in proclaiming His work to others. "Those who are true to their calling as messengers for God will not seek honor for themselves. Love for self will be swallowed up in love for Christ. No rivalry will mar the precious cause of the gospel. They will recognize that it is their work to proclaim, as did John the Baptist, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' John 1:29. They will lift up Jesus, and with Him humanity will be lifted up."³

REACT

1. What specific changes happen to a person who uses his or her talents for God's service? Explain.

2. What would you say to rappers or country singers who praise God for the special musical gifts they possess while their music fails to glorify Him?

3. What role do you and I play in helping others unearth their hidden talents? Are you ever responsible for what some do or don't do with their gifts?

1. *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 118, 119.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 179, 180.

Oh Be Ye Grateful

HOW-TO

Matt. 25:14-30

In the parable of the talents, the talents represented silver of great value. The biblical representation of the talents, however, is given as our God-granted special gifts of the Spirit.

The reason that God granted these gifts is twofold: (1) He wants to increase His holdings. It is like an investment in a stock, with the hope that stock value would rise, therefore increasing the initial investment. God invests in us talents of great value so we may use them to bring others to the kingdom of heaven. (2) God is using and testing us with the goal of being able to place into our hands greater responsibility (Matt. 25:21).

Each of us has work to do in preparing ourselves and fellow humanity for Christ's second coming. It is up to us to return a greater investment. God does not bestow on us more than we can handle. He blesses us with enough to challenge us so that the result is a richer walk with the Lord and experience to return the Lord's investment. This investment is numbered not in silver, but in something infinitely more precious: the souls that we bring to the Lord.

**It is up to us to return
unto Him a greater
investment.**

Many may claim that they don't have any talents or that their talents are too insignificant. This is not the case. The Holy Spirit has bestowed talents upon everyone. They might seem insignificant, but they can be used to the glory of God. It is your responsibility to use them to return to the Lord His investment.

How can you identify your talents and use them to the glory of God?

- Earnestly ask God to lead you. Ask Him to show you where your talents lie and lead you in their use.

- Examine your life, pay close attention to those things that you are good at, those things that give you a sense of fulfillment. Always accompany this process of self-discovery with prayer.

- Explore how you can use these talents both in and out of the church in such a way that you are using them to the glory of the Most High.

- Finally, through prayer, Bible study, and the constant application of your talents, strengthen your walk with the Lord so that when the Master returns and demands an accounting of the talents that He has given unto you, you can say, with all humility and honesty, " "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them" ' ' (Matt. 25:20, NKJV). And His reply will be " "Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your lord" ' ' (verse 21, NKJV).

Where Do You Want to Be?

OPINION

Matt. 24:32–34

The Bible is a revelation of God to humankind. It was written by kings, farmers, lawyers, fishermen, ministers—poor and rich alike. But the Bible is one book because God is the real Author.

When it comes to prophecies, God inspired the writers: “The Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth” (Jer. 1:9, NKJV). God can reveal the future. That is why He is able to declare “the end from the beginning” (Isa. 46:10, NKJV).

If we take a look around us, there are many signs to show that God is the most

**Our hearts are subject to evil
and salvation is the only key.**

powerful and almighty Being. He is the Landlord of life because *Lord* means “ownership.” At any time He has the right to determine whether we

stay or go. We must realize that there is a purpose to life. And because everything God did was “very good,” it shows that humanity was made perfect.

It doesn't cost us to have a relationship with God. But if we take God for granted, the cost will be eternal life. We should not close our eyes to truth. We, as children of God, should not let false doctrine dethrone the faith and laws instructed to us.

Humanity's condition here on earth is bound with sin. Our hearts are subject to evil, and salvation is the only key. Humanity can be saved from the consequences of the sins we've committed; salvation is the need of every human heart.

Is it possible for humankind to change their condition? “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23, NKJV). Through the atonement of Jesus Christ, we as humans need to look to the Holy Scriptures, look to God, believe in the gospel of Christ, and look for Christ's return. This is simply what it takes in our quest for salvation.

There are many signs around us. We have to make up our minds to face the reality of the world we live in. Eternal life is dependent upon our decision. What will you do with Christ? When you choose Christ, you are choosing life beyond. To be a part of Christ's everlasting kingdom, we must plan now to be a part of it.

We are living in the end of times. Within the last 35 to 40 years, the human mind has grown exponentially. There will be deceptions, and the physical world is experiencing famines, earthquakes, and all types of pestilences. These world conditions are indicators showing that the coming of the Lord is “at the doors” (Matt. 24:33, NKJV).

Worshiping the Gift-Giver Rather Than the Gift

EXPLORATION

James 1:17

CONCLUDE

So often we fall into two common pitfalls that hint of either pride, as we convince ourselves that we are responsible and deserving of our gifts, talents, and resources, or self-pity that tempts us to envy the apparent skills or money of others, or that, taken personally, might make us feel unloved or of no value to God or others. Jesus, as the Lord of our resources, reminds us that the focus is less about us and our worth (the pride or the self-pity) and more on Him and His worth. He gives us gifts and asks us only to appreciate them and use them, not to find our self-worth by them.

CONSIDER

- Self-assessing the resources that God has given you by forcing yourself to list at least 50 things (yes, count them!) that in the right context you could share/use for His glory.
- Honestly asking yourself what skills, resources, talents you covet the most. Journal "What motivates me to crave this particular resource?"
- Experimenting with one resource you think you have but haven't necessarily developed yet. What has been the obstacle? What fears do you think motivate your excuses? How can you best experiment in building this gift?
- Asking your pastor for—or finding—a book that includes a spiritual gift inventory so you can utilize one more tool in your self-awareness of identifying aspects of your life that can aid you as you minister to others.
- Strategically planning if you had ten hours to serve God (by maximizing who you are), where would you focus that time? Or if someone gave you a fund to use for ministry—what options do you have?
- Creating a collage from magazine pictures/words that highlight the many resources God gives humanity.

CONNECT

Ephesians 4

Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 139–159.

Bugbee, Cousins, and Hybels, *Connections: The Right People in the Right Places for the Right Reason* (spiritual gift inventory).

Lord of our Body Temples



“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20, NKJV).

Newsweek and the Temple of God

Sabbath
August 20

INTRODUCTION

Col. 3:23

At the library where I work, I'm in charge of preparing and cataloging our magazine subscriptions as they arrive. We have a wide variety of titles—everything from *Time* and *Newsweek* to *Psychology Today* and *Martha Stewart Living*. This range of periodicals has at least one thing in common: They all regularly feature articles on health. The forms vary: One magazine may investigate dieting trends and products, another provides fitness routines, and the rest explore other aspects of health. But one thing is evident: These magazines understand clearly that people are interested in their health.

It's not just magazines. "Whole foods" grocery stores are flourishing; Web sites devoted to vegetarianism, veganism, and yoga are finding audiences clamoring for more information. Whole industries have sprung up around low-carb diets.

What is the significance of our extensive health knowledge?

In many ways it is an unprecedented opportunity to share our traditional health message. Seventh-day Adventists can help answer their neighbors' and friends' questions and provide guidance for people seeking wellness. But what is the significance of our extensive health knowledge?

Though there are many benefits to be reaped by faithfully following practices that promote healthful living, for the Christian, it's about much more than just having a body that looks good and works well. First Corinthians 6:19, 20 tell us that our bodies are the temples of God and that we must honor God with our bodies. The ways we honor God aren't limited to what we do with our bodies, but also what we do to our bodies.

It is clear that the way we treat the bodies God has given us matters to Him. Our bodies are not our own, as is often argued in secular circles. The way we take care of our bodies is a reflection on God, and doing the job properly is part of our duty as His children.

What is less clear to me is precisely how we are to go about doing this. If I am called to "work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people" (Col. 3:23, NLT), what does that tell me about how I should treat my body? How does it help me deal with specific questions of how much exercise I need or whether I should eat that piece of pastry? How can I take the Word we have been given and apply it today?

Bigger Reasons to Be Healthy

LOGOS

Exod. 20:2; Ps. 139:13–16; John 1:1–4; 10:10; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 12:1; Gal. 3:13; Col. 1:16, 17; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19

There are so many good reasons to care for our bodies.

Some of them are personal: We can live longer; we can decrease our risk of sickness and disease (being sick is not fun); we feel better when we are healthier; we are more attractive to others; we can play our favorite sports or hike or swim with less pain, less risk, and a greater fun factor; we have less risk of falling behind at school or work because of sick days; and we can even save money by being healthier.

Other reasons for healthful living have broader implications: We can help our families and friends more—and have more fun with them; we can encourage others to live healthier lives by our example; and we can use our increased energy to make a bigger impact in our world, whatever our goals. The use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs has severe health impacts—and

**It is a temptation to see
God as a voice booming
from the darkness.**

also real indirect effects and costs to those around us and our communities.

There are also significant environmental impacts connected with a healthful lifestyle. I recently completed a brief online survey of my own environmental impact. The survey (www.planetlayer.com) was inexact, focusing primarily on our personal contribution to carbon-dioxide emissions. But I was surprised at how many of the factors were linked to health. For example, consider the inefficiency of meat-eating in an underfed and polluted world; unnecessary use of motor vehicles when we could walk or ride a bike; and the significance of how we spend our money—including lifestyle-induced medical bills—and how that money could be used to help those who really need it.

In short, good health is a good thing for many reasons. The world would be a happier, healthier place if we all were a little more careful with our personal health.

All these reasons are important. But the Bible comes up with some bigger reasons still: God's claims on us as His people—He made us and He saved us.

God's first claim on us is always that of creation. John's story of Jesus begins with reminding us of God as Creator: "He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone" (John 1:2–4, NLT). This is an amazing picture of Jesus—the eternal and pre-existing Source of life—but it is a temptation to see

God as far away, perhaps a voice booming from the darkness.

In Psalm 139 David paints a much more intimate picture: “You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. . . .Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born” (Ps. 139:13–16, NLT). This is a God who cares about the fine details of our lives and bodies. This life is a gift from God and as such is to be treated with care.

The second claim of God is that of Savior. When God set out the rules for good living that we now know as the Ten Commandments, He first established a foundation upon which the relationship between God and His people was set up. His pronouncement from the mountaintop began with the reminder, “ ‘I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from slavery in Egypt’ ” (Exod. 20:2, NLT). Added to this is His reference to Creation in the fourth commandment, regarding the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8–11). And even at this stage, many of the rules God set out touched on physical health, even to the point of detailing foods that were—and are—less than healthful (Leviticus 11).

A similar motivation is urged upon the early Christians in the New Testament. “You do not belong to yourself,” writes Paul, “for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20, NLT). Because of what Jesus has done for us, we are to offer all aspects of our lives—including our physical body, health, and strength—as “a living and holy sacrifice” to God (Rom. 12:1, NLT).

When we recognize the importance of God’s claims on our lives and what He has done for us in Creation and salvation, we can see all the other reasons for good health as evidence that God simply wants the best for us. The positive lifestyle and good health God wants for us bring all these other advantages. It demonstrates Jesus’ statement that He came “to give life in all its fullness” (John 10:10, NLT). It’s another reason that the world would be a happier, healthier place if we all were more closely connected to God.

REACT

1. Can you add to the list of positive reasons for good health?
2. How important are God’s claims on our lives in relation to our own health? Explain.

Monday
August 22

Lord: The Obligation of Ownership

TESTIMONY

1 Cor. 6:19, 20

“Lord (lôrd) n. 1. The owner of a feudal estate. 2. Lord Chiefly Brit. the general masculine title of nobility and other rank. 3. Lord. a. God. b. Jesus. 4. A man of renowned power, authority or mastery in a given field or activity. –v. To domineer: lorded it over their subordinates.”¹

Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, owner of all, including our pains, sorrow, misery, and our long-suffering due to the corruption of sin since the fall of man. This feudal state that humanity has been in because of Satan created the need of a Savior—not any savior, One of sovereign authority over all of which He was Master, Creator, Redeemer. This was not a choice; it was an obligation of a Father, of a King, of a fair Judge, of the Lord of all.

“Sorrow filled heaven, as it was realized that man was lost, and that world which God had created was to be filled with mortals doomed to misery, sickness, and death, and there was no way of escape for the offender. The whole family of Adam must die. I saw the lovely Jesus and beheld an expression of sympathy and sorrow upon His countenance. Soon I saw Him approach the exceeding bright light

**“Sorrow filled heaven,
as it was realized that
man was lost.”**

which enshrouded the Father. Said my accompanying angel, He is in close converse with His Father. The anxiety of the angels seemed to be intense while Jesus was communing with His Father. Three times He was shut in by the glorious light about the Father, and the third time He came from the Father, His person could be seen. His countenance was calm, free from all perplexity and doubt, and shone with benevolence and loveliness, such as words cannot express. He then made known to the angelic host that a way of escape had been made for lost man. He told them that He had been pleading with His Father, and had offered to give His life a ransom, to take the sentence of death upon Himself, that through Him man might find pardon; that through the merits of His blood, and obedience to the law of God, they could have the favor of God, and be brought into the beautiful garden, and eat of the fruit of the tree of life.”²

1. *American Heritage Dictionary*.

2. *Early Writings*, pp. 149, 150.

Is There Proof?

EVIDENCE

Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:7; 9:6

What evidence sets our bodies apart as God's temple?

Our bodies perform incredible, complex life-sustaining biochemical processes. Yet this biological aspect of humankind does not make us significantly different from the rest of creation to warrant our being God's chosen vessel.

"We share with the animals a biological shell composed, in our case, of bone, organs, muscle, fat, and skin. In truth, we fall short in direct comparison to the strictly biological features of some animals. Who would compete in beauty with a splashy macaw or even a lowly luna moth? A horse easily outruns us, a hawk sees far better, a dog detects odors and sounds imperceptible to us. The total sum of our sheer physical qualities is no more godlike than a cat's."¹

If our biology doesn't set us apart, it could be our dominion. But even more, it could be God breathing into man.

"When I heard that verse as a child, I imagined Adam lying on the ground, perfectly formed but not yet alive, with God leaning over him and performing a sort of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Now I picture that scene differently. I assume that Adam was already biologically alive—the other animals needed no special puff of oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon dioxide to start them breathing, so why should man? The breath of God now symbolizes for me a spiritual reality. I see Adam as alive, but possessing only an animal vitality. Then God breathes into him a new spirit, and infills him with His own image. Adam becomes a living soul, not just a living body. God's image is not an arrangement of skin cells or a physical shape, but rather an inbreathed spirit."²

"The total sum of our sheer physical qualities is no more godlike than a cat's."

Could it be that we were "brain dead"—spiritually incapable of inviting Him to live in us—before God gave us this special treatment? Does this treatment make our bodies fit to be His temple? And if He is to be Lord of our body temples, in His loving way, wouldn't He also give us a role to play in choosing to have Him be that Lord? Just as some have chosen to be demon possessed, shouldn't we choose daily to have Christ in us, thus completing the job of making Him Lord of our body temples?

1. Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 22.

2. Ibid.

Warning! This Is Private Property

HOW-TO

Ps. 139:14; Rom. 8:5

We live in a society of easy access. Television and many other advertising agents constantly promote self-indulgence. In 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, Paul speaks about our bodies being a “temple of the Most High God.” If our bodies belong to God, there is no room for self-gratification.

In what ways do we gratify ourselves? With (a) sexual immorality; (b) poor eating habits; (c) substance abuse; (d) unwholesome entertainment; and (e) foul language, slander, and gossip. Unfortunately, these are just a few of the many destructive forces present today.

How can we combat self-gratification?

1. Accept Jesus as the source of our existence. God created us with love. He knows us inside and out. He defined our purpose before we existed. We are fearfully and wonderfully made and should praise God constantly (see Psalm 139:14). Acknowledging Christ for who He is helps us to realize the extent to which He suffered for us. By willingly dying for our sins, Christ gave us the

We live in a society of easy access.

opportunity to repent and live eternally. When we open ourselves to a personal relationship with Him, we will seek to honor Him completely—in every aspect of life.

2. Reject sinful human desires. Just because we want it doesn’t always mean it’s good for us. If we live according to our sinful nature, our desires are for our own benefit, but if we live according to the mind of the Spirit, our minds will be set on pleasing our Creator (see Romans 8:5).

3. Protect the avenues of the soul. These are the eyes, ears, mouth, and mind that control our actions. God expects us to take more care with what we watch and listen to, where and how we spend our time, the way we treat others and the things we say, and with whom we associate. Conscientiousness about health and diet practices is also important. Take the time to eat right. Get plenty of rest and exercise.

The most helpful guard against all these things is the Word of God. It is our guide to a happier, healthier, more fulfilling and God-gratifying lifestyle. As Christians who claim to love God, we must hold our bodies to a higher standard of holiness. Think of your body as private property—God’s private property.

REACT

What is your personal definition of God-gratification as it pertains to your life?

Real Success

OPINION

1 Corinthians 6

Success is something every person desires, yet sometimes we feel like failures. As Christians our success should be focused on our walk and relationship with God.

"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20, NKJV).

This is a body-conscious world. Many products are for clean-up, fix-up, and paint-up. Almost everyone has a great concern about their physical health. You watch that cholesterol, and of course you reduce the amount of salt you use. Well, there is another concern for your body. The day you became a Christian something happened to your body! Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in you. Who is in you? A person is in you.

When you became a believer, the Holy Spirit became a part of you. In other words your actual physical body becomes the temple of the Lord.

When we ask Jesus to come into our life, God sends the Holy Spirit to live in us. The Holy Spirit seals God's ownership of our body, soul, and spirit. Our body is literally a temple for the Holy Spirit. We all know that temples are used for worship, so our bodies ought to be dedicated to worshipping God.

We were bought with a price, so therefore, we should glorify God in our body and spirit (1 Corinthians 6). See how clearly the Bible bears the truth. Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15, NKJV). The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to build you up in the body of Christ to the glory of God.

Sexual sins corrupt the temple and damage our body. Paul mentioned in verse 18 that sexual sin is sin against our bodies. The consequences of this can include alienation from God, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, and spiritual confusion. If you have sinned sexually in thought or action, you can turn from your sin, repent, and rededicate your body to God. Even though you may not escape the consequences of your previous actions, you can start reaping God's blessings for deciding to honor Him with your body now.

Surrender your body to the Lord and glorify God in your daily life.

**God sends the Holy Spirit
to live in us.**

REACT

What does it mean to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirit?

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 6:19, 20

CONCLUDE

Honoring God involves what we do with and to our bodies. There are many good reasons to care for our bodies, and the world would be a healthier place if we paid attention to our personal health. Jesus, as Lord of heaven and earth, gave His life as a ransom for humankind. When Christ breathed life into us, it set us apart and we became living souls. We must reject self-gratification by praising God constantly, rejecting sinful desires, and protecting our soul. As new creations, we must glorify God in body and spirit in our daily life.

CONSIDER

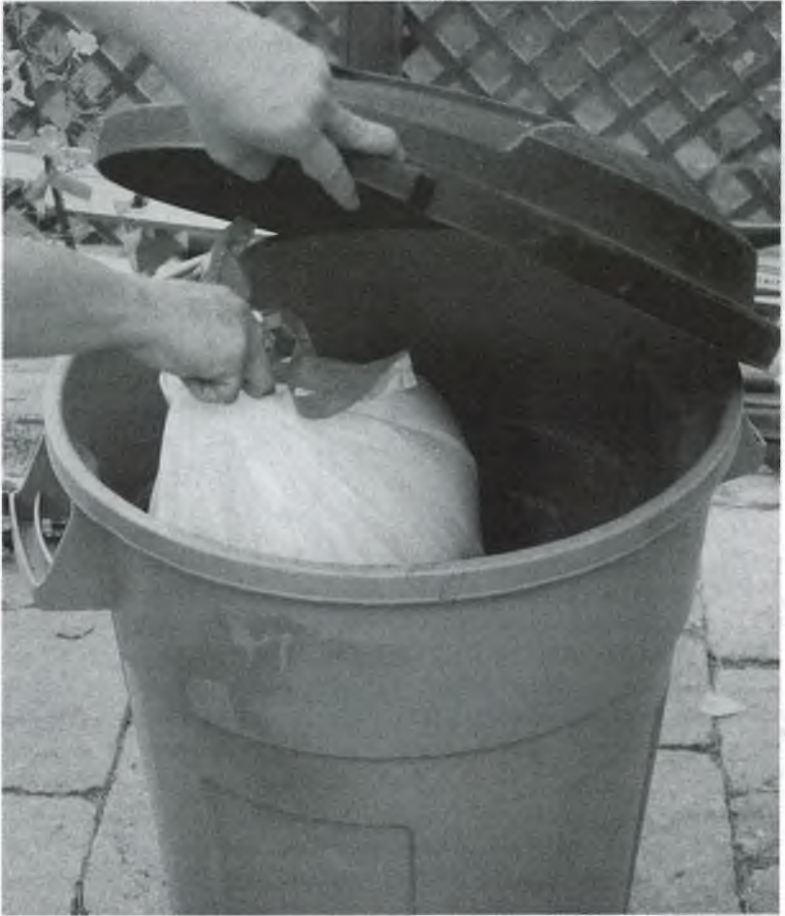
- Thinking about how you treat your body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Is it obvious to others that you are a Christian by how you live your daily life? What evidence of God can be found in your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of your life?
- Making a list of ten things that you can do to improve your health. Try to implement one of these things every week. Keep a journal to track your results.
- Finding current magazine or Internet articles regarding health and diet and comparing them with traditional Adventist teachings regarding health. How is our heritage and message relevant to today?
- Cooking a healthful meal and inviting some friends over. Try out some new recipes and explore new varieties of your favorite fruits and vegetables.
- Spending a day keeping track of what you allow to enter your body—including food, television, and reading materials. How much of your day would you have liked Christ to be a part of?
- Spending time praying for the health and well-being of family and friends. Intercede on their behalf for victory over harmful addictions and bad habits. Ask God to reveal to you specific areas of your health that you may need to improve on so that your body—and spirit—may better serve Him.

CONNECT

Counsels on Diet and Foods.

Chris Rucker, *The Seventh-day Diet*; John McDougall, *The McDougall Program: Twelve Days to Dynamic Health*.

Lord of our Labor



**“ ‘He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise’ ”
(Luke 3:11, NKJV).**

Labor . . . the Beneficiaries?

INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 2:10

There was once a king who had many servants. Each had a piece of land on which he would toil to provide food for his family and perhaps some surplus to sell. It so happened one day that the king wanted to put in charge of all his lands one who would oversee the production of crops and look to the needs of the people. So he decreed that all eligible for the position must come to his castle and have an audience with him.

The days went by as many came and went, seeking to fulfill this position, but the king still had not found the man he wanted. Finally, only two remained. Realizing that he would need to make a choice between the two, he asked them to show him their piece of land.

**The product of our work
is a reflection of how we
view work.**

The two men were puzzled, but they complied.

The first man's plot of land had neat rows of carefully planted crops of cabbage, tomatoes, carrots, pumpkins, and beans.

Vines of grapes ran alongside the vegetables. Orchard trees, just at the peak of their season, were laden with fruit. A trough, brimming with water, stood nearby, ready for use. At the corner of the plot stood a small shed, bulging with a fruitful bounty of harvested crops. The small plot of land was indeed a picture.

The second man's plot was quite the opposite. Though it produced the man's crops, no sign of care and attention existed. The king looked sadly at the man, feeling pity for him, for in that instance, he knew which man he would hire.

The product of our work is a reflection of how we view work. If we choose to see it positively, the results and reflections will be positive. Likewise, if we choose to perceive work negatively, the outcome will be negative.

We, and those around us, are the beneficiaries of our labor. When bosses and employers observe us, they, seeing Christian service, will benefit. We ourselves will be labeled with that characteristic that reflects exactly how we perform in our workplace. That will determine our reward: a good reputation, a promotion, a good salary, a position, or simply job satisfaction. And that is how we benefit. Whatever it is, excellence of work portrays an excellence of spirit.

The Lord showed labor to be good, and if the Lord advocated it, who are we to be against it? If actions speak louder than words, surely we would want to display, through our working environment, that Christ lives in us. We are witnesses in every aspect of our lives—even that of labor.

Commissioned to Soul-Saving Labor

EVIDENCE

Matt. 25:21

The Gospel of Matthew is one of the major “guides” to all Christians. This is a book that contains instructions and pointers for finding the kingdom of heaven. It can be considered as the “Christian Manual.” From the beginning of the book, we can clearly see what Jesus intended for humankind to do.

We hear of John the Baptist, who went around doing what he knew best, and that was soul saving. Then Jesus joined the picture. From the time He began His ministry to the time He was crucified, Jesus traveled to many cities and countries soul saving and serving as a role model.

In Matthew 25:14–30, in the parable of the talents, Jesus again illustrates what humankind is supposed to do. This chapter begins with the parable about the ten virgins, which, according to *The SDA Bible Commentary*, places much emphasis upon personal preparation for Christ's promised return, while that of the talents stresses the responsibility of soul-saving labor for others.¹

“God has called us to serve Him in the temporal affairs of life. Diligence in this work is as much a part of true religion as is devotion. . . . Every man and woman who is truly converted will be a diligent worker.”² Every man and woman who is truly converted is commissioned to join Jesus in His quest for soul saving.

This magnificent manual then concludes with the most important instruction, which is titled the “Great Commission.” It is also about soul saving: “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NKJV). We can therefore clearly notice that Jesus is so very particular about soul saving that He promised that He would be with us every step of the way.

In Matthew 25:21 there's the reward ceremony in which Jesus illustrated what it will be like on Judgment Day, when everyone will present what he or she has, and then either join in the Master's happiness or, as in verse 28, lose what they have and then be thrown into the darkness. Every man and woman who is truly and wholly converted is commissioned to soul-saving labor.

**Every man and woman
who is truly and wholly
converted is commissioned
to soul-saving labor.**

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 509.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 343.

Labor—a Curse or a Blessing?

LOGOS

Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:15; 3:17–19; Isa. 65:21–23; Matt. 25:14–30; Acts 10:36–43; Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:6–12

Picture underground miners, during the last hour of their day's work—their clothes drenched in sweat, their muscles aching, and their minds set on the comforts of home. Again, picture worn-out farm laborers picking cherries in the blazing midday summer heat; the anticipated pay is their only inspiration. Yet another picture: a young college student combing through piles of research books. Her head aches and her exhausted mind yearns for a break. The picture is endless: a distressed babysitter rocking a colicky baby to sleep, a stressed out executive chairing a tense board meeting. Labor, work, toil, employment—a curse or a blessing?

The Genesis of Labor (Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:15; 3:17–19)

Our response to this question determines our attitude toward labor. Right from Creation, we realize that labor originated from God. God established labor after

God's master plan is that we work enough to take care of ourselves and support the poor.

having demonstrated it Himself:

"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work" (Gen. 2:2, NIV). By example God introduced and demonstrated the dignity and benefits of labor.

Through God's creation, human-

ity appreciates the importance of precision and excellence in labor. At every stage of Creation, God confirmed that His work was good. Even our fallen planet still testifies that God created earth in a thoughtful and flawless manner.

Most of us wish we could live the Edenic lifestyle because we usually picture it as a utopia without work. Wrong. Right from the beginning, God assigned Adam and Eve a job: They were to tend the Garden and manage and maintain the perfection God created. This refutes the assumption that labor came as a result of sin. The book of Genesis records that after sin, God cursed the soil, not man; consequently, man's labor was intensified. The Lord of our labor, however, demonstrated through His Son Jesus Christ that work, even in a fallen world, is honorable.

Jesus, the Diligent Worker (Acts 10:36–43)

Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus traveling long distances doing God's work. Jesus taught, healed, preached, and even assumed a servant's role during

the Last Supper. He labored until His assignment was accomplished. The same intensity and dedication to work is expected of God's children.

God Facilitates Man's Labor (Matt. 25:14–30)

In facilitating our labor, the Lord has equipped each human being with specific talents or the potential to excel in our fields of work. For all who fully use their talents, God promises a reward. The story of the three servants with different talents illustrates His expectations. God gives each of us talents according to our abilities; accordingly, He does not expect us to excel in areas for which we are not equipped. However, in those areas that we are equipped to excel in, God expects us to stand out.

From this parable we learn the benefits of hard work and the futility of unproductivity. The productive servants multiplied their talents; they made a profit. In addition the master gave them more opportunities to multiply their talents. Above all they enjoyed God's presence. Conversely, the unproductive servant receives a curse from the master: He loses the little he had; the Lord takes away his idle talent and gives it to industrious servants. He is cast out of God's presence into a life of suffering. "Each of us has a work to do for God. Though there are varying degrees of responsibility, none are altogether exempt from responsibility."* The amount given to each servant is equivalent to their ability, and all God asks of each servant is faithfulness in executing our God-given tasks.

Our Lord's Master Plan (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:6–12; Isa. 65:21–23)

In the book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul teaches that we should respect and implement labor in our lives for self-sustenance and care of the less fortunate. Furthermore, he implores believers not to associate with lazy people who, he says, have no right to eat. Paul himself set a good example: "nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you" (2 Thess. 3:8, NIV).

God's master plan is that we work enough to take care of ourselves and support the poor. It is not God's ideal for us to depend on others for our livelihood. We should follow our Master's example and be an example to the people of the world. If we all faithfully follow God's work plan, we would successfully eliminate the vices that are rampant in our world today—there wouldn't be stealing, dishonesty, cheating, homelessness, etc. Work, part of divinity, is part of humanity forever, for our own good. The benefits of labor are numerous: healthy living, financial freedom, positive self-esteem, debt-free living, independence, and blessings from the Lord of our labor.

* *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 510.

There Is No Substitute for Quality

TESTIMONY

Matt. 25:14–30

In all our duties in this life, we are to take every task put before us with seriousness and diligence. As Christians we are to apply quality in all duties that we exercise no matter how mundane the duty may seem. There should never be a “useless” or “small” duty. Ellen White notes, “Many feel that their lives are useless; that they are doing nothing for the advancement of God’s kingdom. But this is a mistake. . . . The humblest duties are not to be ignored.”¹ Therefore God will take into account all our efforts in everything we do here on earth. We are to represent God in all our tasks and duties.

In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30), Jesus makes it clear that even the one who received that one talent could have used it for the glory of his master.

**Christians should lead in
the pursuit of excellence.**

The servant who received that one talent could have applied that same work ethic that the other servants applied. The reward that was extended to the other servants could have

been extended to him as well, if only he had not taken his talent lightly. Ellen G. White goes on to say that “However small your talent, God has a place for it. That one talent, wisely used, will accomplish its appointed work.”² Therefore all duties that are presented to us in this life should be used for His glory. As Christians who take Christ as their example, we should aspire to have that touch of excellence that Jesus showed in His work here on earth.

Christians should lead in the pursuit of excellence. “If it is your work to till the soil or to engage in any other trade or occupation, make a success of the present duty. Put your mind on what you are doing. In all your work represent Christ. Do as He would do in your place.”³

REACT

1. How should Christians respond to those who may not appreciate the work that we do?
2. Why do some people have a negative attitude toward work? How can you be of help to such?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 359.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 359, 360.

Labor and Royalty

HOW-TO

Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Pet. 2:9

Royalty is usually associated with authority, wealth, and splendor. We may fantasize about being in a royal family: living in a mansion, riding in limousines, having all the cash we need—brilliant life! But we tend to forget that we already belong to a royal family! God is our King, and He calls us His children; we are royal by birth. Although there is a twist; the same King, who calls us a royal priesthood also calls us servants! How can one be a servant and royalty at the same time?

1. Vacancy: Before Jesus left the earth to return to His throne, He gave orders: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19, NKJV). This is a call to work. It is the Great Commission that each baptized individual is called to take up.

2. Job Description: Christ expects us to witness to every kindred, nation, generation, and tongue. Our duty on this earth is to be “clones” of Christ—being holy just like our Father is holy. If we are willing to serve, we must be willing to become servants. Don’t expect all roses along the way just because we are doing what Christ wants us to do. But strive to do everything to the glory of God.

3. Qualifications: Christ told the parable of talents in Matthew 25:14–30 not merely to amuse the disciples with another story. It bears a profound connection to the Great Commission. Christ has already armed us with the necessary tools that we need to carry out this job. They are to be used in soul winning.

Our duty on this earth is to be “clones” of Christ.

4. Benefits: Usually when we work, we expect remuneration in the form of wages or salary. Our job that Christ has appointed us offers a great benefit: eternal life!

5. Contact Details: Through it all Christ has promised to be with us and supply all our needs according to His riches in glory (Phil. 4:19). He advises us to keep in touch with Him throughout by praying without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).

Food for thought: We live in a world that is wealth- and fame-oriented. We will experience the hardships of standing up for Christ—in school or in the workplace. But that should not lead us away from the job we are meant to carry out because Christ has assured us that although we face hardships He will provide us with the strength to carry on (2 Cor. 6:8–10). Soul winning is our mission—our only reason for living!

REACT

1. In what ways can we avoid making work a mundane duty?
2. How do we justify divisions of labor between the rich and poor? Why does some work seem better than other work?

OPINION

Isa. 65:23

I waited with anticipation and anxiety. Were they going to make it or not? Were all my efforts in vain? Lord, where was my reward? These thoughts tumbled through my mind. Why couldn't they do it? The many hours of constant repetition never seemed sufficient, and I began to wonder what I was actually supposed to accomplish. Prayer, at that moment, was impossible—or so my negative mind argued.

The girls sat before me waiting with uncharacteristic eagerness. Once again we began drumming in the six times tables. As a special needs teacher, patience was an imperative virtue for me, which seemed to slip as endless minutes passed by. Half an hour seemed like an eternity.

As I watched their minds struggle, I could almost see the wheels burning as brains tried to sift through the masses of information, fishing for the right answer. One of them gazed at me with an uncomprehending look written on her face, while the others' confusion seemed to twist her features. What would I do?

**As each card snapped
down, the answers
flew out.**

With determination I sat down and began typing in the times tables on the computer. The printer worked furiously to produce lists on brightly colored sheets, and as I looked at the effort of laminating, cutting, and sorting, I wondered if it was worth it all. After a few moments in earnest prayer, I proudly carried my flashcards to the lesson the next day. Their eyes lit up with excitement as they saw the attractive cards.

We began. As each card snapped down, the answers flew out. Randomly plucked-out questions produced startling results. The girls, armed with positive reinforcement, continued and begged for the class not to end. Time had flown, and I hadn't even glanced at my watch. My steps were light, and I sat to ponder in the staff room.

What would I have felt if they had failed to grasp such a simple concept? As much as I had wanted them to learn, would I have felt disappointed?

Laboring for the Lord can never be in vain, for He ordained it. When we work and our commitment to the Lord is strong, we yearn to achieve the best that we can. We may fail, we may succeed, but we teach ourselves to build upon either result. "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58, NKJV).

Satisfaction in our work area brings a wonderful satisfaction in our relationship with Jesus, for if we are contented, labor reaps profits that are priceless.

Pondering the Eternal

EXPLORATION

Acts 10:38

CONCLUDE

"Find a job you love and you'll never work a day in your life." After the Fall, labor and work took on negative connotations for many. God's intention in assigning meaningful work to Adam and Eve, however, was a blessed positive. Work is divine in origin and a boon for human spiritual development. When engaged in honest labor, humanity emulates God, who is always at work (John 5:17). But humanity is *most* like God when they join the Creator in the work of soul saving. In this love effort, humankind employs its God-given talents in an enterprise that reaps eternal rewards.

CONSIDER

- Listing as many benefits of labor as you can think of. Then list what many perceive are the liabilities of labor. Compare and discuss these ideas with others.
- Contacting an unchurched neighbor or co-worker to invite them to church or Bible study.
- Recording on a cassette tape or CD music whose words inspire you to be involved in soul winning. Play it to motivate you to share in God's ministry with others.
- Setting a goal for how many Bible study enrollment cards you will give or send during the next 30-day period. Keep a record and review it at the end of the period.
- Analyzing several episodes of your favorite TV program for its viewpoint on the subject of work in a person's life.
- Constructing a small literature rack, pouch, or holder that can be unobtrusively placed near you at your workplace. Stock it with colorful, interesting, inspirational literature.
- Observing an ant farm. Note how these creatures work and discover new lessons from their activity. Read Proverbs 6:6; 30:25.

CONNECT

Messages to Young People, pp. 214, 215; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 418.

Lord of our Worship



**“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel
before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are
the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand”
(Ps. 95:6, 7, NKJV).**

Active Participation or Passive Observation?

INTRODUCTION

John 4:23

During my college days I attended a class in ministry of worship. As one of the assignments for the class, one of my fellow students and I had to attend a divine service in a certain Protestant church in downtown Washington, D.C.

Filled with expectations, we showed up in the sanctuary on a Sunday morning and joined the regular worshipers who were already filling the pews.

An excellent organ and choir created the mood of worship. A dramatic reading of various texts from the Scriptures—among them Isaiah 53—further tuned our mind-set toward worshipping our Lord. And then finally it was time for the sermon, which was to be presented by one of the nation's most famous preachers.

The preacher entered the pulpit. "Friends," he said, "for a long time we have needed some moments of silence in this church. We have just listened to a text reminding us of the sufferings of the Lord of our worship. The best we can do is just to keep silent and reflect upon this text. May the Holy Spirit guide our thoughts as we celebrate and worship our Lord through some moments of silence."

**Maybe we need more
silence in our worship
services.**

Then the preacher sat down—and for the next 20 minutes not a sound was heard in the sanctuary. We were all alone with just our own thoughts. I shall never forget this worship service.

This makes me think of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who reminds us that many of us have a mistaken understanding of what real worship means. We should not be just spectators at a church service, as we watch the show in a theater, but we should be active participants as we listen to the Prompter—our Lord and God.

The important thing for us to think about is not where we worship—which it is obvious the woman at the well thought a lot about. The most important is who and how we worship in the days to come. To worship in spirit and in truth does not necessarily require that we turn up the volume on the drums and guitars accompanying the songs of praise or that we imitate the program of charismatic churches. God was not in the storm on Mount Carmel, but in the quietness surrounding it.

Maybe we need more silence in our worship services, so that the Lord of our worship can reach us with the prompting that is necessary if we will be better equipped to carry our witness to the world around us.

The Road to Genuine Worship

LOGOS

Psalms 47; 63:1–4; 95:6, 7; 99:9; 150; John 2:13–16; Acts 4:24–31; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:8–14; 14:6, 7

The Creator-Shepherd inspires genuine worship (Ps. 95:6, 7).

In the rich metaphorical language of the book of Psalms, contrasting images are drawn together to show that God is at once supreme and exalted and yet close and sympathetic to humanity. He is, for example, both Creator and Shepherd (Ps. 95:6, 7). Both of these images of God serve to widen our perception of who God is, deepen our relationship to Him, and elicit our response in worship. As Creator, God inspires awe and wonder in His creatures, and as Shepherd, He inspires a sense of intimacy and assurance. Awe and wonder, intimacy and assurance are important characteristics of genuine worship.

The Psalms, though, are not mere exhibits of beautiful, religious imagery. They invite us to let our worship be of substance; to bow down (verse 6) and by so doing

**Self-interest had subtly
supplanted genuine worship.**

indicate that we acknowledge our God not only intellectually but with our entire being, and that our intention is complete devotion to Him.

This attitude of devotion will stand in contrast to the attitude of unfaithfulness represented at times by the people of Israel (verse 8) as the Creator-Shepherd sought to shepherd them to the Promised Land.

The Lamb is the focus of genuine worship (Rev. 5:8–14; 14:1–3).

Even the troubling and uneasy scenarios of the book of Revelation are, at times, interrupted by powerful scenes of unreserved praise. These apocalyptic worship scenes all have the Person of the Lamb as their exclusive focus (Rev. 5:8–14; 14:1–3). The depth of worship seems to correspond only to the depths from which the worshipers have been saved. In fact the very subject of their song is the extent to which the Lamb has gone to save them (5:9). His own life was offered. The worship here is demonstrative: They play instruments, burn incense, prostrate themselves, sing loudly, and completely surround the throne where the Lamb is sitting. This is universal worship (verse 13) because the Lamb, through His blood, has won a universal victory, and only universal and unrestrained worship will suffice.

The Son of Man envisaged genuine worship (John 2:13–16).

“How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” (John 2:16, NIV). As Jesus drove the moneychangers from the temple courts, His words and actions were reminiscent of the ancient passion that burned in the hearts of those who truly lived to honor God (John 2:17; Ps. 69:9). In fact, Jesus not only shared but also embodied the zeal of the prophets (Jer. 7:11) who called for a restoration of inclusive and wholehearted devotion to God and a turning away from idolatry.

The temple courts offered a place of worship for Gentiles, but the steady encroachment of trading in the outer courts meant the exclusion of this group of worshipers from expressing their devotion to God in the temple, the very purpose for which the temple was built (Isa. 56:7). Something was wrong. Self-interest had subtly supplanted genuine worship. Jesus’ actions sprung from His deep longing to see genuine worship restored not only to the life of Israel but to all people who desired to worship the Father.

Christ’s teaching nourishes genuine worship (Col. 3:16).

The Scriptures as taught by Jesus (Col. 3:16) were meant to give substance to the life and worship of the Christian community. Music was instrumental in this regard. There was an almost natural affinity between the teaching and learning of the Word, and the expression of the Word in praise and song. One could say that the Word of God gives birth to genuine worship and that the Word of God nourishes genuine worship. In this context music and song were not merely an end in themselves but served the purpose of permeating the believer’s mind with God’s Word.

REACT

1. How important is the relationship between Scripture and worship?
2. What are the connections between how we live and how we worship?
3. Identify three ways you can keep your worship from becoming mere ritual.
4. How is the worship imagery presented throughout the Bible (such as the Lamb as the focus of genuine worship) different from idolatry?
5. In reference to Revelation 5:13, this lesson observes that only unrestrained worship sufficed. In your life today, at what point could worship be too unrestrained, such as with music or dance, and why?
6. In your own words, explain what you think this statement means: “Worship has to do with the biblical truth of another reality.”

The People of the Spirit?

TESTIMONY

John 4:23–25

“‘A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks’” (John 4:23, NIV). I have heard many sermons stating that we should be “people of the Book,” i.e., the Bible. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that we are people of the Bible and that this leads to knowing the truth. This is very important, but are we also people of the Spirit?

One of the most important parts of our worship experience is singing. We

“Singing, as a part of religious service, is as much an act of worship as is prayer.”

each have our own unique experience when we allow the Holy Spirit into our hearts and the expression that then comes from us in our singing. However, our culture, childhood experi-

ences, or expectations of conformity to tradition can stifle our experience of worship—particularly in regard to music.

Last year, I was privileged to sing Handel’s *Messiah* as part of a large choir in the Sydney Opera House. Last Sabbath I attended a youth rally with contemporary worship songs and a band made up of a group of young people. In my home church I sing hymns and praise songs. In all of these, my singing brings me closer to God and is an important part of my worship experience.

“Singing, as a part of religious service, is as much an act of worship as is prayer. The heart must feel the spirit of the song to give it right expression.”¹

Indeed, many a song is prayer. If the child is taught to realize this, he will think more of the meaning of the words he sings and will be more susceptible to their power.”²

We are each challenged to allow the Holy Spirit into our lives. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit will be in the way in which we worship our God—particularly in our singing. So whether you enjoy instrumental music, hymns, or contemporary praise and worship songs, don’t let your heart be cold to the power of the Holy Spirit. For then we can indeed be people of the spirit and the truth.

REACT

How can I enter into a more meaningful worship experience with God through music?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 594.

2. *Child Guidance*, p. 523.

Worship: An Evidence of God's Actions

EVIDENCE

2 Cor. 5:5

In John 4:23, 24, we find that God seeks true worshipers. Worship is many things and can take many forms. We can worship God with our lives, with our songs, or in other ways in which we choose to express ourselves.

Basically worship has to do with the biblical truth of another reality—God's reality. To worship the God of the universe focuses us on another truth rather than the one we see through our physical eyes. What difference can we expect this other reality to make in our own lives when we worship?

When we speak of the facts and of the character of God that we don't see, we are being obedient and acting in faith. This act is inspired by God Himself. First Corinthians 12:3 says that our proclamation of Jesus as Lord is the work of the Holy Spirit. By proclaiming His lordship, we take part in God's reality.

The evidence of God is seen when His characteristics become real in our lives.

According to 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22, we are given the Holy Spirit as evidence—a guarantee that we have a connection to God's reality. Galatians 5:22, 23 speaks of how God's reality of peace, joy, and love is revealed in our lives. By worshipping Jesus, our reality will be transformed by Him through the Spirit.

Try for a moment to consider how you experience the Holy Spirit's work in you when you worship.

God wants to make it real to you that in spite of everyday challenges and problems, there can be peace, joy, etc. (2 Cor. 5:1–5). By the Holy Spirit worship affects the reality inside you, showing you how big God is and showing you concretely what it means that Jesus has conquered the evil one. By this God can change your reality.

Regular worship has a great effect because the truth about God in us is strengthened by the trust we put in Him.

A practical challenge for you today could be to pray that God will make the theoretical facts about Himself real when you worship Him.

Ask God to reveal to you this very day what it means that Jesus is Lord, and ask Him to reveal to you the true meaning of His salvation.

- Consider your priorities in your day.
- Consider your relationships.
- Consider your plans for the future.

**Worship has to do with
the biblical truth of
another reality.**

Spiritual Nourishment

HOW-TO

Heb. 10:25

A churchgoer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every week. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher: "I've

**"For the life of me, I can't
remember a single one
of them."**

been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this: They all nourished me and gave

me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

We feel good when we have healthful meal choices. Consider this:

1. Portion. A good portion gives you enough nutrition and energy. Make sure we have daily spiritual food to keep us going and healthy spiritually.

2. Way of cooking. Fast food is quick and easy but has less nutrition than properly prepared food. Be active and more involved in choosing a good source of spiritual food as well as in preparing and consuming it. You will enjoy the preparation and the meal.

3. Appetite comes from the eye. A well-prepared worship gives extra blessing and the joy of worship. How wonderful it would be if everyone takes time and applies extra effort to put their talent into worship. Worship would be most joyful and a time you would look forward to. Being friendly, beautiful music, working on the sound system, presentation shows, and flower arrangements are only some examples. You must have at least one of those talents.

A little change makes a big difference.

REACT

1. Think about your spiritual eating habits. How does your eating choice affect your spiritual life?

2. How big is your spiritual portion?

For All the Peoples

OPINION

Isa. 56:6, 7

God has no limits. As Creator, He is not confined to one race, one nation, or one culture. Even in Old Testament times, His grace was not exclusive to the Jews. In Nineveh, one of the world's largest cities, thousands repented. Foreigners who turned to God and accepted His covenant were welcome in Jerusalem. The temple was to be called "a house of prayer for all the peoples" (Isa. 56:7, NASB).

Even more so after Jesus' time on earth. The apostles were shown through Peter's experience with Cornelius (Acts 10) that the gospel of salvation is indeed for all people. We will worship God in unity, for we are all equal before the Cross.

But no two people are identical, and no two groups of people are identical. The Jews would come to Jerusalem for the feasts but attend their local synagogue the rest of the year. Today we no longer go to Jerusalem to worship, but "worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23, NKJV). We are united through the work of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the Word of God. And, of course, there are cultural differences.

A rural Midwestern church in the United States will not worship in the same way as an inner-city church in London, England, and both will differ greatly from a village in Papua New Guinea. Hopefully, though, spirit and truth will transcend cultural differences, so the love and grace of our Savior is evident in our worship, regardless of the setting.

A lot of things are changing in the world today with terms such as "globalization," "network society," and "the global village" having an impact on how we view our identity. Culture is no longer decided solely by geography; we choose for ourselves which networks and societies we wish to be a part of; hence we live very different lives from those of our next-door neighbors.

This obviously represents a great challenge for outreach and worship, as exceedingly individualistic persons will prefer different styles of worship. Merely lamenting this development would be pointless; instead we should continue to explore new ways to reach unchurched people and new ways to worship a Lord who is too great to be restricted to one human culture. And remember that to worship in spirit and truth is not about us and our desires, but about focusing on the God who unites us.

**No two groups of people
are identical.**

O Worship the Lord

EXPLORATION

1 Chron. 16:29

CONCLUDE

Have you ever said, "We need to have worship"? Doesn't it make more sense to worship than to "have" worship? Worship should be an active verb. It should be an action that occurs between you and God that sometimes includes other people. Worship can take many forms and have different components such as music, prayer, testimony, giving, Scripture, service, preaching, silence, drama, and art. But the heart of worship is Jesus and the incredible sacrifice He made for us. He is worthy to be praised!

CONSIDER

- Praying the ACTS prayer as part of worship. Begin with (A)doration and praise to God, continue with (C)onfession of sins, follow with (T)hanksgiving, and conclude with (S)upplication or prayer requests.
- Composing your own worship music. Write a song of praise or set one of the psalms to music.
- Creating a place of worship at home or outdoors. Decorate a corner of a room with things that help you connect with God. Or make a special place in a garden or yard.
- Listening to Michael Card's CD *Unveiled Hope*. It includes many beautiful scriptural worship passages found in Revelation.
- Forming a worship group with a few friends to spend time praying and worshipping together.
- Painting a picture that shows how you feel when you worship God.
- Planning a unique worship program to present in your school or church.

CONNECT

Revelation 15:1–4; 19:1–10.
Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray*.

Lord of our Service



“ ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant’ ” (Mark 10:42, 43, NKJV).

Divine Appointments: Are You Available?

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 6:7

My heart pounded each time I remembered her. This time I called. "Are you OK?" I queried.

"There is a fire in the shop at present!" she blurted out nervously. Immediately I prayed for protection for her family. My telephone call! Was it coincidence or divine appointment?

We are saved by grace. So we serve because of grace. Christian service is a privilege, not a demand. This brings us to the opportunity place of divine appointments. There we meet both Father and Son, who appoint us some unique mission. For Jesus says, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30, NKJV). When we accept God the Son as Lord and Creator, we become available to God the Holy Spirit as a channel of blessing. Then we acknowledge God the Father as Lord and King of our lives and Jesus Christ as Lord of our service.

Service, work performed by one who serves, provides help and benefit to the receiver. Thus we are advised to "praise God by tangible service, by doing all in

**Christian service is a
privilege, not a demand.**

our power to advance the glory of His name."¹ Our only aim then should be to make ourselves available for the outworking of the Holy Spirit, and become connected with a "link which binds us to God and

to our fellow men."² As we bond with Divine power, heaven takes note of our good deeds, our kindnesses, for they please God. Paul emphasized this mission and challenged the early church to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, . . . which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1, NKJV). James endorsed that fact and explained that "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27, NKJV). "Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave" (Matt. 20:27, NKJV). True service is for the eyes of God, not for the applause of humankind.

Only when our will is linked with His and our spirit is linked with His Spirit, will our work be valuable to Him. Then we will hear from His lips: "'Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!'" (Matt. 25:21, NIV). Make Jesus Christ Lord of your service. Give Him your availability. Accept His mission. He will anoint you to His divine appointments. Are you available?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 300.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 326.

Finding the Evidence on Jesus

EVIDENCE

1 Thess. 5:21

"Special alert, all units. Send backup. This is an all-points bulletin for a suspect in the Palestine area. It is reported he is a tall, dark-haired male with a kindly expression. Suspect goes by the name 'Jesus' and has been seen hanging out with a local gang.

"Suspect is armed, but not dangerous. Proceed with caution. He was last seen dressed head to toe in white linen and sandals. Bloodstains and torn linen have been found. Eyewitnesses say he has wounds in the left side, hands, and feet. Reports say He has taken flight."

So, what's the evidence? Why should I believe you?

The Evidence		
Birth	Matt. 1:24, 25	About 4 B.C.
	Matt. 2:1	Bethlehem, Israel
Death	Matt. 27:50	About A.D. 27
Last sighted	Mark 16:14; Luke 24:34; John 20:26; 1 Cor. 15:6	Many witnesses
Sandals	Matt. 3:11	Typical shoes of the day
Scars	John 20:27; Luke 24:39, 40	Hands, feet, side
Blood	Luke 22:44 Blood at Gethsemane; Mark 14:24 New blood/wine	Blood stains

OK. You have the facts. You've seen the evidence. You decide.

REACT

1. No one doubts the reality of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Though two millennia have passed since Jesus lived, why do you think some people doubt the evidence of Jesus' life?

2. Many people consider the Bible to be the infallible Word of God and thus irrefutable evidence for the gift of Jesus. How do some of the Bible's contradictions affect your belief in the evidence it provides?

3. Thomas needed to touch the wounded side of Jesus before he would believe. What do you need to touch, literally or metaphorically, in order to believe in salvation?

LOGOS

Luke 10:38–42; John 13:1–15; Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:28–13:3

“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. . . . 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. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me” (John 12:24–26, NIV).

Are you ready to cast your life away? Are you willing to put aside all your dreams and goals in order to advance the cause of Christ? What will you give in exchange for your soul—education, family, friends, money, fame, a home, a car, or life itself? What then? Jesus says, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and

where I am, my servant also will be” (verse 26, NIV). Are you where Jesus is? “The lesson of seed sowing teaches liberality. ‘He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall

**Paul reminds us that
without love these gifts
and services are nothing.**

reap also bountifully.’ 2 Corinthians 9:6. . . .

“Only through the sacrifice of Christ, the Seed, could fruit be brought forth for the kingdom of God. In accordance with the law of the vegetable kingdom, life is the result of His death.

“So with all who bring forth fruit as workers together with Christ: self-love, self-interest, must perish; the life must be cast into the furrow of the world’s need. But the law of self-sacrifice is the law of self-preservation. The husbandman preserves his grain by casting it away. So the life that will be preserved is the life that is freely given in service to God and man.”*

The original Greek word for “servant,” *diakonos*, in John 12:26, could also translate as “minister” or “deacon.” In fact, *diakonos* is translated in the KJV as minister 20 times out of the 31 times it is used. (See Mark 10:43; Romans 13:4; 2 Corinthians 6:4.) When we, as Christians, give our lives to Jesus, the Master says that He will be with us every step of the way. The promise of bearing much fruit is given to every one who follows Christ (John 15:1–8).

In John 13:1–15, Jesus provides an awe-inspiring example of service and humility. A dispute arose among the disciples as to which of them was considered greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am

among you as one who serves'” (Luke 22:25–27, NIV). (See also Matthew 18:1–3; 20:20–28; Mark 9:33–37; 10:35–45; Luke 9:46–48.) Jesus, the Word made flesh, not only speaks to the disciples but demonstrates for them true greatness by washing His disciples’ feet. This was the job of a slave, a servant.

In Romans 12:4–8, Paul continues to emphasize the theme of service. His focus, however, moves from the individual to the collective unit serving, recognizing, and using the specific gifts given to each member. Paul’s counsel is preceded by an admonition to humility. Romans 12:3 says we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. In the body of Christ, we must recognize that no member is more important than any other member of the body of Christ. Members must also recognize that service to others is to be their focus. In announcing His mission (Luke 4:18, 19), Jesus announces a mission service. In Matthew 20:28 He says that He did not come to be served but to serve.

We are saved by grace through faith and only by grace through faith. All that we do in service toward our fellow humanity must be done in love and motivated by love. It is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, who gives men and women the gifts needed to serve. First Corinthians 12 outlines a plethora of gifts, orders these gifts, and equates this metaphor of the church to a body. Paul teaches that just as various parts of the body serve a specific purpose, the member with his or her gift(s) also serves a specific purpose. Yet in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, Paul reminds us that without love these gifts and services are nothing.

In serving others there is a tendency to focus on self and not on the Master. Luke 10:38–42 gives a perfect example of this. The sisters of Lazarus (the one Jesus raised from the dead), Mary and Martha, entertain Jesus in their home. Mary sits with Jesus being taught eternal truths. “Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made” (Luke 10:40, NIV). After Martha complained about the lack of help from her sister, Jesus said that Mary had chosen what is better. Though service is needful, Jesus seems to be saying that the material things in which Martha interested herself could be taken away. Self was the lord of her service, not Jesus.

REACT

1. The Bible presents many paradoxes, including the death of Jesus so that we all might live. How is it possible for us to lead as ministers yet also be servants, to be assertive yet also to be humble?

2. What are some new ways you could serve God individually as well as collectively (in a group)? Set yourself the goal this month to actively serve Him in three new ways.

3. If it is possible to have poor motives to serve God or humanity, what might they be? How can these poor motives be replaced by the motive of love?

**Education*, pp. 109, 110.

The Christian's Responsibility

TESTIMONY

Phil. 4:13

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? How can I honor and glorify Thy name upon the earth? Souls are perishing all around us, and yet what burden do the youth bear to win souls to Christ?"¹

This thought should consume our everyday way of life, be in our hearts, minds, and souls. We as young Christians have a responsibility to our heavenly Father and to the people of this world to serve others by giving of ourselves everything that God has already given us.

No matter what His perfect purpose is for our life's calling, we are all called to be a servant to Him, then to others. In John 13:1–15, Jesus gives us the perfect example of our responsibility to the service of the Lord and to others. The Lord has given us so much; it's time to give back to Him.

You mean everything to God; what does He mean to you? If the Lord means everything to you, if He has blessed you, then you must share that with the rest of

**"There is room in the work
of God for all."**

the world. People will perish, people who could have been saved had someone given them God's message. It is through our service that we are ministering God's message and planting

seeds that may someday grow. Nothing would grow if a seed weren't planted in the soil; it all begins with a seed.

"There is room in the work of God for all who are filled with the spirit of self-sacrifice. God is calling for men and women who are willing to deny self for the sake of others, willing to consecrate all they have and are to His work."²

To know God is to know of His love, for He is love, and He loves us with a selfless love, so we must obtain that same kind of love for others as well. Selflessness and self-sacrificing includes giving of yourself, even when you don't have it to give.

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 205.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

Intern of the Master Physician

HOW-TO

1 Corinthians 12; Gal. 6:10

"I see God in every human being. When I wash the leper's wounds, I feel I am nursing the Lord himself. Is it not a beautiful experience?"¹ These were the words of Mother Teresa, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her dedication to the care of the unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. Traveling to the slums to seek the lepers, AIDS victims, and neglected children, she wore a simple one-dollar white sari to identify herself with those who could barely afford to survive. Her mission was to touch those who were considered physically and socially untouchable. Mother Teresa was, indeed, an "angel of mercy."

Christ's life on earth was similar. He sought those with physical and spiritual needs and nursed them back to health. Never did His patients need to be transferred to another doctor, and not once did Christ turn a dying soul away. There was never a condition so chronic that He could not heal—not even death. Christ was truly the Master Physician. As Christ's followers, we are called to be His apprentices, showing the world a Power that heals and restores unconditionally.

How do we become interns of the Master Physician?

How do we become interns of the Master Physician? Here are a few steps:

1. Find the "residency" that fits you personally. In 1 Corinthians 12 we are reminded that the Holy Spirit blesses different people with different gifts, and all of them are equally important to further Christ's healing ministry.

2. Sympathize with your patients. "God requires His people to be far more pitiful and considerate of the unfortunate than they are. . . . God requires that the same consideration which should be given to the widow and fatherless be given to the blind and to those suffering under the affliction of other physical infirmities."²

3. Don't forget that you are working in an emergency room. "There is a great work to be done in our world, and as we approach the close of earth's history, it does not lessen in the least degree; but when the perfect love of God is in the heart, wonderful things will be done."³

4. Realize that you are always on call. Never put off helping someone who is in need. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10, NKJV).

1. Quote from CNN.com on Mother Teresa.

2. *My Life Today*, p. 243.

3. *Ibid.*

Service: Is Your Focus Backwards?

OPINION

Matt. 7:16–23; 20:26, 27

The thought of service poses many questions among Christians. How important is service in our Christian walk? Are acts of service necessary for salvation? How do we deal with the danger of competition where service is concerned? Perhaps the answers we seek have eluded us because we have come to approach the subject with a “what” predisposition instead of a “why,” causing our focus to be backwards.

To understand the relevance of service, it is necessary to define acts of service as the effect and not the cause. Often our attitude toward serving others is that we

We fall into the rut of focusing on the action.

must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the sick if we hope to be saved. This thought leaves us with an underlying notion that we do so to obtain something.

We fall into the rut of focusing on the action, suggesting that service is not part of our character but requires conscious effort to perform. The service referenced in 1 Corinthians 13 is referred to as “charity” and implies that it is part of character or Christian nature. Things that are of our character we do not have to consciously tell ourselves to do; they are automatically done out of habit.

The spirit of service is just as important as the service itself. It is the ever-evolving aftermath of the heart’s continual experience with Christ. When this takes place, the effects are automatic service to others. Because of this the Bible tells us we will be known by our fruits. When commenting about the Gentiles, the Bible also states that “it shall not be so among you” (Matt. 20:26, NKJV). Perhaps this passage was not merely talking about greatness by the standard of men but true greatness; meaning, when people look at us they will see something different. We will be regarded as great not because we exercise authority over anyone but because we endeavor to serve everyone with genuine sincerity of heart.

If we attempt to approach serving as the act, as something we must do, then our focus is backwards. Yes, those who make it to the kingdom will have served others; however, serving others is not the ticket into the kingdom. It is merely a reflection of the person’s relationship and experience with Jesus Christ. It is not possible to have an experience with Him and something not be changed within us. The closer we come to Him, the more our character is changed to His own, creating a new spirit in our hearts, one that does not focus on the act itself, but on the person and the process by which the act is done.

Service or Serve Us?

EXPLORATION

Mark 10:42, 43

CONCLUDE

It is easy to become comfortable contributing to the life of our local congregation and feel that we are justified in the amount of time we are spending in service to others. Jesus has challenged us, both in Word and by example, to move out of our comfort zones to use our spiritual gifts in service for Him. We often intend to reach out to individuals who are not Christians but are held back because we are too busy, because we don't feel we are qualified, or because we wait for something significant to be involved in. Jesus took a towel and washed feet. Simple, humble acts of service matter.

CONSIDER

- Creating a collage with pictures of people involved in acts of service. Put the collage on a large poster board and hang it in a location that will be a visual reminder to you to schedule intentional opportunities to "intern with the Master Servant."
- Gathering a small group of friends together to make a list of ways that your group can provide time ministry doing small things for others in your neighborhoods or in the community where the church is located.
- Exploring the opportunities for service that are listed on the Adventist Ministry Volunteer Network Web site (<http://www.hesaidgo.net>) that might be of interest to you.
- Listening to prayer requests with the goal of finding opportunities for service.
- Conducting a garage sale, pancake breakfast, or benefit dinner for a family or individual who has a need they cannot meet without additional support.
- Dedicating a journal in which you can write down opportunities for helping others that match your gifts and talents. After serving someone, write a paragraph or fill a page in the journal, noting the lessons you learned and the blessings you received from acting in service to others.
- Starting a "random acts of kindness" small group in your church. (See Web site for "100 Ideas for Individuals and Groups" at <http://www.actsofkindness.org/community>).

CONNECT

Adventist Volunteer Ministry Network (online) <http://www.hesaidgo.net>

Chris and Yolanda Blake, *Reinvent Your Sabbath School*.

<http://www.creativeministry.org/resources/smallgroups/Reinvent/Reinvent.htm>

King of kings and Lord of lords



“I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:11, 16, NKJV).

No More Tears— For Real

INTRODUCTION

John 14:1–3

Ever had your heart broken? Have you ever been so hurt and disappointed that it felt like your whole world caved in? Have you suffered the loss of a loved one, a life-threatening illness, or the devastation of situations that were beyond your control?

Me, too.

We live in a war zone. We are surrounded by broken people, bodies are battered and bruised, and lives are turned inside out in the blink of an eye—but there is an end in sight. We have been told how the story ends. We know for certain how things will turn out.

“I’m coming back for you,” He said. “I want you to be with Me. I will dry your tears, put an end to your sorrow.” Now sometimes, when we hear such promises, we reserve a healthy skepticism, but the One who promised is good for His word. He knows our challenges; He knows our heartache. He’s been here. He’s walked the walk. He really does understand, and He has a heart of compassion. He promised

**Truth be told, we don’t
always keep our
promises.**

not to leave us here, in our hurt, forever. Truth be told, we don’t always keep our promises. Sometimes we forget. Sometimes, in spite of our best intentions, we change our minds. Sometimes, we have simply promised more than we can deliver. He’s not like that. He can deliver. He will deliver. He will not forget. He will not change His mind. He has more power than we can imagine, more resources than we can fathom, more love for us than we can comprehend.

He is our King of kings and Lord of lords.

Growing up, I was terrified of Jesus’ second coming. It seemed to me that we focused much more on the pandemonium and terror of the time of trouble than on the incredible joy of finally seeing Jesus our Lord and King, face to face. Troubles and sorrow will fade away; the King’s glory will shine forever.

When I see Jesus in all His glory and majesty, surrounded by choirs of angels, then and only then will I experience true worship, as my heart bursts in awe and adoration. Only then will I begin to comprehend His greatness, power, and depth of love. For now, I must wait with eager anticipation.

The King is coming. Our King. He loves us and He’s coming back for us. There will be no more tears. He promised.

King of Kings and Lord of Love

LOGOS

Matt. 7:21–29; 24:23–51; John 14:1–3; Acts 1:9–11; Phil. 2:9–11; Rev. 20:7–9

To truly “watch” and “be ready” we need to understand and present the signs of Christ’s coming in the light of God’s love. In John 14:3 Jesus said, “If I go . . . I will come again” (NKJV). And in Acts 1:11 the angels said, “This *same* Jesus, . . . will so come in *like manner* as you saw Him go” (NKJV, emphasis supplied). In verse 9 the angels ask why the disciples are standing around. They remind them of their mission to proclaim good news and to warn the world.

Second Coming Not a Secret Coming (Matt. 24:23–28, 30, 31)

Jesus doesn’t want anyone to be deceived. He warns His disciples not to follow false messiahs and not to go into the desert or secret rooms. The Son of Man’s return will light up the sky like lightning. It will be surprisingly swift and stunningly brilliant. Unlike His birth in Bethlehem, this coming will not be a local event, but will be visible to all the tribes of the earth and will be trumpeted loudly.

Prophetic Signposts (Matt. 24:29)

Next, Jesus gives us virtual pinpoints on a timeline by saying, “Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken” ’” (Matt. 24:29, NIV).

**Good works minus faith
equals lawlessness.**

Prophecy tells us there would be a time of apostasy and corruption. A “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:3, NIV) would infiltrate and corrupt the church. This would lead to persecution of those who remained faithful to God and His laws. Jesus said that immediately after this tribulation “ “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light” ’” (Matt. 24:29, NKJV). Clear evidence points to these prophesied celestial events being specifically fulfilled just after 1798.¹

Jesus said that one sign of His coming is like a fig tree. Just as you know that summer is near when it begins to produce leaves, so you will know when you see these signs that it is near, even at the door. It is also interesting that the book of Revelation refers to a fig tree in connection with the falling of the stars.

This Generation (Matt. 24:34–51)

Why did Jesus say this generation will not pass until all these things are ful-

filled? Remember that, first of all, in Matthew 24 Jesus is answering the disciples' question regarding the destruction of the temple: " 'When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' " (Matt. 24:3, NKJV). So part of His answer was for them and referred to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In light of the prophetic signs of verse 29, however, we realize that His answer was also for those living at the time of the end. (Compare Matthew 24:8, 13, 14.) And let us not forget that Jesus clearly warned against date setting (Matt. 24:36).

Works of Faith Versus Faithless Works (Matt. 7:21–29)

Although many cry "Lord, Lord," only those who do God's will make it into the kingdom (Matt. 7:21). Some will be lost though they have prophesied, cast out demons, and performed many wonders in Jesus' name. Yet He will say, "I never knew you."

A stunning statement indeed! To think that a commandment-keeper could be called lawless! Good works minus faith equals lawlessness. Truly such good deeds are hollow at the core, because they are tainted by selfish motives rather than the perfect love that fulfills the law. Good deeds are no substitute for real intimacy with God, nor can pious appearances replace a faith relationship.

In another parable the wise man builds his house on a solid rock foundation. But the foolish man builds on sand. Notice that both work hard. Both build houses, but the key is where they build. What about our lives? Are we depending on God's solid promises or on our own shaky ones? Our "promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand."²

Lord of Lords and King of Kindness (Phil. 2:9–11; Rev. 20:7–9)

Scripture tells us that one day "every knee" will bow at Jesus' name, and that, "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10, 11, NKJV). But then, just after this admission, the wicked will rise up and try to attack the saints inside the New Jerusalem. Finally, God has no choice but to give them the destruction that they have chosen. Saddest of all is that the lost will choose the wages of sin instead of the gift of justification paid for by Christ's blood (Rev. 20:14).

Sin has run its course. Mercy and justice have come full circle. Now with tears in His eyes, He carries out "His unusual act" (Isa. 28:21, NKJV)—the consuming fire of His presence falls on those who have sought to avoid Him and His love. Truly, all the universe can see now that our God is King of kings and Lord of lords, because He is the greatest Lover of all.

1. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, pp. 340, 341.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

Behold, He Comes Again!

TESTIMONY

John 14:3

"Christ came to earth as God in the guise of humanity. He ascended to heaven as the King of saints. His ascension was worthy of His exalted character. He went as one mighty in battle, a conqueror, leading captivity captive. He was attended by the heavenly host, amid shouts and acclamations of praise and celestial song."¹

"Christ is coming with clouds and with great glory. A multitude of shining angels will attend Him. He will come to raise the dead, and to change the living saints from glory to glory. He will come to honor those who have loved Him, and kept His commandments, and to take them to Himself. He has not forgotten them nor His promise. There will be a relinking of the family chain. When we look upon our dead, we may think of the morning when the trump of God shall sound, when 'the dead shall

**"Soon we shall be in our
promised home."**

be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.' 1 Cor. 15:52. A little longer, and we shall see the King in His beauty. A little longer, and He will wipe all tears from our eyes. A little longer, and

He will present us 'faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.' Jude 24."²

"Long have we waited for our Saviour's return. But nonetheless sure is the promise. Soon we shall be in our promised home. There Jesus will lead us beside the living stream flowing from the throne of God and will explain to us the dark providences through which on this earth He brought us in order to perfect our characters. There we shall behold with undimmed vision the beauties of Eden restored. Casting at the feet of the Redeemer the crowns that He has placed on our heads, and touching our golden harps, we shall fill all heaven with praise to Him that sitteth on the throne."³

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space."⁴

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1053.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 632.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 254.

4. *The Great Controversy* p. 678.

From Whence Cometh My Help?

EVIDENCE

John 14:1-3

Almost 20 years ago a young Armenian boy lay suffering in the darkness. Trapped by a collapsed classroom, it seemed that time marched on unmarked. His elementary school had been destroyed by a powerful earthquake. Panic must have gripped his little heart, "Does anyone know we are here? Who will come and save us?" Yet, within these moments of despair, he remained steeped in hope. "My father will rescue me. He promised he would come whenever I need him."*

Jesus has made promises about His coming too. Most theologians agree that there are more references in the Bible to Christ's second coming (at least 100) than to His first coming.

Some argue that when Jesus says He will come again that He is referring to a generational time frame. "'This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place'" (Mark 13:30, NKJV). Maybe He's already come and gone? Have we misunderstood this promise? Many others have been wrong before. Indeed, many Christians believe that the second coming of Christ is simply a childhood fantasy. Jesus even admits to not knowing when He would return. If He cannot be certain, how can we?

**We cannot simply put
this hypothesis under
scientific scrutiny.**

If what we seek is incontrovertible evidence that Jesus will come again, we have a major problem. The Bible does not work that way. We cannot simply put this hypothesis under scientific scrutiny. Fundamentally, if we accept that Jesus died for our sins and is the Messiah and Savior, we must ask why He did it.

The Bible is not a scientific document; it is a relational diary. The stories are all there so that we will meet, understand, and love a Stranger whom we will eventually recognize as our Saviour and Lord of our lives. It is for this reason—and no other—that we can be certain that Jesus will return for us.

After 38 hours of digging alone through the rubble with bloodied hands, the boy's father fulfilled his promise. Like the boy waiting under the rubble, the only way we can know that help is on the way is that we know the Helper! Jesus is our Saviour; He loves us and He wants to be with us. According to His promise, we look for a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13).

*Jack Canfield and Mark Hanson, *Chicken Soup for the Soul* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications, 1993), pp. 273, 274.

Preparing for the Harvest

HOW-TO

Isaiah 35; Matt. 13:24–30

In the first garden on earth, the Gardener walked with His creatures. Then the enemy sowed the seed of doubt, accusing God of being everything he himself was: unfair, self-promoting, a liar. The seed grew and multiplied over the centuries until the “Seed of the woman” came. His name is Jesus, Savior. He cried and prayed in another garden while His friends slept. He showed us what the Gardener is like. He left us with all we need to grow until He returns for the harvest. The wheat and the tares will grow together, but, in the end, the garden of happiness will be restored both around us and within us.

The lessons of the garden help us prepare for His second coming.

- 1. Get to know the Gardener.** When you know Him, you will trust Him to manage and nurture your life. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you. Intentionally seek Him out in the study of the Bible, in unceasing communication with Him, in the fellowship of other seekers, in the circumstances of your life. Prepare eventually to reach the crisis and joy of surrender.

**A healthy, thriving garden
is a living testament to
the character of
the Gardener.**

2. Yearn for the rain. Pray for the assurance of His presence as you would for your very breath. He is more willing to give the Holy Spirit than a father is to give good gifts to his children (Luke 11:13). Without this gift, you lack true comfort, discernment, peace, and power.

3. Wait patiently for the fruit. Do not force the blooms open or despair of ever seeing fruit. Growth is natural and the fruit is perfect at each stage as long as the plant is connected to and tended by the Source of Life. When discouraged, ask Him for forgiveness and strength and know that “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NKJV). Pray for the same merciful spirit to forgive ourselves and others. (Read Ephesians 4:32.) Be assured that the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) will be revealed. A healthy, thriving garden is a living testament to the character of the Gardener. The enemy hates that! The world needs it.

REACT

How much of the work of preparation is God's work and how much belongs to us?

Open the Door— Today

OPINION

Rev. 3:20

“‘I stand at the door and knock’” (Rev. 3:20, NKJV). Jesus here bids us open the doors to our hearts and let Him in. He wants us to make Him King of kings and Lord of lords in our lives. We have all heard of those who have experienced a deathbed conversion, but not everyone gets that opportunity. If we wait, we may die suddenly and never know the peace of Christ in our lives. As soon as we open the door, we receive a great blessing: the hope of eternal life with Christ in a new earth where “there shall be no more pain” (Rev. 21:4, NKJV). When Jesus returns, we will be among those singing praises to God.

When we put Jesus at the head of every aspect of our lives, we experience the wonder of His love and power immediately, as well as assurance that He will take us home with Him when He comes back. But there is another reason to open the door today. God wants as many to accept Him as possible, and when you open the door, He will use you to help others. They will receive kind, loving deeds at your hands; help when needed; a friend they can depend on in good times and in bad times.

**As soon as we open the
door, we receive a great
blessing.**

I recently lost a dear friend to the sleep-death of this world. But there was no last-minute confession for him. He lived a life of faith before disease struck, and in the grip of cancer, he continued loving those around him and caring for their needs. Young as he was, he scorned Satan and praised God for the many blessings in his life, even to the end. He looked forward to the day when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, . . . and . . . every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10, 11, NKJV).

I plan to join him there. How about you? In John 14:1–3 Jesus promises His disciples that He is going to prepare a place for them and that He will return to take them there. In verse 4 he tells them that they know “the way to the place” (NIV) where He is going. “‘No one comes to the Father except through me’” (verse 6, NIV). We do not have to save ourselves. In fact, we cannot. But by God’s grace Jesus died for our sins, and all He asks of us is that we accept Him as our King of kings and Lord of lords. Open the door of your heart to Jesus today, and let your life and the lives of those around you see His kingdom here and now, and forever!

The Return of the Lord

EXPLORATION

Matthew 24; Rom. 4:5; Phil. 2:9–11; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; James 2:24

CONCLUDE

There will be no greater display that Jesus is Lord of all lords than at His second coming. With trumpets blaring and all to see, His glory will shine forth to declare to all that He is Lord. But not just for His glory will this happen. Having promised to return, Jesus' second coming will reveal just how much He loves and cares for us, and is able to do all that He claims. Truly all, believers and nonbelievers alike, will see His glory, bow, and confess that He is indeed Lord.

CONSIDER

- Watching a sunrise and imagining it as the shining of God's glory at His second coming. How do you feel?
- Listening to Mercy Me's song "I Can Only Imagine" from their *Almost Home* album. Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the singer's position. How do you think you'll react when face to face with Jesus?
- Sketching the scene of Jesus' second coming as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.
- Listing the signs Jesus gave in Matthew 24 to show that His return is near. Research and compare the number of times these signs occurred 100 years ago to the number of times they have occurred in the last 20 years.
- Debating this statement: "A man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24, NKJV). Use Romans 4:5 to counter it. Finish off by trying to reconcile these two ideas.
- Thinking of a loved one who has fallen asleep into what we call "death." Reflect on how you will feel upon seeing that person at Jesus' second coming.

CONNECT

Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, chap. 24; Richard L. Neil, *His Coming*.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Ephesians: The Gospel Of Relationships

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 2005, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: The Church at Ephesus

Logos: Acts 19; 20:17–38

The Week at a Glance: What kind of culture did Paul face in Ephesus? What really motivated much of the opposition against him? Who were Aquila and Priscilla? What was the secret of Apollos's power? What was the essence of Paul's farewell address to the Ephesians?

Lesson 2: Ephesians: Themes in Relationships

Logos: Isa. 14:12; Acts 26:9–19; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:11–17; Eph. 3:11, 12; Col. 1:20, 21; Rev. 12:7

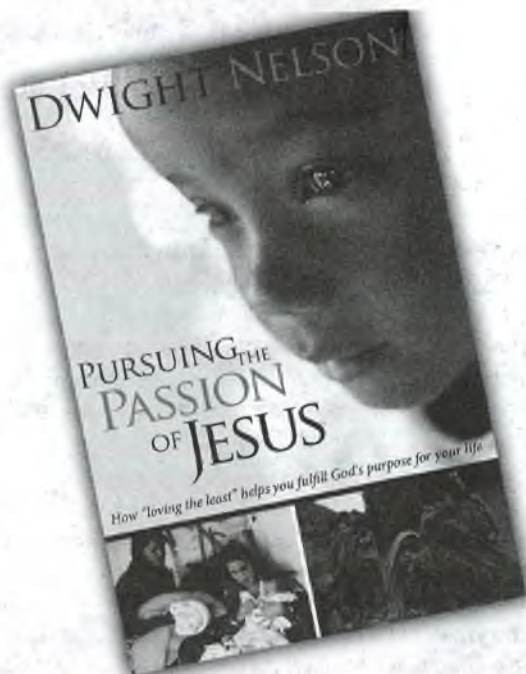
The Week at a Glance: Why was Paul so confident of his calling? What is an apostle? What is a saint? When the Bible talks about peace, what does it mean? What does Paul mean by the phrase "in Christ"?

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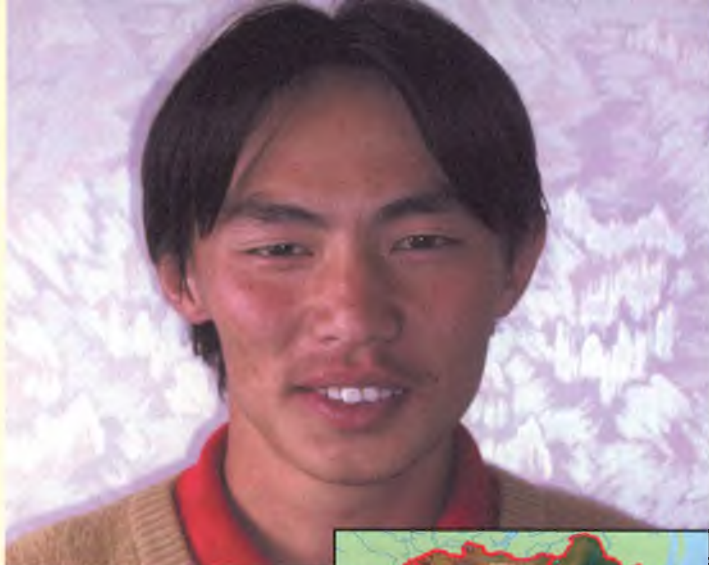
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MISSION PROFILE



Zavya lives in northern Mongolia. He loves music and often wrote songs to express his longing for a better life. A friend introduced Zavya to a well-known



Northern Asia-Pacific Division

Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.

guitarist, who taught him to play the instrument. Then the guitarist invited Zavya to visit a church. He went and enjoyed the music. When the church pastor learned that Zavya could play the guitar, he asked him to play for their services. Playing for the church filled a need in his soul.

A rock band invited Zavya to play with them. He thought he could do both, and for a while he did. But he felt torn. One evening during church, his rock band friends entered the church and motioned for him to come. He knew that if he did not go, his work with their band was over. Zavya lay down the guitar and walked out of church.

Read the surprising conclusion to Zavya's story in this quarter's *Mission*.

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter goes to countries in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division.



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