

A Devotional Bible-Study Guide for Young Adults



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Ephesians: The Church as a Living Organism

OCTOBER—DECEMBER 2005



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Ephesians: The Church as a Living Organism

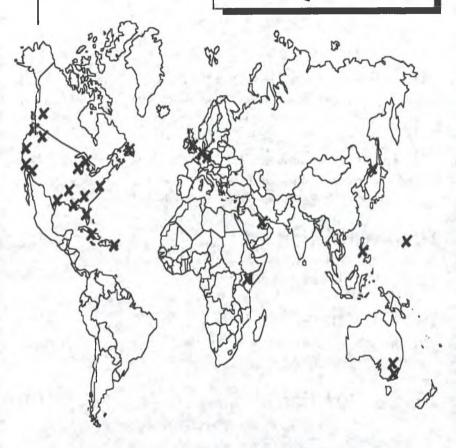
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The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in CQ's writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to CQ each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

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This Quarter's Illustrator



With a childhood passion for visual arts, Vinson B. Matias has driven himself to harness his graphic design skills where he has found himself most productive using the digital media. He enjoys digital arts, photography, print, and Web layout. He earned his degree in speech communication at the University of the Philippines Diliman, and is also an alumnus of the Philippine Center for Creative Imaging, where he took up advanced design courses. Vinz has worked as a computer design instructor in Bangkok, Thailand, and is currently a freelance Web/graphic designer. He also maintains a personal portfolio Web site called "Vinzualize" at <www.vinzmatias.com>.

Getting the most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

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

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Circulation of CQ is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

- 1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
- 2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
- 3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
- 4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
 - 5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:

"Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

"Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.

"Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

"Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.

"How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

"Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

"Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

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

The Church at Ephesus



"The word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (Acts 19:20, NKJV).

God Is Calling

INTRODUCTION

Mark 16:15

Jen, praying: Lord, I want to serve You. I want to proclaim the gospel to all mankind. I want to be an ambassador to this sin-infested world.

A brother from church: Jen, we're visiting the prison this Sabbath afternoon. Would you like to join us?

Jen: Lord, I want to be a missionary. Send me to Africa where I can teach children how to pray.

Sabbath School Superintendent: Jen, would you teach the earliteens this Sabbath?

Jen: I want to go to places where they've never heard about Jesus Christ.
Jen's mother: Jen, I heard we have new neighbors. Want to pay them a visit?
Jen: I want to testify about Your greatness and Your love.

Jen's father: Jen, please forgive me for my mistakes in the past. I want to make it up to you.

Jen: I want to tell them to be ready for Your second coming.

Are we the Jen who answers all those questions with a Yes? Are we willing to serve Him wherever He appoints us? Or do we overlook the mission field in front of us because we're waiting for the ideal situation before we serve Him? Do we

allow Him to use us in simple ways or are we in search of a big break, a high profile spot in His work?

Do we have a humble, teachable spirit like the Ephesians? Or are we too self-sufficient to

Are we like Paul who heeds His call and follows His direction?

be followers and learners in the church?

God has a distinctive message in the book of Ephesians for us. Everything starts from being a believer and follower of Christ. But God doesn't want us to go through our walk with Him on our own. God didn't just build His church for nothing. It plays a major role in our Christian lives.

By engaging ourselves in His church, we grow as Christians. By leading and following, we learn about Him and ourselves more. And by looking up to Jesus we can remain faithful to Him.

We will study about Paul, Ephesus, and the Ephesians this week and the whole quarter. May we learn more about Paul, the great missionary, and Christ, the greatest Missionary of all times.

A Church at Its Best

LOGOS

Acts 19; 20:17-38

Beginnings (Acts 18:24–19:5)

We are given a clear formula of how a church grows roots through the experience of Paul and the pioneering of Apollos (Acts 18:24–28). Through seed-faith, the experience of a handful of disciples with John the Baptist, Paul was able to capitalize on the knowledge that they already had of the ministry of Jesus Christ. But they lacked one thing: the presence of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit was not by their side while they were keeping their belief in the Messiah. The reply to the query was, "'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit' " (19:2, NKJV). It was an evidence of that one trigger that would nurture their seed-faith into maturity—receiving One who will enlighten them of the truth that was already theirs.

After mere "hearing" (verse 5, NIV) of the matters on the Holy Spirit, the first Ephesian church members experienced the first pouring into their faith, which

What organization on earth survives without conflict?

caused it to grow in immense proportions. The formula: Seed-Faith (from the Word) + the Holy Spirit (through acceptance) = the start of a strong company of believers.

Maintenance (Acts 19:6-10, 20; Eph. 2:10, 11)

By making sure that the members of the Ephesian church had the Holy Spirit to inspire them to do mighty works (verse 6), Paul was confident in what they could do. Paul even made sure that the Jewish prejudice toward Gentiles would cease by making sure that they both "heard the word" (verse 10, KJV).

Thus, "the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (verse 20, NKJV). What organization on earth survives without conflict? The Ephesian church was not exempted. From inside, pretentious disciples who thought that in their power they could summon demons from the possessed finally realized that it takes more than mentioning a name to exorcise. For even the demons whose fallen nature has degraded their beauty from the beginning know which Sovereign to believe in. And so instead of surviving souls, there were shameful tragedies.

Knowing that his presence among the members was short, Paul admonishes them to watch out for "savage wolves" (20:29, NKJV) who will "draw away disciples after them" (verse 30, NIV).

Outside was the conflict of interest from the craftsmen who based their profession on idolatry. And the community was obsessed with the mystic, magical, and superstitious. They saw that the disciples' response was all too powerful—the renunciation of traditional paraphernalia of mysticism. This was the dawn of a revolution in their midst. It was the keys to the kingdom of Jesus Christ against the great temples and costly images of the goddess Diana.

Thus Paul reminds the church to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32, NKJV), in order to bind them to the only way out of the conflicts that should arise in the present or in the future.

Clear Testimonies (Acts 20:17-27; James 1:12)

As the Great Leader Jesus Christ would have, Paul becomes an instrument to pay homage to Him who was responsible for the growth of the Ephesian church. In Acts 20:19, 20, we see five points that the church should always remember:

- 1. Humility. As the Master has served us with His own life despite His sovereignty, so should the members practice to pound pride out of their hearts and minds and stay focused on the service that lies ahead.
- 2. With Many Tears. We were not promised a comfortable life by Jesus when we follow Him. Sorrow is but a part of what leads us to appreciate the rewards.
- 3. Temptations. "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12, NKJV).
- 4. Leadership by Example. "I kept back nothing that was helpful" (Acts 20:20, NKJV). These were Paul's comforting words to distance the growing church from the ugliness of jealousy and conceit. The Ephesians should be ready to follow Paul's—and God's—leadership.
- 5. Impartiality. The clearness of the universality of the message of hope for both Jews and Greeks was the focal point of Paul's ministry through the Ephesian church. It was to open the doors to all who would repent and accept the Holy Spirit.

A Prayer by Example (Acts 20:35, 36; Eph. 4:5)

Paul's parting words to the Ephesian church were "I have been a constant example" (Acts 20:35, NLT). His own representation of the work that Jesus Christ appointed him required that Paul himself would be in the spotlight to endure, to remain in faith, and to share. And in these times no other point was to be taken, except that all things should be taken in prayer, in glorifying God, and making Him first in all things.

Monday September 26

When You Are in (First) Love . . .

TESTIMONY

Acts 19:20

A worldly city like Ephesus was a big missionary field. I presume this was the reason that Paul labored more than three years in Ephesus.1

Paul, whose ultimate desire was to labor for the Master, "push[ed] forward with untiring zeal the gospel work, and guarding the interests of a church yet young in the faith, [he] was bearing upon his soul a heavy burden for all the churches." Just like Paul, God gave us a mission field to work in. We just have to be willing to work in His field.

Look at how Paul began his ministry. Take note that he started his work insideout. When he arrived in Ephesus, he worked first on the 12 members of his fold. These brethren were ignorant of one of the major truths of the Bible: the power of

Look at how Paul began his ministry.

the Holy Spirit. But they wanted to learn and to gain wisdom. "With deep interest and grateful, wondering joy the brethren listened to Paul's words." The apostle set before them the great truths that are the foundation of the

Christian hope: Jesus Christ. He repeated the Savior's commission to His disciples: "'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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. 28:18, 19, NKJV).

The first love of the Ephesians to God made a big difference to the first-century Christian family. God reminds us of our first love in Revelation 2:4. "Amidst the constant storm of opposition, the clamor of enemies, and the desertion of friends the intrepid apostle almost lost heart. But he looked back to Calvary and with new ardor pressed on to spread the knowledge of the Crucified. He was but treading the blood-stained path that Christ had trodden before him. He sought no discharge from the warfare till he should lay off his armor at the feet of his Redeemer." We can do the same.

^{1.} Acts of the Apostles, p. 291.

^{2.} Ibid., p. 296.

^{3.} Ibid., p. 283.

^{4.} Ibid., p. 297.

The Word Did All

EVIDENCE

Acts 19:20

In 500 B.C. the people of Ephesus had erected a temple to the nature goddess Diana. The original temple burned down in 356 B.C., but in 334, Alexander the Great contributed largely to a new temple of unrivalled splendor, which was ranked among the seven wonders of the ancient world. Its importance derived not merely from its architectural beauty, but from the status, which the temple management enjoyed—as "banker of the whole world." It has been said that the temple of Diana was the equivalent in ancient pagan society to the Bank of England in modern times. The principal industry of Ephesus was manufacturing and selling images.² No wonder Demetrius, the silver shrine maker, was angry with Jesus' followers (Acts 19:24).

"All who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord" (verse 10, NKJV). imagine yourself reading this headline from the *Ephesian Bulletin* in Paul's time.

Asiarchs, Paul's friends, gave advice (verse 31). The Asiarchs were men of the highest rank, being invariably chosen from among the wealthiest of the people.

Significantly, these numbered among Paul's friends, indicating the impact of the gospel at the highest level of Ephesian society.³

The town clerk appeased the riot led by Demetrius and

The temple of Diana was the equivalent of today's Bank of England.

defended Gauis and Aristarchos as neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers (verses 37, 38). This town clerk was an officer of great influence in the Grecian cities of Asia. He stood next in rank to the officer that we now call mayor. A marvelous insight into Paul's method of preaching appears quite incidentally here. "He preached positive truths, rather than making a direct attack on their error."

Reformer Martin Luther stated it beautifully when he said, "I put forward God's word, and wrote—this was all I did. And yet while I was asleep . . . the word that I had preached overthrew popery. . . . And yet I did nothing; the word alone did all." "And the Word was God" (John 1:1, NKJV).

^{1.} Ron Ritchie, In Christ We Have Our Redemption <www.pbc.org>, p. 4.

Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament, Acts 19, <www.searchgodsword.org>, verse 10.

^{3.} Ibid., verse 31.

^{4.} Medieval Sourcebook: Pliny on the Christians. [Acts, chap. 19, p. 2] helisall@murray.fordham.edu>.

^{5.} The Great Controversy, p. 190.

Power We Need

HOW-TO

Matt. 28:19

A man strolled out of a hardware store with a smile on his face and a brandnew chainsaw in his hands. He was told how it could cut down five big oak trees in an hour. Twenty-four hours later, however, his smile was gone. Frustrated, he was back at the store complaining that the saw would never cut five trees in an hour. "It took me all day to cut down five trees," he said.

Puzzled, the store owner stepped outside with the saw, gave the cord a swift pull, and fired up the steel-toothed beast. Its deafening roar sent the customer stumbling to get away. "What's that noise?" he gasped.

Clearly this man did not know where the power came from. There's another

How do we tap into this power?

group in the Bible who had the same problem. This group consisted of the disciples from Ephesus, who before Paul came and baptized them, did not have any knowledge of the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2).

Today's church at times tries to cut the trees of hardship without the power of the Holy Spirit. It is very important that Christians connect to the source to become more efficient ministers. How do we tap into this power?

- 1. Accept. We need to accept that we are sinners and then receive Jesus as our personal Savior and surrender ourselves to Him through baptism. As the brethren in Ephesus grasped the amazing truth of Christ's atoning sacrifice and were baptized, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and labored as missionaries. "He who will give himself fully to God will be guided by the divine hand."
- 2. Renounce. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11, NKJV). Before Paul came, the Ephesian converts had not fully renounced their superstitions, practicing magic. Now that they had been baptized, they gave evidence of true conversion by burning their books on magic.
- **3. Live.** By beholding Christ we become changed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). Beholding Christ is studying His holy Word. Just as we nourish our bodies, "we must eat the bread of life and drink the water of salvation" daily. Like the brethren in Ephesus, as we are filled daily with the Holy Spirit, we shall labor as missionaries fulfilling the Savior's commission to His disciples: "'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).

^{1.} The Acts of the Apostles, p. 283

^{2.} Ibid., p. 285

Of Twists and Truths

OPINION

Acts 20:30, 31

The apostle Paul, in all his journeys within and without Asia, stayed relatively long in Ephesus. In this length of stay, any ordinary person will get to learn about a certain place and its people. Friendships may be formed. Paul had this experience in Ephesus. It is evident in his farewell speech that the apostle knew the Ephesians well. His advice and warnings were meant to strengthen the character flaws of the church in Ephesus.

One of these was that they had a penchant for twisting the truth for their own benefit. No one is exempted from Paul's prayers because both the Jews and the Gentiles had their own ways of expressing it. The Jews imitated the truth while the Gentiles traded it. The Jews made a small twist on the truth so they could gain fame. They thought that they didn't have to believe in Christ to drive away evil spirits in Christ's name. The Gentiles, on the other hand, thought they could silence the truth if they would increase the volume of a lie. They made a big turnabout just so they could earn more. No wonder Paul prayed for them with tears day and night. No matter how small or large a twist, it is still a twist, and any taint in the truth is no truth at all.

In present times we see that most of us have not escaped Paul's warnings. Everyone now has his or her own twist of the truth so that its picture is now like looking at yourself in a broken mirror pieced together. Offshoots have been sprouting from the church itself carrying with them the principles of a distorted truth. Many even claim that they are Christ themselves.

Thus, let's keep watch on ourselves, so no savage wolves will come in among us to destroy the flock and destroy the truth that we hold on to. Let us stand faithful and steadfast until the Truth Himself comes again.

REACT

- 1. As a Christian, how could you contribute in the preservation of the truth by taking heed of the apostle Paul's warnings? Be specific.
 - 2. How do unconverted people today use Jesus' name for their own ends?
- 3. What is the best approach to addressing falsehood in today's culture and church?
- 4. What principle do we see in Paul's experience in Ephesus that can give us encouragement to labor for God in the midst of social crises and danger? Be specific.

Heaven Calling

EXPLORATION

Acts 19; 20:17-38

CONCLUDE

The early Christians understood that following Christ often/always implies a radical break with one's own life as one has lived it, and with one's culture or society. It was just as easy then as now to drift along, expressing belief in a set of doctrines while avoiding committing unpopular sins, and just as difficult to take one's Christianity seriously and live in a way that makes a difference. Like the Ephesians, we must believe but also allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in making those beliefs real to ourselves and others around us.

CONSIDER

- Sharing Jesus with someone who is—to all appearances—a good person, but who has expressed indifference or hostility to God and/or the Christian faith.
- Looking at your life for clear instances of guidance by the Holy Spirit. Were there such instances? How did you respond?
- Writing a mission statement for your life as a Christian led by the Holy Spirit. Keep it in mind as you interact with your world.
- Drawing or painting a picture depicting where or how you think God might lead you in a given period of time—one year, five years. What do you see yourself doing? How do you feel about it?
- Walking prayerfully through a neighborhood or area you might normally be reluctant or frightened to go to. Don't put yourself in real danger, of course. Go with trusted friends or a church group.
- Reflecting on how a favorite piece of music, sacred or secular, has influenced you in your spiritual life.
- Calculating how much money you spend on satisfying desires, not necessarily real needs.

CONNECT

Acts 19:23–41.

Acts of the Apostles, pp. 578–580.

Mario Veloso, Prison Papers, pp. 27–34.

Ephesians: themes in Relationships



"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3, NKJV).

Confidence in the Calling

INTRODUCTION

Rom. 8:28-31; Eph. 2:19-21; Heb. 11:1

Lying in the plush foliage of the Garden of Eden, Adam turns to Eve and says, "What is the meaning of life?" Nose to nose, Noah stares into the eyes of a chimpanzee and mutters, "Why am I here?" Dusty clouds hang in the air below as Moses descends Mount Sinai. His thoughts and prayers combine, "Why me, Lord? Why this wilderness?" Gideon straps on his sandals and stares across the countless multitude of Midianites. "Is this really God's plan for me?" he whispers into the night air.

Although Scripture does not record these exact scenarios, think for a moment about Bible heroes. Each was called by God, often in the face of daunting obsta-

They must have asked the same questions we often ask.

cles and nearly hopeless circumstances. They must have asked the same questions we often ask in our lives today: "Why believe?" "Why do I exist?" Adam and

Eve were called to share companionship with God and populate the earth. When all seemed lost, only God could restore their faith and hope. Moses, worried about a speech impediment, wanted God to find another man. But God had called, and He would not take No for an answer. Instead He guided and He provided.

Meanwhile, the Bible is filled with even more outstanding instances of incredible faith. Samuel hears voices in his sleep, and boldly responds, "Here I am, Lord." Lust and deceit send David into a canyon-sized rut of sin. His heart breaks as he cries, "Have mercy on me, God!" Crunching on a honey-dipped locust, John the Baptist prays, "Lord, use me to prepare the way." Burly, wild man John showed no lack of confidence!

I am most inspired by the faith and confidence recorded in the writings of Paul. Although cold mud drips down through creaking boards overhead, Paul etches words of life, joy, peace, and love for his faraway friends. Talk about confidence in the calling! Some of the most beautiful, encouraging, and convicting verses in the Bible were penned by the prison-bound hand of Paul.

What about you? Are you confident in your calling? Have you developed a personal mission statement? Ask: Why do I exist? Why do I believe in God? What is the meaning of life? What is God calling me to do? Craft a personal mission statement today, and live by it!

Unity—How Is It Possible?

EVIDENCE

Gal. 3:28

"All one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, NIV). This is a phrase that I tend to skim over as a distantly memorized Sabbath School verse without really considering what it means. In the book of Ephesians, however, Paul places emphasis on this unity as a sign of being in Christ. Looking back through Bible history, there were so many disasters resulting from a lack of unity between people that it seems essential for Paul to begin with the ideal model of a unified church.

About the time of this writing, horrendous atrocities have been committed: "war crimes." Newspapers have plastered pictures of abused prisoners at the hands of a "civilized" occupation. However, can we really be surprised? Soldiers live under a harsh, dehumanizing regime. The opposition has to be viewed as subhuman, unworthy of pity or mercy. Given the soldiers' position of superiority and their temptation to inflict harm, it is almost inevitable that these humiliating acts will be committed. But how can we begin to break down the layers of prejudice, hatred, superiority, and cross-cultural fear and misunderstanding?

My parents are studying family therapy. One of their tutors has explored the damage done by the imbalance of power in all kinds of relationships, and Horrendous atrocities have been committed.

teaches the concept of looking at others—whoever they might be—through lenses of appreciation. Student therapists are encouraged to look up at those who are very different from themselves, those who are finding life challenging, those who are feeling vulnerable, and to be filled with wonder for them as they look for each person's special gifts and resources.

It's difficult to fight people when you are looking for their gifts and appreciating them. Paul knew this: "Honor one another above yourselves. . . . Live in harmony with one another. . . . Do not be conceited" (Rom. 12:10, 16, NIV).

Included in Ephesians are the guidelines for parents and children, husbands and wives, all designed physically to manifest the love between God and His church. With a spirit of unity we can begin to be channels of God's love in our fellowships, creating the kind of atmosphere to which non-Christians would be attracted.

The universal sacrifice Jesus made as our Savior puts us all on spiritually equal footing. Perhaps remembering this is the simple secret to the unity that God wants to see in our families, marriages, churches, society—and even the whole world.

Monday October 3

Lessons From a Not-So-Green Thumb

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

"Take care of the plants—keep them in a place with plenty of sunlight and make sure they stay well watered." A simple enough task, even for a six-year-old child. I was extremely pleased to be given so much responsibility. I enthusiastically and diligently made sure that our houseplants had plenty of what they needed to grow and stay healthy. At least, that was the way it was for the first few weeks!

Very satisfied that all of the plants were green, lush, and full, I stopped watering them—after all, they were apparently doing very well. Why would I need to bother making sure they were in the sunlight—they were already healthy enough. But, of course, I soon learned that you can't neglect providing a plant with what it needs to grow just because it appears to be doing well. In order to *maintain* its healthy state, it has to be watered and exposed to the light on a continual basis.

Otherwise, it will rapidly deteriorate.

These same principles can be applied to our spiritual relationship with God. Observing their browning leaves and limp limbs, I decided that I needed to tend them properly again. Fortunately, for many of the plants the intervention came on time. From this experi-

ence, I also learned that, many times, even those plants that seem to be in the poorest of health, if given the light and water they need, can experience amazing transformations! Even some of those on the brink of death can be resuscitated to a vibrant life.

Growing Up, but Never Outgrowing God

These same principles can be applied to our spiritual relationship with God. There is no such thing as being spiritually healthy enough that you no longer have a need of regular exposure to the light of God and the watering of our souls provided by communing with Him. Those who believe that they have come to a place in which they have outgrown their need of this regular maintenance will soon experience a rapid deterioration in their spiritual health. Such was the fate of Lucifer (Isa. 14:12–14; Rev. 12:7–9). Because he thought he no longer needed God, we see how this once illustrious being fell from heaven. Because of his continued pride, he became beyond redemption.

Revived From Death to Life

For a willing heart, however, exposure to the light and grace of God has the ability to produce the most miraculous results in even seemingly hopeless cases. In Acts 26:9–19, Paul relates the story of his transformation, brought about by the exposure to the light of Christ. His once sordid and violent ways were changed, and he became a remarkable witness for the Lord (Gal. 1:11–15). This man, who by all appearances was beyond hope, experienced a new life. He began relating to others with a spirit of love, concern, and zeal for their soul salvation.

Only God's grace can provide such a turnaround in attitude and focus. There is no substitution. This is why Paul asked for it on behalf of his congregations again and again (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3). He desired to see their characters changed in such a positive way too. Another change caused by Paul's experience with God is that he witnessed with confidence. What evidences do we have of this change? (Gal. 1:15–17).

Regular Maintenance

God desires all of us to grow spiritually and to become more like Him (Eph. 5:1, 8; Col. 1:19–22). Are there areas in your spiritual life that God may want to transform? Have you been exposing yourself to opportunities for God to make these changes? If not, what can you do to start maintaining your spiritual growth and health?

REACT

- 1. How can we keep our connection to God in the midst of life's clamor and stresses?
 - 2. How can we avoid the temptation to rely on self?
- 3. If a strong spiritual life doesn't guarantee that things will go smoothly, how can we grow closer to God through trial?
- 4. What could you do on a practical level to encourage unity in your local church?
- 5. How do our spiritual gifts relate to witnessing? How does using our talents enhance our effectiveness?
 - 6. What are some ways to move into an "in Christ" journey? Be specific.
- 7. What steps can I take personally to live with and even cherish the complexity of living "in Christ"?

Becoming Best Friends With God and Man

TESTIMONY

Ps. 133:1

"The strength of God's people lies in their union with Him through His only-begotten Son, and their union with one another. There are no two leaves of a tree precisely alike; neither do all minds run in the same direction. But while this is so, there may be unity in diversity. Christ is our root, and all who are grafted into this root will bear the fruit which Christ bore. They will reveal the fragrance of His character in the talent of speech, in the cultivation of hospitality, of kindness, of Christian courtesy and heavenly politeness."

The Lord arranged to bring humanity into close relationship with Himself and into sympathy and love with fellow human beings by placing upon us responsibilities in deeds that would counteract selfishness and strengthen our love for God and humanity.

"Unity in diversity is God's plan. Among the followers of Christ there is to be the

The Lord arranged to bring humanity into close relationship with Himself.

blending of diverse elements, one adapted to the other, and each to do its special work for God. Every individual has his place in the filling up of one great plan bearing the stamp of Christ's image.... One is fitted to

do a certain work, another has a different work for which he is adapted, another has a still different line; but each is to be the complement of the others. . . . The Spirit of God, working in and through the diverse elements, will produce harmony of action. . . . There is to be only one master spirit—the Spirit of Him who is infinite in wisdom, and in whom all the diverse elements meet in beautiful, matchless unity."²

"Our Saviour took up the true relationship of a human being as the Son of God. We are sons and daughters of God. In order to know how to behave ourselves circumspectly, we must follow where Christ leads the way. For thirty years He lived the life of a perfect man, meeting the highest standard of perfection. Then let man, however imperfect, hope in God, saying not, 'If I were of a different disposition I would serve God,' but bring himself to Him in true service."

^{1.} The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1083.

^{2.} Our High Calling, p. 169.

^{3.} Selected Messages, bk. 3, pp. 135, 136.

How to Be a Funnel

HOW-TO

Eph. 3:14-21; 4:1-3, 29-5:2; 5:19-6:9

God's love is showering down on us all the time. His rain of love never stops. By the way we choose to relate to others we can be umbrellas—preventing others from experiencing the fullness of God's love, or we can be funnels—catching every drop of God's love that we possibly can, and focusing it on the people around us.

How can we be funnels of God's love?

- 1. Look for God's love at work in your everyday life. God's love is pouring down on you all the time. He is pure love, and He is always looking for ways to express His love for you. Look for those moments of love in the tiny details of your life as well as the big things. Thank God for the smile of a friend, a moment of wonder in an unexpected place, or the way He smoothes the bumps in the path of your life.
- 2. Experience the difference that God's love can make. Each day find a time and a place to sunbathe in God's love. Let it soak into your life so it can saturate the way you think about yourself and those around you.
 - 3. Look at others through God's eyes. Each of us is a masterpiece of God's

creation. Most people are working their hardest to do the best they can with their lives in the challenging places where they find themselves. How can we begin to see others as God sees them and

How can we be funnels of God's love?

look at them through eyes of pure love? What difference would it make to the way we relate to others if we looked up at them with wonder and honored them above ourselves?

4. Become a funnel of God's love. God wants everyone to experience the richness of His love. But He needs us. He needs our eyes to look out for people who need to experience His love. He needs our voices to speak the words of love He wants others to hear from Him. He needs our ears to listen to others with a loving heart. He needs our hands to touch others gently and to perform thoughtful acts of kindness.

REACT

- 1. What might be preventing me from experiencing the fullness of God's love for me? Be honest and specific.
- 2. What does it mean to be "strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16, NKJV)?
 - 3. What is your own greatest challenge when it comes to sharing God's love?

In Christ or Church Carbon Copy?

OPINION

Acts 26:9; Eph. 1:11-14

To be reflective is to be sensitive to and fascinated by the complexity of things. It entails an openness to the nuances and grace notes of life. When Saul opted to believe the voice was of divine origin rather than a bad migraine/heat stroke that day on the road to Damascus, he began a journey into complexity. He had been a diligent and devout Pharisee, skilled in reducing the wealth of Scripture into coins of small value, redeemable in a limited number of places.

Early in his life Paul was thinking, I had "to do everything I could to oppose the followers of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9, NLT), a reasonably simple task with measurable results in crowded jails, and immeasurable results in intimidating Christians. After his conversion he traded this thinking for the complexity of being a Roman citizen/ Jewish Pharisee preaching the word of a Jewish Messiah to a Gentile world. He knew what it meant to be a Jew in Tarsus, but his apostleship forced him to explore what it meant to follow Christ in places all over Asia Minor.

"Simple it's not, I'm afraid you will find, for a mind-maker-upper to make up his mind."

Living "in Christ" is complex. It's simple for us to shuffle over to make room in our comfort zone for "them." It is complex to step out on a journey "in Christ" (Eph. 1:11–14), in which

the new Christian is valued, not just "pressed into shape." Paul tells the story of the Ephesian Christians and reflects on the richness of synergy, the combined heritage and stories that are woven together in Christ. Assimilation is expanding a comfort zone, but it soon becomes a "discomfort zone" because no one feels valued there.

"Simple it's not, I'm afraid you will find, for a mind-maker-upper to make up his mind." For someone who values the safety of being with persons who think within a well-defined set of boundaries, the "in Christ" journey is not simple. There is complexity: the challenge of listening to and valuing people by reflecting on what God is doing individually and together. It is not being defined by a set of teachings. It is being defined by being in Christ and shaped by Him (and the teaching is part of that shaping), being responsive to Him and creatively responsive to the people He loves. Instead of merely seeing people in my church as those who show up on Sabbath, we may get a taste of the joy of the journey, the learning, the richness of "in Christ" that warmed Paul as he wrote to the Ephesian church.

^{*} Dr. Seuss, Oh, the Places You'll Go! (HarperCollins, 1992).

The Family Name

EXPLORATION

Eph. 3:14-21

CONCLUDE

As members of God's family on earth, we are united by the fact that we have the same Father, and that our Father loves us with overwhelming love. As we are united with the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit, their love flows into our lives and transforms us. We are to be channels to bring that love to others. Disunity, divisiveness, and disrespect should have no place in the lives of God's children. Though our differences are genuine, divine love can build bridges to cross any chasm and draw us together into one family—a family whose name is Love.

CONSIDER

- Inviting a diverse group of fellow church members (or visitors) to your home after church this Sabbath—people you don't normally invite to your home. Try for different ages, social standings, and ethnic backgrounds, and plan a simple but enjoyable meal and activities that will let all your guests know that you care for them.
- Drawing a picture to illustrate your church family as a tree with Jesus as the root and the members as branches. As you sketch in different members on the branches, think about what unique contribution each one makes to the family.
- Singing the song "We Are One in the Spirit" together with a group of fellow Christians. Reflect on how the song's message is reflected in the reality of your church experience.
- Writing a poem that paraphrases the message of Ephesians 3:14–21.
- Reflecting on the power of Christ's love in your own life. How has His love touched you personally? How is He using you to share this love with others?
- Researching statistics on earth's longest river, highest mountain, and the deepest point in the planet's oceans. As you think about these natural wonders, consider why Paul used height, width, length, and depth as metaphors for the love of Christ.

CONNECT

Christian Leadership, chap. 39.

Richard J. Foster, A Celebration of Discipline, chaps. 8, 9.

What God has Done



"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7, NKJV).

Ransom for Sinners

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 1:7

A story is told of a man, John Griffith, who worked at a great railway bridge that crossed the mighty Mississippi. His duty was to raise the bridge for boats to pass under and lower it for trains to cross over. For the first time that day in 1937 he brought his eight-year-old-son Greg to work with him. At midday John put the bridge up because no trains were due for some time and took a walk with his son.

Time went by fast until John heard the sound of a distant train whistling. He looked at his watch and saw it was soon time for the 107, the Memphis Express with 400 passengers, to be crossing the bridge. He knew he had just enough time to get back and lower the bridge, so he told his son to stay where he was.

As he put his hand on the huge lever that controlled the bridge, he suddenly saw that his son had tried to follow him to the control room and had fallen into the

He knew he had just enough time to get back and lower the bridge.

huge box that housed the monstrous gears that operated the drawbridge. His son's left leg was caught between the two main gears. The father knew if he pushed the lever his son would be ground in the midst of tons of winding, grinding steel. His

mind whirled. What could he do? He could go and pull his son out, but if he did he wouldn't have time to get back up to the control room to put the bridge down in time. This would result in 400 people being killed. But if he didn't do this, his son would be killed. This was his only son, he thought, but there were 400 people on the train. In the final moment, in anguish he pushed the gear forward.

God made just such a decision for us too when He allowed His only begotten Son to die so that we could be saved. Jesus paid the price for our sins with His own blood. What a ransom!

By infinite love and mercy the plan of salvation had been devised and a life of probation was granted. By sin humanity was shut out from God. Except for the plan of redemption, eternal separation from God and the darkness of unending night would have been ours. Through the Savior's sacrifice, communion with God is again made possible.

You may ask what God has done. He has redeemed us through the blood of Jesus, He has adopted us through His Holy Spirit, and He has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. What infinite love! This week we will journey down Redemption Road with the One who has given us redemption through His blood.

Bought With a Great Price

LOGOS

Rom. 8:15, 16; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8

Unshackled (Rom. 8:15, 16)

In his discussion of the subject of sonship through the Spirit, the apostle Paul makes a salient point. He rightly asserts that if our desire is life, that is to say, eternal life, then there is a corresponding obligation to live according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. To do otherwise would be to subject ourselves to the bondage that is consistent with a life guided by fleshly impulses, the result of which is fear and ultimately death.

How do we then become unshackled from this bondage? The answer is clear: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom. 8:14, NKJV). At the point of acceptance of what Christ has done for us, the bondage that resulted from being estranged from God is replaced by an acceptance into the family of God—that to which the apostle refers to as adoption.

This adoption, however, is the result of a corporate effort between the Holy

What is our greatest need?

Spirit and the believer: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit" (verse 16, NKJV). This must be so because the Spirit can influ-

ence us only as far as we will be influenced. He can lead us only as far as we will be led. Our success or failure at cooperating with Him will determine whether we remain shackled or be called "children of God."

Mysterious Wisdom (1 Cor. 2:7; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8)

"The plan of salvation, formulated before the creation of the world, and announced and put into effect by the Father and the Son when Adam sinned, was a great mystery to the universe. The angels could not fully comprehend it. The prophets, who wrote concerning it, understood only in part the messages they bore to the church concerning salvation through Christ. The natural man completely fails to appreciate the 'wisdom' of God because it is so directly contrary to man's accepted philosophy of life. Even the consecrated believer cannot fathom the depths of meaning in the plan of salvation."

God's wisdom is remarkably demonstrated in the provision He has made for the redemption of the human race. It defies human logic and transcends our finite capacity to appreciate and to understand. It is often misunderstood, misinterpreted, and miscalculated, but it reveals the nature and mind of God and will be the

theme of eternal investigation and study. It is fascinating to contemplate the content of the plan, the Savior's self-sacrifice. It is amazing just to consider the timing of its conception before the world's creation. Indeed "great is the mystery of godliness," and, in the words of Fanny J. Crosby, it is quite fitting to say, "To God be the glory, great things He has done."

Our Greatest Need Supplied (Eph. 1:3–14)

What is our greatest need? Is it instruction? Is it education? Could it be that our greatest need is to be given a wider sphere in which to exert our influence? Is it more power? I think not. What we need most is redemption from sin. As it is, our race is disordered, condemned, and enslaved. We need to be delivered—unshackled. The good news is that in Christ we have that freedom. Paul expresses it this way: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3, 4, NKJV).

In this brief passage the expression "in Him" or "in Christ" occurs at least seven times. Herein is eloquently proclaimed the fact that it's only through Jesus Christ that we can become unshackled. "In Him" we are blessed (verse 3). "In Him" we have been chosen (verse 4). "In Him" we are redeemed (verse 7). "In Him" we are united (verse 10). "In Him" we have an inheritance (verse 11). "In Him" we trust and "in Him" we have the sealing of the Spirit (verse 13). What an amazing package! And the implications for our value and self-worth are remarkable, for we "were not redeemed with corruptible things, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18, 19, NKJV).

As Charles Spurgeon puts it: "There is a sanctity about a blood-bought man or woman of the highest degree: the Lord has purchased him with His life." With this knowledge of the value that has been placed upon us, it behooves us to walk and talk as if we know who we are and whose we are. After all, we are "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20, KJV). Therefore let God be glorified in all we do, that our lives may be lived "to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:12, KJV). After all, haven't we been bought with a great price?

REACT

- 1. How will our attitude toward Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf affect the way we relate to each other?
 - 2. How can one's self-esteem be influenced by what transpired at Calvary?

^{1.} The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 670.

^{2.} Charles H. Spurgeon, *Library of Spurgeon's Sermons*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), p. 195.

The Price of Our Redemption

TESTIMONY

Isa. 53:3-5; Eph. 1:7

"It has been at an infinite cost that the salvation of man has been provided. The world may refuse the gift, but this will not lessen its value, or relieve men of responsibility."

There He stands in the Garden of Gethsemane, talking to His disciples just after praying to His Father. Then comes the betrayer, who kisses Him. He knows all the things to come, but still He says, "I am He" (John 18:8, NKJV). He must be wounded, not because of anything that He has done, but because of our transgressions. He must be bruised, not because He deserved it, but because of our iniquities. He must bear the chastisement of our peace, not because He has sinned, but because His stripes must heal us. Yet, knowingly, He went all the way to Calvary.

Along our Christian journey we often use or hear the words "redemption," "redeemed," and "Redeemer," but do we really understand, or better yet appreci-

Some have limited views of the atonement.

ate, the meaning of these words? Do we truly know what it took for our Redeemer to bring us this redemption we speak, sing, and read about? To truly serve the Lord we must understand what it cost

Him to bring redemption, forgiveness of our sins.

"In order to fully realize the value of salvation, it is necessary to understand what it cost. In consequence of limited ideas of the sufferings of Christ, many place a low estimate upon the great work of atonement. . . . Some have limited views of the atonement. They think that Christ suffered only a small portion of the penalty of the law of God; they suppose that, while the wrath of God was felt by His dear Son, He had, through all His painful sufferings, the evidence of His Father's love and acceptance; that the portals of the tomb before Him were illuminated with bright hope, and that He had the abiding evidence of His future glory. Here is a great mistake. . . . We should take broader and deeper views of the life, sufferings, and death of God's dear Son. When the atonement is viewed correctly, the salvation of souls will be felt to be of infinite value."

^{1.} The Youth's Instructor, Sept. 1, 1892.

^{2.} Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, pp. 200, 213, 215.

The Believers' Blessed Assurance

EVIDENCE

Eph. 1:3-14

It is believed that the book of Ephesians was written not just to the church at Ephesus but to all the churches in Asia Minor—of which Ephesus was the capital. This belief is founded on four points: (1) In old manuscripts the words "at Ephesus" are omitted. (2) There are no personal references to people within the church. (3) The language in 3:2 implies that not all the readers knew its writer personally, but most at least had heard of him. (4) The letter doesn't address any specific problems but addresses general issues that affect every Christian.¹

Another important point to note is that in the Greek, Ephesians 1:3–14 is one sentence. This sentence functions as an explanation of the different roles of the Triune God as it concerns salvation. The work of the Father is election (verses 3–6), the work of the Son is redemption (verses 7–12), and the work of the Holy Spirit is protection and sealing (verses 13, 14).²

These two points are important to this lesson because they show that even in

its construction, the book of Ephesians is all about relationships. Relationship can be seen between the apostle and members, the main church and satellite churches, and words with other words to convey truth. The

Even in its construction, the book of Ephesians is all about relationships.

greatest relationship, however, is that of the Godhead with humanity, which leads to the believers' blessed assurance.

There are 11 blessed assurances found in this short passage: blessed (verse 3); chosen (verse 4); predestined (verse 5); adopted (verse 5); accepted (verse 6); redeemed (verse 7); forgiven (verse 7); enlightened (verses 8, 9); given an inheritance (verse 11); sealed (verse 13); and assured (verse 14).

The Bible clearly states that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4, NKJV). He is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV). There is no evidence that God has decreed that some persons should be lost; such a decree would deny Calvary, where Jesus died for everyone (John 3:16).

^{1.} Thomas Nelson, Inc., King James Version Study Bible (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

^{2.} W. A. Criswell, *Believer's Study, Logos Library System* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

^{3.} Ibid.

I'm Adopted by the Most High!

HOW-TO

Rom. 8:15; Eph. 1:5

Children in orphanages dream daily that someone, some nice lady and gentleman, will come and choose them, adopt them, today or tomorrow. Some are luckier than others. Some are adopted in a moment, while others wait all their lives. They build great expectations and many are disappointed. Some get their dream of being chosen, being adopted, but when they go to their new homes with their new parents they do not like their new homes.

We, the children of the Most High Jehovah, have been chosen; we have been adopted by the best. Fortunately, none of us is luckier than the other. We do not have to go to bed and dream about being chosen the next morning. We do not have to build great expectations and then get disappointed. We do not have to worry about what our new home will look like because in the Bible our Father gave us a radiant idea of exactly what it will be like. We are even so privileged that we have even been adopted before we were born.

As Christians we do not talk enough of this adoption.

As Christians we do not talk enough of this adoption, and some of us do not even live as if we have been adopted. Now is the time to begin living as if we have

been adopted by the Most High. Here are a few steps to implement:

- 1. Recognize that we have been adopted by the Most High. We have "received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom. 8:15, NKJV).
- 2. Accept our adoption as children of the Most High. Jesus, our Brother, came to earth and paid the price for our redemption. This sacrifice bought our adoption and through Him we can be adopted. In order to be saved we must accept this adoption.
- 3. Live as if we have been adopted by the Most High. There can be no greater joy or comfort than knowing that before the foundation of the earth the Lord had the plan of redemption in place. Our sinless God, made a sinless plan, in a sinless world, so that we can be set free from sin. After we've accepted this adoption, we must live as if we've been adopted. We are bought with a great price, so we must act as if we are precious, as if we are gems, as if we are the children of God.

REACT

How can living as if I have been adopted lead others to the throne of God?

Going to Heaven? Is It Predetermined?

OPINION

Rom. 8:28, 29; Eph. 1:5, 11

As a child I believed that God had already chosen the lucky ones fortunate enough to enter heaven. The unlucky ones would be doomed, with no chance for redemption because they are already destined for death and destruction. I also wondered at times that if God knew my destiny, why did He allow me to be born into this world where I don't stand a chance of seeing the pearly gates?

But now as an adult I fully understand that God does not predetermine our destiny. We are responsible for where our destiny lies—heaven or hell.

God desires for all of us to be saved. "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV).

God gave us the freedom to make our own decisions. Hence we are held accountable for the consequences. "God might have created man without the power to transgress His law; He might have withheld the hand of Adam from touching the forbidden fruit, but in that case man would have been, not a free moral agent, but a mere

automaton." Without freedom of choice we would have been mere robots, and our service to God would have been out of a

We are not helpless victims with an unchangeable destiny.

forced sense of duty-not love.

God has shown us the way to eternal life. It is only through Jesus Christ our Lord and believing on Him that we will inherit everlasting life. We are also admonished that the consequence of sin is death (Rom. 6:23; John 3:15, 16). Just as He did for Adam, God will not withhold our hands from touching the forbidden fruit. We have to decide the path we will choose to travel.

The question is asked, "If a boy is born in a wicked neighborhood, grows up undisciplined, learns to do evil things, and later in life becomes a leader of criminals, was he a victim of circumstances, or did God predestine it?"²

God did not predestine the fate of the boy. We are not helpless victims with an unchangeable destiny. Although God sees, knows, plans, prepares, appoints, and decides what will happen, if an individual willingly chooses a path that takes him away from God, then God will allow such a person to inherit eternal damnation. Eternal life is our responsibility, our choice, not God's.

^{1.} Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 49.

^{2.} New Study Bible, King James Version (Mission Publishing, Inc., 2000).

Ransom and Release!

EXPLORATION

Isa. 53:3-5; Rom. 8:15, 16; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:3-14

CONCLUDE

Often "ransom" is a sinister term these days, as terrorists take hostages and demand money or changed policies. But in God's vocabulary, ransom is the ultimate act of love because rather than making demands, He gave Himself in His Son to ransom us from sin's terrible grip. Jesus' own blood was the incredible price of our pardon, and as redeemed sinners (and even more, adopted children) we have the privilege of allowing ourselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

CONSIDER

- Measuring the dimensions of one cement slab in a sidewalk closest to your front doorstep. Calculate how much the slab probably weighs, then find the per-ounce price of gold, and work out the object's value if it were solid gold. Then calculate the value of a block's worth of the sidewalk. (Then remind yourself that in heaven, gold isn't payment but pavement!)
- Reading 1 Corinthians 2, then outlining a small book (about the size of *The Prayer of Jabez*) to be called *God's Hidden Wisdom*. Title each chapter with one of the elements of God's wisdom, and then write the back cover copy, slanting it toward the casual Christian shopper in a grocery store.
- Writing God's "will." Beginning with "Being of sound mind and body, I, God, hereby bequeath to My heirs . . ." list as many tangible and intangible bequests as you can in ten minutes.
- Contacting the nearest Adventist adoption agency. Find out what their three greatest financial needs are. With your church board's permission, begin a month-long fundraising campaign, quoting Romans 8:15.
- Discovering the dream career of each of your fellow Sabbath School class members. Ask them what glory would be for that career. For example, what is glory for an athlete? A concert violinist? A successful business entrepreneur? Once you've discussed this, try as a group to come up with some definitions for God's glory.
- Writing (in your journal or elsewhere) a paragraph about three or more of your current major fears. Read Romans 8:15, 16. After each fear paragraph, write, "Because I am a child of God, I need not fear, because".

CONNECT

Karen Mains, *The God Hunt;* Bruce Marchiano, *In the Footsteps of Jesus;* Jon Paulien, *Meet God Again for the First Time.*

Praise and Prayer



"God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church" (Eph. 1:22, NIV).

Love Versus Walking Coffins

INTRODUCTION

2 Cor. 13:4

"His behavior shows signs of schizophrenia," diagnosed the psychiatrist treating my youngest brother.

"What's schizophrenia?" I inquired. My eyes began to warm with tears.

"Schizophrenia is the most serious of the mental disorders," the psychiatrist began. "It is chronic and progressively incapacitating. The patient loses ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Ability to think and emotional responses become confused or confounded. As the disease progresses, delusions, hallucinations, and eccentric mannerisms develop in the patient. In his delusions, the schizophrenic hears persons saying unkind things about him. Feeling he lives in a world apart, he stares at himself in the mirror or smiles or laughs to himself."

I groped for a chair to sustain myself. I love my youngest brother so much. I call him *Bunso* (youngest) or *Totoy* (kid). I dreamed that someday he'd be a neurosur-

It has been almost eight years.

geon, engineer, or pilot. But my fondest dreams and hopes were now shattered.

With ten siblings, six girls and four boys, we are susceptible to almost any kind of

sibling conflicts. Nevertheless, I love all my brothers and sisters. But to Bunso, there is an added fondness maybe because he's the youngest and so endearing. A teenager when the horrible disease victimized him, he was full of life—until the day the terrible disorder silently crept within him and slowly ate him up.

"I see walking flowers and coffins!" my brother shouted as the disease enveloped him. "I have impure thoughts! I can't tell you! Please go away from me! Please release me from this condition!" Shocked and frustrated, all of us would pacify him and make him take the drug prescribed. When he settled, we began to feel relief, going to a room where we could hide our tears.

It was during this depressing condition that I learned to trust the Lord—to seek my faith in Him. Difficult as it was as the heart-rending situation faced me every day and night, I began to claim His promise. It has been almost eight years since I entered into a covenant of faith with God. Things have improved very little. My brother still hallucinates. Our resources have run dry; his medicines are costly. But we thank God that He leads us to the best alternative: love and support for our brother. I have dwelt in God's faith since then, and everything has become serene as I claim His promise. After all, He will heal and transform my dear brother. And I will praise His name forever!

Attack of the Gentiles!

EVIDENCE

Acts 19:23-41

Ephesus, a city in western Asia Minor, was situated at the junction of several natural trade routes within the Greek world and lay on the main road from Rome to the Orient. This strategic position probably has contributed much to the church in Ephesus as being the mother of other churches in the province. Paul had spent more than three years in Ephesus and probably had built up a strong center of Christianity from which the message spread into other cities of the province of Asia. This seems evident from the fact that only a few years later Christian churches were found in most of the large cities of that province.

Christian churches in Asia Minor doubtlessly included Gentiles of several races. I could imagine Paul as he writes his epistle. He was probably recalling from memory how he was forced to leave the city. A riot occurred against him during the month of Artemis (March–April). It was led by Demetrius, a silversmith who was afraid of

losing his lucrative business of making silver models of the goddess Artemis—the goddess of fertility of the Ephesians. From 1926–1935 the Germans excavated the churches and the gymnasium of Ephesus.

This was the scene of the riot against Paul and his teachings.

One of the most impressive ruins is the great theater built on the western slope of Mount Pion. Its semicircular auditorium was 495 feet in diameter and its orchestra 110 feet. The stage was 22 feet wide. The theater contained 66 rows of seats accommodating 24,500 people. This was the scene of the riot against Paul and his teachings (Acts 19:23–41).

Paul is described in almost unparalleled terms with regard to the significant role he has in God's plan for bringing the Gentiles to faith in Christ. And inasmuch as this is true, Paul still looked after the spiritual condition and welfare of the believers. Some teachings, such as those of the Judaizers (2 Tim. 1:15) and Docetism (1 John 4:1–3), both of which denied Christ, were injected into the church of Ephesus. That's what Paul, in his letter, sought to check by his emphatic statement on the unique position of Christ in the faith of the believer.

Christians should have a close personal relationship with Christ. In addition to that, Paul also felt a special need to develop the theme of unity in Christ as a means of binding those of diverse backgrounds together in Christian fellowship.

In all these things, from the attack of the Gentiles to the showing of faith of the fellow believers, Paul never ceased praising God.

Monday October 17

The Need for Praise and Prayer

LOGOS

Luke 1:37; Eph. 1:15-23; Col. 4:5; James 2:20, 26; 3:13, 17

Imagine yourself a hermit or monk who devotes your lifetime to acts of worship to your Creator. You will definitely reach the point of asking yourself, *Is this the kind of life I must live to experience the fullest of everything?* We are admonished to live a Christlike life—between the mountain and the multitude. Thus, the proper cultivation of the social elements in our nature brings us into sympathy with others, and gives us opportunity for development and strength in the service of God.

After the salutation to and thanksgiving for Ephesians, Paul explains our election and adoption by grace, which is the true and proper fountain of salvation. Because the height of this mystery cannot easily be attained unto, the apostle prayed that the Ephesians may come to the full knowledge of Christ.

A Tone of High Spiritual Exaltation (Eph. 1:16)

God has done for His chosen people that which should inspire praise and thanksgiving, and it grieves Him that so little praise is offered. "The rich gifts He Has bestowed upon us were not intended to absorb our thoughts and love so much that we should have nothing to give God; they are constantly to remind us

of Him, and to bind us in bonds of love and gratitude to our heavenly Benefactor."

Paul explains our election and adoption by grace.

Paul's spirit of gratitude found repeated expression. The frequency of his outbursts of

thanksgiving is an indication of the joyous and radiant nature of his spirit, without which he could never have endured his sufferings. This note of joy and thanksgiving is sadly lacking in many Christian lives.

God expects daily thanksgiving, and this will be our attitude not only on recognized special days in our life but in our every thought and prayer daily. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:16–18, NKJV).

Giving praise to God helps us understand how awesome He really is! We should praise Him for how generous He is. We should praise Him for how loving He is. We should thank Him for all that He has done, is doing, and will do for us.

Mystery Revealed = Love and Faith Relationship (Eph. 1:15, 17)

Love and faith are the human responses to divine revelation. Once God shows us something of Himself, then we can believe. True faith occurs when the human

heart responds positively to God. It is something that comes from within us. When God through His mercy reveals Himself to us in some way, we are then in a position to choose whether or not to believe. Even this ability to choose often blinds our minds so that we do not believe (John 12:40; Rom. 9:18). Not only is the initial act of revelation something from on high, but it is through God's mercy alone that any of us believes. "It is necessary to exercise more than reason to come to a true knowledge of God. There must be divine enlightenment, a spiritual vision, given directly by God to the believing soul."²

Paul elsewhere joins together faith and love (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:3), for these are what distinguish all true Christians. Love to the saints is a natural outcome of faith in Christ. It is impossible to love God without loving the saints (1 John 4:20), and, indeed, those who are not so saintly. The love Paul commends is comprehensive, including all the saints, even those whom it may be difficult to love because of their various habits and temperaments.

But saving faith—genuine faith—the kind of faith that justifies before God those who possess it, is faith which results from God's revealing Himself. The Scripture explains that faith is not of us but rather it is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8). This means that it does not originate within us but that God gives it to us through revelation.

God's Power to Us-ward (Eph. 1:18, 19)

The word "power" used in this chapter of Ephesians comes from the Greek word *kratos*, "strength," and is used in the New Testament only in connection with God or with His Word. God's mighty power is displayed in the transformation of a sinner into a saint. This remarkable change is not accomplished by psychology, education, or good works; it is an act of divine grace and power. In addition to knowledge of hope and of riches in Ephesians 1:18, the apostle prays for experimental and experiential knowledge of the power of God in the life. Our feeble natures are revivified and transformed by divine energy in conversion and sanctification. The holding out of "the hope of his calling" (KJV) would be most tantalizing and unsatisfactory were it not for the accompanying power.

In our generation the great controversy will come to its end, but "the adversary seeks continually to obstruct the way to the mercy seat, that we may not by earnest supplication and faith obtain grace and power to resist temptation."

"By calm, simple faith, the soul holds communion with God, and gathers to itself rays of divine light to strengthen and sustain it in the conflict with Satan. God is our tower of strength and power."

^{1.} Steps to Christ, p. 117.

^{2.} The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6.

^{3.} Steps to Christ, p. 95.

^{4.} Ibid., p. 98.

Thankfulness in Prayer

TESTIMONY

Eph. 1:15-23; James 3:13, 17

"Advancing in faith, Paul labored unceasingly for the upbuilding of God's kingdom among those who had been neglected by the teachers in Israel. Constantly he exalted Christ Jesus as 'the King of kings, and Lord of lords' (1 Timothy 6:15), and exhorted the believers to be 'rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith.' Colossians 2:7.

"To those who believe, Christ is a sure foundation. Upon this living stone, Jews and Gentiles alike may build. It is broad enough for all and strong enough to sustain the weight and burden of the whole world. This is a fact plainly recognized by Paul himself. In the closing days of his ministry, when addressing a group of Gentile believers who had remained steadfast in their love of the gospel truth, the apostle wrote, 'Ye . . . are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.' Ephesians 2:19, 20."

Paul has given us an example of a consecrated life in prayer. He prayed for both

Despite the trials we encounter, we should always give thanks to God.

believers and unbelievers. In all his undertakings, he prayed. And in his prayers, praise and thanksgiving were always expressed to God. As Ellen White advises, "Pray, pray earnestly and without ceasing,

but do not forget to praise. It becomes every child of God to vindicate His character. You can magnify the Lord; you can show the power of sustaining grace."2

"While we review, not the dark chapters in our experience, but the manifestations of God's great mercy and unfailing love, we shall praise far more than complain. We shall talk of the loving faithfulness of God as the true, tender, compassionate shepherd of His flock, which He has declared that none shall pluck out of His hand. . . . Praise, like clear-flowing streams, will come from God's truly believing ones."

^{1.} Acts of the Apostles, pp. 175, 176.

^{2.} Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 317.

^{3.} Ibid., vol. 6, p. 367.

Where Is Our Brother?

HOW-TO

Luke 1:37

Faith is defined as confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing. It is a belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence. Loyalty. Allegiance. Some even say it is the theological virtue defined as secure belief in God and a trusting acceptance of God's will. Defined as such, faith is not only a mere belief. It has power. Power to move. Power to influence. Power to lead.

Faith is important to the church. It can heal broken hearts, revive weary souls, cheer the lonely, heal the sick, refute disbelief, and pave the way of doubts. God through our faith can do all these miracles and a lot more. "Nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37, NIV). Unfortunately, if we have lesser faith shown in the church, we can lose a brother. Thus, here are some steps to bear in mind:

- 1. Check yourself. It is important to assess yourself first. Ask yourself how much faith you have to share. It is detrimental if you do not have any. If that's the
- case, start asking from God now! God will surely give it to you.
- 2. Live out your faith. Once you have faith, no matter how big or small it is, you have to

It is important to assess yourself first

practice it. "Do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:20, 26, NKJV).

- **3. Share your faith.** Describe your faith to others. Testify to the church how God helped you through challenges, how, through faith, God saved you. Share this not only with the church but also with the "outsiders" (Col. 4:5). Read the Bible with others; conduct Bible studies. You do not only share your faith by doing this, you also allow God to add to your faith.
- **4. Point others to Jesus.** Make them realize that Jesus is the One who had unsurpassed faith, the One we must all look up to and follow. Encourage others to read the Bible to see how it tells of God's love to us. By this we will all prosper.

We have responsibilities to our brothers and sisters in church, and faith is a dynamic part of this. It will guide us all to praise God, to pray for others, and to strengthen the relationships of the church. So, when the gates of heaven open and we behold Jesus' glory and He guides us to the New Jerusalem, all of us who helped each other will eventually see each other there. Isn't that the most beautiful picture? No one left behind, no one missing!

How Do You Know God?

OPINION

Eph. 1:15-23

As we have studied this week's lesson, we have learned that Paul's letter to his friends in Ephesus told them about the wonderful things that he prayed for them (Eph. 1:15–23). Paul prayed for two specific things: He prayed for wisdom and revelation so that his friends might know God and His character better. He also prayed that they may be enlightened so that they might understand that since Jesus' victory over sin when He died on the cross, many things have changed. He prayed for enlightenment so they might recognize and appreciate three things: the hope, the riches of the inheritance that we receive, and the power to overcome sin, all of which was made available to all of us through the victory of Jesus at the Cross and through God's wonderful grace.

The apostle Paul was aware that people can have different ideas about God's character and that there can be misconceptions about God's character. He was

Paul was aware that people can have different ideas about God's character.

also aware that the things that have been made available to us when Jesus won the victory over sin should be made known to all.

The knowledge of God's character and realization of Jesus' victory over sin are essential to every Christian, and

we can expect Satan to give a lot of effort to distort our understanding of these two specific things by giving us the wrong information.

Today some people may also have misconceptions or even have a lack of knowledge about the character of God. And they probably have much less knowledge about the hope and the gift of salvation, the right to be a part of God's family, and the power available to those who believe in our Savior Jesus Christ. These people may even be inside the church; some of them may even be your friends.

How then can we know God's true character? One way is by reading God's Word! We can know Him more when we read such references as "To Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20, 21, NKJV).

Beginning this week, whenever you feel down, whenever you need encouragement or whenever you fear or doubt anything in the future, try to examine your ideas of God's character and remember Paul's prayer for his friends in Ephesus.

Praise and Prayer

EXPLORATION

Eph. 1:22

CONCLUDE

When Paul wrote to the Ephesian church to be encouraged by the rulership of God who would give the church hope, he was not only speaking words of encouragement but being a living example of Christian optimism. It is widely believed that Paul wrote the famous passage of Ephesians 1:15–23 from a prison cell in Rome. In this passage Paul encouraged the Ephesians and us today to "know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength" (Eph. 1:18, 19 NIV). To be confident in the future is uniquely Christian, and praise God always for that, our privilege.

CONSIDER

- Making a list of the things you are really grateful for in your life. Put a tick next to all the ones that you believe are gifts from Jesus Himself.
- Writing down one of the most depressing moments or periods of your life. Was it difficult to praise God during this time? What do you believe God's response to this would have been?
- Reading or singing the hymn "Amazing Grace" by John Newton, who had an amazing conversion experience. Now compare "It Is Well With My Soul" by Horatio Spafford who lost his family in a shipwreck. Answer this about this question: How can the experience of God be so real to both men?
- Viewing two or three episodes of a current popular television program that deals with spiritual issues. Analyze what role prayer plays in this program.
- Writing in a journal or notebook about the one moment in your life when you felt closest to God.
- Thinking about the following scenario. If you knew that God was going to lose in the great controversy and heaven would be lost, would you still follow Jesus? After answering, read again Ephesians 5:22, 23.
- Finding a piece of music that would reflect the passage of Ephesians 5:20–23.

CONNECT

John 12:1-8; Acts 5:17-42; 7:54-60; Revelation 4; 5.

The Church: God's Workmanship



"By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9, NKJV).

Relationship Rap

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 2:10

Hey there, Lord, let's take a walk On woman and men, we need to talk You have made us as the fairer sex But sometimes I just get so vexed For we seem to be such easy prev To those "smoothies" we meet almost every day They always say the perfect words Using positive nouns and expressive verbs They smile at us when they pass by And escort us to a temporary high They promise the world and so much more And just when we think they are finally sure For the simple reason, they still covet The freedom of those single guys Who do what they choose, who don't have ties They repent for any wrong they've done And say that "it's been so much fun" And then they leave us high and dry Realizing our loss, we sit down and cry Help us forgive those fickle creeps For what they sow, they will surely reap And give us insight into mankind To what goes on in their tiny minds Grant us courage and keep us strong Fill our minds with peace, tune our hearts with song And help us remember when our fists are curled That the hand that rocks the cradle, still rules the world.

It's not always easy to know who is in control in the world. Sometimes, even as Christians, we lose sight of the hand that rocks the cradle of the church. We forget who founded the church and whose workmanship it is. We believe that we sinful human beings are in charge and that it is "our church," but we are wrong. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10, NIV).

Wanted: Dead and Alive

LOGOS

Rom. 3:22-28; 6:8-11; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 2:12, 13

Romans 3:22-28

This scripture is the great equalizer. If all humanity has sinned and fallen short, all of us are on common ground. We have no reason for pride, prejudice, or segregation. The first part of this passage clearly states our condition (verses 22, 23). The next part of the passage provides the remedy for our condition. We can be justified, made right by the sacrifice of Christ (verses 24–26). The last part of the passage states the way we appropriate the remedy (verses 27, 28). It is by faith in the sacrifice of Christ that we move from lost sinner to justified saint. It is interesting that Paul states that there is no reason for boasting.

Romans 6:8-11

In this passage Paul presents the simple method of salvation. If we die with

There comes a point when death is an answer to prayer.

Christ, then we can live with Him. In the act of baptism this death, resurrection, and new life is portrayed as a living parable. This is one reason that baptism by immer-

sion is important.

2 Corinthians 5:18

This text speaks of God reconciling us to Himself through Jesus. The Amplified Version amplifies the word reconcile with, "received into favor, brought us into harmony with himself." At the end of the verse Paul says that we should be agents for bringing this reconciliation or harmony to others.

Ephesians 2:1-10

In verses 1–7 Paul again returns to the analogy of death and life. He refers to the life before conversion as death. Compare Paul's use of life and death here with Galatians 2:20. It sounds as if Paul intends his readers to understand that there are no halfway conversions. We cannot be kind of dead or kind of alive!

Normally death is dreaded and we cling to life. In the past year I have been praying for three people and their families. All three of them have had their lives hanging in the balance as they struggled with cancer or Parkinson's. As I am writing this, one has died; for one, death is close; and one [praise the Lord] appears

to be healed. In the beginning I prayed for life in each case, but as time passed, my prayer changed in the first two cases. I began to pray just for peace and comfort. There comes a point when death is an answer to prayer. It is hard to face this reality when friends and loved ones are dying. As I grow older and experience more death in my circle of family and friends, I understand Paul's metaphor about life and death and our spiritual condition in a different way. Life and death are no longer just abstract subjects. To everything there is a season, Solomon says, a time to live and a time to die (Eccles. 3:2). This is a truth both in our physical life and our spiritual life as well. In both cases death, with faith, can be an event that opens the way to real life!

Ephesians 2:8, 9 is the gospel in two verses. We are saved by grace, not by works. We receive this gift of grace through faith. Sometimes people talk as if it is faith that saves them. Why is it so easy to fall into a self-earned/works-oriented salvation, especially when Paul makes it so clear that salvation does not come through works? Compare Romans 6:23; Titus 3:4–7. For me the most powerful remedy for a works-oriented salvation is the concept that salvation is a gift.

In the context of Ephesians 2:10 works are called good and required.

Colossians 2:12, 13

In this passage Paul calls the preconversion life not just dead but also uncircumcised. The converted are alive and called circumcised. For a Jew circumcision was a sign of belief and belonging. Compare Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4 with this passage. The circumcised heart is an indication that our lives have been dedicated to the Lord and that we belong to Him.

REACT

- 1. What is the difference between taking rightful credit and boasting, between confidence and overconfidence?
 - 2. What is the importance of knowing that Christ died once for all?
- 3. Why do you think Paul uses the metaphor of life and death to describe salvation?
 - 4. What are some other synonyms for the word reconcile?
 - 5. Why do you think Paul compares life before conversion to death?
 - 6. How do grace and faith relate to each other?

What a Gift!

TESTIMONY

Eph. 2:8

Things had gone wrong in Eden! Adam and Eve had sinned! "The broken law of God demanded the life of the sinner. In all the universe there was but one who could, in behalf of man, satisfy its claims [For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8)]. Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven." Talk about grace!

Not of works, lest any man should boast (verse 9). "Man had become so degraded by sin that it was impossible for him, in himself, to come into harmony

Let's face it: no grace, no salvation, no hope.

with Him whose nature is purity and goodness. But Christ, after having redeemed man from the condemnation of the law, could impart divine power to unite with human effort. Thus by repent-

ance toward God and faith in Christ the fallen children of Adam might once more become 'sons of God.' 1 John 3:2."²

Let's face it: no grace, no salvation, no hope. All that remains for us is to accept the gift so freely offered or reject it. We can easily know what is really our choice when we remember that we "were [not] redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:18, 19, NIV).

REACT

- 1. Why is it so tempting to depend on our works to earn salvation?
- 2. Why is it hard to accept that Jesus has accomplished everything and that all we need is to believe?
 - 3. Why is life considered a gift from God?
 - 4. How then can we use our life for God?

^{1.} Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 63.

^{2.} Ibid., p. 64.

Little Christs

EVIDENCE

John 12:24

As I was growing up, a fairly popular game was called "Telephone." A person would begin by telling something to the person in front. From there, this person would go and relay the message to the next person, and so on. When the message returned to the original, it would be very different from when it started.

Imagine now that you were Christ. You have this important message to tell the world, and it is vital that it does not get altered under any circumstances. You could tell a few people, knowing in the end that somehow it will be altered and twisted. The only way to prevent this would be for only you to spread the message. However, the message would spread only in a very limited amount of time. If you could somehow make duplicates of yourself, however, this would guarantee that the message would remain pure.

In a way that is what Christ did. "'Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds'"

(John 12:24, NIV). Two thousand years ago, Jesus came to earth, died for our sins, and on the third day rose again (1 Cor. 15:1–4). Once we receive the Holy Spirit, Christ begins to live in us through Him.

Not only are we saved completely by God, but He prepares a work for us to do.

As we read, it is by grace that we are saved and not works, so no boasting is possible (Eph. 2:8, 9). Once Christ begins to live in us, however, we are then used "to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10, NIV). Not only are we saved completely by God, but He prepares a work for us to do. The unexpected thing is that it is not through our own strength that we do the work, but through Jesus, who lives in us (Phil. 4:13).

We are Christians, which means "little Christs." When the authorities crucified Jesus, they thought they got rid of Him forever. However, they were planting the seed, which in time, increased greatly. Instead of one Jesus to reckon with, they were now confronted with thousands of little Christs (Acts 2:41). The question is now posed: Are we going to allow Jesus to live in our lives and finish the work He started two thousand years ago?

He finished His work, but now wants to work through you to do yours.

The Best Things in Life Are Free

HOW-TO

Matt. 20:1-10; Eph. 2:8, 9

The man received in thankfulness a *denarius* for his work. He never expected it. All day long he stands hopeless in the marketplace, for no one has hired him—not until a rich landowner asks him to work in his vineyard. Believing in him, the man accepts the offer. But he was given hope not only for a good dinner, but also for tomorrow. Other workers question why the man receives payment equal to theirs. They say that they worked for the whole day so they must receive more. The man worked for an hour and still received a *denarius*. So it says that the kingdom of heaven is like this (Matt. 20:1–10).

The parable talks not of labor relationships but of how God's grace works. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul agreed on how the parable explored the concept of grace (Eph. 2:8, 9).

1. "By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves"

The only happiness that will last is given to us.

(verse 8, NIV). Like the man in the vineyard, we are all hopeless and sinful—until the Landowner calls us and saves us, not because of our works, but because we believe in Him. For even if we dedicate our

whole life working for Him, we—on our own—are not worthy to be saved.

- 2. "It is the gift of God" (verse 8, NIV). Grace is freely given to us not because we finished the day's work. He sees every one as a candidate for His kingdom and of His grace.
- 3. "So that no one can boast" (verse 9, NIV). Professed Christians look at themselves as greater than others. From their lips we hear their work achievements. Like the other workers, they always question when they are compared with others. They are so intellectual but they still didn't grasp the concept of grace. Looking at yourself as being superior is in itself boasting before God.
- 4. "For we are God's workmanship" (verse 10, NIV). When we accept His offer of grace, we then become a new creature in Christ to do good. Our relationship with others determines how we preserve the character He creates in us.

The best things in life are free. The only happiness that will last is given to us because He loves us. As the sun rises and sets for all He creates, good or bad, His grace is freely given to us. We just have to hear His call, get out of our house, and feel the radiance of the sun. And with His love in our heart, let's show to the world that we are new, that we are God's workmanship.

An Impossible Commandment

OPINION

Eph. 5:3

Of the Ten Commandments found in the Torah, which one gives you the most trouble? Could it be the second commandment? I used to idolize certain celebrities. But now I tend to "idolize" my own philosophies. What about the third commandment? How often do you use God's name in a casual conversation—or even when you are stuck in traffic?

Then there's that bothersome number four. Through the years I found myself the typical Adventist playing "Beat the Clock" on Friday afternoons. Funny, the sun seemed to "drop down" on Fridays; on Saturdays it took its own "sweet time." When I found myself in a generation gap with my parents, I would sometimes think, Why don't we do away with the fifth commandment? There are times when that particular commandment just doesn't seem to make much sense. And the list goes on. But then we find ourselves faced with the bottom line: "Do not covet . . . anything . . . your neighbor owns" (Exod. 20:17, NLT). I have one word to say about that: IMPOSSIBLE! We all have hopes and dreams that are often inspired by what

we see others have. How can anyone not desire the finer things in life? Would it be unreasonable for a very hungry child to desire the sandwich he or she sees you eating? Is it

I made a list of terrible things that have happened to me and thanked God for them.

wrong for me to covet/desire a good night's sleep that I frequently witness others enjoying? Concerning covetousness, Paul cautions that "it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints" (Eph. 5:3, NKJV). Now come on! Where does God draw the line?

I think the secret lies in what the apostle stated in verse 20. We should be "giving thanks always for all things to God" (NKJV). How often do we give thanks? It may be easier to thank heaven for the obvious blessings; but what about the negative occurrences in our lives?

I once tried this method. I made a list of many terrible things that have happened to me and I thanked and praised God for them. That attitude seemed to eradicate any covetous feelings I had. I began to feel sorry for others who had it so good and would not be prepared for the future judgments of God. Now that commandment didn't seem so impossible—at least not with God.

The Gift That Gives

EXPLORATION

Rom. 11:36

CONCLUDE

The church—you and I—are the product of God's effort; His workmanship. Christ, the Workman, has supplied the raw material and the tools so that we may carry out His purpose and glorify His name. We are unable to contribute anything to this process, and this is good. As we fulfill His purpose, He receives the credit, because everything we are and have, He has freely given.

CONSIDER

- Prayerfully writing your own statement of purpose as a product of God's effort.
- Looking up three offers of free items in your local newspaper. Consider these questions: Are they really free? How do they compare to the gift of salvation?
- Starting an "anonymous caring" project. During this week do an act of kindness: bake cookies, or write notes of encouragement, and send them to someone who needs encouragement without being discovered.
- Finding the meaning of the word "workmanship" in a dictionary. Write down what it means to you in the light of God's work in your life. Be specific.
- Viewing the video Antz (1998). Think about what this film says about the search for significance. This is not necessarily an appropriate activity for Sabbath.
- Illustrating grace through a collage of pictures gleaned from magazines.
- Paraphrasing Ephesians 2:4–10 in your own words.

CONNECT

Romans 11; Philippians 2:1–8.

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 4.

Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, chap. 7.

The **Church** without **Walls**



"He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation" (Eph. 2:14, NKJV).

Breaking Down Barriers

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 2:11-22

Yo quiero mi medicina, someone shouted at me. I had no idea what that meant. The crowd stood around, pushing to get up to me, trying to yell at me and make me understand that they wanted their medicine now.

I was on a spring break mission trip to the Dominican Republic with my college. It was our second day in the country and we were conducting a medical clinic. Since I have no medical training and I don't speak Spanish, I was sent to do a basic task of crowd control. I took the orders for the medicine that the doctors had written and passed them on to those in our makeshift pharmacy to fill. It was a pretty simple task, and I had spent most of the afternoon trying out my very small Spanish vocabulary on the kids who had gathered around me. I had fun because the kids talked slowly, repeated things often, and used hand gestures to make me understand. But as the day wore on, the doctors got faster or we got slower and soon there were a lot of orders in my hands and a lot of impatient people outside the door.

I didn't know what to do.

As the people gathered around my door, all trying to talk to me at once, I had one very big problem: a language barrier. As

these impatient people gathered around, the noise level increased, and all I heard was Spanish, feelings of helplessness flooded over me and I was overwhelmed with frustration. I could not help these people and they just kept yelling at me. I didn't know what to do.

Then it happened. One of the boys pushed his way to the front of the crowd. He had been talking to me earlier and knew what I was trying to do. He began to talk to the people and calm them down. He broke down the language barrier. Soon the people had calmed down and we had filled all of the orders that once seemed impossibly large. The people went home happy and I learned about how God breaks down barriers.

Jesus steps into our lives just as this boy stepped into mine. He comes in when we have reasons to avoid talking to someone, and he opens up communication. Our text for this week speaks of the fact that Jesus is the One who reconciled the Jews and the Gentiles. He is the One who can reconcile us too. Whatever barriers you find in your life, if they are racial, religious, linguistic, or economic, Christ wants to tear those down.

This week we will look at what He did to break down our barriers.

The Impossible Possibility

EVIDENCE

Eph. 2:14

The impossible possibility: 1 + 1 = 1 impossible? Not so when it comes to the mathematics of the gospel of Christ. Paul's forceful message this week is, What is impossible in a human equation is possible under divine power and provision. Christ has created in Himself one new man from the two (Eph. 2:15), and this He did only through His blood, shed in behalf of all humanity, Jews and Gentiles.

The transforming power of the Cross creates a new humanity in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, 29, NKJV). The good news is that while differences may exist between persons, genders, cultures, races, and nations, the ultimate divine purpose is to bring all created order into one unity in Christ (Eph. 1:10). All these distinctions, though real, are superseded by the unity we have in Jesus.

"The same agencies that barred men away from Christ eighteen hundred years

ago are at work today. The spirit which built up the partition wall between Jew and Gentile is still active. Pride and prejudice have built strong walls of separation between different classes of men. Christ and His mission

The transforming power of the Cross creates a new humanity.

have been misrepresented, and multitudes feel that they are virtually shut away from the ministry of the gospel. But let them not feel that they are shut away from Christ. There are no barriers which man or Satan can erect but that faith can penetrate."

"Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value.... Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live."²

REACT

- 1. How were the walls of separation between people torn down?
- 2. Why is there a similarity between submission to God and reconciliation?
- 3. Why were the Jews supposed to hear the good news first?

^{1.} The Desire of Ages, p. 403.

^{2.} Ibid.

Monday October 31

Reconciliation's Next Frontier

LOGOS

Rom. 3:20-31; 2 Cor. 5:17-19; Eph. 2:11-22; 5:12-18; Col. 1:20-22

Reconciliation is one of the great themes in the history of humankind. Ever since sin disrupted Adam and Eve's face-to-face communion with God, He has worked to reconcile our rebellious race into a relationship with Him that overflows with lasting fulfillment.

The Old Testament sacrificial system was one way God showed—through symbols—how He was willing to suffer extreme loss for the sake of reconciling His rebellious creatures. That system, although cloaked in rituals that are now sometimes difficult to interpret, all revolved around one thing: reconciliation.

In the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) God demonstrated to His Old Testament people the same principle highlighted by the apostle Paul centuries later: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23, NIV). Simply put: Separation from God means death; a relationship with God means life. The word "atonement" is simply an old English word meaning "reconciliation."

Incidentally, the Hebrew term for the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, literally means "day of the cover" and refers to the cover of the ark of the covenant, the

Even Christians fall into the trap of categorizing each other.

piece of furniture that contained the Ten Commandments in the earthly tabernacle. The scholars who translated the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into modern translations such as German and English understood that this

cover represented the intersection of God's justice (the law) and His mercy (grace), that's why they called it the "mercy seat," another symbol of reconciliation.

In Jesus Christ those Old Testament types and symbols met their fulfillment. On the cross Jesus took the punishment we deserve, so that we might live lives of eternal glory that He deserves. Biblical reconciliation is nothing less than the triumph of God's will, bringing us back into a right relationship with Him.

That's the easy part.

Getting Practical

Now you'd think that having been reconciled to God by the extravagant sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and having our hearts melted by the overwhelming demonstration of God's amazing grace, we would find it easy to reflect that spirit of reconciliation to others. You might think that, but you'd be wrong.

The fact is, while we may revel in the assurance of salvation for ourselves, it is quite another thing to extend that message of reconciliation to others, especially to those who are different from us. This is where the whole concept goes from fuzzy abstracts to rigid concretes. The human tendency has always been to categorize people into "us" and "them"; Jews and Gentiles; believers and nonbelievers; Christians and—well, you get the idea.

The fact that there are so many categories and subcategories in society proves that it's easier to highlight our differences than it is to focus on the things we have in common.

Even Christians fall into the trap of categorizing each other, asserting that some are more deserving of God's grace than others. The folly of this position is revealed in the fact that none of us is worthy of God's grace. (That's why it's called "grace.") Salvation—that is, reconciliation between us and God—comes to one and all as a gift; we don't earn it, we can't deserve it; we either accept it or we don't.

God has gone to extreme lengths to reconcile us to Him; now He asks us to be reconciled with one another. Paul put it this way: "[Jesus Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two [Jews and Gentiles] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, . . . He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (Eph. 2:14, 17, 18, NIV).

The great obstacle between us and reconciliation with others is our human nature. Beyond our tendency to categorize others in terms of how they are like us or unlike us, we have incredibly long memories, especially when it comes to how we've been wronged. It's not easy to offer reconciliation to someone who's been either intentionally or unintentionally unkind, unfaithful, deceitful, or cruel. It's even more difficult if that person happens to be a fellow church member, or worse, a family member. There may be nothing harder than offering forgiveness and reconciliation to someone with whom we've had a closer than average relationship.

But the miracle of reconciliation is not only that God is willing to be reconciled to us, it's also that we can be reconciled with one another—even if, especially if—we don't want to be reconciled. Paul reminded the believers in Corinth: "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19, NIV).

It's not enough to be reconciled to God; we have to be reconciled to each other also. "He has given us this command," writes the apostle John. "Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:21, NIV). That's the real proof that we've been reconciled with God.

REACT

- 1. Why is it difficult for us to reconcile with others, especially those who seem different from us?
 - 2. Does pride hinder us from reconciliation? If so, why?

Different Backgrounds— One Goal

TESTIMONY

Eph. 2:14; 3:6

"For the carrying on of His work, Christ did not choose the learning or eloquence of the Jewish Sanhedrin or the power of Rome. Passing by the self-righteous Jewish teachers, the Master Worker chose humble, unlearned men to proclaim the truths that were to move the world. These men He purposed to train and educate as the leaders of His church. They in turn were to educate others and send them out with the gospel message. That they might have success in their work they were to be given the power of the Holy Spirit. Not by human might or human wisdom was the gospel to be proclaimed, but by the power of God."

"The disciples were to go forth as Christ's witnesses, to declare to the world

"Christ began to break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile." what they had seen and heard of Him. Their office was the most important to which human beings had ever been called, second only to that of Christ Himself. They were to be workers together with God for the

saving of men. As in the Old Testament the twelve patriarchs stood as representatives of Israel, so the twelve apostles stand as representatives of the gospel church.

"During His earthly ministry Christ began to break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile, and to preach salvation to all mankind. Though He was a Jew, He mingled freely with the Samaritans, setting at nought the Pharisaic customs of the Jews with regard to this despised people. He slept under their roofs, ate at their tables, and taught in their streets.

"The Saviour longed to unfold to His disciples the truth regarding the breaking down of the 'middle wall of partition' between Israel and the other nations—the truth that 'the Gentiles should be fellow heirs' with the Jews and 'partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.' Ephesians 2:14; 3:6."²

^{1.} The Acts of the Apostles, p. 17.

^{2.} Ibid., p. 19.

How to Have Perfect Peace

HOW-TO

Ps. 34:14; Eph. 2:14

"Peace" is mentioned over 400 times in the Bible—with references from the Old Testament that peace was connected to the Messiah (Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:5). In the New Testament this is also implied (Rom. 15:33; Heb. 7:2). By being their peace before God. Christ affected peace between Jew and Gentile. The peace in Ephesians 2:14 is Jesus Christ Himself.*

In order to obtain this perfect peace, we need to remember that "to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6, NKJV). God promises that He will provide the true peace (Ps. 29:11). We all fall short of God, but we are to overcome the world to obtain this peace, just as Jesus did (John 16:33). We need to make an end to ourselves and seek God (Ps. 37:37). The only way that we can obtain perfect peace is to "depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14).

Jesus stilled the storm in Mark 4 and demanded that it have peace. God also tells us that we need to have peace. Just as water is tossed to and fro, we too can be tossed to and fro. The only way we can obtain this peace is by listening to Jesus

The only way we can obtain this peace is by listening to Jesus.

telling us to stop what we are doing-sinning.

What can you do to obtain perfect peace? Here are a few steps:

- 1. Listen to God. When the wind was being tossed to and fro, Jesus was there, vet He didn't say anything at first. He waited until it got so bad that He had to say something because the disciples became frightened. This shows that God can use us, but we should wait until He says something.
- 2. Seek and be meek. As humans it is easy to fall into the trap of becoming prideful and trying to work righteousness into it. We need to fall away from this trap and have Christ be our Foundation.
- 3. Let God do the job. Sometimes we take things into our own hands and try to fix things, but they don't work. We need to let God do it for us and still maintain the balance of doing our part.

REACT

What are some aspects of your life that can be calmed by Jesus' voice (peace)? Be specific.

^{*}The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1009.

Do You Feel Boxed In?

OPINION

Matt. 25:40; Gal. 3:28

Have you ever walked into a place where you felt uncomfortable? Not necessarily a church setting; perhaps it was a new school or, maybe, a new culture where you weren't accustomed to the social practices. Either one of these situations could be very intimidating for some people.

The topic of interest that is presented in these situations is the existence of walls. They could appear in many shapes and forms; but, particularly, we'd like to discuss the ones that exist within our own church. They are anything that comes between us, as a church, being united as a whole.

Maybe it was the lower-class family who walked into the church service a little late with only beat-up T-shirts and jeans on. Or maybe it was the group of kids from

These walls do exist. Why are they here?

a different cultural background that didn't view reverence the same way you did. And just maybe, it was you; as you walked through the sanctuary doors, you could feel the eyes of the others in church fixed on you. As the

whispers began to rise, you could hear others talk about how your hair shouldn't be that unnatural color and spiked so high.

These walls do exist. Why are they here?

There were times when Jesus Himself would speak and His audience would be detoured from hearing the truth because of these walls. "He's only a carpenter and a child of a poor family." "What does He know?" These walls resemble, in many ways, the same walls that Martin Luther King Jr. was battling against during the civil rights movement in the United States. "I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, and rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."*

How are we, as a church, to grow if we allow these walls to exist in our *spiritual* lives? How are new members to feel acceptable in the eyes of God when they are constantly being judged by the history of their past instead of the newly found character of their heart? "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, NKJV). United we stand and divided we fall.

^{*}Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," Speeches and Letters From Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., 5/3/04. https://members.aol.com/klove01/dreamsp.htm

"Can We Talk?"

EXPLORATION

Eph. 2:11-22; Phil. 2:1-9; 1 John 4:11, 12

CONCLUDE

Jesus came to reverse the Tower of Babel—to restore one language to all, the language of love, and to meet us where we live since we can't climb to where He lives. From the raging flood, He creates still waters; from the storm of conflict, He restores our souls; in a tormented world, He offers peace—within us and among us. As the magnetic pole that draws us all, Jesus aligns our magnetic forces—so instead of repelling our fellow believers, we learn to stick together.

CONSIDER

- Making "friendship soup." Invite any reasonable number of "regulars" and new friends. Ask each to bring one ingredient for soup. Heat one to two cups of water per person and add ingredients as your guests arrive. Have the best cook in the group supervise quantities and seasonings. (It's nearly impossible to wreck this dish.) While the soup cooks, have the ladies churn ice cream (using prepared liquid custard) and the men make homemade rolls and breadsticks (using prepared dough).
- Sponsoring a cookie contest. Invite two disparate groups (juniors and elders; college students and Baby Boomers; singles and married with children) to a cook-off. Organize into teams of two or four, using equal numbers from both groups (or teams of three if there are more present from one group than from the other.) Give each team a budget (they can buy ingredients or donate them from home) and set the clock for about 2 hours. Have sufficient oven space available; permit teams to bake at home if they wish. Let the group judge the finished products by taste, visual appeal, etc. Send each participant home with a cookie collection to share.
- Creating a class—or church—collage. Photograph as many members as possible dressed in distinctive outfits to represent cultural background or profession or special interest. Cut and paste literally or virtually—filling in a large picture of Jesus' face. Title the work "We Are One in the Lord." Display the original if this is "hard copy." If yours is a computer collage, use it as a bulletin cover or welcome brochure.

CONNECT

Martin Buber, I and Thou; John Powell, Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?; Gary Chapman, The Five Love Languages; W. Fowler, Stages of Faith; Philip Yancey, What's So Amazing About Grace?

God's Mystery: the universal Fellowship



"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen"

(Eph. 3:20, 21, NKJV).

Universal Unity

INTRODUCTION

Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-22

When I have been on holiday in different cities in the past, it has always been a very special moment when Sabbath came and when I planned to go to church. Feelings of joy and excitement have filled me. Questions like *How many youth will be there? How will the service be? Will anyone talk to me?* go through my head until I walk through the door.

I've visited plenty of churches in different countries. You open the door, standing at the porch for a few seconds, and look around the room.

In my opinion everything depends on the welcome you receive when you enter a new church. You feel like a part of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church when love and warmth are shown to you—even though you might be in a church far from home where you don't even understand the language!

After the church service we are filled by feelings of friendship, closeness—a

feeling of unity. Although we are all different because of culture, color, and language, we are all God's children. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither

Everything depends on the welcome you receive when you enter a new church.

Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26, 28, NKJV).

Because Jesus died for us on the cross, the Gentiles were also drawn to Christ and reconciled with Him. In Ephesians 2:14 Jesus is described as "our peace" (NKJV), who abolished the enmity through His death, and He functions as the uniting power between peoples and nations. The last verses of chapter 2 show us how God sees us and how He wants us to look at our tasks. We are fellow citizens and saints in God's house, which is built on the foundation of prophets and apostles (verses 19, 20). This house, God's palace, will be inhabited by different people, races, and nations.

"'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation'" (Isa. 28:16, NKJV). We shall always bear in mind that we are Christ's partners and God's holy people!

Who Has the Right to Salvation?

LOGOS

Matt. 10:5; John 4:9,10; Acts 10:26-28; Ephesians 3

The Sending Out of the Twelve Disciples (Matt. 10:5)

"These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: 'Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans'" (Matt. 10:5, NKJV).

When we read this verse, we could be thinking that Jesus didn't want His disciples to take the gospel to the Gentiles and the Samaritans. But that would go against God's mission. Jesus Himself witnessed to the Samaritans with His disciples (John 4:39–42).

The Jews were not the chosen people anymore. Over hundreds of years they separated themselves from God. They were captured in their own laws and rituals.

Jesus died for every human being on this earth.

Only a few realized that Jesus was the Messiah when He was on earth. They expected a king who would free them from the Romans, not a poor, insignificant man. Jesus wanted

the disciples to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel to bring them the good news so that His "chosen people" wouldn't be lost. The disciples knew about the needs of the Israelites and should first bring the gospel to them; later the message would go to the Samaritans and Gentiles.

Christ—Living Water (John 4:9,10)

"The woman of Samaria said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?' " (John 4:9, NKJV). If we were to read only this one verse and take it out of context, the woman's statement would be matching Matthew 10:5. But as we know, in the New Testament it isn't about Jews, Samaritans, or Gentiles anymore. All of us became one people because of Jesus' life.

Our God is so big, so mighty, and so loving that everybody has the opportunity to drink from the Living Water (John 4:10). By drinking this water, our thirst will be forever quenched and we will be saved. We realize that our life was previously without a goal, without real love and joy. Encouraged and inspired, we will go out to tell other people about this "living water," and by doing so we will experience even more joy. Jesus stills our thirst and He will fill the emptiness in our lives with love and hope for an all new life with our Lord. It is not important anymore where a person comes from, what his or her color is, or which confession he or she has. Because of Jesus' love and grace, we receive the power to present the good news about the salvation through Jesus Christ when we encounter people.

Gentiles—Not Excluded (Acts 10:26-28)

What do these verses tell us? It was prohibited for the Jews to interact with strangers, non-Jews, because they didn't pray to the true God. Peter recognized that this wasn't what God wanted. Jesus died for every human being on this earth, not just for the Jews. Peter didn't let the old laws and rituals of the Jews irritate him. Instead he let the Holy Ghost work in him and through that he was prepared to bring the Gentiles to the light of salvation. Despite resistance he walked the way that God showed him to go, telling people from different cultures about God's wonderful love. He surely had to pray to God every day for help and strength to be able to do God's work. It was not always easy for him, but by accepting God's leading, he fulfilled God's plan for him.

Like Peter, we also can work for God when we are standing on God's Word and asking for His help every day. For us it will not always be easy, but Jesus is with us and will lead us.

God Loves All People (Ephesians 3)

In Ephesians 3 Paul is writing that Gentiles are also inheritors of the New Jerusalem. They are as much a part of Christ's body as the Jews. The hope of eternal life is for them as well. God did not exclude anyone. Everyone who is taking the gift of Christ's death on the cross and the forgiveness of sin will be with the Lord in eternity.

Jesus wants to live in our hearts; He wants to be the most important part of our lives. He wants to save us from all our sins and debts. If we accept that in our lives, others will recognize it and will ask why we are different. Our lives will be filled with God's glory and strength. We will be a light in this dark world and we will reflect the greater light. We want to accept God's love and power and be as brave as the apostles—Jesus' first followers—to lead many other people to their Creator. So the earth will be filled with many little lights that all reflect the greater light, Jesus.

God loves everyone!

RFACT

- 1. Why is it that the gospel was not just for the Jews?
- 2. What are the barriers that stand in the way of our relationship with Christ? How can we overcome these barriers?

Monday November 7

One Love, One Mind, One Fellowship

TESTIMONY

Acts 10:26-28; Rom. 12:18; 13:8; Phil. 1:5; 1 John 1:7

God created us as social beings to have fellowship with Him and with each other. Hence, there is a longing in each of us to feel loved and accepted by others. We wish to belong, to be supported, and to be understood by someone. God "has put us here to make people feel at home. He has put them here to love people, to validate them, to give them hope, to let them know that there are no conditions of worth."

The Greek word for fellowship is *Koinonia*, which means "association, community, joint participation, intercourse, intimacy; the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship; i.e., in fulfilling the apostolic office."²

"Pride and prejudice have built strong walls of separation between different

To have a spirit of fellowship, we need to be like Jesus.

classes of humanity. Christ and His mission have been misrepresented, and multitudes feel that they are virtually shut away from the ministry of the gospel."³

To have a spirit of fellowship, we need to be like Jesus. To be like Him, we must spend a lot of time getting to know Him. "Communion with God is the life of the soul. . . . Communion with God gives us a daily experience that does indeed make our joy full.

"Those who have this union with Christ will declare it in spirit and word and work. Profession is nothing unless, in word and work, good fruit is manifest. Unity, fellowship with one another and with Christ—this is the fruit borne on every branch of the living vine. The cleansed soul, born again, has a clear, distinct testimony to bear."

Jesus has given us an example of how we should treat one another. His love is not to be limited to race or nation.

^{1.} Hamilton J. Williams, "Who Kissed Me?" pp. 199, 200.

^{2. &}lt;Crosswalk.com>.

^{3.} The Desire of Ages, p. 403.

^{4.} In Heavenly Places, p. 72.

Unbelievable

EVIDENCE

Acts 10:34, 35

Imagine that there is a land where the inhabitants learn to live as God's chosen people. They work, walk, live, and sleep with the knowledge of being chosen. As time passes by they seem to like it. They become arrogant and try to exclude the others from the light in which they seem to rest, and so, rather naturally, their national identity shifts toward religious forms and becomes hard as stone. They have a deeply rooted common feeling: We are God's own people.

This is what happened to Israel. Israel and the spiritual elite were unable to see behind the curtain of arrogance hanging before their faces. Jesus told His disciples: "'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:8, NKJV). I have the feeling that not only the ascension of Jesus Christ but also this astounding good message kept their eyes fixed on the sky. The truth should be brought to everyone on this earth. Paul and Peter had to

learn that God's grace is only waiting to come into every human heart.

Peter said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every

The truth should be brought to everyone on this earth.

nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him' " (Acts 10:34, 35, NKJV).

Even Paul considered himself a "prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles" (Eph. 3:1, NKJV). They finally understood. And today? Can you see walls in your own life?

I see myself "street witnessing," separating the ones I want to talk to and the ones I don't want to talk to. I am a very good carpenter when I'm about to construct my own "mission house" instead of leaving it in God's hands. Jesus has also been a carpenter, and He came to break down every single artificial wall, wherever it may exist and whenever it seems to stop the truth.

Wednesday November 9

How to See God in Others

HOW-TO

Rom. 2:11

An old, gray-haired man was sitting next to a bed in which a younger man was sleeping. The man watched the sleeping figure, silently wiped away a tear, stood up, and walked to the door of the prison cell.

As the young man woke up, he remembered that this would be his last morning. He was a condemned man and today he would be shot. He washed and sat down and waited for the warden to take him away. Morning passed, noon passed, and the young man was still sitting there when the warden came. He could hear the footsteps and knew that his time had come. They took him away, gave him new clothes, and led him to the prison door.

There they told him that in the morning an old man had requested to be executed for the things the young man had done. This young man, standing there in

What do we see when we look at other people?

the prison door, knew now that his father had given his life for him and that he was free because of it.

God has done the same for us. He gave His life for every single sin we do each day. He has

done it for every person who accepts His gift. He wasn't asked to do it; He just did it. Not for someone far away, but for you and me. He didn't say: "This person is too bad to be saved," or "This one is not in church every Sabbath," or "I don't like the race, color, or haircut of this person." When He looks at us, He sees His Son whom He loves.

What do we see when we look at other people? Someone we don't like? How can we practice Ephesians 4:32 in our daily lives?

The person you might not like is loved by God the same way He loves you!

REACT

- 1. Why is it that we look at and treat people differently?
- 2. Why is it that Jesus saw others and treated them all the same? How can we be more like Him?

How About the Heathen and Us?

OPINION

Eph. 2:17

"He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near" (Eph. 2:17, NKJV).

Well, Paul, I don't understand your excitement about the whole thing. OK, you are the Jew among the Jews. You can show an impressive genealogical tree—Pharisee maybe to the fifth generation. If somebody wanted to know something about the law, you were the right man to go to. But, Paul, wake up! You met Jesus! He spoke to you. The Lord blinded you with His presence and afterward He made you see again. You should know Him best.

Shouldn't we know Jesus very well too?

How many years have you known Jesus?

When was your baptism?

How many generations of Adventists are in your family?

Maybe there are things we are a little too proud of, but those things don't count. It is not enough to say we are Christians, Adventists, just as it wasn't enough for Paul to say

How many generations of Adventists are in your family?

he was a Pharisee. Jesus changed his heart and sent him to go out to the world to tell the heathen about His love. God calls Paul His chosen tool in Acts 9:15. Paul can hardly believe it: God's grace is for everybody! Be honest: Is it possible that we think also that God's grace is just for some special people?

I don't mean races and genders. We are much too educated and modern to be exclusive in that way, but don't we still judge other people by our own measurement? And then we are deciding if they are worth hearing the gospel or not. I for one tend to divide people into "worthy" and "unworthy."

Lord Jesus, let me become a Paul, who told the truth with all his might, who gave all his love and patience to lead precious people to You. I want to see people with Your eyes. Please help me to do so!

REACT

- 1. What would happen if God treated us the same way we treated others?
- 2. How would you feel if Jesus died on the cross for everyone but you?

We Are One

EXPLORATION

Gal. 3:26-28; Eph. 2:11-22

CONCLUDE

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross not only paid the penalty for our sins—it united us with all other human beings. As recipients of God's generous gifts of love and salvation, we should do nothing less than share these gifts with those around us. After Jesus' ascension, His followers brought the good news to the Gentiles, and His followers today continue to move beyond barriers of any kind—race, gender, status, religion—to love everyone and to share the gospel with them. We are one family in Jesus. He has brought us together—for eternity.

CONSIDER

- Visiting a Seventh-day Adventist church that you have not attended before. Note how welcome you feel and what factors help or hinder this feeling.
- Finding the Web site <www.amnesty.org> and clicking on "Act Now." Read about someone suffering from a civil rights violation, then write a letter of appeal on this person's behalf.
- Sitting in a public place such as a park, an airport, or a city street. Pick out three strangers you think you would like to be friends with and three you wouldn't; analyze what makes the difference in your attitude.
- Joining a choir and singing one part, or listening to a choral recording and observing how all the parts contribute to the overall effect.
- Finding a recipe and preparing a national dish from a country you've never visited before or even thought much about.
- Going outside and collecting as many samples of one natural object as you can find in ten minutes (e.g., leaves, rocks, flowers, plants, insects). Study them closely to see the diversity in them.
- Purchasing a puzzle and dividing the pieces among several people, then putting the puzzle together as a group.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 43. Leslie N. Pollard, Embracing Diversity.

Unity amid Diversity



"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4–6, NKJV).

Equal Opportunities

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 4:16

A sign was hung in an office window. It read:

Help wanted.

Must type 70 words a minute.

Must be computer literate.

Must be bilingual.

An equal opportunity employer.

A dog was ambling down the street and saw the sign. He looked at it for a moment, pulled it down with his mouth, and walked into the manager's office, making it clear he wished to apply for the job. The office manager laughed and said, "I can't hire a dog for this job."

The dog pointed to the line "an equal opportunity employer."

"I still can't hire you for this position." So the manager said, "OK, take this letter and type it." The dog went off to the word processor and returned a minute later with the finished letter, perfectly formatted. The manager said, "All right, here's a

problem. Write a computer program for it and run it."

Fifteen minutes later the dog came back with the program.

The manager still wasn't convinced. "I still can't hire you for this position. You've got to be bilingual."

The dog looked up at the manager and said, "Meow."

The office manager had advertised requirements for the post available. Although the dog proved to possess all the qualities required, the office manager failed to live up to his word. This is the key to genuine Christianity, not only preaching but practicing what we preach. We must be accepting of differences.

Our body comprises different parts performing different functions—but all for the growth and betterment of the body. As individuals we each look after our own interest. Self is our priority, but when we become Christians we should have one goal: the glorification of God. Working together with one goal, we will grow. When we became Christians, Christ gave our life meaning: His glorification and the building up of His body, the church. Although we are always different individuals, because we are working to achieve the same goal, we all have different parts to play. This is how Christ can bring unity to our diversity.

Encouragement From Behind Bars

EVIDENCE

Eph. 4:1-16

The book of Ephesians was written by Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome awaiting trial. He had established the church of Ephesus on his third missionary journey three to five years earlier. Since he could not revisit the church in Ephesus, he wrote them a letter to strengthen and confirm them in the grace of God and the gospel of Christ, as well as to encourage them in performing their works of service and holiness in response to God's saving grace.

While Paul's companion letter to the Colossians emphasized the greatness of Christ, who is the Head of the church, his letter to the Ephesians emphasized the church itself, of which Christ is its Head.

In the first three chapters Paul shows that the church was foreordained by God, that it has been redeemed, and that Jew and Gentile have been made one in

Christ. In the last three chapters, Paul embarks upon the practical application of the truth stated in the first three chapters. He writes of unity, love, newness of life, walking in the

Ephesians was written by Paul while he was a prisoner.

strength of the Lord, and the need to put on the armor of God. Consequently, there is a clear-cut division in this letter between the exposition found in these first three chapters and the exhortation found in the last three chapters. In chapters 1–3, the truth is stated; in chapters 4–6, the truth is applied.

In Ephesians 4 Paul exhorts the Ephesians to maintain the unity which God has lovingly provided for the church by walking in ways of God's provision for unity, holiness, love, light, and wisdom with one another, and by standing against the spiritual attacks from Satan in the certainty of God's provision for them.

The Holy Spirit has brought about unity in the church by forming one body, dwelling in the universal church, and being the hope of future redemption. The Son has brought about unity in the church by being Head of the church, the object of faith for all believers, and the One in whom all believers are identified. The Father has brought about unity in the church by being the Father of all, the Sovereign over all, living through all, and dwelling in all believers.

REACT

In what ways can we use our diverse gifts to bring unity to the church?

LOGOS

Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:28-31; Eph. 4:1-16

As Christians our task is to spread the gospel to every nation, no matter the individual's background or difference of culture (Mark 16:15). While Jesus was on earth, He seemed to have one task, which was to see to the needs of each individual no matter how small. The Bible doesn't illustrate every miracle that Jesus performed, but through each biblical story it can be seen that Christ had a task.

The number of people who followed Him was an indication that people talked. "Yeah, there is this Guy and He is just great to be around. I didn't even have to tell Him what my burdens were, and surprisingly He knew what was wrong. And, better still, He knew what the solution was."

Christ tries to portray how we as humans should live our lives in unity with each other, just as Christ shows His love to us. At first the disciples didn't understand Christ's calling and the important role each one had to play, but with the outpour-

The Holy Spirit makes us more focused on the task set.

ing of the Holy Spirit as their main source of strength, the task became plain. Paul was a theologian, who informs us how Christ speaks to the world through us with the

help of the Holy Spirit. The main word is "unity," united in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and so united with our fellow men in worship (Eph. 4:2, 3).

As students of Christ we never know when we are going to have a test, when we'll have opportunity to share our own testimonies with someone. For the Holy Spirit to work through us, we need to admit our sinful state; through baptism we become one with Christ (Eph. 4:4–6).

One God

"'Let Us make man in Our image'" (Gen. 1:26, NKJV). God made humankind and wanted to have constant communication with us. Sin broke the communication between our God and us, so the Son had to die in order for the Holy Spirit to rest upon each submitting heart—just to be one with the Father again. Our character should be more like that of Christ each passing moment. We all are standing at the end of a pipe waiting for the water to come out (the Holy Spirit), and then with receiving cups (our hearts through prayer) we can then pass on the message to others.

The Holy Spirit makes us more focused on the task set, edifying us until we are unified in faith and so relaying the message on to others (Eph. 4:12, 13). We all are different parts of the body of Christ—all having the same motive but playing differ-

ent roles toward the coming of Christ. In washing your hands, it is the head that tells the hands what to do; the heart supplies the muscles in the hands with blood and the stomach supplies the blood with energy. In all of this the head controls each function and so harmonizes the function of the body so that the body can be complete. Each cell of the body plays an important part in the body's functioning, with different roles yet unified. Our message is that of salvation—for ourselves and for others (Heb. 6:9)—in which we all share and tell of God's love.

One Hope

Our hope is that one day we will see Jesus, to be One with the Godhead and see how things used to be before sin entered this world. The work will not be finished until the gospel is preached to everyone, telling each individual about God's grace, told in love by a person who is driven by love poured out by the Holy Spirit (Heb. 4:15). Our main task is to teach and so become unified in Christ. This is our main objective, to strengthen our faith in God, in the blessed hope that one day we will physically be with Him.

REACT

- 1. Does every church member do the same thing in striving for unity among God's people? If not, why not?
- 2. How would you respond to a non-Christian friend who said, "If God is all about unity, then why are there so many denominations? And why is there so much strife and disagreement in individual churches?"
- 3. "While Jesus was on earth, He seemed to have one task, which was to see to the needs of each individual." Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why or why not?
- 4. How does a Christian's view of unity in diversity compare with that of the worldly view of such?
- 5. There will be times when others who exercise their gifts and calling in Christ will seem to you to be doing the wrong thing, the wrong way. How can you learn to provide support when things are being done very differently than you would have done them?
- 6. Why do you think God created so much diversity when He knew it would be so challenging for us?
- 7. How is it possible to reach out to others successfully while treating them differently?
- 8. Andrew Murray's statement is striking: "The bond that unites a man with his fellow-men is no less real and close than that which unites him to God." If you literally believed that interacting with someone was sacred in the human bond you shared, how would it change your interactions today? With family? With friends?
- 9. What is your reaction, both mental and in action, when the church makes a decision you don't agree with?

Tuesday November 15

"Press Together in Our Differences"

TESTIMONY

John 17:21

"What kind of unity is spoken of in these words?—Unity in diversity. Our minds do not all run in the same channel, and we have not all been given the same work. God has given to every man his work according to his several ability. There are different kinds of work to be done, and workers of varied capabilities are needed. If our hearts are humble, if we have learned in the school of Christ to be meek and lowly, we may all press together in the narrow path marked out for us."

"Of the twelve disciples, four were to act a leading part, each in a distinct line. ... In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these disciples, differing so widely in natural characteristics, in training, and in

"No member of the Lord's firm can work successfully in independence."

habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ's object to secure.... The burden of His labor for them is expressed in His prayer to the Father, 'that they all may be one;

as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us' (John 17:21)."2

"Like the different parts of a machine, all are closely related to one another, and all dependent upon one great Center. There is to be unity in diversity. No member of the Lord's firm can work successfully in independence. Each is to work under the supervision of God; all are to use their entrusted capabilities in His service, that each may minister to the perfection of the whole."

REACT

- 1. Since God has made us all with different abilities, how should we then act toward a sister or brother who would not do a particular work because they insist that that is not what God called them to do?
- 2. Discuss a few Bible characters who were different in ability and personality but were still able to come together to accomplish God's work.

^{1.} The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1148.

^{2.} Conflict and Courage, p. 288.

^{3.} In Heavenly Places, p. 287.

How to Break Barriers of Diversity

HOW-TO

Rom. 12:9, 10; Gal. 3:28; Phil. 2:3, 4

We are living in a world of differences. The differences are both major and minor. We are different in the way we talk, dress, think, and feel. Some of the differences are very noticeable like our skin color, hair color, the shape of our face, our body build. The list is endless.

As human beings we are normally drawn to people who are like us because they make us feel more comfortable. This is not what is expected of us as Christians.

The Bible tells us to love one another as we love ourselves. In other words, we should treat everyone the same way we treat ourselves. As Christians it is important that we learn how to put the theory of loving everyone into practice. It is instrumental in bringing more sheep to the fold and we can use it as a way to reach out to others and to witness to them.

This might seem easier said than done, but here are a few steps on how we can put it into practice.

Together we can make a beautiful picture.

1. Accept that we are dif-

ferent but equal. The Bible tells us that we are different but are all equal in the eyes of God since we are all here by God's grace. We are all made in His likeness. We are not any better or any worse than others (Gen. 1:26).

- 2. Value everyone as God values us. Christ had the choice of not coming to die for us, but because He loved the world—and that includes everyone—He left heaven to be like us. Through God, He became man for our sake (Phil. 2:5–7).
- **3. Look at the positive side.** We are all talented in different ways. We make a beautiful picture together since we are all a part of God's body. We cannot do everything by ourselves; we need each other. if we realize that we can succeed only if we work together, the world will be a better place (1 Cor. 12:12–27).
- **4. Remember the golden rule.** We all want to be treated tenderly—with love and compassion. Remember that we should do to others as we would have them do to us. We need love; we should therefore be ready to give it as freely as we receive it from God (Mark 12:31).

Together we can make a beautiful picture since we are all a part of God's body.

The Bond of Peace and Grace

OPINION

Matt. 18:20; Eph. 4:1-16

Christians tend to forget sometimes to find time to praise and thank God for His blessings when everything is going well, and then the moment something goes wrong they question God. Many times during our weakness we remember that there is strength in unity, and that's when we come together; but we need always to remember that our growth in grace, our joy, and our strength all depend on our union with Christ and the degree of faith we exercise in Him. We need to set an example and show others that by the bond of peace and grace through the Spirit we can unite during the good times as well as the bad times.

When Christians come together—in a body united in the Holy Spirit—they can boldly claim the promises of God. As Andrew Murray states, "The bond that unites

"The extent to which the Spirit can dwell in the Body depends on the union and cooperation of everyone." a man with his fellow-men is no less real and close than that which unites him to God: He is one with them. Grace renews not only our relationship with God, but our relationships with our fellow human beings, too. . . . Just as each member of the

Body depends on each other, the extent to which the Spirit can dwell in the Body depends on the union and cooperation of everyone."

As Christians we are unable to receive God's full blessings that He has ready to bestow upon us through the Holy Spirit until we seek and receive it in unity. In Ephesians 4 Paul urges the people to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and the message is the same for Christians today.

In the unity of faith, love, and the Spirit in the bond of peace and grace, God's will and power is manifest in our lives and we are blessed. "As all the different members of the human system unite to form the entire body, and each performs its office in obedience to the intelligence that governs the whole, so the members of the church of Christ should be united in one symmetrical body, subject to the sanctified intelligence of the whole."²

^{1.} Andrew Murray, With Christ in the School of Prayer (Springdale: Whitaker House, 1981), pp. 111, 112.

^{2.} Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 16.

Alike—in a Different Sort of Way

EXPLORATION

Eph. 4:4-6

CONCLUDE

Our God is a God of variety. Just as the Trinity is composed of three persons who are one in nature and purpose, so is the church composed of countless individuals who differ among themselves in just about every conceivable way, yet share one faith and one mission. Our task as a church community is to recognize and appreciate our differences, while putting them to use in advancing God's kingdom. Rightly understood, these differences are a good thing. The ability of the church to accommodate the variations in temperament, talent, background, outlook, etc. among its members is what distinguishes Christian unity from the mere uniformity often enforced by what would be the world's "in-groups."

CONSIDER

- Having a group of friends or acquaintances take a personality test, for example the Meyers-Briggs Personality Inventory. Compare and discuss your results.
- Studying several species that exist in a given natural environment and note how they survive and thrive in quite distinct ways.
- Making a list of the talents and strengths of someone you tend to dislike or look down upon. Try to look at them as God does.
- Teaching a skill you are particularly talented in to others in your church or peer group.
- Reading about several biblical figures whose individual strengths—and weaknesses—God used in unexpected ways.
- Listening to a selected variety of Christian music. If it doesn't appeal to you, why might it be appealing and helpful to others?
- Trying a new ethnic cuisine. Use it as a vehicle to learn about another culture.

CONNECT

John 17:6-19.

Sakae Kubo, The God of Relationships; Mario Veloso, Prison Papers.

Living the new Life



"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you" (Eph. 4:32, NKJV).

Is It Pretense?

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 4:1-3

John was born and grew up in apartheid South Africa. He was brought up with the notion that a white man must never become familiar with a black man.

In 1994 he left South Africa for the first time to visit a friend who had migrated to a small, poor community in the southern part of Zambia. "I was amazed by what I saw when I arrived at my friend's house," John says. "He was sitting at the same table, eating with his black employees. It was the first time in my life that I had seen a white man eat with a black man. I was not sure I could do that myself."

Apparently, John did not know that his friend was now a Christian. As they continued to stay together, he too came to meet and know the Lord Jesus Christ! Today, John has settled among the same community as a farmer. He has helped to build a local Seventh-day Adventist church and worships there too. He has employed local people to work on his farm. "I no longer have a problem to mix or eat with anyone else," he says.

The change that took place in John can be understood only from a Christian perspective. You are a new person when in Christ. Your old values no longer show prominence in

The transformation in John was real.

your life. A new way of thinking and looking at issues germinates in you. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20, NKJV).

The transformation in John was real. He was not pretending or putting on an act in order to gain favor. This is the promise of God through Jesus Christ to all who come to Him (Eph. 3:16–18).

This week we shall take a look at one of the subjects that makes the basis of the Christian life: living the new life. It is not sufficient to profess fellowship with Christ yet fail to demonstrate the very principles that He said would emanate from His followers.

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul endeavored to show the importance of leading an exemplary lifestyle once you are in Christ. "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:17, 18, NKJV).

Christ beckons everyone to come to Him (Matt. 11:28). He calls us to learn from Him; only then can we live to the fullest the Christian life. This is the focus of this week's lesson.

Change and Keep Going

LOGOS

Rom. 1:26-32; 3:10-18; 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:9-16; Eph. 4:17-32; Phil. 4:8, 9

Man's Inherent Nature (Rom. 3:10-18)

By virtue of our births, we are sinners. This trait makes us divert from godliness and do all manner of evil. If we persist in committing sin, God separates Himself from us and will not hear us. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies" (Isa. 59:2, 3, NKJV).

In his letter to the Romans Paul also drew the attention of the church to the natural state of humanity: "'There is none righteous, no, not one'" (3:10, NKJV). The heart of man is selfish and full of self-destructive tendencies.

It is amazing to note how much God is willing to reveal.

"By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels."¹ We are called upon to emulate Christ in our lives in order to escape from sins

that originate from self-seeking behaviors.

Life Without Christ (Rom. 1:26-32)

It is only by divine intervention that one can tell what is acceptable in the sight of God. Without Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, humanity cannot differentiate between godliness and ungodliness. The characteristics mentioned by Paul in Romans 1:29–31 would be of no consequence to someone who does not know God.

For those who have made Christ the center of their lives, however, the Holy Ghost constantly gives the strength to live godly lives.

The Way to Overcome (Rom. 12:2)

It is ironic to note that despite our inherently corrupt nature, God does not want us to be conformed to the lifestyles of this world. This is because He has provided for us the means to overcome our humanity. Believers ought to be a conscious people; ones that cannot be swayed easily by the evils of this world. We can escape the vices of this world if we allow ourselves to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2, NKJV).

We should be willing to allow Christ to change the way we view life. In this

respect He will remold us by the presence of the Holy Spirit and make us fit to take up our rightful positions in the family of God. Only when we have put worldly pleasures aside can He assign us the greater responsibility of being ambassadors to the world.

Messengers to the World (1 Cor. 2:9-16)

Those who have allowed God to transform their minds are privileged to know His ways and learn of Him. It is amazing to note how much God is willing to reveal the secret things of His kingdom to those whose minds have been transformed to His ways. What God has prepared for the saints is beyond the imagination of this world. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9, NKJV).

As a church, the Seventh-day Adventists have received tremendous light regarding the things of God's kingdom. Through the Spirit of Prophecy, God has shown to the church immeasurable truth that we remain with no excuse for not being good messengers to the world.

"It is a wonderful privilege to be able to understand the will of God as revealed in the sure word of prophecy. This places on us a heavy responsibility. God expects us to impart to others the knowledge that He has given us. It is His purpose that divine and human instrumentalities shall unite in the proclamation of the warning message."²

Keep On Going (Eph. 4:17-32; Phil. 4:8, 9)

The encouraging words from Paul are that we should never let go and return to our wasted years once we come to the full knowledge of God's truth through Jesus Christ. We must emulate Christ in all ways, and this change must be seen by the world because that is what we are: new creatures (1 Cor. 5:17).

"Those who have been buried with Christ in baptism are to rise to newness of life, giving a living representation of the life of Christ."³

Our consciences should be clear, our thoughts pure, and our actions consistent with Christian values and standards. We should not let our words and deeds contradict each other. In our new life we should be free to speak to others as Paul did: "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do" (Phil. 4:9, NKJV).

Once we have our minds renewed according to the will of God, we should keep going and never look back. Christ has promised great rewards to those who shall remain faithful until He returns.

^{1.} The Desire of Ages, p. 19.

^{2.} Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 19.

^{3.} Ibid., p. 20.

Commercial Sex Worker Enlists as Disciple

TESTIMONY

Luke 7:47

"Mary had been looked upon as a great sinner, but Christ knew the circumstances that had shaped her life. He might have extinguished every spark of hope in her soul, but He did not. It was He who had lifted her from despair and ruin. Seven times she had heard His rebuke of the demons that controlled her heart and mind. She had heard His strong cries to the Father in her behalf. She knew how offensive is sin to His unsullied purity, and in His strength she had overcome.

"When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption

"Before being accused by man, [Zacchaeus] had confessed his sin." has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. The one who had fallen, and whose mind had been a habita-

tion of demons, was brought very near to the Saviour in fellowship and ministry. It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil, and bathed His feet with her tears. Mary stood beside the cross, and followed Him to the sepulcher. Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour."

"Christ has plainly taught that those who persist in open sin must be separated from the church, but He has not committed to us the work of judging character and motive. He knows our nature too well to entrust this work to us. Should we try to uproot from the church those whom we suppose to be spurious Christians, we should be sure to make mistakes. Often we regard as hopeless subjects the very ones whom Christ is drawing to Himself."²

"Before Zacchaeus had looked upon the face of Christ, he had begun the work that made him manifest as a true penitent. Before being accused by man, he had confessed his sin. He had yielded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and had begun to carry out the teaching of the words written for ancient Israel as well as for ourselves."

^{1.} The Desire of Ages, p. 568.

^{2.} Christ's Object Lessons, p. 71.

^{3.} The Desire of Ages, p. 555.

Unlocking the Mysteries

EVIDENCE

Eph. 2:12

Paul, the author of this epistle, spent almost three years in Ephesus in fruitful ministry. He made many intimate friends. His salutation in this letter, however, applies not only to the church in Ephesus but also to the universal church.¹

This book is also known to be a gospel of relationships; between God and His church, Gentiles and non-Gentiles, husbands and wives, and Christ and the church. It has unlocked the mysteries that existed between the Jews and Gentiles.

Paul wrote at a time and from surroundings that well form the background message: when bloody Nero was emperor, and licentiousness, luxury, and murder were rampant. Unity in Christ was then vital. He was writing to a church consisting of Jews and Gentiles, circumcised and uncircumcised, Asian and Europeans, slaves and free, all symbols of a disrupted world that was to be restored to unity of purpose in Christ. The letter would necessitate unity of church, race, person,

family (husbands, wives, and children), not only in doctrine and organization but also in Christ the Head (Eph. 5:22; 6:4).

"We have no reason to doubt God's word."

Ephesians is a letter written

to the church during weak relationships of individuals to family, family to nation, nation to race, and of all to the church and God. As an answer Paul presented Christ as center and end of all things, working His purpose through the church, "gather[ing] together in one all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10, NKJV).

Barriers were broken through Paul's writings in this epistle. Being Roman gives clear evidence of how Gentiles broke barriers by revealing the mysteries (Eph. 3:1, 3, 6, 7).

"The word of God, like the character of its Author, presents mysteries that can never be fully comprehended by finite beings. But God has given in Scriptures sufficient evidence of their divine authority. His own existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. . . . We have no reason to doubt God's word because we cannot understand the mysteries of His providence. . . . The mysteries of the Bible, so far from being an argument against it, are among the strongest evidences of its divine inspiration."

^{1.} The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 993.

^{2.} Education, pp. 169, 170.

Reassembled in Heaven

HOW-TO

Eph. 4:20-22

"The Epistle to the Ephesians shows how the Grace of God, freely given to his chosen ones gives them a present position and present blessings as high as heaven is above the earth."

"When one who has been controlled by a stubborn, wayward will is set free, and yields himself wholeheartedly to the drawing of God's heavenly agencies, a miracle is wrought; so also when a man who has been under strong delusion comes to understand moral truth."²

"As we learn more of him exalted at God's right hand, we more rightly value and understand practical truth as we see it in his entire conduct in manhood on earth. Though the fleshly nature remains in one who's met Jesus, this no longer dominates him. There is a new controlling factor: he has put on a new man who is consistent with God's own nature, created in righteousness and holiness of Truth. Holiness—love of what is good and hatred of evil. But it is the truth of God

A Christian should not hoard the good he's received from Christ.

that decides what is Good and what is evil, not merely people's consciences or opinions."³

In spring, flowers bloom boldly in different colors to attract birds and insects to come for their sweet nectar, thus helping the flower bear

fruits through pollination (Acts 2:46, 47). In a similar way a Christian should not hoard the good he's received from Christ but should share it openly with others.

What does it require for a flower to attain a stage at which birds get attracted to it?

- Plant the seedling in good soil. A born-again Christian must be receptive to the Word of the Lord continuously.
- 2. It should be watered regularly. The new creature must continually learn from the Holy Word of God prayerfully. This will help to strengthen the newly found Christian character.
- **3. It should be trimmed.** We should allow God through the Holy Spirit to remove bad habits and characteristics and replace them with ones that are in conformity with the new life.

^{1.} L. M. Grant, Comments on the Epistle to the Ephesians.

^{2.} The Desire of Ages, p. 407.

^{3.} Grant, ibid.

Walking in the King's Highway

OPINION

Eph. 4:22-25

A genuine Christian walk that attracts a work of character transformation involves a radical change of habits and practices. Some Christians believe that the changeover process from the darkness of the world to the radiance of heaven is ultimately theirs immediately when they accept Christ as their personal Savior. They think that a feeling of the presence of the Holy Spirit seems to seal it all and there appears to be no battles to be won within or without. However, this may not be the case in the Christian warfare.

"It is true that men sometimes become ashamed of their sinful ways, and give up some of their evil habits, before they are conscious that they are being drawn to Christ. But whenever they make an effort to reform, from a sincere desire to do right, it is the power of Christ that is drawing them. An influence of which they are unconscious works upon the soul, and the conscience is quickened, and the outward life is amended. And as Christ draws them to look upon His cross, to behold

Him whom their sins have pierced, the commandment comes home to the conscience. The wickedness of their life, the deep-seated sin of the soul, is revealed to them. They begin to comprehend something of the

"Was all this love, all this suffering, all this humiliation, demanded?"

righteousness of Christ, and exclaim, 'What is sin, that it should require such a sacrifice for the redemption of its victim? Was all this love, all this suffering, all this humiliation, demanded that we might not perish, but have everlasting life?' "*

A work of transformation that leads to a newness of life begins to manifest itself in the lives of those who have taken a closer look at Calvary, and a new lifestyle begins to reveal itself in character, values, relationships, and motives.

RFACT

- 1. Why is faith not expressed as a feeling in the Christian walk?
- 2. What is the source of authority for secular society's ideas of relationships?

^{*}Steps to Christ, p. 27.

Something Completely Different

EXPLORATION

Eph. 4:22-32

CONCLUDE

Though we are saved by grace alone, we are saved for a totally new life. This new life will manifest itself in radically changed relationships with other people, because we are following Christ's law of love. Our values and standards will be distinctly different from those of the world, because Jesus has become our Standard. The Christian life is a process of growing in grace as we tap into the Spirit's power to imitate Jesus' lifestyle.

CONSIDER

- Sitting down with a parent or grandparent and reviewing pictures of your own infancy and childhood. Invite them to share stories about your growing up and reflect on how the process of growing to maturity mirrors the process of growing to be a mature Christian.
- Writing a letter to someone whose Christian faith and example you admire. Tell them specifically what qualities you admire in them, giving God the glory for the work He has done in their life.
- Creating a collage of pictures cut from magazines, newspapers, etc., that show people engaged in activities you believe exemplify the new life in Christ.
- Volunteering a day to help out someone who is in need and is unlikely to be able to repay you. You might baby-sit for a single parent, serve food at a homeless shelter, fix a car, program a computer, or do home repair for an elderly neighbor.
- Choreographing and performing a mime or dance depicting the process of growth in nature. Perform using the song "Growing" by Wayne Watson or another appropriate piece of music.
- Spending time playing with and caring for a baby or small child, then writing a journal entry about how you see this child growing in maturity and how that parallels your own growth in Christ.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, "Growing Up Into Christ," "The Work and the Life." C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, bk. IV, chaps. 10, 11.

The **Christian** walk



"You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8, NKJV).

Without the Light, We're Stranded

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 5:1-21; 1 John 5:2, 3

That April morning held no indication of the trouble I'd face after dark. I didn't knowingly get in my truck and intend to be stuck on a jungle trail in the dark that night.

The crispness of the early morning energized Gary, my husband, and me as we loaded our Toyota pickup and drove out of Bangkok heading to the Thai-Cambodian border. We were going to visit and take supplies to our ADRA workers in the Khmer village of Sok Sann.

April in Thailand is the rainy season. Jungle paths and rainy seasons are an interesting mix. Hiking up the mountain proved strenuous. We were in mud up to our knees most of the morning and late afternoon. We struggled through ruts in the path and were completely soaked when we reached the base camp of Sok Sann.

After dropping off supplies, eating a quick meal, and visiting with our medical team, it was apparent that we had to head down the mountain to be back to our truck before dark. Our escort was a group of armed Khmer soldiers. "Remember

Those words held more portent than usual.

to stay on the path" were the parting words of our fellow workers. Those words held more portent than usual. The path literally was the only safe place to be. Landmines were scattered every-

where along the way. It had taken effort and even casualties to carve out a safe trail up the side of the mountain.

Our journey down that afternoon was even slower because the rain had increased. Darkness comes early in the jungle, and Gary and I broke out our flashlights. About 45 minutes later my light began to flicker. I shook it hoping there was just a loose connection. It flickered once more and then quit. We stopped and I took Gary's flashlight since I was in the lead. Just 20 minutes later we held our breath as the second flashlight flickered and died, leaving us in total darkness. We couldn't go forward or backward. We couldn't see the path. Without the light we were stranded.

As Christians, we are to walk in the light of knowledge of Christ. We can't claim to be followers of Him and then keep up our old ways. When we try to walk without His light in our lives, we can't see the path. We are stranded.

Our lesson this week focuses on the instruction Paul gives about walking in the light. When we walk with Christ, the elements of love, judgment, light, wisdom, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit come into focus.

How to Live in a Sinless World

EVIDENCE

Isa. 5:20; Eph. 5:8-14

High altitude mountaineering requires substantial commitments of time, resources, and sacrifice. In many ways it is not unlike the Christian walk. It is very common for climbers to start their summit days at 2 or 3 A.M. to ensure that they have enough daylight to finish the climb. It can be uncomfortable to start out in the dark, but it is necessary. It is also more difficult to navigate. Once the sun comes up, it is easier to find your way. In Ephesians 5:8–14 Paul urges us to walk in the light. As we continue in our Christian walk, we should be able to see things more clearly and avoid the pitfalls in the darkness of our old lives.

An even greater hazard than darkness on the mountain is lack of oxygen. At altitudes as low as 10,000 feet, people can begin having difficulty extracting enough oxygen from the air to support high activity levels. This is due to the lower

density of the air. If the gain in altitude is made gradually over a period of days and weeks, the body is able to adapt in part by producing more red blood cells and increasing the efficiency of the oxygen exchange system. The critical fac-

Even with these guidelines it is still possible to get off course.

tor is the time allowed for the body to make the changes.

Many times climbers do not allow themselves enough time to acclimate to the altitude and thus find themselves getting sick because of a lack of oxygen. As sinners, we cannot go directly to heaven. We wouldn't be able to handle the perfect environment there. Part of our walk with Christ is meant to help acclimate us to the sinless reality that we are climbing toward. Ephesians 5 describes some guidelines to help us understand the goals.

Even with these guidelines it is still possible to get off course. Isaiah 5:20 discourages mixing up the order of things. It says, "[Don't] put darkness for light" (NKJV). It might as easily say don't mix up your priorities. The goal of our Christian walk is not to live by a set of rules or to get to a destination, but to know our Savior. By walking with Him, we come to understand Him. It won't happen overnight. Even the disciples who were in His physical presence for years didn't understand half the things He said. Fortunately we are not on our own. Jesus wants to walk with us. And we know that if we want to go one mile, He will go two miles.

The disciples were able to walk along the roads of Palestine with Jesus. How can you walk with Him now when you can't see Him?

Monday November 28

Light and Dark Relationships

LOGOS

Exodus 20; Isa. 5:20; John 15:10; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 5:1–21; 1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 1:6

In Ephesians 5 Paul discusses the life of Christians and pagans. He declares that those who are pagans are darkness. They don't just live in darkness—they are darkness. Christians are characterized as the opposite. They don't just live in light—they are light. These characteristics impact our lives and relationships with others.

The Foundation for All Relationships (2 Cor. 5:18; 1 John 5:2, 3)

Everything God has done for us and wishes to do for and through us is seen in relation to others. In 1684 John Donne penned his notable and oft-quoted poem "No Man Is an Island." It is a simple yet profound statement of the fact that each of us is in some way related to everyone else. As God gives us the gifts of the Holy

All our sin is committed in relation to others.

Spirit, each gift is to be used in relation to someone else.

Similarly all our sin is committed in relation to others. Each sin is either the breaking of our relationship with some person or with God. The fifth through the

tenth commandments speak of sins which, when committed, break our relationship with the people around us. All Ten Commandments, when broken, show a fractured relationship with God. There is one of the commandments, however, that has an even broader negative result: "You shall not commit adultery"—destroys hope of a godly relationship with the person with whom the adultery was committed, with the church, with God, and with yourself (1 Cor. 6:18).

The Great Power of Certain Sins (Eph. 5:1-8)

We must be cautious to avoid portraying sexual sin as the greatest sin. Still, Ephesians 5:1–8 speaks of the broken relationship that is not only against God and others but against ourselves as well. So powerful is this one aspect of a relationship when rightly lived that it is used by God as the image of the right relationship that God wants to have with us. And equally, when broken, the resultant sin has the power to destroy all relationships that we may wish to build.

This issue alone has power to strengthen or destroy our bond with God, with a spouse or potential spouse, with all persons of our own gender or of the other

gender, and certainly with children we may have now or in the future.

Since all we do is done either to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31) or by reverse reasoning to glorify Satan, this must also certainly be true of sexual relationships. Therefore, the God-ordained sexual relationship between a man and his own wife (Gen. 2:24) is not only a continuation for their purity (Heb. 13:4); more than that, it may even be considered to be an act of worship.

Therefore by extension adultery, fornication, homosexuality, looking on a woman "to lust after her" (Matt. 5:28, KJV) may be seen by God as acts of worshiping Satan. This reference can also be seen by the fact that God compares a holy marriage to His relationship to His church (Eph. 5:31, 32), and that He compares fornication prophetically with the worship of the beast (Rev. 14:8, 9; 17:1–5). These sins are idolatry (Eph. 5:5).

Choose Your Relationship With the Right God (Isa. 5:20; John 15:10)

According to Barclay on Ephesians 5,¹ chastity was the one new virtue that Christianity introduced into the world. It is a picture of God's character not seen in the worship of God or gods in the ancient, pre-Christian world. Though it seems to be becoming less accepted even in Christian lifestyle, it is still obviously a part of the picture of God's character. The focus of our Ephesians passage is preparing us to see that God still intends for the Christian, whether single or married, to imitate this characteristic of God.

In Ephesians 5:1, we are told to "be imitators of God" (NKJV). Barclay quotes Clement of Alexandria as daring to say that the true Christian wise man practices being God.² Though this might seem as blasphemy to some (claiming to be God or like God), isn't that exactly what is meant by Jesus being our example? The example or model is what you fashion yourself after. That's why, knowing that by beholding we become changed (2 Cor. 3:18), Paul instructed us to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, etc. (Phil. 4:8) in hopes that we would become like Christ—"to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13, NKJV). Jesus must be the subject of our emulation and our worship. We are not to strive to fashion ourselves after other people.

^{1.} William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 160, 161.

^{2.} Ibid., p. 160.

Keeping the Spiritual Light

TESTIMONY

John 14:6; Eph. 5:11, 14

Remember that moment when you experienced the thrill of accepting Christ into your life? It changes us in ways we often can't comprehend at first. The presence of Christ drives away the darkness and allows heavenly light to encompass us. That light is the truth that Jesus spoke about when He said, "'I am the way, the truth, and the life'" (John 14:6, NKJV).

"Truth is of God; deception in all its myriad forms is of Satan, and whoever in any way departs from the straight line of truth is betraying himself into the power

"Satan cannot hold the dead in his grasp when the Son of God bids them live." of the wicked one. Those who have learned of Christ will 'have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.' Ephesians 5:11. In speech, as in life, they will be simple, straightforward,

and true, for they are preparing for the fellowship of those holy ones in whose mouth is found no quile."

"Satan cannot hold the dead in his grasp when the Son of God bids them live. He cannot hold in spiritual death one soul who in faith receives Christ's word of power. God is saying to all who are dead in sin, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.' Eph. 5:14. That word is eternal life."²

"After the outpouring of the Spirit of God . . . it was proved . . . that a time of great spiritual light is also a time of corresponding spiritual darkness. Satan and his legions of satanic agencies are on the ground, pressing their powers upon every soul to make of none effect the showers of grace that have come from heaven to revive and quicken the dormant energies into decided action to impart that which God has imparted. Had all the many souls, then enlightened, gone to work at once to impart to others that which God had given to them for that very purpose, more light would have been given, more power bestowed. God does not give light merely for one person but that he may diffuse light, and God be glorified. Its influence Is felt."

^{1.} Prophets and Kings, p. 252.

^{2.} The Desire of Ages, p. 320.

^{3.} Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 129.

How to Be a Spirit-Filled Light

HOW-TO

Eph. 5:8, 14-20

When Paul the apostle came to Ephesus, he found the 12 church leaders and asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." These leaders understood that there was a Holy Spirit, but they had not accepted Him. They were unable to greatly influence the city of Ephesus. The leaders later realized that it is not enough to know what the Holy Spirit does, but that the soul must be filled with the Holy Spirit. If there is the feeling of a lack of spirituality in our churches, or in our own life, then the Holy Spirit has not been accepted. How can we make sure that we are receiving the Holy Spirit and that He continues to dwell in us? Here are four steps:

 Recognize the need for the Holy Spirit in the world and in each individual's life. The Holy Spirit helps us to recognize our sin and leads us to the truth

and God's Word; then we are able to accept Christ's sacrifice for us (John 16:13). Without the Holy Spirit men would never be able to spread the truth; the Holy Spirit is God's teacher of righteousness and was sent to

He also hinted that some greater experience was to be gained.

this earth as a comforter to those who are lost in darkness.

- 2. Receiving is better than knowledge. It is not enough to recognize the operations of the Holy Spirit, because it is His dwelling in us that allows us to be able to be a light in the world. We must open up our hearts to Him. The Holy Spirit will never force Himself into the heart, but waits for us to open the door. We must then receive the Holy Spirit.
- 3. Seeking the Holy Spirit. After the experience of the Last Supper and the foot washing, Jesus spoke to His disciples and encouraged them with the promise that the Holy Spirit was with them (John 14:17). He also hinted that some greater experience was to be gained, that is, to have the Holy Spirit dwell in them. The key to this greater experience seems to be accepting Jesus as Savior (described loosely in verses 19, 20) and in keeping the commandments (verse 21). These are the same terms that identify God's church in the last days (Rev. 12:17) and to the saints who will be taken to heaven (14:12).
- **4.** Be filled with the Holy Spirit. To be filled means for your whole being to be controlled by the Spirit. By being filled by the Holy Spirit we come to know Christ and are always conscious of His presence. We are then ready to be lights to those who are in darkness.

Cookie Cutters and Light Waves

OPINION

Gen. 1:1-4; Eph. 5:1-21

Light is a curious thing. Without it we can't see. Yet there are times when light can be so brilliant that it blinds us. According to Genesis 1, light was the first thing God created on this earth. It is necessary for vegetation to grow. Our bodies need sunlight to produce Vitamin D. Jesus said He is the Light. Paul tells us we are to walk in the light.

Light waves are made up of different lengths. They can bend and reflect. There are different types of light—incandescent, ultraviolet, natural, infrared, and so on. There is the visible spectrum and the electromagnetic spectrum. God didn't create just one type of light. He used different properties of light to achieve different results.

As we read and understand the admonition that Paul gives Christians in Ephesians 5:1-21, it's important to consider that we as Christians might reflect the

Paul tells us we are to walk in the light.

light that we have in different ways. The one constant in applying these texts to the Christian life is that after accepting Christ, we must all be light, not darkness.

Does the world see that light in

the same way in all Christians? The answer is an emphatic No! Should the world see that light the same way in all Christians? The answer is more complicated.

God created humans as individuals. We bring to our Christian walk different backgrounds, cultures, personalities, and a myriad of other factors. As Christians, our mission in life is to reflect the characteristics of Jesus to others. But just as with light waves, this can be perceived differently. When you see a rainbow, the wavelengths that are 750 nanometers appear red. The wavelengths that are around 550 nanometers are seen as yellow.

What does this mean to us as Christians in today's society, in today's church? First, we need to recognize that Christians are not cookie-cutter models. Christ has called us to follow Him, but how we fulfill that calling will be different for each of us

The challenge is to continue to walk in the light without pulling fragments of our old life from the dark along with us. Paul says we aren't supposed to continue to associate with those who speak empty words or live in the dark. Yet those are the very people we need to bring to the Light. We must constantly ask God to show us how to walk in light and yet reach those in darkness, without compromising our relationship with Him.

In the Spotlight

EXPLORATION

Ephesians 5

CONCLUDE

When we take a walk—whether it's a literal hike or a figurative "Christian walk"—we're safest and most stumble-free if we do it in the light. Once we've recognized what real spiritual light is, and have avoided the dangerous fallacy of considering certain kinds of darkness as light, we can walk transparently forward into sunny lands of reality, following Jesus, "the Light of the world." The Holy Spirit accompanies us, shining His gentle yet persistent light into the shadowy corners of our souls.

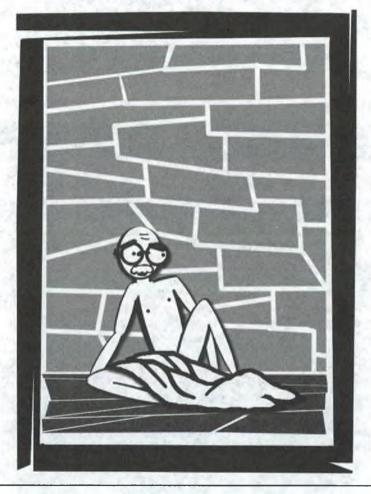
CONSIDER

- Drawing a map that shows the journey you take from your home to your church. Plot out a "love walk" (Eph.1:2) by marking places on the route where you could stop and tangibly show Jesus' love to someone.
- Writing a small article targeted toward an Adventist or other Christian magazine stating and explaining reasons that being "filled with the spirit" is preferable to and more enjoyable than drinking wine.
- Borrowing a book of Sabbath School songs for children. Together with fellow class members, choose two or three songs that are theologically profound. Sing each of these "spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19), and then discuss their deeper meanings.
- Using the tune of "Amazing Grace" or another well-known song of faith to write lyrics of appreciation for a friend, thanking God for the reasons you admire or care for that person.
- Leading a charades game in which one participant acts out ("imitates"— Eph. 5:1) a loving act of God described in the Bible. The person guessing correctly gets to star in the next round.
- Discussing, in groups of three or four, your favorite and least favorite ways of being awakened from sleep. Then discuss what God might have to do in your life to arouse you from spiritual slumber.
- Writing a letter or email to a friend or relative who's estranged from you, even slightly. Apologize for anything you might have done to hurt that person, and express your desire to be reconciled.

CONNECT

Janet Holm McHenry, *Prayer Walk;* William Carr Peel and Walt Larrimore, *Going Public With Your Faith;* Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor*.

Christian relationships



"Submitting to one another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21, NKJV)

Price of Unity: Already Paid

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 2:11-22

In 1948 Mohandas Gandhi arrived in a city of chaos and violence. New Delhi was the capital city of the recently formed Indian nation, and the Hindu residents and refugees alike wanted revenge against the Pakistani Muslims for the murder of Hindu refugees fleeing Pakistan. In this sea of hatred, Gandhi took his most effective form of protest: a hunger strike. He had used fasting to influence those around him before, including an almost fatal fast in Calcutta. Doctors advised against it as he had not recovered enough. The crowds of people passing him on his pallet in the street mocked him and chanted, "Let Gandhi die! Let Gandhi die!" However, after three days, his kidneys failed, his breathing became labored, his heart began to misfire. On day four, the Indian Government decided to meet Gandhi's demands. Homes and mosques were returned to their Muslim owners.

The Indian parliament agreed to pay £55 million to their enemy Pakistan for violence against Pakistani refugees while fleeing India. Massive amounts of weapons were

Unity is not even a meeting in the middle.

collected and destroyed. At last Gandhi agreed to give up his fast.

Two weeks later Gandhi died, not from his hunger strike but from gunshot wounds received from a Hindu fanatic. With his death Gandhi achieved what thousands had tried and failed to achieve: peace and unity in India.

Like Gandhi's death, Christ's death brought about unity among believers. He brought about unity among Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. But sadly, the unity in Gandhi's story was short lived. Very quickly the unity among Hindus and Muslims began to fail. Sadly, just a few short years passed before the unity among Christians began to suffer. Paul wrote to the Ephesian church of this problem of disunity, and we can read it in Ephesians 2.

Today the unity among Christians suffers still. Unity is not a one-way street, or the enforcing of one ideal over another. Unity is not even a meeting in the middle. Unity is the acceptance and acknowledgement of both sides of an argument. Unity is the acceptance and acknowledgement of both the practices of the Jews and of the Gentiles; of both Western and non-Western attitudes toward Sabbath; of both young and old members' tastes in music and worship styles. Today, both Gandhi's ideals of unity and peace and Paul's letter to the Ephesian church give us a shining light to follow for our local church, our youth group, our family and those around us every day.

Sunday December 4

Treating People As Jesus Treated People

LOGOS

Exod. 20:12; Luke 9:23; John 3:13; 13:35; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 5:21–33; 6:1–9; 1 John 4:10, 11

The Hindu saint and father of Indian independence, Mohandas Gandhi, is reported to have said, "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians, for they are so unlike your Christ."* Being a Christian isn't just something we say, a slogan we repeat, a label we wear, a catchy bumper sticker.

First, it is a relationship of love and trust with a real, living person, Jesus Christ, who gave everything for us. Then it is a radical transformation of our lives, especially in the area that matters most: our relationships with other people. Being a Christian means nothing less than being like Christ in the way we relate to and interact with people. Both the establishment of a new relationship of love and trust in God through Jesus Christ and the reorienting of our lives so that we treat peo-

The mark of a true Christian is not an airtight theology.

ple the way Christ treated people are supernatural works of the Holy Spirit for us and in us. Of course we must respond to the Spirit, but it is God's initiative and

His creative energy that makes us children of God and His transformative power that enables us to live as children of God.

Being Christlike begins at home (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-4).

It is often easier to behave like Christ in the workplace and in front of other people than it is at home. Living uprightly in close proximity to the people who count on us the most calls for special grace and spiritual discipline.

Scripture counsels children to be responsive to the direction of godly parents and to honor even those parents who make un-Christlike choices and demonstrate less than sanctified behavior. It does not call, however, for unqualified submission to—or participation in—evil on the part of children at the insistence of a parent. Parents are instructed to be gentle with and sensitive to the needs of their children in every dimension of their rapidly developing lives.

The mistreatment and exploitation of children is epidemic in every part of today's world. Unfortunately, the homes of professed Christians are not exempt from the abuse of children. The statistics for Adventists in this regard are no more encouraging than those for members of the body of Christ at-large or for people who are "in the world."

With alarming frequency, congregations attempt to excuse themselves from

intervening even when members are aware of cases of neglect and abuse within their midst. Concern for the image of the church; a misguided desire not to interfere with private, family matters; an it's-not-my-business attitude; or the naive certainty that-can't-be-going-on-in-my-church-or-in-that-home approaches cause many congregations to turn a blind eye to the welfare of the children, teens, and adults who are entrusted to them. The image of the church in the community and the world is never enhanced by that body's failure to confront members and hold them accountable to the standard of Christlike behavior, especially when it comes to issues of domestic violence, spousal abuse, and the mistreatment of children—physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and sexually.

Submission is a two-way street (Eph. 5:21).

When it comes to Christian behavior in the home, Ephesians 5:22 gets much more airtime than the preceding verse. Verse 22 says: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (NIV). It's a favorite among those who advocate an unbalanced approach to spousal relationships and male headship in the home. Ephesians 5:21 calls for mutual submission, following the example of Christ, before any discussion of specific roles within the family, church, and society can be rightly discussed. Left on its own, without the context of verses 21 and 25 ("Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," [NIV]), males have for centuries sanctioned un-Christlike, domineering roles for husbands in the home. Nothing could be further from the Spirit and example of our Savior.

Mutuality and partnership, deference to one another, the sacrifice of one's will and one's own interest for the well-being and advancement of the other, and an atmosphere of gentleness, civility, and love characterize Christ's life and must characterize every Christian marriage.

Love is the bottom line for Christianity (1 John 4:10, 11).

Love for one another is Christ's way. Living by this principle separates genuine Christians from mere pretenders.

The mark of a true Christian is not an airtight theology. It's not the ability to win arguments, it's not the ability to lead or persuade people, it's not a matter of appearance, it's not a particular spiritual gift nor a peculiar set of lifestyle distinctives. According to Jesus, it is love: "'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another'" (John 13:35, NIV).

^{*}http://www.urbandictionary.com/ "Christian."

Sit on the Ground

TESTIMONY

James 2:2-4

Should we not sit on the ground and offer the better seat to others around us—both rich and poor?

"Let us diligently cultivate the pure principles of the gospel of Christ, the religion, not of self-esteem, but of love, meekness, and lowliness of heart. Then we shall love our brethren and esteem them better than ourselves. Our minds will not dwell on the dark side of their character; we shall not feast on scandal and flying reports. But 'whatsoever things are . . . of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise,' we shall 'think on these things' (Phil. 4:8)."

It is not our duty to scorn, judge, or condemn our brothers. It is our duty to love them first. "God so loved the world. . . . God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world" (John 3:16, 17).

"The soul is fed by the streams of pure love that flow from the heart of Christ,

Should we not sit on the ground and offer the better seat to others around us?

as a well-spring that never fails. Oh, how is the heart quickened, how are its motives ennobled, its affections deepened, by this communion! Under the education and discipline of the Holy

Spirit, the children of God love one another, truly, sincerely, unaffectedly,—'without partiality, and without hypocrisy.' And this because the heart is in love with Jesus."²

"If the watchmen sleep under an opiate of Satan's and do not recognize the voice of the true Shepherd, and do not take up the warning, I tell you in the fear of God, they will be charged with the blood of souls. The watchmen must be wide awake, men who will not slumber at their post of duty, day nor night. They must give the trumpet a certain sound, that the people may shun the evil and choose the good. Stupidity and careless indifference cannot be excused. On every side of us there are breakers and hidden rocks which will dash our bark in pieces, and leave us helpless wrecks, unless we make God our refuge and help. Every soul should now be distrustful of self. Our own ways, our own plans and ideas, may not be such as God can approve. We must keep the way of the Lord to do his will, making him our counselor, and then in faith work away from self."

^{1.} That I May Know Him, p. 184.

^{2. 1888} Materials, p. 1509.

^{3.} Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, December 24, 1889.

Honor Father, Mother, and God

EVIDENCE

Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-4

God wants us to have healthy relationships with our parents. Therefore He asks us in the fifth commandment to "Honor your father and your mother" (Exod. 20:12, NKJV). I truly believe that God asks this of me so that He can bless my life.

What do you do if obeying your parents goes against obeying God? Many times the words "honor" and "obey" are understood to mean the same thing. I learned the hard way that obeying and honoring are two completely different words. God helped me understand how to honor my parents by obeying God. There was a time when I struggled to understand my relationship with my parents in conjunction with my relationship with God. My dad asked something of me that I felt I could not do; this created tension in my relationship with my dad.

For almost eight months I tried to reason with my dad. Praying for help and

guidance, I would get on the phone and try to talk things through, and he would yell at me, giving me more reasons to not do what he was asking of

That's when I understood that I was not helping my father.

me. I had gotten to the point of such frustration that I almost didn't care anymore.

I was talking through the previous night's conversation after a very stressful evening, when a friend shared something with me that would change my attitude toward the situation: Ephesians 6:1–4. That's when I understood that I was not helping my father by refusing to do what he asked. I needed to build him up and show him that I wanted to follow him; only then would he see my side of the situation. That evening, I said a prayer, picked up the phone, and called my dad. This time it wasn't me against my dad, but God helping me to honor my dad. After I read the verses to him, for the first time in eight months my dad spoke in a normal voice.

By saying I wouldn't obey my dad, I wasn't doing what God was asking of me. I first shared why I couldn't do what he was asking and then asked my dad for another chance. Only then, after I submitted lovingly to him, did my dad apologize for "provoking" me "to wrath." God didn't just give us His Word to grow in a closer relationship with Him; He gave us His Word to build stronger relationships with everyone.

REACT

How would you define the difference between "honor" and "obey"?

A Reflection of Christ

HOW-TO

Eph. 5:1, 2

Poor widows and rich Pharisees, tax collectors and sex workers, Roman soldiers and children—Jesus reached out to help and encourage people from every demographic. Do our relationships span such broad groups of people? Does our attitude toward others always reflect Christ's outward focus? Ephesians 4:24 and 5:1 encourage us to lead a life "created to be like God" (NKJV) and act as "imitators of God" (NKJV).

Let us examine some simple steps we can implement with the aim of giving something in each contact we have with others, so that each person we have encountered is better off having spent time in our presence.

1. Use all opportunities. List the different groups of people you have relationships with, and the most important may include parents, spouses, best friends,

Does our attitude toward others always reflect Christ's outward focus?

and siblings. Others may include workmates, school friends, and neighbors. Are you giving these relationships all that you can? Proverbs 3:27 reminds us not to "withhold good from those to whom it is

due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so" (NKJV). To those whom you meet only briefly, give a smile or a greeting. Ephesians 5:16 urges us to make the most of each opportunity. Brighten the day of those who share your elevator, your train carriage, or hand over your change. Reflect Christ in every interaction you have with others.

- 2. Encourage others. Look and listen for opportunities to help and encourage others (Prov. 20:12). Is someone sick? Has someone been absent from church or another place where you regularly see them? Give the person a phone call or send them an email to communicate that you care. Proverbs 12:25 reads, "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad" (NKJV). Remember to imitate Christ and quote His Word, to "speak a word in season to him who is weary" (Isa. 50:4, NKJV).
- **3. Pray for your relationships.** Pray diligently for all aspects of your relationships (Eph. 6:18). We must ask that God will help us to use every occasion to reflect Him in our interactions with others, that God may show us situations where we can assist others. Pray for each of those you have relationships with. Be specific, tell God any problems your friends may have, and thank Him for blessings they receive. Don't forget to pray for your enemies (Matt. 5:44).

Submitting to One Another

OPINION

Mark 9:35

The very word *submission* does not have a positive connotation. In a lot of ways it appears that it is a sign of weakness, a character flaw. This is more so in the "me" society we live in, where individualism rules, where we are encouraged to fulfill ourselves, to feel good about ourselves, to stand up for our rights, to find our inner selves. Who has time for submitting to another person? No one should be able to control me. What, give up my personal rights? Never!

Surprisingly, though, this is exactly what Christ tells us to do. When we submit to His will, we are set free. It seems a radical concept, but then again we serve a radical God. "Radical?" You might ask yourself "How so?" Think about what Christ said when the disciples were arguing about who is the greatest: "'Anyone who wants to be the first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else'" (Mark 9:35, NLT), and "'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to keep

your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life'" (Luke 9:23, 24, NLT).

This is exactly the opposite of what society tells us.

The Christian life, therefore, should be one of servi-

tude, in which husband and wife submit to each other (Eph. 5:21), in which children submit to their parents (6:1–4), and in which slave and master are equal (verses 5–9).

This is exactly the opposite of what society tells us. We are often confronted in our daily lives, whether it is in work, sport, or other activities, to think about ourselves and our ambitions—sometimes even at the expense of others. Our relationship with others seems to take second place. If we are to follow Christ's example, then we must think of others first and put ourselves last.

This is no easy task! How are we meant to conduct ourselves so we meet this Christian standard? God provides His Holy Spirit to enable us to live this way. To utilize the Spirit's power, however, we must lay aside our evil desires and submit ourselves to this new way of life. We are to be like the Christians in Acts: "of one heart and mind" (NLT). Easier said than done, you might say. I would probably agree with you, but what I have found is that if you submit yourself to God and nurture a close relationship with Him, it comes naturally. So submit your will to Christ and seek to love others.

Christian Relationships

EXPLORATION

Eph. 5:21

CONCLUDE

As it is often said, "Why do we find it so hard to get along?" Most relationships, whether romantic or not, go just fine—at least for a while. It's after the courtesy and superficiality disappear that relationships begin to become hard work. Too often people decide that it's too hard and opt for the ease of superficial or new relationships. The Bible advises us that whether at church, work, or home, being unselfish, like Jesus, is the only way to have fulfilling long-term relationships. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21, NIV).

CONSIDER

- Compiling a playlist of songs that highlight the differences between Christian relationships and non-Christian relationships. List as many differences as the songs bring up.
- Illustrating Ephesians 5:21, which is one of many symbolic moments in Scripture, e.g., Jesus washing His disciples' feet. Select one and illustrate or mold a piece of artwork with your interpretation of this moment.
- Thinking of your worst enemy at the moment. Do you think it would be possible for you to initiate reconciliation? Do you think that with God it is possible? Consider Ephesians 5:21; Matthew 19:26.
- Viewing the video Field of Dreams (1989). Think about what this film says about reconciliation. This is not necessarily an appropriate activity for Sabbath.
- Listing as many non-Christian friends or associates as you can. Do you consider the dynamic you have in your relationships with these people to be Christian or non-Christian in nature? Why?
- Going through your email address book and thinking of every person whose name you see. Is there anything for which you need to ask forgiveness of this person? Is there anything for which you can forgive them? Why not write them an email and take the first step to reconciliation?

CONNECT

Hosea 1:1-3; 3:1-4; Matthew 26:14-35; Acts 7:54-60; Ephesians 5.

The **Christian** warfare



"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12, NKJV).

Prepared for Battle

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 6:12

Greg was prepared. He had just graduated from the police academy and had earned the top ranking of his class. He had absorbed all the lessons in combat training classes. He knew every tactic, studied every discipline. His marksmanship rating was superb. Every weapon he picked up was automatically an extension of his body. The care and use of each was now subconscious. The training simulations the academy used to teach students to differentiate between combatants and innocents were all ingrained in his psyche. His mind and body were ready.

Greg was prepared. He had taken home all the personal gear that the academy had designated. His .357 magnum automatic was the best handgun in the

This was the most dangerous area, and he was ready for it.

world. Its leather holster had a snap-down catch that would keep others from slipping his gun from his belt. He was issued two sets of handcuffs to keep

arrested criminals subdued. His radio was top of the line, with automatic settings that could switch between his headquarters' frequency and local channels. Its operating range was the best. He had a utility belt that kept all his necessities in easy reach. His truncheon baton slung easily at his side, ready to whip out at an instant's need. Above all this, he had body armor. The kevlar plates could stop a bullet at close range. His equipment was perfect.

Greg was prepared. He had gotten his assignment: the downtown district. This was the most dangerous area, and he was ready for it. Greg went over his schedule for tomorrow in his head while he unlocked his front door. He would make a big impression, not only on his new precinct, but also on the criminals.

As he opened his front door, he looked up to see the devil standing in his front room. His first thought was to his gun, but what would a .357 magnum do against the devil? Could he handcuff the devil? How about radio for backup? Would his kevlar body armor be of any use against an enemy like this? Greg began to sweat.

Greg was not prepared.

Century 21: The Controversy Continues

EVIDENCE

Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:1-3; 6:10-12

A Christian co-worker of mine had recently stated something that I had wondered about myself. To paraphrase, she said there must be something about Christianity that reveals the ultimate truth about God, because other religions are not disregarded as Christianity has been. In other words, if there was no truth in Christianity, then it would not be threatening to those who don't believe in God, forcing them to see that atheism, not God, is a lie. Now a brief glance through history can easily indicate otherwise. The Crusades were an attempt to enforce Christianity on the Islamic-held Middle East during medieval times.

Here in the U.S. non-Protestants and Jews were persecuted in various ways at the start of American history due to their religious convictions. Yet true Christianity was not being displayed in such instances. These were moments when Christians were acting out of worldly concepts of conquest and oppression rather than Christian concepts of love and peace. Today saying one is a Christian and truly

attempting to follow Christ is still an awesome statement. It is too easy to fall into the habits of one's environment or old nature like relying on self, lacking trust

With God's help all such diversions can be overcome.

in God, being cynical, etc. But falling into old habits is one of the ways the devil works to keep us from thinking that our hope is truly in something greater than what this world can give. With God's help all such diversions can be overcome.

I'm not certain what's so frightening about a humble Jewish carpenter from Nazareth who loved all, taught truth, and died for us all, which makes people discount His importance. Perhaps it is because He was really God in the flesh, His very presence and actions on earth imploring that we discard mediocre spirituality for a real relationship with the Lord, automatically separating us from others and drawing us closer to an unseen, all-powerful God.

In Ephesians Paul writes, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1–3, NKJV). So as we allow ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2), we should imitate Christ. By staying close to Him we can overcome.

Living in a War Zone

LOGOS

lsa. 35:4; Dan. 10:19; Luke 22:31; Rom. 7:15–20; Eph. 6:10–12; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8; Rev. 12:9

The Reality of War (Eph. 6:10-12)

From an early age the realities of living in a war zone begin to take their toll. We stop believing everything we hear and see. We learn that human love sometimes comes at a price, that life is not fair. The cruel reality of sin is all that we have ever known. We have come to call normal the perversity, the devastation, the brokenness that results from our sinful environment and nature. Like the Israelites of old we turn to anything that can temporarily satisfy our desperate needs. Anything, that is, except the only One whose promises will never expire, the only One who is faithful enough to complete that which He has promised, the only One who is able to satisfy our deepest needs. We demand that God bless us but overlook the fact that

God does not leave us to fend for ourselves.

He has already given us every spiritual blessing that is in Christ. We are not lacking one thing that we need in this cosmic battle. Limited as we are by human vision, it is easier to focus on the physical rather than the spiritual

and to see the temporary rather than the eternal. The Bible reveals that this war is more real than we realize.

The Universal Conflict (Gen. 3:1-6; Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43; Rev. 12:7-9)

Before sin entered our world at the fall of humankind, Revelation tells us that there was war in heaven. One-third of the angels were deceived by Satan's accusations against God before being cast down to the earth (Rev. 12:4, 7–9). Genesis 3:1–6 gives an idea of the nature of Satan's accusations. In the Garden Satan asserts to Eve that God's law is unreasonable and impossible to keep. In Satan's carefully chosen words, "you will not die," he implies that God is holding out on the human race and everyone who chooses to follow Him. Satan claims that God's government is tyrannical, that He's set up an impossible standard and will kill you if you don't keep it. Those who do worship Him, do so out of fear of being destroyed.

His whispered "You won't die" is heard not only by Eve but by an entire universe of fallen and unfallen angels looking on. The parable of the wheat and tares tells us that the angels are carefully watching the unfolding events of earth's history. The question of God's character is being dramatically answered on this earth

(Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43).

Interestingly, humankind is the last and crowning part of God's creation of earth. Adam and Eve were not there to witness the awesome power of God speaking the world into existence (Genesis 1; 2). Neither were they there to witness the fall of Satan in heaven. Instead they must simply trust God, not on the basis of His power, but on the basis of His Word. Satan is given the chance to win over Adam and Eve, but if they trust God, not out of fear, but out of love, Satan's accusations would be silenced. Instead humanity mistrusted God and the seeds of sin took root in the hearts of humankind.

The Casualties of War (Luke 22:31; Rom. 7:15-20)

The resultant fruit of mistrusting God and trying to do things on our own has been repeatedly revealed throughout earth's history and our own lives. The enemy has not only secured a strong hold on this earth, but the enemy lies within our own hearts as well. In Romans 7 Paul tells of the struggle that wars within the hearts of even seasoned Christians. War, murder, deceit, lust, pride, destruction, strife, self-preservation, the fruit of Satan's rule are all manifest in our individual lives (Matt. 15:18–20; Rom. 7:15–20). The Bible tells us that Satan does not leave us to the natural course of sin. He is actively involved in trying to destroy God's precious creation (Luke 22:31; 1 Pet. 5:8).

Ephesians 6:12 clearly tells us that we are battling against more than our own hearts and external behaviors. More is at stake than just our own salvation. God's character has been called into question. Our lives are demonstrating to the universe either God's character revealed in a fallen humanity or the gross reality of choosing to live without God.

Victory for the Taking (Isa. 35:4; Dan. 10:19; Ephesians 2; 3; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8)

Despite humankind's failure at the Garden and continued fallen condition, God's plan has not been foiled. Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, God can unite the human family again, not by force but through love (Ephesians 2–3:9). This group of people, united in serving God out of love, apparently is finally able to silence the accusations of Satan. The love of God, finally revealed in His people, vindicates God's character to the entire universe (3:10, 11).

God does not leave us to fend for ourselves. At the Cross Christ offers us the opportunity to be a part of the winning team. Victory is ours for the taking. He offers us His strength to endure the attacks of Satan (Isa. 35:4; Dan. 10:19). He offers us His righteousness and His life.

We can join Paul in saying, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8, NKJV).

We're at War!

TESTIMONY

Eph. 6:12

Over the course of our lives, we learn to discern what risks may be involved as a consequence of our choices. We consider the facts as we know them, assess the positives and negatives, then make our decision. If there are facts that are not known to us, however, we may make some bad choices. In our spiritual warfare, we make a grave error if we think of the satanic agencies as being more or less like us. Our text for this week is a reminder that they are definitely not human. In an article published in *The Signs of the Times,* August 5, 1886, Ellen White gives similar advice: "If we could always remember that Satan comes to us in disguise, his motives concealed, and he himself clad in garments of light, we would be on our quard, and would not fall a prey to his devices."

If Satan were to approach us openly, we would be on our guard. We would know to seek God's protection. We would—at once—pray for deliverance! But, he

If Satan were to approach us openly, we would be on our guard.

comes in disguise. There is no apparent need for concern. He may even appear to be a friend. From a flesh-and-blood point of view, he appears to be innocent, or at worst unthreatening. This is why the apostle Paul tells us that we are warring with the decep-

tive powers of darkness and evil spiritual forces from a realm far beyond our understanding.

If we were left to our own defenses, we would certainly be overpowered. But we are not alone! Jesus has offered Himself to fight the battle for us. "He is infinite in righteousness, in goodness, and in truth. He has power to withstand principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. Armed and equipped as the Captain of the Lord's host, He comes to the front in defense of His people. His righteousness covers all who love and trust Him. The General of armies, He leads out the heavenly host to stand as a wall of fire about His people."* If we engage the adversary alone, we are defenseless and will be duped, defeated, and destroyed. However, if we ask Christ for protection, He will—as the Lord of all the hosts of heaven—bring all that angelic army to defend us from the enemy. He clothes us in His protective armor, and then He defeats the foe.

^{*}Manuscript Releases, vol. 21, p. 271. (See Joshua 5:13-16.)

No Rest Areas on the Path

HOW-TO

Eph. 6:10-12

The path through earth's battlefield is flat and narrow, arrow-straight mostly, snaking occasionally around impassable abutments or trenches. At the far right horizon the path climbs steeply toward heavenly light. Each step higher is bathed in gloriously more intense beams. At the opposite horizon, the path widens and slopes toward darkness. It's an easy path there, but what waits in the shadows?

We're born on the path, and whether we're directly attacked or live a more sheltered experience, we all suffer occasional shrapnel wounds from the battle raging around us. Ever since General Adam fell victim to the enemy's war strategies, the battlefield has belonged to Satan. We know the shadows belong to him too; and in fact, the path itself belongs to the enemy all the way to the base of the first step in the right direction. When the battle is over, the shadow sojourners will lose. Those walking *toward* the darkness will lose. Those who are motionless on the path, whether facing the light, the shadows, or turning in place will also lose. Those who

have begun the journey up the steps are certainly on the right path, but even some of those tire of the climbing and are Uturning. Losers. Some look back into the darkness below to see what's happening and fall

Most reading this lesson consider themselves at least to be on the steps.

off the steps. Losers. And some try to create a little rest area for themselves on the steps, sitting down for a while to rest, but they have turned their backs to the Light—losers. Only those facing the Light and actively attempting to climb the next step will see and clasp the hands of Jesus, reaching to whichever step they're on, allowing them to be pulled into the Victor's camp. Winners!

We're familiar with this metaphor, and most reading this lesson consider themselves at least to be on the steps. How do we keep actively climbing above the battlefield toward the Light?

- **1. Avoid the distractions.** Instead of nit-picking which of our entertainments (music, TV, movies, computer games, etc.) are sins and which are OK, why not ask a better question: What more could I be doing for the Lord?
- 2. Act on beliefs. We believe God is always all around us, but do we conduct our lives in reflection of that belief? How much easier it would be actively to climb the next step if we constantly and purposefully conducted our lives such that every thought, word, action, and emotion reflected our knowledge that God is right there beside us.

Getting Back on Track

OPINION

Rom. 7:15-20

For me, personally, this sentence is key: "The enemy will use every argument, every deception, to entangle the soul; and in order to win the crown of life, we must put forth earnest, persevering effort."

Satan is always trying to come between me and God, and he interferes in any way he can to destroy that relationship.

I know my purpose: to live a good life and set my sights on heaven, to live the way God wants me to and to grow more and more into His image every day. It is sometimes difficult, however, to remember this while dealing with all the snarls that Satan throws my way. Somehow Satan causes me to get sidetracked. He makes it too easy for me to get caught up in this world and turn my focus away from God and toward myself.

Getting back on track is difficult. To get back on track, I need to pray more and

Satan is always trying to come between me and God.

read the Bible more, but because of Satan, I create all sorts of excuses for not doing what I know I need to do. I am too busy or too tired. I have to do this or I have to do that.

Satan is the reason for all the excuses, and the excuses reflect that I am too much into this world. The excuses show that I am thinking only of myself.

When we are thinking of self, we are turning away from Christ, who gives us life. Satan knows this, and he tries to keep our minds turned away from the Saviour. He wants to keep us from living and working with Christ.

Satan tries to use the pleasures of the world to turn our minds away from God. He uses life's worries and sorrows. He uses the faults of others and our own faults and weaknesses to turn our thoughts from God. We must not let Satan deceive us with these thoughts.

We should not make self the center of out thoughts. . . . Thinking of self turns our minds from God. We should give ourselves to God and talk and think of Jesus.

To help me stay focused on my work for the Lord, Ellen White also writes in *Steps to Christ:* "Give yourself fully to God in the morning.... Let this be your daily prayer: 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Yours. I lay all my plans at Your feet. Use me today in Your service. Live with me, and let all my work be done in You.' "²

^{1.} My Life Today, p. 105.

^{2.} Steps to Christ, p. 70.

Lose to Win

EXPLORATION

Phil. 3:8

CONCLUDE

It is not like any other battle we've seen or heard of. In order to obtain victory, we must surrender completely and allow God to fight in our behalf. We cannot pretend to tackle this enemy with our own strategies and weapons; we are sorely unfit to face his devious attacks. Every day, moment by moment, God calls us to lose ourselves, giving up everything, to find salvation in His arms.

CONSIDER

- Beginning a journal. Document your daily battles and identify the weapons Satan has been using against you.
- Praying about your journal entries and asking God to take over your personal struggles and to enable you to yield to His will.
- Adapting Wednesday's lesson "No Rest Areas on the Path" to perform a skit for your Sabbath School group.
- Interviewing people in a local mall with the question, "What is the most important thing in your life?" Evaluate the answers and discuss how Satan uses distractions to keep our eyes on this world.
- Reading Acts 9:1–31. Explain what made Saul surrender to Christ.
- Singing the hymn "All to Jesus I Surrender" and thinking about what "all" means to you.

CONNECT

Romans 6

The Great Controversy, pp. 505-510.

Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, chap. 10.

The **Christian** armor



"Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13, NKJV).

Buckle Up With the Belt of Truth!

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 6:14

In the groundbreaking film *The Matrix*, Morpheus offers his pupils a choice between a red pill or a blue pill. One pill reveals the truth about the Matrix, which uses human beings as an energy source for machines, creating a virtual world in which freedom and reality only exist outside of the Matrix.

Everyone has to decide what is true for their lives. That choice, however, may have nothing to do with the absolute truth. The fact is each of us will choose a truth that we desire to live by.

This choice of human truth can have dire consequences: the evil of slavery, apartheid, the holocaust, and genocide between neighbors in the former Yugoslavia. Personal truth can support beliefs of one true religion, one true church,

one true denomination, and one true set of doctrines—encircling us within a tight wall of exclusion and detaching us from the rest of humanity.

This is where the Oracle can help.

Ephesians 6:14 asks us to

stand firm, with the belt of truth buckled around our waist. The question is: What is your truth? How do I know when I have buckled up with the right belt? Thankfully, there are a couple of guides to help us.

First, we need information. As Morpheus shared new and shocking information with his pupil, Neo, so too the Bible peels away the secrets of our soul. However, information can sometimes be overwhelming, confusing, conflicting, or nonsensical. This is where the Oracle can help.

The Oracle enters to guide us though the knowledge garden. The Oracle joins us in this garden and helps us learn, train, and quest for the choice of our spiritual path. The Oracle provides clarity, distilling the dogma of doctrines from meaningful message, enabling you to find the absolute truth.

Neo had his Oracle, and we have ours: Jesus.

After His encounter with the centurion, Jesus exclaimed, "'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith'" (Matt. 8:10, NIV). The soldier was not a Jew; nor was he a church member. In fact he was one of the hated enemy, a Roman.

Do we choose the red pill or the blue pill? If we follow Jesus, we will find out where He will lead us. The ride is bumpy and exciting, so let's buckle up with the belt of truth!

Put It All On!

LOGOS

John 14:6; 18:38; Rom. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Thess. 5:8

The country church I pass on my way into town bears this message: "We are open between Easter and Christmas." As I write, Easter has just passed. For you, the reader, Christmas is next week. At the end of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul is commending his audience, people who are Christians just like you. "Congratulations! You've made it to the thirteenth Sabbath without losing your quarterly!"

"But," warns Paul, "don't let your guard down." The enemy hasn't lowered his defenses. The minute you drop your sword, or (like Goliath) raise your helmet, he will strike the exposed body part.

A good pastor, Paul rejoices with his converts in the baptismal tank. But while

A brick, falling from a scaffold two stories up, landed on his head and bounced off. we are still wet, he warns us that trials will come. Then Pastor Paul lists the things we need to protect ourselves and fight those trials. "And don't just take one or two of these de-

fenses," Paul insists. "Wear them all!"

The Belt of Truth (John 14:6; 18:37, 38; Eph. 6:14)

"What is truth?" Pilate asked Jesus, and then walked away from the answer. When Jesus said He had come to bring truth to this world, Pilate must have thought Him hopelessly naive.

"Everything is relative!" the modern secularist would answer Pilate—except evil. The killing of innocent children is always wrong. Pollution hurts all of us. Suffering must be alleviated. While most people reject "absolute truth," many believe in "absolute evil."

When we look at Jesus, we see the antidote to evil, not a list of proof texts or infallible doctrines, but the embodiment of good: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22, 23, NIV).

The Body Armor of God's Righteousness (Isa. 59:12–17; 1 Cor. 1:30, 31)

So you're patting yourself on the back, are you? I studied the lesson quarterly every week, attended church faithfully, served during the ordinance of humility. . . . When we look at ourselves, we don't look that bad. But when we look at Jesus, we

can see we've majored in minors, and missed the main point. (See Isaiah 59.)

If we are going to boast, Paul writes the Corinthians, God has given us something to brag about. Modern Christianity uses the phrase "Christ's robe of right-eousness," but Paul called it a breastplate.

Gospel Peace Runners (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:14, 15)

Before ministering God's salvation in the sanctuary services, Moses and Aaron washed their hands and feet (Exod. 40:31). Before leaving His disciples, Jesus washed all their feet. In Ephesians the warrior's feet are dedicated by the gospel, and protected by the peace of Jesus. Strange soldiers, we go forth, not to wage war, but to bring peace and good news. We run through enemy territory, sometimes through the valley of the shadow of death. But we know He runs beside us.

The Shield of Faith (Rom. 1:16, 17)

A devout Augustinian monk on his hands and knees, Martin Luther climbed Pilate's staircase in Rome, whispering the Lord's Prayer on each of the 28 steps. He was praying for the salvation of his grandfather's soul. "But," at the top he asked himself, "who knows if it is so?"

Eight years later, in an Augustinian chapter meeting, Luther argued, "He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ."* Belief in the wrong thing quickly becomes a shield of Swiss cheese. Like that of Luther, the faith of many young Christians is based on superstition leading to fear, self-discipline leading to discouragement, and what other people tell them. This leads to a bitter bondage. But faith in the grace of God and His eagerness to forgive our sins brings optimism, gratefulness, and a positive lifestyle.

Faith, says the writer of Hebrews, "is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen" (Heb. 11:1, NLT). Faith is the mind telling the heart, "Don't worry. He is able." It is the heart telling the mind, "Don't doubt. Your Father loves you."

Salvation's Hard Hat (Gal. 2:20; 1 Thess. 5:8-10)

My cousin walked out the front door of the construction project, carrying a load, when a brick, falling from a scaffold two stories up, landed on his head and bounced off. He shook himself and continued walking.

"That boy's got one hard head!" the other workers said.

He also had his construction hat on.

The good news for the warrior, suiting up to fight this battle, is that the war has already been won! The enemy is defeated; our Hero is victorious (Gal. 2:20). As Paul explains it to the Thessalonians, this gives us confidence. Satan can throw anything he wants at us. His bricks just bounce off salvation's hard hat!

^{*} Harold J. Grimm, ed., *Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), vol. 31, p. 55.

The Armor in Action

TESTIMONY

1 Pet. 5:8, 9

"There is to be no compromise with the powers of darkness. Individually we must take our stand. If we are not at enmity with the prince of darkness, the serpent, his folds encircle us and all our powers; his sting is in our hearts. All who range themselves under the blood-stained banner of the Prince of Life will henceforth count Satan as a foe, and will in God's strength oppose him as a deadly enemy. They will take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And what will they do in order to hold vantage ground? 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance' (Eph. 6:18)....

"We should be quick to discern danger. We should see the hateful character of sin and should expel it from the soul. The doers of the Word know that in Jesus

"We can meet any influence and our purity remain untarnished." there is strength, which becomes their own by faith. They are clothed with righteousness that God will accept, for it is the righteousness of Christ. Clad in this armor of God, the panoply of

heaven, they successfully resist the serpent's wiles. Not one soul has a moment to lose. . . . The concerns of eternity are of sufficient importance to take precedence over every other enterprise. 'What must I do to be saved?' should be the great and solemn question with us now."

"The very conflicts and rebuffs we meet are to make us stronger and give stability to our faith. We are not to be swayed, like a reed in the wind, by every passing influence. Our souls, warmed and invigorated by the truths of the gospel, and refreshed by divine grace, are to open and expand, and shed their fragrance upon others. Clad in the whole armor of righteousness, we can meet any influence and our purity remain untarnished."²

"Those who place themselves under God's control, to be led and guided by Him, will catch the steady tread of the events ordained by Him to take place. Inspired with the Spirit of Him who gave His life for the life of the world, they will no longer stand still in impotency, pointing to what they cannot do. Putting on the armor of heaven, they will go forth to the warfare, willing to do and dare for God, knowing that His omnipotence will supply their need."

^{1.} In Heavenly Places, p. 48.

^{2.} Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 556.

^{3.} Ibid., vol. 7, p. 14.

Ashamed of Your Shoes?

EVIDENCE

Rom. 1:16, 17; 2 Corinthians 5

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16, NKJV).

Immediately after revealing Himself to the zealous young Pharisee, the Lord announced that Saul—better known as Paul—was His chosen agent to carry His name to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 9:15). God gave him a compelling desire to preach the gospel, especially where it had not yet been heard (1 Cor. 9:16). Though many believed in Christ through his preaching, others did not. Whether they thought the Resurrection foolish or the Cross offensive, the gospel was to them something to be ashamed of (1 Cor. 1:22–25).

Given the persecution Paul experienced in his preaching, it is noteworthy that

he counseled the Ephesians to stand with their feet "fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15, NIV). Why is the good news referred to

The readiness of the gospel has broader implications.

as the "gospel of peace," and what does it ready us for?

In the gospel God reconciles us to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18). We are at peace with Him (Rom. 5:1). Through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, our most fundamental relationship is healed. Our arrogance and self-righteousness, which caused such conflict in our human relationships, is replaced by humble gratitude for a God who would reclaim us from our hopeless condition. We are now free—as far as possible—to "live at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18, NIV).

Our newfound peace readies us to stand firm when persons or circumstances try to pull us back into destructive habits. When the situation requires it, we are given swiftness so that we may "flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue right-eousness, faith, love and peace" (2 Tim. 2:22, NIV).

But the readiness of the gospel has broader implications. Within and beyond the sphere of our existing relationships are others experiencing the same alienation from God, the same strife in human interactions, the same despair, the same enslavement to self that we once did. To them "we are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:20, 21, NIV).

His Armor, Not Ours

HOW-TO

Eph. 6:10-17

Before I settled on being an engineer, I worked at some jobs that required the use of protective clothing. In construction I had to wear a hard hat, gloves, and hearing protection. At my job in a wafer fab, I worked with acids and had to wear rubber gloves, an apron, and a face shield. I had tasks to do each day that could not be survived without protective gear. Likewise, we all have a task at hand that we simply will not survive without the Lord's protective clothing.

"Those who will put on the whole armor of God and devote some time every day to meditation and prayer and to the study of the Scriptures will be connected with heaven and will have a saving, transforming influence upon those around them."*

Each day we need to begin with a conscious choice to connect ourselves to Christ through truth, righteousness, peace, and faith in Him and His salvation. We must daily pray, meditate, and wrap ourselves in the armor of God. With His faith

Wearing two helmets today won't protect your head for tomorrow's game.

and His eagerness to spread the gospel, our feet will be swift and His words will spread the "transforming influence upon those around them"

The immediacy of the

images of strapping on armor, preparing for the game, or getting ready for your work day can guide us to think correctly about how to use the armor of God. The breastplate of righteousness, helmet of salvation, shield of faith, Word of God—all held together with the belt of truth. Each day has its own demands, and we must prepare ourselves for them daily. Wearing two helmets today won't protect your head for tomorrow's game.

As you think about this armor and its use, it is important to remember that it is His armor, not ours.

Each day whenever your mind is at its best, renew your choice to put on the armor of God. This could take the form of a prayer, song, favorite text read thoughtfully, or a psalm that you read or repeat.

Regularly pick one element of the armor of God. For instance, the shield of faith. Imagine some situation in your day when you're being armored with God's shield of faith—His faith, not yours—which empowers you to act with His faith.

^{*}Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 112.

The Right Armor for the Job

OPINION

1 Samuel 17

I'm a vegetarian. I'd love to say I chose that lifestyle for myself, but really it has mostly to do with how my parents raised me. A few times I tried meat, but I just couldn't get myself to continue eating it because I wasn't used to the taste. Young David had a similar reaction when he was given the option of wearing the war armor that King Saul advised. He eventually told the king, "I cannot go in these, because I am not used to them."

In Ephesians 6 we learn about another kind of war armor—God's armor. The interesting thing about this armor is that no one can see it, but you know you've got it on when the devil comes at you and he's unable to penetrate your heart, soul, and mind.

David's load was also a lot lighter when he decided against the burdensome armor that Saul had to offer and chose the invisible, but perfectly placed, armor of God.

Toward the middle of the film, Troy Achilles's cousin puts on Achilles's war armor and goes out to fight the battle against Troy. Upon seeing Achilles's armor, Prince

We will be recognized by our armor.

Hector of Troy charges at him and kills the soldier he thinks is Achilles.

We will be recognized by our armor. When we put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the readiness of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and prayer, people will want to know who we represent.

After Goliath was slain, King Saul had to know who this small but victorious kid was. He asked, "Whose son are you, young man?" David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

As we faithfully put on God's armor each day, first out of love for God and then out of love and habit, we too will be winning spiritual battles. And each time someone sees our amazing victories, they will also ask, "Whose son/daughter are you?" I can't wait to tell them, "I am the daughter of the Almighty God of heaven."

REACT

- 1. If "clothes make the man," what does the armor of God (described in Ephesians 6:14–17) say about the Christian?
 - 2. What other suits of armor are we asked to wear in this world?

The Well-Dressed Warrior

EXPLORATION

Eph. 6:10-17

CONCLUDE

Life really is a battle and we are combatants. Our General has assigned us missions in this dangerous enemy territory we call home. Satan's work begins in our mind. He is an expert in diverting our attention from what God wants to what we want. God has given us the helmet of salvation—God's plan for our future—to keep us secure in who we are and where we are going.

CONSIDER

- Experiencing the difference between being properly shod and ill-prepared for the terrain. On one foot, wear a cotton sock and sandal—on the other, a wool sock and hiking boot; or wear one comfortable tennis shoe and go barefooted on the other side.
- Inserting a small symbol of your salvation into your favorite hat(s) or cap(s.) Each time you put your hat on or take it off, thank God for your salvation and ask Him to guard your mind and direct whatever decisions you face in that interval.
- Weaving a belt from strands of yarn, cord, thread, suede lacing, etc. (Tie a knot about 12" from the end of the braiding bundle. Braid the strands until your belt fits your waist. Tie another knot. Cut the remaining strands off leaving about 12" on the end. If you like, knot the ends of the strands; you can even thread beads on the strands before you knot them.) Mentally label each major strand of your belt with an important scriptural truth that has personal meaning for you.
- Building a shield of faith by compiling a medley of your favorite "faith" songs to play or sing any time this week when things look bad for you and trusting God seems scary.
- Viewing the film *The Last Samurai* (2003), noting the use and effect of uniforms and armor—on the warrior and on the enemy. Ask God to use the armor He provides you to help strengthen your identity and to fulfill your commission. This is not necessarily an appropriate activity for Sabbath.

CONNECT

The Message, Ephesians 6. Cornelius Ryan, The Longest Day.

The Christian Communion and Conduct



"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18, NIV).

We Can Win

INTRODUCTION

Phil. 2:16

"Hold tightly to the word of life" (Phil. 2:16, NLT).

Once upon a time in a distant land there lived a king. This king was strong, noble, and adored by all his citizens. This adoration derived primarily from his accessibility. From the wealthiest to the poorest, from the educated to the illiterate, the king was always available and willing to listen to and talk with his loyal subjects. The more time the people spent with their king, the more they came to see his great love and compassion, his desire for justice, and his gracious heart—always willing to forgive.

It so happened that the king was at war against his greatest enemy. There were

The king could only watch and hope.

the typical battlefields and fighting you'd expect with a war. But the enemy's most successful form of warfare did not involve weapons. It did not involve face-to-face combat. With great stealth the enemy simply broke down

the lines of communication between the people and their king.

The king was well aware of these tactics. As his people started talking to him less and less, he decided to write a decree of sorts. Actually, it was more of a letter. In it he told of his great love for his people. Over and over he stressed how much he cared for them and the lengths he was willing to go to for them. He knew the war was discouraging them, but he knew they would be victorious—if only they read his letter and kept talking to him.

The king could only watch and hope: Would his people obey him or would they continue to slip away?

Some took his advice and made efforts to read his letter over and over, and daily went to talk to their king. Somewhat surprised, they found that the more time they spent with the king, the less threatening the enemy became. Hope again filled their lives. Others, however, didn't bother to read the letter. "Come on," they scoffed, "how's talking to our king going to help us win the war? We need to be out there fighting the enemy. That's how we're going to defeat him—facing him rather than having a cup of tea with the king." But these people found that life on the battle-field was tough. Their strength slowly diminished and their hope vanished.

Reading a letter and talking to a king doesn't seem like a successful plan for winning the war, but isn't that what God has asked us to do?

Powerful Prayer

EVIDENCE

Eph. 6:18

The epistle of Ephesians traditionally is a letter written by Paul to the Christians in Ephesus. In some circles, however, there is disagreement over that statement. Upon investigating the earliest Greek manuscripts, the phrase *en efesw* is not included. One of the explanations that some scholars point to is that Ephesians originally meant to be sent to the church in Laodicea or was to be a general letter sent to different churches around the area.¹ Other than the textual criticism of the problem of *en efesw*, there are no problems with the text. Within Ephesians we also find that there is no conflict between Jews and Gentiles in comparison to other texts such as Romans.²

The particular text that we are looking at deals with prayer as a part of the armor of God, which in turn we are to use against the rulers of darkness and principalities of this world.

Within this specific passage there is a sense of community. We find that the author is insisting that they are to pray not only for themselves but also for the other saints, other people with-

One way of affirming the community of believers is through prayer.

in the community. During this time and culture, people did not think of themselves as individuals but as a part of the group. The family was considered as one, not separate. Within Ephesians there is also an emphasis. One way of affirming the community of believers is through prayer.

One of the most affirming things that add to our faith is the fact that we have the power of prayer as a means to communicate with God. God not only listens but also responds to our prayers. It is also not limited to just one group of people. Anyone with a mind has the ability to pray to the loving God who desires to help His creation and children when in a conflict with the evil of this world.

Prayer is a medium in which we are able to speak to the Father, and in turn He can respond to us if we are willing. But we must always be alert to the evil one and keep our eyes and hearts heavenward to listen and understand what the Lord is telling us. God in time will answer and rescue us from our troubles.

^{1.} Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *The New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 378. 2. Ibid., p. 377.

Theology Gets Real

LOGOS

Ps. 119:9, 11; Mark 13:33; Eph. 6:17-24; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 5:8

Do Paul's Letters Peter Out?

If there is any part of Paul's letters that readers tend to ignore, it is what comes at the very end. Paul always begins with profound theological insights. Ephesians is no exception. In the first chapter we read about God's great mystery that is now made known. God intends to bring all things in the universe under one Head, Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:9, 10). Paul goes on to show how this is fulfilled in part by the church, Christ's body. Through this great mystery, barriers and walls between God and humans, and among humans, fall crumbling to the ground.

After such provocative theology we would expect Paul's letter to build to a brilliant conclusion. Yet, as is true of most of Paul's letters, Ephesians ends in short little snippets of advice and then personal greetings.

Some have argued that these snippets of advice were just the usual stuff that

The letter ends with real people greeting each other.

teachers in that day always said. Paul just turned off his mind and turned traditional at this point, even if such commands weren't really consistent with the theology of

grace Paul taught in the main part of his letters.

This idea is off base, however. In actual fact Paul is a pastor as much as a theologian, who cares deeply about the real life of the congregations he serves and loves. The advice at the end of the book is the Christian's only appropriate response to God's grace. Here is where theology gets real. If the commands came before grace, they would have an entirely different ring. They would simply be harsh law. But they come after grace. As Paul has shown in Ephesians 2:8–10, we are saved only by God's grace. We have nothing to boast about. Yet we are saved for good works. Grace makes a difference in life. The last few verses of Ephesians help us see this difference in a practical way.

The Word and Prayer

Paul advises Christians to put on the whole armor of God. This includes the helmet, which is salvation—God's free gift, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's Word (Eph. 6:17). It is through the Word, energized by God's Spirit, that we come to know God, understand what He has done for us, and receive instruction about how to live a life that is consistent with His plan for our lives.

In addition Paul shows how important continuing communication with God through prayer is for Christian growth. In fact it is surprising how much Paul says about prayer in these few little snippets of advice. Here are a few things Paul tells us in just two verses, Ephesians 6:18, 19:

- **1. We are to pray in the Spirit.** This means we acknowledge our dependence on God's Spirit in order even to know how to pray and what to pray for.
- **2. We are to pray continuously in all occasions.** Prayer is not just a ritual but a constant way of life in which we are taking God into account and visiting with Him throughout all our activities.
- **3. There are different kinds of prayer.** Paul doesn't spell out all the types, but he urges Christians to pray all kinds of prayers.
- **4. Making requests to God is a legitimate kind of prayer.** Some would rule out such prayers as selfish. If our only communication with God is to ask Him for things, that probably would be selfish. But Paul believes that God is interested in our entire lives, and it is legitimate to ask Him for specific requests.
- **5. Another type of prayer is intercessory prayer.** Paul asks his readers to pray for all the saints and for himself. Certainly God knows the needs of everyone and cares about them at least as much as we do. Yet He asks us to pray for others.

Witness

Paul's specific request for their prayers concerns his witness to the gospel. His passion is for God's work in the world so that this mystery of the gospel will not only be known to all but will be fulfilled. He wants to be bold in his witness. Paul's theology is not just interesting ideas for intellectuals to consider and debate; it is a vital message that the world needs to hear.

Community

The great mystery of the gospel Paul has unfolded in Ephesians isn't just a theoretical construct. It takes shape as Christians come together and live out the unity and love that Paul has discussed. So the letter ends with real people greeting each other, praying for each other, and encouraging each other. One of Paul's associates, Tychicus, will come and minister to them to strengthen and nurture this community. This is truly where Paul's theology reaches its goal.

Conclusion

The conclusion of Paul's letter is not a grand and glorious theological climax. But it would be terribly wrong to say the letter peters out from profound theology to just some advice and greetings. The reality of everyday Christianity in the church is the living climax of Paul's theology. When Christians listen to God's Word, pray for each other, witness, and find encouraging and nurturing community in the church, Paul's message becomes real. Ephesians ends by reminding us that Paul's theology isn't an interesting idea; it is the word of life that results in lives lived in faith in the fellowship of Christ's body, the church.

The Rule of the Game

TESTIMONY

Eph. 6:17, 18

Years ago I went to a spiritual retreat with my fellow AMiCUS friends, and I remember one particular activity that we did. We played a game called "Heaven or HeII," and the rule of the game was simply to choose.

The game was easy. We were blindfolded, and then we must wait for someone to pick us. There were at least two persons assigned to each player: The one will lead you to heaven and the other will lead you to hell. But the question was, how will you know who was deceiving you and who was saving you?

That game made me realize something about my faith, about the things to come, and about my weaknesses as a Christian.

As sinners, we were blindfolded by sin. Our situation makes us walk in the wrong path and sometimes makes us stumble and fall to the ground. Sometimes

God has promised never to leave His children.

we get scared for not knowing what is happening and just stand there, doing nothing, worrying about what lies ahead. It seems that it is a darkened life for us. Oftentimes we forget to ask God's

help and we fail to trust His promises.

This world is not a safe place; the enemy's temptations and deceptions are intended to leave God's children in ruins. No matter how faithful we claim to be, if we neglect constant communication with our Father and our Savior, we will all fall into the deceiving tactics of sin. But God has promised never to leave His children and that He will save us from our frailty as sinners. He continues to communicate with us and tells us what we should do. By keeping a constant and open communication with Him through earnest prayer and the study of His Word, we should know how to walk securely in this world and be perfectly fit for heaven.

As Ephesians 6:17, 18 says, "Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (NKJV). His way is the safest, and nothing can harm us if we are on His side and if we continually maintain that connection with Him. God never leaves us. But it is all up to us to stay with Him and keep His words intact and overflowing in our minds, hearts, and lives.

The rule is, still, to choose.

How to Be a Good Ambassador

HOW-TO

Eph. 6:17-24

When it comes to relations between countries, there are at least two methods of approach: warfare and diplomacy. Once a country has an enemy, it readies itself and goes to war. If, however, another country still hasn't decided whether it will be an ally or an enemy, often the best approach is one of diplomacy, and carefully presenting the case at hand while trying logically to convince the other side.

We as Christians are asked not only to put on the armor of battle (including the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit) in order to overcome the devil's forces. We are also told to be ambassadors for him and, through prayer, support those already out on their "patriotic" duty for Christ. Here is what we should do to be good ambassadors:

1. Pray all the time and about everything. Paul asks the Ephesians to "pray

in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers" (Eph. 6:18, NIV). God wants us to hold nothing back and talk to Him about everything.

God doesn't expect us to do things on our own.

2. Be alert and pray for the

other ambassadors. In addition to asking us all to spread the gospel, God has appointed teachers, pastors, and evangelists to do special work. They need support and the strength to hear what God wants them to say. Most of all they need the courage to deliver His message.

3. We need to listen to veteran ambassadors. God doesn't expect us to do things on our own. He gives us the support systems and mentors we need to do His work. He sent Paul to the ancient world as an ambassador, and through Paul, He sent another seasoned ambassador, Tychicus, to the Ephesians to help them out. Listening to the advice of those wiser and more experienced than we are is a smart idea.

REACT

- 1. How can you tell if an ambassador really is wise and giving good advice?
- 2. How do you know when to use diplomacy and when to fight—spiritually, that is?

Did You Get the Word?

OPINION

Ps. 119:9; Eph. 6:17, 18; 1 Pet. 5:8

An important aspect of every relationship is communication—many times just for the fun of it. We talk to our friends at school and work about the silliest topics, ranging from what happened on the camping trip we went on four years ago to a recent episode of our favorite television program. We also discuss more seriously topics related to school, to work, to relationships, and to faith issues. Even when there is little or no talking involved, we are still communicating.

Some have suggested that a Christian's relationship with God should more closely resemble a parent-child relationship, not a mutual friendship (for the two parties are not on even ground). This may be true; however, it is also true that good parent-child relationships allow for the previously mentioned communication

Communication in a relationship must be cooperative.

types: silly, serious, and silent. Why then would we not communicate with our Lord the same way?

Bible reading plays a very important role in this communication. As God's way of talking to us verbally, we can read about "silly" topics of past

relationships. God tells the story of a time when "His man" David was watching his father's sheep and a huge beast tried to steal away one of the sheep, but David would have none of it and hit the beast with a rock. The Bible also communicates more serious topics like God's warnings of enemy traps. First Peter 5:8 cautions that the devil prowls around like a hungry lion seeking to devour us, so we must be self-controlled and alert (perhaps David's story is not as silly as I suggested earlier). God also reveals in the Bible how we can be alert. Psalm 119:9 shows that people can keep pure by living according to God's Word.

Communication in a relationship must be cooperative. This means we must not only listen for God's voice in the reading and hearing of Scripture, but we must communicate honestly with God as well. Ephesians 6:18 says "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (NIV). Our prayers need not only be heavy or serious. Viewed as time we are sharing with a friend, we can tell God anything regardless of how silly it seems. We can also communicate in silence and still express our deepest groanings.

To build a strong relationship with God, our communication with Him must not be as a one-way street. Rather, it should be a busy road traveled heavily by both parties involved. That means listen . . . talk . . . listen . . . talk . . . listen.

Survival Kit

EXPLORATION

Eph. 6:10-24

CONCLUDE

Paul ends the last chapter of Ephesians with vital suggestions for Christians. Using battle imagery, he tells believers to put on "the full armor of God" (Eph. 6:11, NIV), explaining that we must be prepared for "the devil's schemes" (verse 11, NIV). He suggests praying "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (verse 18, NIV), including praying for each other. He also stresses the need for "the sword of the Spirit" (verse 17, NIV), which is the Word of God. Only through the power of God—which can be ours through salvation, faith, the Bible, and prayer—can we remain strong and minister to others.

CONSIDER

- Interviewing some Christians, asking them the question, "How do you hear God speak to you?"
- Memorizing some Bible promises to help you during times of discouragement and temptation.
- Asking a friend or relative to shout in one of your ears while another person whispers in your other ear. Do this with each person, then discuss what "noise" in our lives might make it difficult to hear God's voice.
- Listing 20 things you've prayed for or about. Consider how God has responded to these prayers.
- Choosing a spiritual theme song for your life and singing or humming it throughout the day.
- Taping and watching an episode of the television show *Joan of Arcadia*. Analyze how the program depicts God communicating with Joan and whether or not this fits your understanding and experience.
- Praying to God without using your voice (i.e., mime your prayer, draw it, photograph it, etc.).
- Writing a note or email to a pastor, teacher, Christian musician, student missionary, or other person involved in ministry and telling them you'll pray for them.
- Looking at a scenic spot in nature and journaling what you hear God saying to you through His creation.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 38.

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, chaps. 11, 12; Jim Hohnberger, *Escape to God*, chap. 7.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Christian Home Families in the Family of God

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 2006, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: A Family of Families

LOGOS: Gen. 2:18–25; 27:5; Matt. 10:35–37; John 17:11, 21, 22; Acts 9:17; 21:8, 9; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 4:14, 15; Gal. 4:5; 1 John 4:8, 16.

Memory Text: "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:19, 20, NKJV).

The Week at a Glance: Through our family, both in our households and in His church, God longs for us to experience His self-giving love.

Lesson 2: God's Word on Family Living

LOGOS: Exod. 20:12; Ps. 18:2; Song of Solomon; Isa. 54:5; 62:5; John 10:11; 15:5; Eph. 5:21–25.

Memory Text: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4, NIV).

The Week at a Glance: Within the pages of His Word, God has unfolded His plans and purposes for families.

To order your personal copy of CQ, contact your Adventist Book Center or write:

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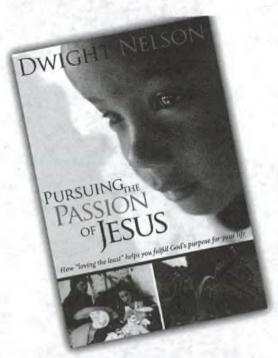
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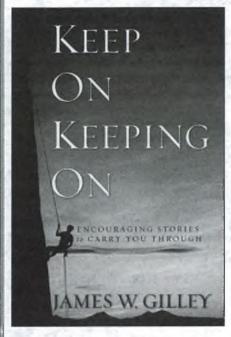
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Alden Thompson

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fear and
discovered
love

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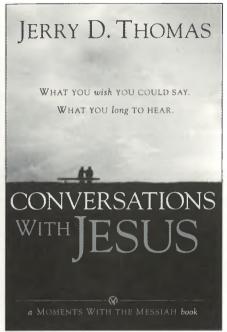
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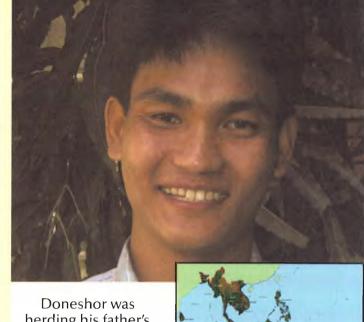
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S S R F E



boneshor was herding his father's cattle beside a river in Bangladesh. It was hot, and he decided to go for a swim. While in the water, he saw a book

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floating toward him and grabbed it. He carried it to shore and examined the soaking book. He was not a Christian, but he recognized the book as a holy book.

He laid the book in the sun to dry it, then he began to read its pages. He learned about a God who loves His children and wants the best for them. This was so different from what he knew from his own religion.

But Doneshor knew no one who was a Christian, and there was no church in his village. Four years later he met a classmate who had become a Christian. "Teach me about God!" Doneshor begged. And his friend studied with him. What joy when Doneshor was baptized—in the same river where he'd found the floating Bible.

Read Doneshor's story this quarter in *Mission*. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will provide houses of worship in Bangladesh.