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2009

Walking
the Walk:

The
Christian
Life

A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults

ever think about writing a Sabbath School quarterly



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Walking the Walk: The Christian Life

APRIL—JUNE 2009



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Editorial Office: Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, U.S.A.

Place orders with: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A.

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CQ (ISSN 0744-2939). Volume 32, No. 2. Published quarterly by Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A., and printed by Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A.

One-year subscription in U.S.A., \$16.84; single copy, \$6.29. One-year subscription in countries outside U.S.A., \$22.84; single copy, \$6.29. All prices at U.S.A. exchange. Periodicals postage paid at Nampa, ID 83687.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *CQ*, P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A. Send editorial inquiries to *CQ*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, U.S.A. Send circulation inquiries to Pacific Press® Publishing Association, P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A. When a change of address is desired, please send both old and new addresses.

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Printed in the U.S.A.



Walking the Walk: The Christian Life

1. Love 10

David Edgren, Sarah Christine Grecea, Hannah Hogg, Kristina Malarek, Stephane Millien, Kristin Thiele

2. Faith 19

Michael Belknap, Ashley Cheney, Aaron Purkeypile, Kerri Purkeypile, Deena Bartel-Wagner, Gary Wagner

3. Hope 28

April E. Barba, E-li Santillan Curameng, Rudy Espiritu, Sarah Napigkit, Farrah del Rosario-Paterniti, Seth Sabalboro

4. Life 37

Audrey Ahwan, S. Matthias Esson, Patrick Herbert, Albert A. C. Waite, Elliott A. Williams, Gregory Wilson

5. Revelation 46

Andrea Jackson, Miguel Lopez, Patricia Lopez, Jill Manoukian, Timotey Whitley, Andrea Will

6. Sin 55

Stephen Chavez, Stephanie J. Knight, Rachelle McKenzie, Fabian Rose, Kamile Baghaloo-Rose, Ryan Wiggan

7. Grace 64

Choo Shi En Christon, Jimmy Quek, Pan ShuQin, Lionel See Yun Song, Nathaniel Tan, Faith Toh

| | |
|--|------------|
| 8. Rest | 73 |
| Dian Bailey, Peter Bailey, Norman Grant, Natara McDermott, Kemar McDonald, Lenworth McKenley, Shelly Ann Murphy | |
| 9. Heaven | 82 |
| Maurice J. Alexander, Kelly Nachreiner-Harden, Jehoshaphat Mokamba, Bevan A. Prime, Wronnell Timothy, K'sha Woodley | |
| 10. Discipleship | 91 |
| Tresa Beard, Robert E. Bennett, Evon Parkinson, Lisa Poole, Noel Wright, Kimani Lee Young | |
| 11. Stewardship | 100 |
| Bentley Chambers, Talbert L. Knight, Donovan Mitchell, Stephane Millien, Kirth Rose, Diana Wright | |
| 12. Community | 109 |
| Débora Tatiane Martins Borges, Maria Cristina dos Reis Goulart, Felipe Lemos, Larissa Pothin Preuss, Marcelo Moreira Rezende, Graciela Érika Rodrigues | |
| 13. Mission | 118 |
| Amanda Ernst, Rebecca Gates, Joella Meyer, Karen Pires, Shellie Pires, Ron Reese | |

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If you sent a critique for this quarterly, but you are not listed above, it is because your name is not on our master list. Please accept our apologies and register again at the Web site below.

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We're looking forward to hearing from you!



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JUST CLICK AND SERVE!

This Quarter's Illustrator



Cherie Birkenstock

Originally from northern Namibia, I now live in Somerset West, South Africa. Since falling in love with Jesus in 2005, life has been an adventure! Looking back to the times when God was not in my life, I can see His leading even then. I studied Ecology at Stellenbosch University, but was not happy in that field. So I did a year of art and discovered a passion for graphic design. Since then, God has led me in many ways, and I now have my own business. I have been privileged to do design work for the Adventist Media Center of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division and also for Helderberg College.

My hobbies include reading and playing badminton. I am also an avid birder; and, having grown up in the bush, I love God's creation. I hope the theme of my illustrations for this quarter will help you to not only appreciate nature, but to see God in all things.

By the time you read this, I will have married Andrew, pictured here with me. He reminds me that the most important thing in life is people, and that loving them unconditionally is next to loving God. Knowing God's heart and His goodness has changed my life, and I pray that He is doing the same in your life!

Getting the most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

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

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

Circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

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

CQ AND THE CHURCH

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

Love



**"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the
greatest of these is love"
(1 Cor. 13:13, NIV).**

The Great Search

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 22:37–40

In a world saturated by a distorted image of love, finding the fulfilling love that God offers is not always easy. We hunger for love from the time we are born until the time we die. Without love, we are empty and broken. Love brings with it all other virtues and is the fulfillment of “‘all the Law and the Prophets’” (Matt. 22:40, NIV).

Jesus said, “ ‘Love the Lord your God.’ . . . This is the first and greatest commandment’ ” (Matt. 22:37, 38, NIV). Therefore, perhaps the greatest sin is to fail in doing just this. God is love, and He loves us beyond comprehension. Our love for God should permeate every aspect of our lives. Our morals and ethics as Christians should reflect and maintain that love. For example, rather than focusing on how to keep the Sabbath, we should focus on our relationship with the Lord of the Sabbath.

To love completely and to be loved completely, we first have to love ourselves. Matthew 22:39 implies that we should love ourselves. There “is a self-love which is natural, and the rule of the greatest duty, and it must be preserved and sanctified. We must love ourselves, that is, we must have a due regard to the dignity of our own natures, and a due concern for the welfare of our own souls and bodies.”*

**Without love, we are empty
and broken.**

The fine line between self-love and selfish love is not easy to find. So many teenagers and young adults feel unloved, and they dislike who they are. However, God reveals His love for us in so many ways that it's hard to deny that He created us and loves us the way He made us, rather than the way we want ourselves to be. Negative peer pressure placed on young people to fit a certain image is not easy to deal with; but through God's love and strength, it's possible to be a self-loving, morally courageous person.

Jesus says that the second most important commandment is to love your neighbor as you love yourself (Matt. 22:39). He makes it clear that our neighbors are not just fellow believers, but all the people with whom we come in contact. By loving ourselves, this commandment is easier to follow. Our need for healthy self-love and self-respect is also evident in our need for love from the people around us. We get this love from our parents, friends, and also from our partner and children. But most importantly, we get that love from God.

*L. F. Church, ed., *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible in One Volume* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1960), pp. 116, 117.

To Die, to Live, to Love

LOGOS

Isaiah 53; Matt. 22:37–40; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 3; 4

To Die For (Isaiah 53)

Humans do not embrace death unless that which they are protecting is dear to them. To die for something requires a commitment of the heart beyond reason. Martyrs over millennia have given their lives for one primary reason—love.

Many may declare their allegiance, but when guns are held to their heads, only those with love in their hearts will remain true. That's just human nature! God, however, is unnaturally human. He sets the perfect standard: "Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:7, 8, NRSV).

No wonder we call Him Savior. He saves us from ourselves, despite ourselves. We, like Peter, shake our heads and cry, "I never knew the man!" Yet He purposefully spread His arms wide and accepted the nails that bind us to freedom. And

despite our rejection of Him, the resurrected Christ approaches us and searches our heart, "Do you love me?" (John 21:17, NIV).

He died for you regardless of your response. That's love.

**He died for you regardless
of your response. That's
love.**

To Live For (Matt. 22:37–40)

This God, who became one of us to die for all of us, beckons over His shoulder, "Take up your cross and follow Me" (see Matt. 16:24–26). He has saved us from death and now, in response, He asks for our life. He went so far as to say, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27, NRSV).

So what does living for God look like? Moses received the law—a transcript of God's character (see *The Upward Look*, page 294)—and was told to instruct the people to "impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut. 6:7, NIV).

Jesus was tested by an expert in that same law who asked which commandment is the greatest. Read His reply in Matthew 22:37–40. These verses show us what living for God looks like. Love God with everything you are, and love each

other with everything you are becoming. That's the cross you are called to bear—live and love.

To Give and Receive (1 Corinthians 13)

We are often reminded that it is more blessed to give than to receive. However, there is one prerequisite before we can give or receive anything. We need someone significant. Without a person of value to us, neither giving nor receiving is fulfilling. Receiving a random prize does little to bring us lasting joy. Giving something to someone we care little for leaves us feeling hollow.

We need friends. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help" (Eccles. 4:9, 10, NRSV). Once we become a faithful friend, we offer the many embodiments of love that exist between those who value each other. Without love, however, we are nothing.

To Know and Be Known (1 John 3 and 4)

The song begins with pensive tones, building to a chorus that resolves in a melodious anthem of joy, "There are no strangers / There are no outcasts / There are no orphans of God / So many fallen, but hallelujah / There are no orphans of God." Avalon, the group that sings "Orphans of God," is on to something.

John, who calls himself the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23), speaks with the same surety as Avalon when he says, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1, NIV).

In his revelation of Jesus Christ, John wrote that angels exclaim, "'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, / to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength / and honor and glory and praise!' " (Rev. 5:12, NIV). Yes, this God is worthy of all the praise we can muster, because He models the life of love. We can know without a doubt that Jesus is truly our Savior and that His Father is truly our Father—a Father who loves us enough to offer His only Son.

John is big on love because God is big on love. Read 1 John 4:15, 19, 21. These verses express the ultimate aim of all of John's writing—to draw God's people to a life of loving others. "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 John 3:16, NRSV).

God gave all when He gave His Son, and He did it for you and for me. We are His beloved children. We are to love likewise—drawing all people to Christ, and through Him, to our Father. "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7, NRSV).

Love Speaks the Loudest

TESTIMONY

1 John 3:16–18

“No matter how high the profession, he whose heart is not filled with love for God and his fellow men, is not a true disciple of Christ. Though he should possess great faith and have power even to work miracles, yet without love his faith would be worthless.”¹

It's remarkable to think that even the greatest faith is useless, if it's not used to showcase the greatness of God's love to others. After all, what's the point of confessing Jesus, if we walk in ignorance of those around us and fail to do right by them?

“Every true, self-sacrificing worker for God is willing to spend and be spent for the sake of others. Christ says, ‘He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life.’ By earnest, thoughtful efforts to help where help is needed, the true Christian shows his love for God and for his fellow beings.”²

“The love and interest of Christ's followers must be as broad as the world. Those

**“Those who live merely for
the ‘me and mine’ will fail
of heaven.”**

who live merely for the ‘me and mine’ will fail of heaven. God calls upon you as a family to cultivate love, to become less sensitive in regard to yourselves and more sensitive to the griefs and trials of others.”³ It is only through such service and humble-

ness that we can begin to receive the rewards of righteous living.

REACT

1. As Christians, we are commissioned to help those in lesser circumstances. So why do we often fail to reach out and lend a helping hand?

2. How great is our faith if we profess to be Christians, but do nothing to show the world God's goodness and glory in our lives?

3. How can you begin demonstrating God's love from this moment onward?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 318.

2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 302.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 530.

Learning to Love More Than Me

EVIDENCE

Matt. 22:37–40

William Somerset Maugham, English playwright and novelist, once said, “We seek pitifully to convey to others the treasures of our heart, but they have not the power to accept them, and so we go lonely, side by side but not together, unable to know our fellows and unknown by them.”¹

Rabbi Jonathan Kligler notes that we have become busy individuals who look for what we can get out of a quick relationship instead of valuing the community.²

Today we live in a 30-second world. If something can't be done quickly and easily, we lose interest and move on to something else.

Jesus' command to “‘love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’” (Matt. 22:37, NIV) cannot be accomplished in 30 seconds. Nor can you “‘love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:39, NIV) in 30 seconds. You might be able to squeeze in a quick Super-Poke! on Facebook—but you aren't loving them.

Today we live in a
30-second world.

First Corinthians 13 explains how empty life is when devoid of love and when we don't understand what love is really all about. Read Paul's definition of real love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.

If the world is meant to know Christians by their love (1 John 3:7–10; 4:7, 8), then we first must be willing to spend more than a few moments sizing people up. Christ set the example for us when He came to earth dressed as a common man. He had nothing about Him that would make any of us look twice (Isa. 53:2). All that He was, was wrapped in His actions. Even then, we often miss His true value. His love for us was not shown in a 30-second commercial. His love for us was shown every day of His life, and even more so in His death.

Our call as Christians is to show that love. It's an active love, but without flashing lights or loud sound effects. It's not an easy love, but it is a love that's more valuable and more needed than any of us could ever imagine.

1. Thinkexist.com, “William Somerset Maugham Quotes,” Thinkexist.com, http://thinkexist.com/quotation/we_seek_pitifully_to_convey_to_others_the/182723.html (accessed December 18, 2007).

2. Rabbi Jonathan Kligler, “The Breakdown of Community and the ‘Commodification’ of Our Lives,” *Mountain Record* 19, no. 1 (2000), <http://www.mro.org/mr/archive/19-1/articles/community.html> (accessed December 18, 2007).

The Love in My Life

HOW-TO

John 3:16; 1 Cor. 13:1–4

God is love. He has shown that love in the gift of Christ when He “he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). When God’s love is appreciated, it will awaken our love for Him and for other human beings. This love is more valuable than any spiritual gift (1 Cor. 13:1–4).

God initiated His love toward us because “only by love is love awakened. . . . Only He [Jesus] who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known.”* If we would only open our hearts to Him and get acquainted with Him, we would love Him. This love awakens our affections, improves our character, and motivates us to control our passions and impulses. Our love for Jesus has the power to influence everyone around us.

True love does not exist by itself. It must be directed at somebody or some object. True love is the basis of the best human relationships. This world is so focused

on material things—possessions, riches, fame, popularity—which are all regarded as tangible symbols of success; yet, without love, even these have no meaning. There is no joy in having a beautiful house if you

**True love is the basis of the
best human relationships.**

have an unhappy marriage and a dysfunctional relationship with your family, or if you have riches, but no one who loves you to share them with (see Luke 12:15).

So how do we attain more love in our lives?

Understand that Jesus is love. God is the supreme and ultimate Source of true love. His love is inexhaustible.

Believe that Jesus is revealed in God’s Word. He is the Divine Word (John 1:1).

Spend time reading the Bible. Don’t stop there, however. Always meditate on what you read.

Do the four-step program. Study about Jesus, think about Him, talk about Him, and praise Him.

Know that you are being changed into the image you behold. In this way, you become more loving to your parents, siblings, friends, and boyfriend or girlfriend.

Share your time and money. Find someone to help, or do volunteer work for a worthy organization in your community.

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

God Is Love

OPINION

1 Cor. 13:13

Our Father in heaven is the Source of life, wisdom, love, and joy. We experience these attributes of His character in the beauty and wonder of nature. Jesus, God's Son, lived by the Spirit, teaching us that life should be lived with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Gal. 5:22, 23). However, the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:13; also see *Steps to Christ*, pp. 9–15 and *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 758–764).

Five centuries before Christ was born, the Greek philosopher Sophocles stated, "One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life: That word is love."^{*} We see that this is so in the life of Christ. As humans, we often use the word *love* to describe a minor feeling or a temporary infatuation. It can be combined with feelings of selfishness and greed. God's love, however, exceeds all of this. His love for us is not temporary or minor. It is everlasting and pure.

Our sins were nailed to the cross with our Savior. God sent His one and only Son to a sinful world in order to bring hope and salvation to all. This is the greatest way God could possibly demonstrate His love for us. Shouldn't we respond to His love by loving and serving others and by obeying His commandments?

In Greek, there are four main words used for the word *love*.

In Greek, there are four main words used for the word *love*. The word *phileo* was used to describe love toward family. In some cases, it is also used to describe the affection for a particular activity. *Philia* was used to refer to brotherhood, while *eros* was used to describe sexual love between couples. *Agape* represents divine, unconditional, self-sacrificing, active, intentional, and thoughtful love. This term was often used to describe the self-sacrificing love God has for humanity. Agape was the reason God sent His Son to our sinful world. Agape was the reason Jesus was nailed to the cross; and it is the basis for everything God is and does.

The apostle Paul points out that however important faith, hope, and all the other elements of Christianity are, it all starts with love. Without love, we are, as he said, "nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). As Christians, we should be demonstrating God's eternal and unconditional love to those around us. Thus we follow in the giant footsteps left by our Savior 2,000 years ago.

^{*}Michael Moncur, "Quote Details: Sophocles," The Quotations Page, <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/1895.html> (accessed March 13, 2008).

What's Love Got to Do With It?

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 13:13

CONCLUDE

At the center of Christianity is love. Love is a practice that was taught by our Savior Jesus Christ so that everyone would know we are His followers. We may do good deeds, exemplify success, care for our bodies, and possess an overall desire to help humanity. But if our lives are full of quick-fix, feel-good approaches to our fellow humans and our own lifestyle, instead of intentional and purposeful responses to God's unselfish love, we have failed to understand the gospel. God's love is evident throughout the entire Bible because it is prophetic and revelatory. Without Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross, we may have never had a chance to understand the reason for our existence and the answer to the pervasive issues of sin, such as greed, selfishness, and hate. It simply takes love to forgive all that.

CONSIDER

- Creating a nature collage that shows God's love. See how many natural artifacts you can find that support the idea that God's creation was and continues to be an act of love.
- Compiling a CD or playlist with songs about love. Divide them into the four categories described in the Opinion article for Thursday.
- Visiting a friend or relative you haven't seen for a while and requesting that they "pay it forward." Do them a favor without expecting anything in return. Explain to them that they must do the same with someone else.
- Researching how many times the word *love* appears in the Bible.
- Writing your own "love poem" to God, a friend, a significant other, a relative, or a fellow church member. What feelings would each poem evoke?
- Designing a crossword puzzle with as many synonyms (different words with the same meaning) for love as you can think of.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages: (1) love, the principle of God's government—pp. 19–22, 353, 469, 759; and (2) love, the condition and evidence of discipleship and service—pp. 285, 286, 487, 678, 815; *Steps to Christ*, "The Work and the Life."

Faith



“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9, NIV).

The Lifeline of Faith

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 11:1

The platform loomed high above me, taunting me, yet beckoning me at the same time. My family and I had chosen to spend a day at a local rock climbing gym, practicing our skills. As a beginning rock climber, I listened to the instructor, trying to gain knowledge of how to hold the rope while I was belaying another climber. I waited as harnesses were strapped on tight and as carabiners were locked. Each step was to increase the safety of the climber.

Too soon the moment came. I watched as the first person began to climb up the ladder. First, there were the regular handholds on the side of the steel girder. Then there was 10 feet up a rope ladder and more climbing until reaching the platform that was 50 feet above the floor. The first climber made it all look so easy.

I knew that the longer I waited, the harder it would become to climb up to the platform. Soon I found myself sitting next to the instructor on the platform. Again, I watched and listened as the instructions were given. When the instructor said I

was ready, I had the knowledge that the rope would hold me. I had the knowledge of how to hold the rope, and that if I allowed the rope to do its job, I wouldn't fall to my death.

I had to have faith that the rope was my lifeline.

Sitting on the edge of the platform, I was poised to slip off and let the rope bear my full weight. I had to have faith that the rope was my lifeline. If I didn't push myself off the platform, the rope would never have to do the work it was meant to do.

Until I put my faith into practice by trusting the rope, I really didn't have faith. As Christians, our faith in God has to be put into practice. We often say we have faith that He is leading, but then we take control of our lives and don't allow Him to do His work in molding our characters.

This week, we explore true faith versus false faith and how they impact our lives. Take time to think about your faith and see if you've allowed yourself to slide off the platform of self and fully utilize God's lifeline of faith.

No Previous Experience Required

Sunday
April 5

EVIDENCE

James 2:14–24

When you apply for a job, the employer will want to know if you have experience. He or she will want to see a list of everything you've done in that particular area of expertise. That list is a résumé. You really can't get a job without one. Your résumé lists all the things you've done, all your work experience. No work, no job. Imagine if, during an interview, you told your prospective employer that you had faith you could do the job. No résumé, no experience, just faith. He or she would probably laugh in your face.

Thank God, His way is different. He doesn't need to see a résumé or a list of qualifications. He doesn't need to hear all about our "previous experience." All He asks for is faith. Faith that God will keep us, use us, and save us. Faith that He knows best. Faith that even though we will never be qualified enough to do His work, or even to stand at His side, He still loves us and wants us. His death for us proves that.

Joseph was a favorite. He didn't need qualifications because everything was handed to him. But God needed to use him. So Joseph was stripped of all his status and luxury

and was made a slave for many years. His faith in God kept him going until he was at a place where God could use him (Genesis 37; 39–47).

Moses had the résumé to be a prince. He had grown up in the palace of Egypt, had trained for leadership and excellence. However, God needed his faith and humility. Moses the prince was sent to be a shepherd. Only after being stripped of all self-importance was he able to have the faith to do what God needed him to (Exodus 2–4).

God will give us the qualifications we need to work for Him if we give Him the faith to use those qualifications and to follow Him.

Moses had the résumé to be a prince.

REACT

1. Do we treat God like an interviewer? Do we list just our strengths and accomplishments?

2. Do we have the faith it takes to let God work His will in us, instead of working our will for God?

3. Describe the relationship between faith and works. What Bible texts support your description?

In Search of Jesus' Faith

LOGOS

Eph. 6:10–18; Hebrews 11; James 2:18, 19; 1 Pet. 1:3–8

Faith. What is it? What is counterfeit faith, and how can we discern it? Why is having faith such a struggle at times? These and other questions have been pondered for centuries, and yet the promise is that in these last days God will have a people who will have the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12). So why not be the generation of promise? Let's open His Word and study faith until we not only understand it, but live it. Toward that end, let's investigate a few pieces of the puzzle.

The Counterfeit of Faith (James 2:18, 19)

Not everything called faith is faith. In James 2:18, 19, we see that even the devils believe. Theirs, however, is a counterfeit faith. It is counterfeit because it sidelines the main character. The demons acknowledge God's existence, but fail to respond to Him as God.

Faith goes beyond belief; faith goes beyond being a weapon of defense in the great controversy.

What is the difference between counterfeit and true faith? One way of distinguishing between the two is that true faith is always a response to God. Counterfeit faith is always based on our own initiatives of seeking out God and His Word with the sole purpose of confirming and/or

strengthening our own thoughts, ideas, and plans.

True faith does not originate in us or center on ourselves. It is something God authors in our lives (Rom. 12:3; Heb. 12:2), then develops and perfects (Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 3:9, 10).

The Battle of Faith (Eph. 6:10–18)

The great controversy centers on the question of faith. In heaven, Lucifer decided to place his faith in his own ambitions, perceptions, and thoughts instead of in God's word. Not surprisingly, his first words of temptation in the Garden comprised a call to doubt God's explicit word in favor of what Eve was experiencing through her senses (Gen. 3:1–6). And so, through Satan's deceptions, the war on this planet between the flesh (our sensual experience) and the Spirit (as revealed in God's Word) began.

To help fight this war, Ephesians 6:10–16 instructs us to take up an entire set

of armor, the most important part of this set being the shield of faith. This comparison intimates that faith is something we must intentionally grasp in order for it to be effective. Above all else, we must keep the proactive shield of faith ready to deflect Satan's attacking arrows.

The Demonstration of Faith (Hebrews 11)

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice" (Heb. 11:4). "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death" (Heb. 11:5). "By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark" (Heb. 11:7). "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out . . . , obeyed" (Heb. 11:8). When we look at the hall of faith in Hebrews 11, we see men and women moving, acting, and obeying. What does this tell us about faith? Carefully study their stories. Hebrews 11 shows people who are putting the weight of their lives on the commands and Word of God.

For example, when Abraham left his homeland, he was completely dependent on God to lead and provide, not to mention his own vulnerability in accepting God's leadership when asked to give up his only son.

Faith goes beyond belief; faith goes beyond being a weapon of defense in the great controversy. Faith is the central issue in this war between good and evil because faith is an active choice to become vulnerable to the One we are choosing to trust. The vulnerability factor in faith comes from being completely open and willing to accept the results of choosing faith. Now with such a great cloud of witnesses as those in Hebrews 11, who have gone before and those surrounding us, what will we do?

The Blessed Hope of Faith (1 Pet. 1:3–8)

Why bother to untangle the difference between true faith and counterfeit faith? Why endure the painful struggles and battles in this great controversy? And why be vulnerable when you can learn to protect, defend, and fulfill yourself? The answer lies in the blessed hope of our faith. Read 1 Peter 1:3–8 carefully.

To desire such faith, to cultivate such faith, we may need to study and struggle and open up ourselves to Jesus more than we are naturally comfortable with. However, the blessed result of the trial of our faith is eternal life, an eternal intimate connection with God Himself, and praise and glory to our Savior. May God help us, as we press forward, in granting us the faith of Jesus, today and every day that follows.

REACT

1. Who is the person you trust the most in this world? Why do you trust him or her? What attributes of this person awaken your faith?

2. If faith is a by-product of knowing a trustworthy person, what must we do in order to have extreme faith in God?

Finding Power for Living

TESTIMONY

Heb. 11:1

"The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces Him as a personal Saviour; which appropriates His merits to ourselves. Many hold faith as an opinion. But saving faith is a transaction, by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power."¹

"Without faith it is impossible to please God. Living faith enables its possessor to lay hold on the merits of Christ, enables him to derive great comfort and satisfaction from the plan of salvation."²

"Faith is the condition upon which God has seen fit to promise pardon to sinners; not that there is any virtue in faith whereby salvation is merited, but because faith can lay hold of the merits of Christ, the remedy provided for sin. Faith can present Christ's perfect obedience instead of the sinner's transgression and defection."³

**"Many hold faith
as an opinion."**

"Faith is the living power that presses through every barrier, overrides all obstacles, and plants its

banner in the heart of the enemy's camp."⁴

"Without a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour, it is impossible to make your faith felt in a skeptical world. If you would draw sinners out of the swift-running current, your own feet must not stand on slippery places."⁵

REACT

1. How would you describe faith to a person who has no knowledge about Jesus and how He gave His life for ours?

2. Why is faith necessary, and how do we find balance between faith and works? Why is it often easier to depend on works and bypass faith?

1. *Gospel Workers*, p. 261.

2. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 364.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 366, 367.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 163.

5. *Gospel Workers*, p. 274.

The ABCs of Faith

HOW-TO

1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 5:22; Heb. 11:6; James 2:18, 19

Now what? You've heard of the "heroes," but you're not feeling very faith-filled. After all, Hebrews 11:6 points out that "without faith it is *impossible* to please Him" (emphasis added). How can you and I possibly come anywhere close to their faith?

Ask for faith. In Mark 9:17–24 we find the story of a boy who is filled with an unclean spirit. Jesus tells the father to believe that the spirit can be cast out. The man replies, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief"! Faith is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is not your fruit; it is the Spirit's fruit. Ask Him to help your unbelief.

Behave in faith. According to James 2:18, 19, our lives are a steady barometer of our faith. When was the last time you intentionally discussed Christ with your friends? Not just your non-Christian friends. Or when was the last time you helped those in your community? When was the last time you stepped out into the darkness to share some of the light with which you are blessed? "Even the demons believe" (NRSV). But we act. We respond. We do. We *behave* faithfully.

See faith. When you have asked for faith and begin behaving, or acting, in faith, you will suddenly see what faith does through the power of Jesus Christ. Gideon defeated thousands with some torches, trumpets, and pitchers (Judges 6; 7). David beat a giant with a stone (1 Samuel 17). Rahab saved her family (Joshua 2; 6). Esther saved a nation (Esther 8). You may not see before you step out in faith, but you can always look back and see what faith has done.

"God is faithful" (1 Cor. 1:9). There is no need to worry about what others may say or think. We can't waste our time trying to control the things God is taking care of. When we've handed over the keys of our hearts to the Spirit, we realize our entire existence is under His control, and that only through faith will we please Him (Heb. 11:6).

**When was the last time
you helped those in your
community?**

REACT

1. What requires faith in your daily life?
2. What are you still holding back from the Spirit's changing power? Why is that item so important to you? Do you need to ask, "Lord, help my unbelief"?
3. What is God telling you to do now? How are you acting upon it?

Thursday
April 9

"The Substance of Things Hoped For"

OPINION

Rom. 8:24, 25; Heb. 11:1

Hebrews 11:1 gives a clear definition of faith. It is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." As we read this verse, we should ask ourselves how faith is the evidence "of things not seen." God does not require us to blindly follow Him. He did not create the world and leave us to fend for ourselves as we aimlessly search for the meaning of life and the existence of some Great Being. Rather, the things that we believe through faith are based on physical, mental, and even philosophical evidence.

But what does "the substance of things hoped for" mean? "For in hope we were saved. Now *hope that is seen is not hope*. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8:24, 25, NRSV; emphasis added).

We hope for many things. We hope we pass semester exams. We hope our friend can make it to our wedding. We hope no one notices the food from lunch that we spilled on our shirt. Once the event is passed, we no longer hope for these things. They become the past. Faith, however, requires hope. For example, if we do not hope for the Second

**We have only two choices
when evidence of the truth
is presented to us.**

Coming, we do not believe it will transpire. We cannot truly have faith in anything if we do not hope for something. Our faith is not something recklessly derived by the way we carelessly use the word *faith*. *Faith* is more than another word frequently used by a denomination or a political candidate. Faith is the knowledge of what we hope for and the proof we have found of that same hope.

We have only two choices when evidence of the truth is presented to us: acceptance or rejection. Each choice is based on evidence of things we cannot detect. Let the evidence of those things lead you to an understanding of your hope. Then you will have faith.

REACT

1. For what things do you hope? In what ways does it matter where you place your hope?
2. What evidence do you have that your hope is realistic?

Faith of Our Fathers

EXPLORATION

Heb. 11:1

CONCLUDE

Living by faith means letting go and letting God. It means cutting up the credit cards and trusting that God will provide, just as He promised He would. Real faith is developed through trials and experiences: the evidence of God working in our lives is seen by looking in the rearview mirror. Faith is not about our moving toward the Savior—it is about the Savior moving toward us, completing the work He began. Faith is the ongoing work that God began in us to transform us into His image.

CONSIDER

- Rereading Hebrews 11, thinking about instances in your life when you demonstrated faith. Now, rewrite your own version of this chapter, with at least a half a dozen examples (for example, By faith, I . . .).
- Listening to or singing the hymn “Faith of Our Fathers” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, number 304). Rewrite the words in more contemporary language.
- Talking to people at least twice your age about their faith. Ask them to share experiences about when their faith was tested and strengthened.
- Praying that God will give you opportunities to strengthen your faith.
- Gathering half a dozen friends to practice some trust falls.
- Blindfolding yourself and allowing another person to lead you around for a while. How does it feel to put someone else in control?
- Being a radical, real-world Christian by going out of your way this week to show someone the love of Christ.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, pp. 49–55.

Hope



**“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”
(1 Pet. 3:15, NIV).**

Is There Hope for This World?

INTRODUCTION

Rom. 8:24, 25; Heb. 11:1, 7

With wars and rumors of wars, widespread violence, and the breakdown of the family, the social and economic landscape of the world has become quite bleak. There is only one hope for this world. It is the hope of the Second Coming—the return of Jesus Christ to reign as Sovereign King over the new earth. At the beginning of this reign as King of the New Jerusalem, He will gather His scattered people to live with Him. There they will rejoice in the Lord God of heaven and earth. The earth will at last be at rest from war, disease, and famine. Peace will abound in all aspects of life.

What does the Bible say about hope? Most people understand hope as wishful thinking. However, this is not what the Bible means by the word *hope*. The biblical definition of hope is “confident expectation.” It is a firm assurance regarding the promises of God and our faith in Him (Rom. 8:24, 25; Heb. 11:1, 7). Hope is a fundamental component of the Christian life. Without hope, life loses its meaning (Job 7:6) and in death there is no hope (Isa. 38:18; Job 17:13–15). The righteous who trust or put their hope in God will be helped (Ps. 28:7), and they will not be confounded, put to shame, or disappointed (Isa. 49:23). The righteous who have this hope in God have a general confidence in His protection and help (Jer. 29:11) and are free from fear and anxiety (Ps. 46:2, 3).

**Most people understand
hope as wishful thinking.**

It is easier to understand exactly what hope is by first examining hopelessness. When we have no hope, we are left with despair. Hopelessness is purposelessness, loneliness, and isolation. Hopelessness leads to depression. Without hope, the human spirit spirals downward toward destruction.

Hope is the force or drive that causes us to press on until we have obtained that for which we have hoped. Hope is a force that works on the human heart, or subconscious mind. Hope is equally powerful whether it springs from error or from truth. False hope can motivate a person to action, just as powerfully as hope that comes from God's promises. However, only hope gained from the Eternal is eternal. Hope in the world's promises perishes with the body, leaving one eternally hopeless—a chilling thought.

This week, we will study what the Christian's hope consists of and how it enhances our life while we wait for Christ's return.

Do You Have Hope?

LOGOS

Rom. 15:13; 1 Thess. 1:8-10

One question remains. The last—and perhaps most important—question that hurting people ask is, Exactly what can we hope for if we decide to get help for our problems?

“As your conscience has been quickened by the Holy Spirit, you have seen something of the evil of sin, of its power, its guilt, its woe; and you look upon it with abhorrence. You feel that sin has separated you from God, and that you are in bondage to the power of evil. The more you struggle to escape, the more you realize your helplessness. Your motives are impure; your heart is unclean. You see that your life has been filled with selfishness and sin. You long to be forgiven, to be cleansed, to be set free. Harmony with God, likenesses to Him—what can you do to obtain it?

“It is peace that you need—Heaven’s forgiveness and peace and love in the soul. Money cannot buy it, intellect cannot procure it, wisdom cannot attain to it;

People without hope are people without a future.

you can never hope, by your own efforts, to secure it. But God offers it to you as a gift, ‘without money and without price.’ Isaiah 55:1. It is yours if you will but reach out your hand and grasp it. The Lord says, ‘Though

your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’ Isaiah 1:18. ‘A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.’ Ezekiel 36:26.

“You have confessed your sins, and in heart put them away. You have resolved to give yourself to God. Now go to Him, and ask that He will wash away your sins and give you a new heart.”

People without hope are people without a future. But when hope is restored, life is restored. This is especially true for those who come to know Christ. He gives a sure basis for hope. He has promised to return to earth to take us to our eternal home (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:17). Until then, there is help through the power of the Holy Spirit, and we anticipate the fulfillment of this glorious promise. When Christ lives in our heart, we have a living hope.

Life can seem overwhelming at times, but God offers us hope. Paul wrote, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13, NIV).

Is that hope alive in your heart? If not, admit that you are a sinner. Trust Christ

as your Savior. And He'll give you a hope that makes life worth living. No one is hopeless who hopes in God.

"As God works in the heart, and man surrenders his will to God, and cooperates with God, he works out in the life what God works in by the Holy Spirit, and there is harmony between the purpose of the heart and the practice of the life."²

It's tempting to look at the good that is being done in the world and to declare that in these areas lies our hope, that we can improve the quality of our lives through medicine, rigorous discipline, and increased commitment to personal holiness, spiritual warfare, and a directed pursuit of God. To some degree, all these measures are part of our hope, because they do help, often generating desirable effects.

But (and there is a but), all these good things don't seem to provide the type of hope that hurting people need. Some struggles don't seem to be affected by these measures—struggles like worry over circumstances, health, finances, the people we love, tangled relationships, a gossiping church community where there is no clear solution, and agony over personal battles against such things as lust or alcoholism that continue despite our prayers and good resolutions.

Many of our problems are uniquely human problems. That is, they reflect our struggle to live as people who were meant to enjoy perfect community in God. With all of its imperfections, the community of God's people does provide the resources we need to live with purpose and meaning in this alien world. Whether community is offered by an individual or by a small group, the simple truth is that we need to be living with other people whom we know and who know us, people from whom we receive and to whom we give in return.

Now the good news is that a little bit of shared goodness does more to bless us than a great deal of shared badness does to harm us. That is because shared goodness shares a connection to God. Shared goodness promotes growth in wisdom and in the power of the gospel.

REACT

1. In what did you hope as a child? What types of things do you hope for now? What makes the difference?

2. As you mature in your walk with God, how do you expect your hopes to change?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 49.

2. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 397.

Hope in the Sad Times!

TESTIMONY

1 Cor. 15:57

Sadness and sorrow are life's great equalizers. They affect us all, in varying degrees. Sometimes entire countries suffer. In the '90s, we were horrified by the massive sorrows in Rwanda and Bosnia. And we are all touched by smaller-scale tragedies: accidents, illnesses, family breakups, and financial woes.

But there's another side to this. No matter how tragic our lives may be, no matter if we are given to depression and despair rather than happiness and joy, we are never left hopeless.

"If your earthly treasures are taken away, you are not to grieve, for I [Christ] will give you heavenly treasure. If I remove the dearest objects of earthly attachment, I will supply the lack with more of myself. It is in the time of deepest sorrow that I send the richest tokens of my grace. I will cause the afflicted soul to break forth into the song of praise and thanksgiving. 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' The trials and losses that come to you are

to purify and refine you, and fit you for immortality."¹

"He desires us to be cheerful."

"In becoming man's substitute, in bearing the curse which should fall upon man, Christ has pledged

Himself in behalf of the race to maintain the sacred and exalted honor of His Father's law. . . . God has given the world into the hands of Christ, that He may completely vindicate the binding claims of the law and make manifest the holiness of every principle."²

"We, as Christians, are not required to go about with long faces, sighing as though we had no Savior and no hope. This will not glorify God. He desires us to be cheerful. He desires us to be filled with praises to His name. He desires us to carry light in our countenances, and joy in our hearts. We have a hope that is far above any pleasures that the world can give, and this fact should be made manifest."³

REACT

What might stand in the way of our joy being full?

1. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7, p. 140.

2. *That I May Know Him*, p. 17.

3. *Our High Calling*, p. 148.

Surprised by Trials!

EVIDENCE

Rom. 15:13

So what is our hope? Simply this: that nothing, no problem in our circumstances or in our souls, can keep us from living out God's purpose for our lives if we give ourselves to Him. If cancer blocks that purpose, He will find a way. If depression overwhelms us, He will find a way. If fatigue from poor sleep keeps us from fulfilling God's agenda, He will find a way. If lack of money is a cause for worry, He will find a way.

When illness, discouragement, backsliding children, insomnia, and money struggles are useful to God in advancing His purposes, they will be a part of our lives. We are not wrong to take whatever honorable measures we can to alleviate our suffering, and we are not wrong to thank God if things improve. But because we cannot always understand what God is up to, we are wrong to demand less suffering, to make it our top priority, or to change circumstances to be the way we would like them to be.

Hope for distraught parents lies in their confidence in a loving God's good and just plan. It lies in their capacity to still give to their child and to others the love that has the power to turn hearts toward Christ.

Hope for the person caught in tangled relationships where nothing is clear, consists in the opportunity to connect with at least a few people in the middle of ongoing battles that are fraught with betrayal, resentment, and fear. Encouragement from others can reduce our obsessive desire to be in control when life is out of control. Such encouragement enhances our desire to reflect Christ.

Problems that get in the way of God's agenda for us can be overcome through the power of the gospel made real through community. The struggles that remain become opportunities for deeper trust.

In the middle of our difficult lives, the gospel of Jesus Christ builds a bridge between us and God and between us and other people. As we learn to walk across that bridge, to connect with God and with His people, we will come alive. Struggles will continue, but they will be nudged out of the center of our lives by the reality of meaning, joy, perseverance, and love. Life in Christ together—that's our hope.

**Struggles . . . become
opportunities for
deeper trust.**

Hope Reconnects People!

HOW-TO

Rom. 4:18–25

The gospel reconnects people. It brings together people whose selfishness has isolated them. Then it empowers them to relate better to others. The gospel reconnects people to God and to others.

Hold tightly to hope. How can you be sure that what you are hoping for is going to happen? How can you connect with others in ways that will help both your hope and theirs to grow?

Enter. Listen so profoundly that people who tell you their stories begin to believe that whatever matters to them matters to you. Help them believe it because it's true. Remember that you cannot deeply enter someone's life as a judge or critic, or even as an advisor. Don't be eager to pounce on sin or to correct error, but rather come to people excited by a vision of what they will become as Christ forms Himself in them (Gal. 4:19).

**The power to see clearly
into another's heart
depends on first seeing
into your own.**

See. Look in others for what you've already seen in yourself, both good and bad, nothing more and nothing less. Remember that the power to see clearly into another's heart depends on first seeing into your own. Expect to see two core realities: (1) a hunger for God that

energizes the passion to worship and love, and (2) a terrified determination to protect oneself from further hurt by refusing to connect with anyone, a determination that leaves us looking for satisfaction in pleasures that we think we can control.

Touch. Many people have never personally experienced what it's like to have a relationship with Christ. Make it your priority to know Christ well enough to experience the thrill of enjoying perfect love and hope so that you will have an inspiring testimony to share that can touch the lives of those you meet.

When you choose to hold on to the hope of your salvation—Jesus Himself—it is as if you are binding yourself to God's Word and holding on for dear life. Then when the winds of adversity or doubt or persecution come your way, you can hold steady without falling.

Your confidence in the future is based on the security of God's promises, even when you can't see any sign that those promises are being fulfilled. Biblical hope is based on what God has said, not on what we can see. That is the essence of faith—believing when you can't see.

Prepare-2-Live!

OPINION

John 11:25; 1 Pet. 1:24

The world in which we live offers many things, but it does not offer true hope. Sorrow, pain, disease, and death knock on every door. Heartaches, disappointments, and despair visit every home. Victories never last, and joy is but for a fleeting moment. New things become stale, and bright things become faded.

For us as Christians, our hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we have eternal life. Through the power of His resurrection, we know that everlasting blessedness awaits us beyond the grave. Job was looking forward to life after death when he said, "And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:26, NIV). When anyone by faith, trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, that person receives the certainty of this wonderful hope. The Bible says that this person is "passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Jesus Christ stated, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25, 26, NRSV).

Though Christians suffer all of this world's trials and pains, our comfort is in the knowledge of this great hope, "which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Heb. 6:19).

**Without the hope of
heaven, we Christians are
a miserable lot.**

Without the hope of heaven, we Christians are a miserable lot. We're banking on tomorrow to be better than today. Friend, you also may have this hope of eternal life which transcends the grave. Simply admit that you are a sinner, repent of your sins, and trust in Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, as your payment for those sins. Upon believing this in your heart and confessing this with your mouth, the Lord God will immediately give you hope—eternal life!

REACT

1. So what can we hope for today in the middle of eating disorders, memories of abuse, strained marriages, rebellious kids, panic attacks, and attitudes about ourselves and our lives that we just don't like?
2. Does the gospel take away all the suffering? Some of it? None of it? Explain your answer.
3. How does hope help us endure what God won't improve until heaven?
4. Does the fact that Christ is returning absolve us from attempting to alleviate the suffering of the poor and the helpless? Explain your answer.

Seth Sabalboro, Olongapo City, Philippines

Reason to Hope

EXPLORATION

1 Pet. 3:15

CONCLUDE

For many people, hope simply means positive feelings about the future. Underlying this is the assumption that it is better to be hopeful than to be hopeless, and few of us would dispute that. But the next question is, Upon what is your hope based? Does it hinge upon a new car, a better job, that next investment, or the perfect romantic relationship? Christians have the best of all reasons for hope: Christ's finished work on our behalf, His continuing presence in our lives, and His eventual return to right the wrongs of this world. Is this hope real in your life?

CONSIDER

- Making a poster with the word *hope* in large letters, and drawing, painting, photographing, or finding an image that expresses the concept of hope.
- Looking at hope as a matter of probability. Think about events people place their hope in, and imagine what the odds are that (1) they will occur, and (2) that they will be as fulfilling as the person hoping for them might expect. For the person who puts his or her faith in God, odds are 100 percent for both.
- Taking a fresh look at Hebrews 11:1. How do faith and hope complement each other?
- Listening to or performing the hymn "We Have This Hope" in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, number 214. What does this hymn say about the ultimate source of the hope we have within us?
- Doing something concrete to help friends or acquaintances overcome a problem or issue in their lives—with God's help—that seems overpowering to them (for example, supporting people in developing and maintaining a healthier diet and lifestyle).
- Growing a plant from seed. What evidence do you have that the seed will become a beautiful and/or useful plant? What evidence do you have that God will keep His promises to us?

CONNECT

Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 6–44.

Alan Hecht, Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.

Life



“ ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full’ ” (John 10:10, NIV).

It Takes Courage to Enjoy Life

INTRODUCTION

Eccles. 11:9, 10

Pause for a moment to consider the implications for living suggested by the following two quotes cited by Gerald Corey: (1) "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost anything" (Friedrich Nietzsche). (2) "The malady of our time is meaninglessness. The modern person has the means to live but often has no meaning to live for" (Victor Frankl).¹ So we can say that the elixir to an abundant life is to find meaning and purpose in many facets of life, including work, love, family, suffering, death, church membership, finances, and faith.

Now consider that the path to life's meaning and purpose is through participation. Victor Frankl suggests that finding significance and purpose in life "must be pursued obliquely. . . . It is a by-product of engagement, which is a commitment to creating, to loving, to work, and to building."²

So until we are totally committed to, and become fully engaged in that which defines the core of life, there is the risk that we might not find true meaning and purpose. Meaning is an outcome of *participation*. Perhaps, then, the reason why some of us describe life at home and in the

**"The malady of our time is
meaninglessness."**

church as boring is because we are not participating in the core events of these two institutions.

As you study this week's lesson, consider the implications of two more ingredients for abundant living: "It takes courage to 'be,' and our choices determine the kind of person we become" (Rollo May).³ "If we are creatures of circumstance, we shall surely fail of perfecting Christian characters. You must master circumstances, and not allow circumstances to master you."⁴

Life is a precious gift from God. Decide to live it to the full and for His glory (Eccles. 11:9, 10; Isa. 43:7; 1 Cor. 10:31).

1. Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice Counseling Psychotherapy*, 7th ed. (Florence, Ky.: Thompson Brooks/Cole, 2005), pp. 134, 135.

2. Ibid., p. 143.

3. Ibid., p. 135.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 47.

The Blood of Eternal Life

EVIDENCE

Rev. 22:1, 2

Sometimes we have no immediate control over our living conditions, such as a lack of nutritional foods, a polluted environment, stress caused by others, and grief due to natural disasters, all of which impact life negatively and shorten our years. Yet God expects us to live the best life we can.

Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20, NIV). He promises to be part of our life, through the good times and the not so good, to the end of this earthly life. When the going is tough, we may ask, Where is He now? However, I am encouraged by what Michael Pearson said, "If God comes to be with us as a baby in a stable; if God comes to be with us in an animal feeding trough, you can never be quite sure where He will turn up [in our life]."

Furthermore, "Scientists have pinpointed the Methuselah gene—a stretch of DNA that confers healthy old age on men and women—raising the prospect that researchers may one day be able to create drugs that extend human life. 'There is no reason why we cannot do this,' said Kari Stefansson, chief executive of DeCode Genetics, an Icelandic biotechnology company."² Then we should understand that the God who made the genes in the first place could put in place genes of eternal longevity when He pronounces immortality on the saints.

**Eternal life is ordinary life
without the effects of sin.**

Jesus came to sustain us in this life, whatever the conditions. But through His death on the cross, He provides the blood of eternal life as a means of transition from death to everlasting life. This eternal life is ordinary life without the effects of sin. All of our body's organs and systems will function perfectly, sustained in the new environment by the leaves of the tree of life (Rev. 22:1, 2).

REACT

What does one do with the barriers that prevent the renewal of life in Christ?

1. Michael Pearson, sermon at Newbold College, December 1, 2007.

2. "Old Age 'Methuselah Gene' Discovered," <http://www.buzzle.com/editorials/2-3-2002-9985.asp> (accessed March 18, 2008).

A Dominant Theme

LOGOS

Gen. 2:7; Ps. 139:13, 14; John 1:1–3; 3; 10:10; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 2:1–5

Life is a dominant theme from Genesis to Revelation. The word has a range of meanings from mere physical existence to full and abundant living, in loving communion with God and others.

Source of Life (John 1:1–3)

God is the living God (Jer. 10:10) and is the Source of all life. John 1:1–3 makes it clear that without Jesus nothing would have existed. Moreover, everything that exists continues to exist because of God's grace, wisdom, and life-giving power (Col. 1:16, 17).

Humans Created to Live (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 139:13, 14)

God created humans to live forever. Genesis 2:7 says that after God composed Adam from the ground, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. It is possible that God not only breathed into Adam the *neshamah*, or spark of life, but

that He also breathed into him the Holy Spirit (John 20:22) and with Him, a spiritual nature and dimension (2 Pet. 1:4). So we became a living temple to be dwelt in by God (1 Cor. 3:16). We were designed to live in intimate communion with Him. Hence, we were created to have more than a physical existence. We were created to enjoy loving fellowship with God and all of His children. Human life was to be more than endless; it was to be a happy life. However, the Bible reveals that in order for humans to truly live and be happy, they must choose to live the way God designed them to.

Lower Life: Life Without the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 8:9)

When Adam and Eve chose to follow the serpent and to exalt their reason above God's will, they lost their purity; and, to a significant extent, the Holy Spirit

The higher life is the life for which we were created.

and God's glory departed from them. Sin brought immediate spiritual death (Gen. 2:17). They did not immediately experience a physical death. Rather, they continued to live what is sometimes referred to as a *lower life*. The Fall was a descent into a lower sphere of existence: a life lived without the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. Those who live in the sphere of the lower life are preoccupied with satisfying the desires of the flesh. They are little more than intelligent animals. Read what Paul has to say about such people in Romans 1:21–24 and Galatians 5:19–21. From a biblical perspective, the lower life (or life without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) is no life at all. It is in fact a living death. A *low-lifer* is dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1).

Higher Life: Life Lived in Christ (John 3; 10:10; 2 Cor. 5:17)

Fortunately for Adam and Eve, and for many of their descendants, they repented of their sins and accepted God's forgiveness, made possible through Jesus Christ (John 3:16). God's forgiveness and acceptance of the sinner involves the miracle of the new birth (John 3:1–6). God's creative hand once again touches a person's body, so he or she receives the indwelling and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. At the moment of conversion, a person is elevated above the physical sphere or lower life into the *higher life*. The higher life is the life for which we were created. This is the true life that was brought to light by Christ (2 Tim. 1:10). It is a life lived in Christ, or in intimate fellowship with Christ. It is a life that reflects the principles and activities of the kingdom of God as exemplified by the life of Christ. It is a life that is immeasurably and qualitatively richer than anything citizens of the kingdoms of this world can obtain or experience. It is the abundant life (John 10:10). It is life spent in the presence of God and the atmosphere of heaven while still tied to this earth. The higher life gives evidence of the indwelling Spirit and is characterized by "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22, 23, NIV). Reflecting the image and likeness of God, or the character of Christ, is once again possible, because born-again people are truly children of God and are able to live as such (2 Pet. 1:2–8). The higher life ought not to be taken for granted, for it is made possible through the life and death of Christ (John 3:16) and conscious fellowship with God.

REACT

1. How do you know whether you are an intelligent animal or a born-again child of God?
2. What steps can you take to ensure that your life is spent in constant communion with God and in the atmosphere of heaven while living in a sinful world?
3. Why is constant communion with God so important?

Tuesday
April 21

Living in the Flow of Divinity

TESTIMONY

John 1:1-3

When the Spirit of God is poured upon men and women, minds once darkened by sin will be illuminated by the quickening life force of His Word (John 6:63).

"God is the source of life and light and joy to the universe. Like rays of light from the sun, like the streams of water bursting from a living spring, blessings flow out from Him to all His creatures. And wherever the life of God is in the hearts of men, it will flow out to others in love and blessing."¹

As men and women draw closer to behold the Source of all light and life, they are transformed into His likeness (2 Cor. 3:18).

"The Saviour's life on earth was not a life of ease and devotion to Himself, but He toiled with persistent, earnest, untiring effort for the salvation of lost mankind. From the manger to Calvary He followed the path of self-denial and sought not to

be released from arduous tasks, painful travels and exhausting care and labor."² He said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28, NIV).

"So those who are the partakers of the grace of Christ will be ready to

make any sacrifice, that others for whom He died may share the heavenly gift. They will do all they can to make the world better for their stay in it. This spirit is the sure outgrowth of a soul truly converted."³

**"God is the source of life
and light and joy to the
universe."**

REACT

1. The world has many explanations for the origins of life. What aspects of our belief in a Creator God can we utilize to illustrate the abundant life to the world?

2. Human nature often seeks the easiest route to life's prize; but unlike the caterpillar entombed in a chrysalis, it is the struggle for freedom that produces a glorious butterfly. How do you view your route to life's prize? Are you a struggling caterpillar or a glorious butterfly? Explain why.

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 77.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

3. *Ibid.*

Quality of Life

HOW-TO

Ps. 139:13, 14

In today's society, names matter. More specifically, when we are considering the purchase of a product, we make several assumptions, most of which hover around name brands associated with the product and places where we might purchase it. For example, although several stores sell personal computers, the computer you want will most likely depend on the brand name you favor rather than where you will buy it.

Our quality of life is based on whose name we allow ourselves to be associated with. Let us consider how we can realize the optimum quality of life.

Recognize the Giver of life. Our origin is not a hit-or-miss affair. Genesis 1 and 2 teach us that, in the beginning, God created us.

Recognize how marvelously we are made. The intricate meshing and maneuvering of body parts and systems is awesome to consider. The various pumps and valves, the numerous processes and functions that our bodies engage in without our even thinking about them is beyond comprehension. Also, we must remember the fact that God created us in His image.

Recognize the responsibility that comes with being created in God's image. Being made in the image of God means that we share certain of His characteristics. This fact should govern our thoughts, decisions, and behavior. However, we must always remember that we are perfect only through Jesus.

Recognize the Creator's desire. "Jesus came to 'destroy the works of the devil.' 'In Him was life,' and He says, 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' He is 'a quickening spirit.' 1 John 3:8; John 1:4; 10:10; 1 Cor. 15:45. And He still has the same life-giving power as when on earth He healed the sick, and spoke forgiveness to the sinner. He 'forgiveth all thine iniquities, He 'healeth all thy diseases.' Ps. 103:3."*

When we accept the life of Christ as our own, we begin to climb the stairway to an abundant life.

REACT

1. What is it about the life of Jesus that increases the quality of our lives?
2. Why do we need abundant life?

*The Desire of Ages, p. 270.

Thursday
April 23

The Quest for Completeness

OPINION

John 10:10

Some time ago, I went in search of a pair of boots. They had to be a certain shade and made from a certain kind of leather, with a subtle pattern in the stitching. I shopped everywhere—malls, markets, high streets, and on the Internet. When I finally found them, I was filled with immense satisfaction. Until my sister came over. She had on the exact same pair of boots, only she was wearing them with combat trousers.

I decided that these boots were never going to be complete unless I, too, had some combat trousers. After another tiring shopping expedition the following day, I finally found the pair I wanted. At last I thought I had the “look” I’d been searching for. But on the way home, I saw someone wearing “my look” with a goose-down vest. What was I thinking? Of course! My “look” would never be complete without a

**The decor, the menu,
the music, all became
insignificant.**

goose-down vest! So the following weekend, I went to a couple of malls and found just the right vest, but it was displayed with a hooded top. No one, who’s anyone, would wear a goose-down vest with a hooded sweat top, I concluded. And on it

went—this endless search for greener pastures by a spoiled student who already had too much, but who was nonetheless incomplete.

Jesus came to give us completeness. At the wedding in Cana (John 2:1–12), everything had been prepared to perfection, but Jesus came along and made it better. He made it complete. And people noticed! The decor, the menu, the music, all became insignificant. So much so, that in subsequent conversations, the quality of the wine became the embodiment of the whole affair.

It is entirely possible to fill our lives with a medley of well-planned adventures, projects, and purchases that give the temporary illusion of abundant living but not the permanent condition of completeness. Whatever in our limited imagination we can conjure up to make our lives perfect is nothing in comparison to what Jesus came to give: abundant life here and now—immense satisfaction.

REACT

How do we sell the concept of “abundant living” to someone who already seems to have everything?

Living the Life

EXPLORATION

John 10:10

CONCLUDE

Our lives today bear a faint resemblance to God's original loving design. A long time ago, He sat at the drawing table and formed us: masterful, intricate creatures, each with a heart that longed for Him. He equipped us with everything we needed to live happy, fulfilling, complete, eternal lives. Sin changed all that. Now we live under the shadow of our own bad choices, and we suffer the consequences of thousands of years of rebellion against God's plan. But Jesus came to change all that. Even in this fallen world, He offers all those who will accept the gift of a full, rewarding, meaningful life, and with it the promise of life eternal.

CONSIDER

- Writing a statement of purpose. This should express who you are, what and who have been the biggest influences in your life, what your goals are, and where you are going from here.
- Interviewing some people you know with the question, What does it mean to live a full life? After you've gathered some answers, ask yourself the same question.
- Making a collage of things that give meaning to your life.
- Paraphrasing Philippians 1:21.
- Listening to only Christian music for an entire week. Analyze how this experiment influences your attitude toward your daily activities.
- Praying for ways you can make someone else's life more meaningful by showing them the way to the Life-Giver.

CONNECT

John 4:7-13; 1 John 5:12.

Max Lucado, *Cure for the Common Life* (Nashville, Tenn.: W Publishing Group, 2005); Rick Warren, *What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004).

Revelation



“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1, 2, NIV).

Where Do You Point Your Antennas?

Sabbath
April 25

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 1:1-3

The Bible states that "in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:1-3, NIV). In other words, God has decided to reveal Himself in many different ways so we can get to know Him better. Nevertheless, the questions are always still there: Why is it so hard to hear God? Are there people who can hear God's voice and people who can't?

It is true that God is the Great Communicator. All the way from heaven, Jesus has looked and keeps looking for ways to help us listen to His voice. It is also true that there are some who can hear Him and some who can't. Even so, I would dare to say that the difference does not lie in God but in us.

To explain my point, I am going to borrow an illustration used by Jean Flory. Flory says that our understanding is like the antenna of

a satellite that is focused toward the ground so that the only sound waves it can receive are those coming from the ground. More often than not, our antennas are pointed away from heaven so we cannot receive any signals from God. Because of this, even though God continually talks to us, we don't understand Him. Only those who permanently focus their antenna up above can truly understand the language of heaven.*

So what's the point of this illustration? It is simple. God gave us free will, but at the same time, He decided not to leave us without the information we need to make the right decisions. The Bible says that God has decided to reveal Himself in many different ways; nevertheless, our attitudes determine if we will be able to listen and understand His voice.

This week you will have the opportunity to reevaluate how God has chosen to reveal Himself in your life and what your attitude is toward the information He continuously sends to you. So where will you point your antenna?

*Jean Flory, *Quest for Origins: Evolution or Creation?* (Madrid: Editorial Safeliz, 1984).

Where will you point your antenna?

Five Ways God Is Revealed

LOGOS

Exod. 7:1–6; Ps. 19:1–4; Rom. 1:18–23; 2 Tim. 3:14–16; Heb. 1:1–3

Revelation Through the Word (Rom. 1:18–23; 2 Tim. 3:14–16)

What kind of an image do you have of God? Is He merely a picture painted from a dysfunctional family, an angry father, or an abusive spouse? Is He merely a statue you have built in honor of your favorite real-life hero? Or is He formed out of a book you have read or the church you attend? Romans 1:18–23 tells us of the danger of trying to make God in our own image or from earthly examples.

If you really want to know God, one of the best places to look is the Bible. After all, the Bible is God's personal diary, given by inspiration to His prophets regarding His interactions with humankind. John 5:39 tells us that the Scriptures all testify of Jesus. In studying the Scriptures, we don't just learn facts and doctrines, we are given the chance to come into a living relationship with the Word who became flesh and lived among us—the Truth Himself, who reveals our heavenly Father through His earthly life (John 1:14).

**Christianity is not a call to
a bland and boring life.**

In the Midst of Adversity (Exod. 7:1–6; Gen. 3:16–19)

The Bible indicates that God can reveal Himself to us even in the midst of calamity and hardship. Trials can break through the walls our hearts have constructed against God in ways that nothing else can. In Exodus 7:1–6, God commissions Moses and Aaron to speak to Pharaoh. In verse 5, He tells Moses that His purpose in bringing plagues on Egypt is not just to punish the Egyptians and free the Israelites, but to also reveal Himself to the Egyptians, that they might know He is God.

The pain and suffering that God cursed Adam and Eve with after the Fall was not arbitrary. Even though it was the natural result of their disobedience, it was also redemptive. Pain allows us to recognize that there is something wrong, that we need healing. Without physical pain, a broken leg would soon turn into a crippled leg. Trials can help us see that there is something wrong with the world and with our own hearts. They can motivate us to turn from our self-prescribed and often short-lived analgesics to the Great Physician for perfect and complete healing.

The Heavens Declare the Glory of God (Ps. 19:1–4)

Nature is another place where the Creator's fingerprints can be found. Psalm

19:1–4 reveals that nature testifies not only about the existence of God but also about His character. The intricate details, the diversity, the complexity, and harmony all reveal something about His character—His detailed order, His beauty, and His glory. Just as paintings and sculptures reveal the talent, ideologies, and even character of the artist, so God is revealed more fully through His creation.

When we spend time in nature, we can get to know the Creator. Creation gives evidence of His goodness and His existence, even to those who haven't heard the gospel (Rom. 1:18–20).

Revealing His Love in Your Life (Matt. 5:13–16)

As we come into a living relationship with the Creator of the universe, we are transformed. We enter such a relationship through meditating on His Word and observing His creation, and by His work in our lives. We, in turn, become ambassadors that reveal God to a world that doesn't know Him. Christianity is not a call to a bland and boring life. We are the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13). Just a little salt adds flavor to the whole recipe. As we come into contact with our neighbors and other community members, with people from all nations, tribes, and tongues, we have the opportunity to add flavor to their lives by demonstrating a meaningful and abundant life through our connection with God.

Jesus, the Light of the world, has also called us to be a light (Matt. 5:14–16). If you are in a relationship with God, it is not something you can hide. Christ compares us to a city on a hill that cannot be hidden and to a light in a house. We are a reflection of God to both the world at large and to others who are in God's church.

Together With All the Saints (Eph. 3:16–19)

While God's character can be revealed through our lives, it is also revealed in a collective body of believers. Together with all of the saints, we can better know the width, the length, the depth, and the height of God's love. The fullness of God cannot be entirely revealed in an individual. His love is too immense to be understood alone. Only in a corporate body, in His church, can He fully reveal His character. It is in relationship with others that we are also confronted with our own character flaws and defects, with our sinful natures. As we recognize our condition in the light of God's provision, we are able to reflect His perfect love even in our imperfect and corrupt bodies.

God continues to reveal Himself to us through His Word, through His creation, through trials, and ultimately through our lives and relationships with others. What an awesome privilege we have to know and worship this God, the God of the Bible.

REACT

1. In what ways has God revealed Himself to you?
2. What trials have you faced that have taught you about God?

Revealing God Through Nature

TESTIMONY

Ps. 19:1–4

“Apart from Christ we are still incapable of interpreting rightly the language of nature. The most difficult and humiliating lesson that man has to learn is his own inefficiency in depending upon human wisdom, and the sure failure of his efforts to read nature correctly. Of himself he cannot interpret nature without placing it above God. He is in a condition similar to that of the Athenians, who, amidst their altars dedicated to the worship of nature, had one inscribed: ‘To the unknown God.’ God was indeed unknown to them. He is unknown to all who, without the guidance of the divine Teacher, take up the study of nature. They will assuredly come to wrong conclusions.”¹

“Christ revealed God to His disciples in a way that performed in their hearts a special work, such as He desires to do in our hearts. There are many who, in dwelling too largely upon theory, have lost sight of the living power of the Saviour’s

“From the beauty of natural things, . . . we may learn that God still loves us.”

example. They have lost sight of Him as the humble, self-denying worker. What they need is to behold Jesus. Daily we need the fresh revealing of His presence. We need to follow more closely His example of self-renunciation and self-sacrifice.”²

“Nature testifies that One infinite in power, great in goodness, mercy, and love, created the earth and filled it with life and gladness. Even in their blighted state all things reveal the handiwork of the great Master Artist. Though sin has marred the form and beauty of the things of nature, though on them may be seen traces of the work of the prince of the power of the air, yet they still speak of God. In the briers, the thistles, the thorns, the tares, we may read the law of condemnation; but from the beauty of natural things, and from their wonderful adaptation to our needs and our happiness, we may learn that God still loves us, that His mercy is yet manifested to the world.”³

REACT

Read Psalm 19:1–4. How has God revealed His presence to you today through nature?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 257.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 457.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 256, 257.

God's Hand Is Visible in a Bacterium

Tuesday
April 28

EVIDENCE

Ps. 19:1–4

The complexity of creation in its various forms testifies to the existence of God. Indeed, even the intricacy of the “simplest” of life forms stands as a witness for Him. For example, the tiny *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) is a bacteria that lives in the lower intestines of mammals, often aiding in digestion.¹ *E. coli* moves through the use of a flagellum, a sort of outboard motor that propels it through its microscopic world.² The flagellum is composed of approximately 40 protein parts “including a stator, rotor, drive-shaft, U-joint, and propeller.”³ These components can be seen only by using an electron microscope with 50,000 magnification. But once in view, these little motors are amazing, running at a rate of about 100,000 revolutions per minute. They have forward and reverse gears, and despite the fast run rate, *E. coli* is able to “stop on a microscopic dime,” taking only a quarter turn to stop, change directions, and return to top speed in the opposite direction.⁴

In addition to its sheer complexity, *E. coli*'s little motor is composed of multiple parts, all of which are necessary for the system to function. This is an example of irreducible complexity. “If you remove any one part, the entire system will fail to function. Every individual part is integral.”⁵

***E. coli* moves through the use of a flagellum.**

What an incredible thing to find in a microscopic “simple” life form.

But, you see, that's the problem secular scientists face. There is no such thing as a “simple” life form. Every living thing is incredibly complex—their internal components complicated and precise. All of creation testifies to the existence of a Master Craftsman.

1. P. Feng, S. D. Weagant, and M. A. Grant, “Enumeration of *Escherichia Coli* and the Coliform Bacteria,” *Bacteriological Analytical Manual*, 8th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Food and Drug Administration, 2001).

2. All About Creation, “Proof of God—Design Detection,” <http://www.allaboutcreation.org/proof-of-god.htm> (accessed April 7, 2008).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., quoting Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: Free Press, 1996.)

Revealing Christ Through Practice

HOW-TO

2 Tim. 3:14–16

This past winter, I agreed to be part of a marathon relay team. I had three months to train. *Plenty of time*, I thought. The first week passed, and I had run one mile. *No problem*, I decided. I was just starting. The next week passed, and I hadn't run at all. *No problem*, I thought. It had been a tough week. Each week I kept thinking that the next would be better. But none were. The race came and went. I did participate with my team members, but my legs just hadn't learned what they were supposed to do.

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3: 14–16, NIV).

My legs just hadn't learned what they were supposed to do.

We know God reveals Himself to us when we study His Word, when we admire His hand in nature, when we put our faith and trust in Him. Why, then, is it so hard to look for His

revelations? Frequently, we have good intentions, but we aren't doing the work. Here are two ideas that might help.

We need a schedule. Write down what time of day you will be spending with God and how you will be spending it—either in prayer, Bible reading and meditation, or observing nature. Making a schedule doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't spend more time learning from God. It just means that any extra time you put in is simply icing on a sweet cake.

We need to put in the time. Just as in my race, I wanted to train. Indeed, I knew I needed to train, but I didn't. I needed to go beyond good intentions. I failed to follow any schedule. By creating a schedule and following it, our "spiritual" legs will grow strong and carry us through the race to the finish line.

REACT

During what activities do you find God revealing Himself to you, and why? How can you make better use of your time to include more of those activities?

Truth: An Endangered Species

Thursday
April 30

OPINION

Job 23; 26–31; 38–41; 42:1–6

The rationalist mind of the twenty-first century puts us in a position of questioning everything—even the supernatural. Because of this, every concept that is beyond our understanding is seen as myth, legend, or dogma. Dr. Ariel Roth says, “Too often relativism, agnosticism, and skepticism receive respect, while certainty and truth appear to be endangered. It is fashionable to question almost anything. Doubts are sometimes encouraged for their own sake, even when they have little to contribute except further doubts.”*

Consequently, the road that should take us to the truth doesn’t take us there. Instead, it leads to a place where truth itself is unimportant and secondary to most other aspects of our lives.

Doubt in relationship to God’s revealing Himself to us must be a two-way street. There is not necessarily a “wrong” or a “right” way. There is no specific way to go about questioning religion and God, as long as we take the right attitude. God has ways of communicating with humankind. But these revelations are much more than mere monologues in which God is the speaker. They are much more than just speeches given by the Almighty to mute His subjects. Divine revelation always implies dialogue—a two-way conversation. Dialogue is vital in the secular age in which we live, and healthy questioning is a part of that dialogue.

Questioning requires honesty.

Let us not forget, however, that questioning requires honesty. Even more than that, questioning requires courage, because when God reveals Himself to us as an answer to our questions, most likely, we will realize that we will have to abandon our preconceived notions that are held by the majority of us.

Let Job be our example in this matter. In Job 23 and 26–31, he questions God concerning his suffering. We read God’s response in Job 38–41. The book closes with Job’s humble reaction to this response in chapter 42:1–6. He repents, because he realizes that he spoke about things he did not understand. In other words, he gave up his preconceived notions and accepted God’s response to his questions.

*Ariel Roth, *Origins* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 43.

Friday
May 1

Revealed Through His Handiwork

EXPLORATION

Ps. 19:1–4

CONCLUDE

Nature reveals the handiwork of God. Christ revealed God to His disciples. We find God in Scripture. He reveals Himself to us when we study His Word. We see Him in nature. God reveals Himself to us in many ways, but only we can make the choice to listen to Him and to see the evidence of our Creator.

CONSIDER

- Spending time as the Sabbath closes thinking of the ways God has revealed Himself to you. As you go through the next week, record how many of those ways He revealed Himself to you.
- Drawing a picture showing God's handiwork in nature.
- Writing a news story from a reporter's point of view, detailing how you arrived at the conclusion that nature is evidence of the Creator. Be sure to include any Scriptures that support your story.
- Using Wednesday's lesson, schedule time to spend with God in prayer, Bible reading, meditation, or nature for the next seven days.
- Thinking about the times you doubted God. How did He reveal Himself to you so that your doubts ceased?
- Writing a poem based upon Psalm 19:1–4.

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, "A Knowledge of God," chap. 10; "What to Do With Doubt," chap. 12 (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Assn., 1956).

Sin



“Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all” (Rom. 5:18, NRSV).

Sin: Pride and Prejudice

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 14:13, 14; 1 John 3:4

Sin. Such a simple word for the biggest problem in our world today. We probably don't think about it too often, but all the trials, problems, and troubles we face can be traced back to sin. The Bible clearly defines sin as the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), but what is it that makes us want to go against God's will? Sin started in heaven when God's most decorated archangel, Lucifer, began to develop an overinflated sense of pride and self-importance. "I will ascend into heaven, / I will exalt my throne . . . ; / I will also sit on the mount . . . ; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, / I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:13, 14, NKJV).

Sin and pride seem to work hand in hand because both are rooted in self and selfishness. Unchecked pride can create the illusion that we are better than we really are, predisposing us to unjust prejudices. It made Lucifer feel that, even as a created being, he deserved the privilege of sitting at the right hand of God. That same kind of pride seems to be at the core of our human nature and perpetuates our sinful leaning.

Pride brought sin into existence.

The opposite of pride is humility. Jesus was a perfect example of this trait when He came to earth. He took on servanthood and dwelled among the poor, needy, and rejected. Even as a perfect being, He never turned a blind eye, even to the "greatest" of sinners. It is unbelievable to think that as sinners ourselves, we all at some point look down on others for what we consider to be a sin greater than our own. Read the Bible's warning against doing so in Matthew 23:23. It all comes back to pride, the need to satisfy and exalt self.

Pride brought sin into existence. It prevents us from repenting and asking for the forgiveness for which Christ died to give us. Pride makes us think we can earn our salvation through our own feeble efforts. Ironically, the most humbling thing we can do to rid ourselves of sin is to simply let go of our pride and accept the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation given to us by the Lamb who was slain for our sins. That's it. Sin problem, cured!

Jesus: The Balancing Act

EVIDENCE

Rev. 5:9

The apostle John, in the book of Revelation, captures the power of Jesus' sufficient sacrifice. He witnesses in vision the discussion between the four living creatures and the 24 elders as they recount the qualities that qualify Him to open the seals of the book. The book contained the purposes and the counsel of God. He was worthy to open the book for two primary reasons—His suffering and its effects on humankind. Revelation 5:9 declares, " 'For You were slain' " (NKJV), denoting His worthiness because of His willingness to give up His life for the well-being of His creation. The second reason for His worthiness to open the book was found in the same text where it states, " 'And have redeemed us to God by Your blood,' " signifying the delicate balancing act of reuniting sinner to Savior. When Jesus engaged in this awesome act of love for humankind, He opened a way of escape from the penalty of sin for everyone (see Rom. 6:23).

It is often said that the best form of advertisement is word of mouth. Christians have a responsibility to be transparent sinners saved by grace, with other sinners who know no grace. As believers, we must convey a message to others of our continual need of Christ's amazing

grace (see 2 Pet. 3:9). The Bible reveals God's displeasure of sin and His desire for sinners to come to repentance. Believers as well as unbelievers feel the results of sin. There is disease, disaster, and devastation all around. We must examine our method of ministering to those in need of the good news (see John 3:16, 17), because the season for repentance is ripe, and the Vinedresser awaits a full harvest.

**The season for repentance
is ripe, and the Vinedresser
awaits a full harvest.**

REACT

1. What are some creative ways to share your continuous need for Christ with an unbeliever?
2. How does the sacrifice of Christ qualify Him to be your personal Savior?

Monday
May 4

Sin: Its Cause and Its Cure

LOGOS

Isa. 14:12–14; Matt. 23:23; 25:45; Phil. 2:6–8; Heb. 1:1–5; Rev. 5:9–12

Sin is as mysterious as the plan of salvation. Neither one can be satisfactorily comprehended this side of eternity. Nevertheless, Christians must live in the reality of their existence.

Perhaps the greatest common denominator for all of us who share Adam and Eve's fallen sinful nature is selfishness. Selfishness was one of the reasons Lucifer declared, "I will ascend to heaven; / I will raise my throne / above the stars of God; . . . I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. 14:13, 14, NIV). His desire was not to emulate God's character of mercy, grace, compassion, and justice, but to claim the majesty and honor due only to the Creator.

As we trace the histories of the Bible's heroes and villains, it isn't hard to make the connection between selfishness and sin. They triumphed when they acted unselfishly, motivated by the values of God's kingdom. However, they failed when

**The true measure of our
Christian experience is
demonstrated in how we
serve others.**

they allowed their judgment to be clouded by selfish ambitions and motives. That shouldn't surprise us. David confessed, "Surely, I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5, NIV). And we all know that from the time of its birth, a baby's universe

revolves only around its needs, appetites, and comfort.

We are all consumed by this struggle against sin, against selfishness. The Ten Commandments help us recognize how selfishness can manifest itself in our lives, and how we can guard against it.

Limits of Law-keeping (Matt. 23:5, 6, 23, 27, 28; John 13:1)

By the time of Jesus, the religious leaders had so corrupted the concept of obedience to the Ten Commandments that the law itself became a vehicle for selfishness. Jesus' condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 is a catalogue of how they used the law to burnish their own reputations. Read verses 5, 6, 23, 27, 28. For Jesus, authentic religion went way beyond appearances; it had to do with actions, behaviors, habits.

Notice this passage in John 13: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them *the full extent*

of his love" (verse 1, NIV; emphasis added). What follows is the description of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. But notice again the last phrase of verse 1: when Jesus wanted to demonstrate the full extent of His love, He didn't give them a Bible study; He didn't perform a miracle; He didn't lay down His life for His disciples (that would come later). Rather, He assumed the nature of a servant and washed their dirty feet. He laid aside every vestige of power and dignity, and He selflessly lowered Himself to serve. The act of washing His disciples' feet was a demonstration of the "full extent" of Jesus' love.

Humility at Its Best and Lowest (Matthew 25)

A million sermons couldn't adequately describe the significance of unselfish service in our struggle against sin. We can fool ourselves into thinking that the essence of being a follower of Christ is abandoning the bad habits that come from having a sinful nature. But the true measure of our Christian experience is demonstrated in how we serve others.

Jesus' description of the last judgment in Matthew 25 graphically illustrates the premium Christ placed on serving others: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (verse 40, NRSV). The service we provide each other, especially those unable to return the favor, is counted as done for Christ Himself.

And speaking of Christ, the apostle Paul urged his fellow believers, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5, NIV). Then he wrote about how Jesus lowered Himself to become human; how He descended still further to become a servant; how He humbled Himself even further and "became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (verse 8, NIV). Read the result of Christ's humiliation in Philippians 2:9–11.

In eternity, we will worship a Savior who conquered sin by stooping to serve and dying for our sins. Let's be clear: living unselfish lives of service doesn't earn us any points with God or help secure our salvation. But now that we have the benefit of His sacrificial death and His triumphant resurrection, we are free to live lives of unselfish service and demonstrate His character for all to see.

REACT

1. Think about the following Bible characters. Try to identify how pride or selfishness led to the low points in their spiritual experiences: Jacob, David, Miriam, Peter, Paul, Sapphira.

2. Think of all the expressions of love Jesus demonstrated throughout His ministry on earth. How can it be said that washing His disciples' feet showed the "full extent of His love"? What does that say about our responsibilities to those around us?

3. What examples of unselfish service can you imagine doing in your community? List at least five. How would they serve to combat the threat and consequences of sin?

Tuesday
May 5

"Sin No More"

TESTIMONY

Heb. 8:1, 2

David desired the wife of another. His focus was drawn away from the Creator, and he sinned. The minute our focus becomes blurred is the instant we find ourselves in the quicksand of sin.

"If the soul is to be purified and ennobled, and made fit for the heavenly courts, there are two lessons to be learned—self-sacrifice and self-control. Some learn these important lessons more easily than do others, for they are exercised by the simple discipline the Lord gives them in gentleness and love. Others require the slow discipline of suffering, that the cleansing fire may purify their hearts of pride and self-reliance, of earthly passion and self-love, that the true gold of character may appear and that they may become victors through the grace of Christ."

When Bathsheba became pregnant with David's child, he conspired to have Uriah lose his life in battle. By attempting to cover up his sinful actions, David sank deeper and deeper into the quicksand of sin (2 Samuel 11).

**"God does not give us up
because of our sins."**

"God does not give us up because of our sins. We may make mistakes and grieve His Spirit, but when we repent and come to Him with contrite hearts, He will not turn us away. . . . Wrong feelings have

been cherished, and there have been pride, self-sufficiency, impatience, and murmurings. All these separate us from God. Sins must be confessed; there must be a deeper work of grace in the heart. Those who feel weak and discouraged may become strong men of God and do noble work for the Master. But . . . they must be influenced by no selfish motives."²

When David realized his sinful deeds, Christ's compassion grabbed him from the quicksand of sin. We need to seek perfect communion with our Savior. There is no place for pride and self-judgment at the foot of the cross. Christ stands ready to forgive us if we come to Him with a repentant heart.

REACT

How can you relate to the imagery of sin as quicksand?

1. *Faith and Works*, p. 86.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Ridding Your Heart of Guilt

HOW-TO

Ps. 32:1, 2

My concept of sin was shaped by my mother's counsel that Satan is a jealous being who wants to prevent us from making it to heaven. It's evident that our enemy wants to gloat over our demise. Our weaknesses become his targets. So it becomes our responsibility to seek the aid of the Holy Spirit in building an armor of righteousness and truth around ourselves.

In Jeremiah 18, we are presented with the striking imagery of the potter remaking a broken vessel. When our vessel becomes marred, how can it be restored?

Recognize that we cannot conquer sin on our own. We need to have a consistent and strong prayer life, where talking to and relying on Jesus becomes second nature. "Our condition through sin is unnatural, and the power that restores us must be supernatural, or else it has no value."¹ The battle is not ours. It is the Lord's.

Remember our weaknesses. In every battle, Satan uses our weaknesses to prevent us from doing what we know is right. We must ask the Holy Spirit to help us cement these holes so we can stand against his fiery darts.

Repent, which involves genuine sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. No lasting change in our sinful lifestyle will be evident until we

see the filthiness of sin and turn away from it in our heart. David's prayer in Psalm 32 suggests a broken and contrite spirit with no effort to hide his guilt or escape his judgment. "It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart. He longed . . . to be restored to harmony and communion with God."² Read Proverbs 28:13.

Restoration. Just as children feel bashful after they have been caught doing something wrong, so do we feel after we have wronged our Father. Satan preys on these feelings by encouraging us to focus on what we did rather than on Christ's forgiveness. But God does not delight in measuring punishment to His children; instead He offers us restoration.

In the battle for our souls, we must choose who will control our wills (Matt. 6:24). Whom will you choose—the enemy who wants to see you perish, or the Spotless Lamb who died to redeem and restore you?

**The battle is not ours. It is
the Lord's.**

1. *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 104.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 25.

Thursday
May 7

"Lest We Forget" ... The Sin Dilemma

OPINION

Ps. 51:3; Rom. 3:23

Pastor Donnie McClurkin is a famous gospel singer. He recorded the popular song "We Fall Down," but was criticized by the religious community for showing the video of this song on secular television channels such as MTV. However, McClurkin expressed appreciation knowing that a song dedicated to the furtherance of the gospel found its place among top secular songs, hence reaching those in need of its profound message.

All my life I witnessed my dad struggling with alcoholism. For years we tried to show him that he needed help, but he never admitted his problem. I believe that my father's problem extends to what I call the "sin dilemma." Doctors cannot prescribe treatment unless they formulate a diagnosis. The dilemma of sin exists because we do not understand the pathology of sin. We feel that sin is related to a cause-and-effect scenario, so we criticize the sinner when he or she does not act in accordance with our personal interpretations of God's will. The Bible states

that all of us have sinned, but that those who have repented are set aside from others who continue to dwell in sin.

**The saint is just a sinner
who fell down and got up.**

In *Steps to Christ*, we read that "it is impossible for us, of ourselves, to

escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. . . . There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can change from sin to holiness."^{*} In his minidocumentary, *From Darkness to Light*, Pastor McClurkin disclosed his struggle with homosexuality and his sister's struggle with drug addiction. In my opinion, this qualifies him to sing about the fact that when we fall, we can indeed get back up again. Lest we forget, Christ died so that all of us could accept His saving grace and exhibit Christlike love for all humanity. Lest we forget, the saint is just a sinner who fell down and got up.

REACT

1. Is it our responsibility to eradicate the problem of sin, or is it our objective to bring sinners into repentance? Be able to explain your answer.

2. Christ instructs us to share Him with all nations (Matt. 28:19). How can we do this if we do not integrate with others?

^{*} *Steps to Christ*, p.18.

"Be Ye Holy"

EXPLORATION

1 Pet. 1:13–16

CONCLUDE

We have a problem. We don't realize that we are called to be holy. We go through life on autopilot, oblivious to reality and the nearness of Christ's return. We have not put on the robes of His righteousness, nor do we sense the urgency to do so. Why? Why are we not aware? What's wrong with us? Are we entertaining ourselves on Satan's playground and enjoying it? We need to wake up and start calling sin by its right name and start living as if today were our last day on earth.

CONSIDER

- Comparing 2 Timothy 3:1–5 with the next TV program or film that you watch. Ask yourself if there is any relevance to this passage of Scripture in how it applies to what you're viewing.
- Listing areas in your life with which you struggle in terms of your Christian walk. Ask the Lord every day to give you strength to overcome them.
- Asking the Lord before the next Communion service to reveal to you people whom you have wronged or said something hurtful to. Make it a point to ask them for forgiveness and offer to wash their feet.
- Singing "Marvelous Grace," number 109 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, and writing a fourth verse based on your experience with God's grace.
- Keeping a journal of your daily struggles. Present them to the Lord daily, praying for victory over sin, and watch what He will do.
- Drawing a graph that shows how much time you spend doing things in your day. Analyze how much of your day is spent focused on Jesus.

CONNECT

Psalm 51

Steps to Christ, chap. 2, "The Sinner's Need of Christ."

Grace



"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"
(Rom. 5:8, NKJV).

Getting What We Don't Deserve

INTRODUCTION

Rom. 8:6–8

On October 2, 2006, the quiet village of Nickel Mines was shocked by the news that a gunman had entered their schoolhouse and was holding hostage a group of students ranging from the ages of six to thirteen. The police arrived soon after, but they were unable to prevent the man from shooting ten girls in the back of the head. Three died immediately, while another two died early the next morning. The gunman, a man named Charles, then turned the gun to his own head and committed suicide.

This event devastated the Amish community, and many lives will never be the same. However, what makes this event truly special was the response of the Amish people. A grandfather of one of the girls who was killed said soon after the tragedy, "We must not think evil of this man."¹ Another man who lived nearby said, "I don't think there's anybody here that wants to do anything but forgive and not only reach out to those who have suffered a loss in that way but to reach out to the family of the man who committed these acts."²

Many more acts of forgiveness and grace were recorded as the Amish dealt with this devastating event. One of the biggest and most

unbelievable acts of grace and forgiveness was the large number of grieving Amish families who attended the killer's burial. They were there to support Charles's widow.³

Justice is getting what we deserve. Grace is the direct opposite—getting what we do not deserve. The forgiving attitude of the Amish people, who are often the subject of ridicule because of their lifestyle, is one of the best living examples of Christ in the world today. Christ, too, did not give us what we deserve. Rather, in choosing to die for our sins, He grants us grace. As we explore His grace this week, let us remember the Amish community as an example of what God has done for us. Furthermore, may we as well show grace to our own community, wherever we are.

Justice is getting what we deserve.

1. "Amish Grandfather: 'We Must Not Think Evil of This Man,'" CNN.com, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/10/04/amish.shooting/index.html> (accessed March 16, 2007).

2. Ibid.

3. "Amish School Shooting," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amish_school_shooting (accessed March 16, 2007).

Beyond Our Credit Limit

LOGOS

Exod. 25:8; Isaiah 53; Rom. 5:18, 19; 2 Cor. 3:16–18; Eph. 2:4–10; Titus 2:11–14

The Search for a Savior (Rom. 5:18, 19)

Sin happened, and humans have been suffering ever since. God, however, decided that He would send Jesus to die for us. Jesus did so; and now we're saved if we believe that Jesus did, in fact, die for our sins. Romans 5:18, 19 gives us a simple idea to follow. One man sinned, and because of that, we all are sinners. To reverse this, it took one righteous Man. The only question is, *Who was that Man?* Are we still in search of a Savior, or has He been found?

The Bible plainly states that *condemnation* is a direct result of the *disobedience* of one man. Sin entered the world when disobedience came into the picture, *because of one person*. Adam's sin marked the beginning of the end. However, we

are not left without hope. The text adds that a *single righteous act* led to the *justification* of all humankind. Who would be that righteous Person to reverse the effects of sin? What righteous act would cover the condemned and make them acceptable again in the eyes of God?

**Do we desire God's grace,
yet still try to buy our pardon
by doing good things?**

The Man and the *righteous* act refer to Jesus and His death on the cross. The decision to go ahead with the plan of salvation, which ultimately called for the sacrifice of God's own Son, ended the search for a Savior. Through Jesus, God can find favor in His people once again and can justify all who confess and repent of their sins.

Undeserved Credit Offered (Exod. 25:8)

In Exodus 25, God instructs the Israelites to build a place of worship so that He could dwell in their midst. This is quite extraordinary. People usually build places of worship for their gods without being asked to, but here we see God telling His people that He desired to be with them. What a marvelous God the true God is! This was grace definitely credited beyond the Israelites' credit limit. With all the Israelites could do, they could never have afforded a God so loving and powerful. People choose which gods to serve; but here we read that God chose which people would serve Him.

The word *grace* in the Old Testament is often translated as "favor." Here we find that the Israelites had somehow found favor in the eyes of God. Of all the nations in existence at that time, God chose Israel over the rest. He chose to lead them, to

guide them, to deal with their unfaithfulness and complaints. Undeserved credit was offered to this people.

Today we are all in the situation where we have undeserved credit being offered to us. By God's grace, we receive salvation by believing in Jesus Christ as our Savior (John 3:16). God easily could have made it difficult for us to obtain salvation. However, somewhere, somehow, we found favor in the eyes of God, and that favor offers us the gift of salvation. God is waiting for us to accept Him into our lives! Revelation 3:20 says, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (NRSV).

Freedom Beckons! (2 Cor. 3:16–18)

Paul writes of a veil that covers our minds. This veil represents something that inhibits us from having a solid connection with God. This veil is something that prevents us from embracing freedom that can be found in Christ alone. Second Corinthians 3:16–18 tells us that with our unveiled faces, we will be transformed into Christ's image.

The children of Israel couldn't look at Moses' face after Moses had met with God, because they couldn't stand in the presence of God's glory. They did not have that connection with God that Moses had. For the sake of the Israelites, a veil had to cover the glory of God that still lingered around Moses, even after he had left God's presence (Exod. 34:34).

To have the veils removed and our minds focused on God requires full submission to God. Only He can transform us and bring freedom to our lives. What veils are covering us, preventing the glory of God from showering upon us? Do we desire God's grace, yet still try to buy our pardon by doing good things, hoping that eventually we will be qualified to receive His grace?

Grace the Purifier (Titus 2:11–14)

The grace of God has appeared, and it brings salvation to all people who embrace it! A simple diagram describes to us what Titus 2:11–14 promises,

Embrace God → God Purifies Your Life → Salvation Is Yours

We are promised a new life because God has found favor in us. He stands at the door of our hearts, knocking, hoping that we will open up to Him.

Will you allow God to put you on track and work His will in your life?

REACT

1. How would you describe the effect God's grace is having on your life?
2. Are you willing to allow God to put you on track and to use you as He helps you to develop a Christlike character?

"An Undeserved Gift"

TESTIMONY

Eph. 2:4-10

"When condemned for his crime, the thief had become hopeless and despairing; but strange, tender thoughts now spring up. He calls to mind all he has heard of Jesus, how He has healed the sick and pardoned sin. He has heard the words of those who believed in Jesus and followed Him weeping. He has seen and read the title above the Saviour's head. He has heard the passers-by repeat it, some with grieved, quivering lips, others with jesting and mockery. The Holy Spirit illuminates his mind, and little by little the chain of evidence is joined together. In Jesus, bruised, mocked, and hanging upon the cross, he sees the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. Hope is mingled with anguish in his voice as the helpless, dying soul casts himself upon a dying Saviour. 'Lord, remember me,' he cries, 'when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.'"¹

Scripture defines grace as something that teaches us how to live.

Quickly the answer came. Soft and melodious the tone, full of love, compassion, and power the words: " 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise' " (Luke 23:43, NKJV).

Jesus' promise is yet another "reminder that grace does not depend on what we have done for God but rather what God has done for us."²

Scripture defines grace as something that teaches us how to live. If the thief had been allowed to live, he would have learned that our "growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we are to grow in grace. He is not only the Author, but the Finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always. He is to be with us, not only at the beginning and the end of our course, but at every step of the way. David says, 'I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.' Psalm 16:8."³

When we receive God's grace, we are to manifest it to the people around us, friends and foes alike. Even when Jesus was crucified on the cross, He prayed for His enemies, " 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' " (Luke 23:34, NKJV).

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 750.

2. Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), p. 55.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 69.

Grace

EVIDENCE

Eph. 2:4–10

Ephesus was close to Paul's heart. He had spent three years living among the Ephesians and preaching to them (Acts 19:1–20). While he was a prisoner in Rome, Paul was allowed visitors. One of them was Tychicus of Ephesus, and it was to him that Paul gave the letter to the church in Ephesus (Eph. 6:21).

The book of Ephesians was written with one overarching theme: unity; unity in Christ, because we all are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8). This grace has been given freely to Jews and Gentiles. All who believe share the same mercy of Christ, who takes away our sins. Paul reminds his fellow believers that because this is a "gift of God," we are not to become proud, but to share this gift with all.

Paul sees the church as a living extension of Christ's body. All of us are saved by grace "in Christ" and belong to the body of Christ. "Although 'in Christ' is the key phrase, it is difficult to select a key verse, for there is scarcely a verse that does not present in one form or another the basic theme . . . all are 'in Christ.'"^{*} Christ is the center of all things, and as we draw closer to Him, we unite ourselves with fellow believers. For this we are called to serve in humility, possess a high moral standard, and build a loving relationship with our families.

**Paul reminds the church
where the real battle lies.**

Paul encourages all believers to a new life in Christ—a life led by the Holy Spirit, putting aside our evil desires and submitting to His will. There is no need for those who belong in Christ's household to nurture bitterness, anger, gossip, and any other form of malice (Eph. 4:31).

Finally, Paul reminds the church where the real battle lies: "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:10–12, NIV).

REACT

What are some of the things we can do to strengthen the body of Christ? Are there any barriers in the church that need to be broken? If so, what are they, and how can we deal with them?

^{*}*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 995.

Solving Conflicts Graciously

HOW-TO

Matt. 18:15; 2 Cor. 5:17–19

Think of the ego as the image we project of ourselves to the world. When this image is injured or threatened, we become hurt and are inclined to react in a destructive manner. When we are emotionally wounded, we cannot afford to trust our nature. Instead, we should follow Christ's protocol as given in Matthew's Gospel. Read Matthew 18:15.

Jesus' command can be broken down into five steps:

Accept that conflict will occur. Lack of conflict does not necessarily reflect spiritual maturity; it could be merely apathy. It takes honesty to acknowledge that relational breakdowns exist. It takes maturity to address them with the purpose of reconciliation, instead of discarding the relationship.

Take ownership of the breakdown. Anger often contains an element of self-righteousness that causes us to blame the other person. However, Jesus says "You," indicating that the responsibility to take the first step toward reconciliation is ours, even when it is the other person who started it.

Go directly to the other person. It is tempting to rationalize that by discussing

Public ventilation feeds aggression.

the other person's flaws and neuroses, others can pray for that person more intelligently. However, Jesus commanded that we go *directly* to the other person involved.

Talking to anyone other than that person merely rehearses your angry feelings¹ and biases the listeners' perception.

Be tactful. Jesus says, "When the two of you are alone." This avoids unnecessarily embarrassing someone else by forcing her or him to respond in front a crowd. Public ventilation feeds aggression² and incites anger in the person you're venting on. So, approach the other person the way you would want to be approached—with sensitivity and tact.

Seek reconciliation. The aim is to restore the relationship. Direct confrontation can escalate conflict and create damaging emotional wounds. Which is why, if our purpose is not reconciliation, then we are not ready for Matthew 18:15. Reconciliation is difficult and can be painful, but it is Jesus' will for us (2 Cor. 5:17–19).

1. Carol Tavris, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*, rev. ed. (New York: Touchstone Books, 1989), pp. 132, 133.

2. Howard Kassinove, ed., *Anger Disorders* (Washington, D.C.: Taylor and Francis, 1992), pp. 14–16.

Earning Grace?

OPINION

Isa. 64:6; 2 Cor. 1:3–7; 11:16–30; 12:9

Many of us go through life with the mind-set that if we want something, we must earn it by working hard for it. Such a mind-set can be valuable when we're pursuing an educational degree or saving money to purchase a nice car or house. However, while it can motivate us to stay disciplined, it also can become a stumbling block in our walk with God. We all know that we are saved through faith and that obedience is a result of the Holy Spirit living in our hearts. Yet so often, we still seem to act as if we must work hard to earn our salvation.

If there was ever a way to describe God's unconditional love for us, it would be through His grace. It is precisely because we are worthless and our works are like filthy rags that His unfailing, unconditional love can be put to the test. If we were worthy of God's love, there would be no need for His grace, and Christ would not have had to die on the cross for us.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul boasts about his weaknesses as if they were medals (2 Cor. 1:3–7; 11:16–30; 12:9). Despite going through injustices, humiliations, and sufferings, he wears these scars with pride, because he has come to realize that there is no way to earn salvation. Grace does not remove the scars from our body, nor does it make us perfect beings. Wrongs that we do will not become rights. However, God's grace is like a priceless, beautiful gown that is tailored to fit each of us perfectly. When you and I wear this gown, the scars and the memories of pain and sin are still there, but all God sees is people fit to live for eternity with Him because we believe in Jesus. It is God's perfect solution for making imperfect fallen beings perfect in His eyes. He says to us as He said to Paul so many years ago, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV). Thus it is that through our weaknesses God can shine the brightest.

**Through our weaknesses
God can shine the brightest.**

Friday
May 15

Redeeming Grace

EXPLORATION

Rom. 5:8

CONCLUDE

Grace means getting more than we deserve. In fact, when we experience God's grace, we get the complete opposite of what we are worthy of receiving. God, in His infinite love, has chosen us to be His children and His heirs. He desires so strongly to be in our midst that He asks to dwell with us, even coming to earth as a human to reconcile us with Himself.

Reconciliation requires that we embrace God with every fiber of our beings as we learn to live in the full abundance of His grace every moment of every day.

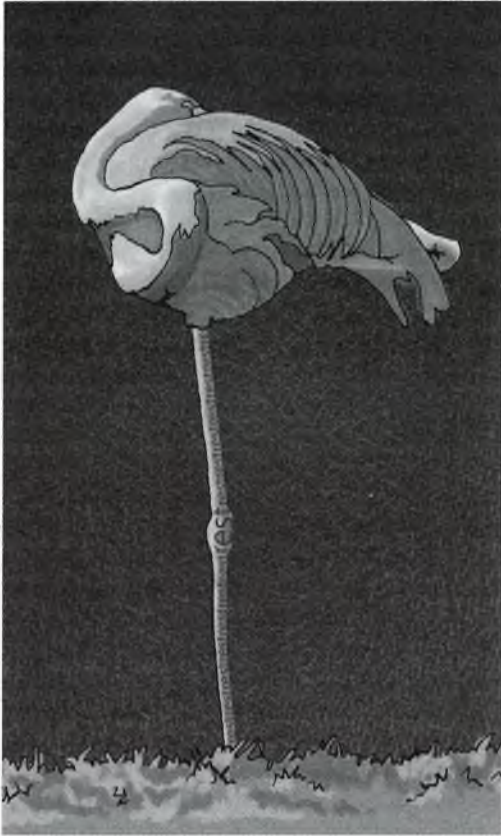
CONSIDER

- Role-playing the conversation in heaven among Members of the Godhead about the plan of salvation.
- Baking cookies for someone with whom you have had a recent conflict and delivering them with an apology for your part in the disagreement, without expecting anything in return.
- Listening to the song "Grace Like Rain" (<http://www.goldusa.com/FCD/F246/TAgracelikeraintrk04.ram>) or the more traditional "Amazing Grace" (hymn number 108 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*) and thinking about how the lyrics match your experience with grace.
- Sharing in a small group what grace means in your personal experience with God.
- Organizing the Bible passages in this week's lesson into a Bible study you could share with a nonbeliever.
- Searching for images to photograph in nature or day-to-day life that could symbolize grace for you.
- Journaling your response to Ephesians 6:10–12, resolving to put on the full armor of God every day.

CONNECT

Chris Blake, *Searching for a God to Love* (Nampa, Idaho.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1999), chap. 4, "Freedom's Mortgage Payments."

Rest



"Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath' "
(Mark 2:27, 28, NRSV).

The Free Gift of Rest

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 58:13, 14; Jer. 29:11; Ezek. 20:12; Mark 2:28

One contributing factor to many diseases today is stress. The doctor often prescribes rest alongside the requisite drugs in curing or controlling an illness. Rest is the panacea for stress and all the burdens of life. It is vital in reinvigorating the body and reawakening the spiritual energies. Rest is God's prescription for well-being, because He wants us to prosper and to be in good health. Our loving Lord has given us the gift of rest on the Sabbath day after six days of toil and labor. What love!

We live in a fast-moving world where we are constantly being bombarded by materialism and many other social ills. However, "the Sabbath calls our thoughts to nature, and brings us into communion with the Creator. In the song of the bird, the sighing of the trees, and the music of the sea, we still may hear His voice who talked with Adam in Eden in the cool of the day. And as we behold His power in nature we find comfort, for the word that created all things is that which speaks life to the soul."*

**Rest is God's prescription
for well-being.**

We can pause once weekly to be refreshed and rejuvenated as a result of spending a full 24 hours away from the other days' activities.

The Sabbath is a symbol of God's ability to save us from sin and our desire to have Him do so. God blessed the Sabbath, and it was thereby declared to be a special object of divine favor and a day that brings special blessings to His creatures. God sanctified the Sabbath, making it holy; and He set it apart for the purpose of enriching the divine-human relationship. In such a world as we live in, these factors are essential to our well-being.

As we go through this week, let us prepare ourselves for a biblical understanding of such a precious element of our faith—the Sabbath's rest.

**The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281, 282

Finding Comfort in Rest

EVIDENCE

Gen. 2:3; Exod. 31:16, 17

Exodus 31:17 tells us that God rested and was refreshed on the Sabbath. The verb “rested,” *shabath*, means literally to cease from labor or activity.* The Sabbath is not merely a rest from physical and mental work. It is also a separation from the mundane realities of life. It is an antidote for the miseries of life because it provides a glimpse of eternal rest with Jesus.

When life becomes tiresome, people tend to find relief with meaningless and sometimes dangerous activities. This may occur in the form of alcoholism, recreational drug use, premarital sex, extramarital sex, et cetera. However, the only source of true rest is in God, the Creator of rest. The Lord has given us the Sabbath as a full 24 hours to reflect upon Him and to replenish our mental and physical strength.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was predicted that as society became more industrialized and filled with gadgets to reduce one's workload that many would move away from religion and allow science, reason, and logic to rule. However, in recent times, there has been a backlash against this theory, because more people are realizing that only in Jesus can human beings find rest. There is hope and assurance in God's Word, causing the human heart to rest from worrying about having enough money to pay the bills.

**The Sabbath is God's gift
to us.**

The Sabbath is God's gift to us so that we can rest from all the toils of life and be reminded in special ways to abide in God's promises and power. The devil works hard to destroy the blessing of the Sabbath; but let us endeavor to keep this day holy and to reap the benefits of this gift God has given to humanity.

REACT

1. Why did our Creator Himself rest on the Sabbath day after He had created the earth and all that was in it?

2. When life becomes tiresome, to whom do you first turn, and why?

**Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (2005 edition), General Conference Ministerial Department, p. 282.

The Why, What, and Who

LOGOS

Gen. 2:2, 3; Deut. 5:12–15; Isa. 58:12–14; Ezek. 20:12; Heb. 4:9–11

The seventh-day Sabbath originated at Creation. God ended His work and rested. Exodus 20:8 also calls us to remember the Sabbath. The commandment given at Mount Sinai was simply a reminder of a preexisting truth.

Why Did God Institute the Sabbath? (Gen. 2:2, 3; Deut. 5:12–15; Heb. 4:9–11)

The Sabbath is a time to reflect on the awesome power of our Creator. In Genesis 2:3, the Hebrew word for *blessed* means “to kneel,” and the Hebrew word for *hallowed* means “to praise.” Hence, the Sabbath is a special 24 hours to kneel before our Maker in praise.

God instituted the Sabbath as a day of rest during which we can be recharged and reminded that He is our God and that without Him, we are nothing. As we go

through the bustle of life, we often neglect our relationship with God. Consequently, He has given us an entire day to rest in Him.

**God is the only One who
can make the Sabbath holy.**

As we observe the Sabbath, we are reminded that it is an everlasting

memorial of Creation. The observance of the Sabbath is linked inseparably to the act of creation (Exod. 20:11). It is also a sign of redemption, of when God redeemed the Israelites from slavery. Today, humans need to escape from the slavery that comes with greed, power, and social inequality.

The Sabbath also reminds us of God’s sanctifying power. Only He has the power to make us holy. In addition, the Sabbath is a symbol of our desire to obey His commandments. It also is a time of fellowship, when we can come together with our fellow human beings in Christian love and fellowship. It is a sign of righteousness by faith, a natural fruitage of the righteousness Christ shares with us. However, we do not observe the Sabbath to be righteous. Those who keep the Sabbath in this way are legalists. Rather, the Sabbath is a symbol of resting in Christ’s righteousness. All who enter into this rest, rest from trying to save themselves through good works. This rest is a true spiritual rest and the ultimate rest to which God calls all people.

The Sabbath, therefore, is essential in reminding us of God’s love for us and for us to show our love and appreciation to Him.

What Is Holy Time? (Gen. 2:2, 3)

The definition of *holy* is a combination of perfect health, happiness, and wholeness, which is a sense of completeness and perfection. After God completed Creation, the Sabbath symbolized its wholeness and perfection. Indeed, Sabbath itself contains blessings that include health, happiness, and wholeness.

The Hebrew word for *holy* is *kaheoesha* and has the connotation of "separateness." As the word suggests, holy time is a time set apart for holy things, a time that is consecrated and special.

Who or What Makes the Sabbath Holy? (Gen. 2:3; Isa. 58:13, 14)

God is the only One who can make the Sabbath holy. This is why no one can think to change His law by keeping the Sabbath on any other day of the week. So when people seek to do differently from the Word of God, they will not receive the true benefits of the Sabbath. When Jesus came to earth, He said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17, 18, NKJV).

Because God made the Sabbath holy, He tells us to keep it holy in acknowledgement of His authority. As we have seen so far, the Bible gives evidence that from Creation, God has called people to Sabbath worship.

We make the Sabbath holy by focusing entirely on spiritual things rather than the stresses of work and other aspects of our daily lives. Isaiah 58:13, 14 tells us how to keep the Sabbath holy. We should not engage in daily pursuits on that day. We should enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the Lord's holy day. We should honor the Lord in everything we do on that day. If we do so, He will be our delight, and He will give us great honor and a full share of the inheritance He promised Jacob. "Acts of necessity and mercy are permitted on the Sabbath, the sick and suffering are at all times to be cared for; but unnecessary labor is to be strictly avoided."*

Those who keep the Sabbath holy accept Christ as their Creator and Savior and the Bible as truth (Ezek. 20:20). As the Sabbath becomes more and more a part of our lives, we will become more prepared for Christ when He comes.

REACT

1. If the Sabbath offers so many benefits and there is clear evidence that it exists and should be observed, why do so many people neglect to observe it?
2. What will happen to those who rebel against the Sabbath, and why? (Isa. 66:23, 24).

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 307.

Sabbath Keepers Repairing the Breach

TESTIMONY

Isa. 58:12–14; Rev. 11:19; 14:9–12

“God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh, sanctifying this day, and setting it apart from all others as holy to Himself, to be observed by His people throughout their generations.

“But the man of sin, exalting himself above God, sitting in the temple of God, and showing himself to be God, *thought* to change times and laws. This power, thinking to prove that it was not only equal to God, but above God, changed the rest day, placing the first day of the week where the seventh should be. And the Protestant world has taken this child of the papacy to be regarded as sacred. In the Word of God this is called her fornication.”¹

Who “shall build the old waste places” and “raise up the foundations of many generations” (Isa. 58:12, NKJV)? Who are the people who have had light from heaven to see that a breach has been made in the law of God? In Revelation, John says, “Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple” (Rev. 11:19, NKJV). “As the temple of God was opened unto His people, the light of the law of God, which was in the ark, shone forth. Those who receive this light are brought to view in the

**“This power . . . changed
the rest day.”**

proclamation of the third angel’s message.

“This angel is seen flying in the midst of heaven, ‘saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. . . . Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.’

“This is the people that are repairing the breach in the law of God. They see that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment has been supplanted by a spurious sabbath, a day that has no sanction in the Word of God. Amid great opposition they become loyal to their God, and take their position under the standard of the third angel.”²

1. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 979.

2. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1152.

How the Sabbath Becomes Meaningful . . .

Wednesday
May 20

HOW-TO

Isa. 58:13, 14

The arrival of the Sabbath as a day of rest brings hope, joy, meaning to life, courage, and relaxation. It provides additional time to commune with God (for an entire day) through worship, prayer, song, and the study of and meditation on the Word. It is also a time to help in special ways the less fortunate.

How can we recognize the Sabbath as a day of rest and delight? We will look at three ways:

A perpetual memorial of Creation. The Sabbath memorializes Creation (Exod. 20:11, 12). Those who observe it as such acknowledge God as their Creator and their rightful Sovereign, that they are the work of His hands and the subject of His authority. Thus the Sabbath was given to all humankind. As long as we worship God because He is our Creator, the Sabbath will function as a sign and memorial of Creation.

A time of fellowship. God created the animals to be our companions. And for a higher level of companionship, God gave man and woman to each other. However, where the

Without the Sabbath, every day would be alike.

Sabbath is concerned, God gave humanity the highest level of companionship—a relationship with Him. Human beings were not made to associate only with animals or themselves. They also were made to fellowship with God.*

A time of rest. Without the Sabbath, every day would be alike, devoted to secular pursuits. The Sabbath is designed as a day that not only provides spiritual enrichment and communion with our God but also a means of physical rest—rest for our tired bodies from hard labor and the stresses of life. God says, “‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’” (Matt. 11:28, NKJV).

REACT

1. In what way are the three aspects discussed above related?
2. What are some other ways in which we can recognize the Sabbath to be a day of rest and delight?

* See *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (2005 edition), General Conference Ministerial Department, pp. 281–289.

A Higher Level of Rest

OPINION

Matt. 11:28–30; Heb. 4:9–11

Rest is a vital component of good health. It equips us with the ability to face a new day by rejuvenating our body's energy. However, global competitiveness does not allow most of us to get adequate rest. " 'Hurry sickness' is the malaise of the modern world. We rush from one appointment to another, and from one task to the next. Many of us in the West are perpetually in search of materialism and money as we charge up the ladder of success." Hence, tiredness has become a major complaint amongst us.

On the seventh day, God rested and was reenergized, yet He did not rest because He was exhausted. He rested from His previous occupation of creating the world. God also rested because He expected humans to rest; He set an example for human beings to follow (Exod. 20:11). In the same way, if we have vowed to follow Him, it is essential that we ourselves rest on the seventh day.²

We also need to take rest to a higher level. After God finished His work, He was not suffering from exhaustion or fatigue. In the same way, God does not want us to work until we are exhausted, especially if we are working just to obtain material goods.

**" 'Hurry sickness' is the
malaise of the modern
world."**

I believe the Sabbath was designed and can be viewed as a symbol of rest in both the physical and spiritual sense. It is not only necessary to rest on the seventh day, but every day of our lives. God Himself was not exhausted or overworked after all His labor. He is calling us to work and rest as He did.

REACT

1. What is rest? Is it more physical than spiritual? Be able to explain your answer.
2. How can we actually find time to be physically and spiritually rested?

1. John Ross Schroeder, "Why We Need a Weekly Day of Rest," *Good News*, <http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn49/restday.htm> (accessed April 4, 2008).

2. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (2005 edition), General Conference Ministerial Department, p. 285.

Taking Rest to a Higher Level

EXPLORATION

Mark 2:27, 28

CONCLUDE

God's Creation was full of beauty and delight. However, there was nothing more delightful than a culminating day of rest—the ultimate demonstration of God's love. The Lord could have kept creating for all eternity without becoming exhausted, but He rested for our good. It's easy for humans to bypass this great gift for many reasons. The enemy of our souls has convinced the world that the Sabbath is not important, that it's so insignificant, it can be supplanted by another day. Jesus showed through His words and actions that the commandments—the keeping of the Sabbath included—were not meant to be disregarded. Rather, His mission was to fulfill God's laws, thus making the keeping of the Sabbath a consistent reminder of our communion with God. The pact God made with Adam and Eve to rest on the Sabbath was designed to have an everlasting effect. This was done for our own good.

CONSIDER

- Hiking on nearby trails on the Sabbath and experiencing the relaxation that ensues from your walk.
- Writing a poem or song that encompasses the rest you experience on the Sabbath.
- Praying with a neighbor or friend regarding his or her questions about the Bible and the Sabbath.
- Researching the sunset and sundown times for the rest of the year and charting them on a color-coded graph.
- Leading a Bible study with your youth group during a Sabbath sunset in a natural setting like the beach, the mountains, or a park.
- Visiting a convalescent home or a homeless shelter on the Sabbath and volunteering to help out or to lead out in worship.

CONNECT

Counsels on Sabbath School Work.

Ned S. Ashton, *The Bible Sabbath* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Assn., 1984); Karen Holford, *100 Creative Activities for Sabbath* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Assn., 2006).

Heaven



**“ ‘In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come back and take you to be with me’ ”
(John 14:2, 3, NIV).**

I Can't Even Imagine

INTRODUCTION

Rev. 21:4

Heaven. A place of fluffy white clouds, chubby babies with small wings flying about, and angels playing a simple tune on huge golden harps all day long while singing mystical tunes. Exciting, right? Not exactly! Yet this is the image today's media paints.

That's why I'm grateful for biblical authors such as Isaiah and John and for modern prophets such as Ellen G. White, who gave us all a true picture of that sweet Beulah Land above. In Isaiah 65:17, we read about a new heaven and a new earth. In Revelation 21:1–4, the exiled John wrote about a place where tears, the stresses of this world, and death would be no more. Ellen White reminded us that heaven “will be more glorious than [our] brightest imagination can portray.”* Now that's an exciting picture.

Have you ever thought long and hard about heaven? To be honest, I try not to. At least, not too often. Because every time I do, I'm stumped by the concept of eternity. Of course, seeing my Jesus, long-lost loved ones (especially my mom), and all my favorite Bible characters, such as Joseph, David, and Job, will be wonderful. Sure, playing with lions, discovering worlds unknown, and eating at the heavenly banquet will be amazing. However, thinking of living forever and ever and ever—my goodness, I can't comprehend it.

Life as we know it marches to the cadence of time. Heaven, however, exists outside of time. Even though I can't fathom it, I'm awestruck to know that my God loves us so much that He left the glory of heaven to die for our sins and is now preparing mansions for us. What an awesome God!

Each year people spend millions of dollars trying to defy the passage of time. From Botox® to cosmetic surgeries to health club memberships, we are obsessed with youth and living forever. Yet we trade the only sure chance at eternity for the finite pleasures of this earth that fade and tomorrow are no more. What a waste.

Take it from Isaiah, John, Ellen White, and myself—heaven will not be a place you'll want to miss. If you lose out on it, you lose out on everything. This week we will be learning a bit about heaven and how God has made it possible for us to be there with Him.

Now that's an exciting
picture.

*Steps to Christ, p. 86

There's No Place Like Home

LOGOS

Eccles. 9:5, 6; Col. 1:3–6, 10–14; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Rev. 21:1–4, 8

Dead or Alive (Eccles. 9:5, 6)

In many old western films, the sheriff of a town musters a posse of strong, law-abiding men to capture an outlaw. His final words to the anxious, horse-riding, gun-spinning men would be to bring him in, “dead or alive.” Many people today believe that a mother, father, brother, sister, or friend who has died is still alive in heaven and looking down on them. This subtle but deadly lie originated from the father of lies in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:4).

Satan’s “not surely” theology worked to deceive the Eden couple, and he still uses it today. He dares not declare to the Christian community that there is no God, but like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, he has caused many good Christians to believe in his “not surely” doctrine. What were the consequences for Adam and Eve?

**Satan’s “not surely”
theology worked to
deceive the Eden couple.**

Devastating! What are the consequences for us? Shades of subtle disbelief of God’s love, power, and provision. Equally devastating. Then we question, Can the blood of Jesus really deliver us from all manner of sin? Is heaven really a literal place?

Are the dead really dead?

Solomon declared in Ecclesiastes 9:5, “For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.” So how could the deceased possibly give guidance, instruction, or protection to the living? (Also see Psalm 146:3, 4.)

Two Heavens? (Acts 1:10, 11; 1 Cor. 2:9; Col. 1:9–14)

The word *heaven* appears over 250 times in the New Testament. This is more than the word *love*, which is mentioned 180 times. So there must be something rather special about heaven. Luke 17:21 and Colossians 1:9–14 make it clear that the inhabitants of earth who intend to make it to the heaven above will first experience heaven on earth.

Heaven is a real place. If we believe in a real, physical Jesus, we must then believe in a real, physical heaven, which He has promised to us. According to Acts 1:11, it was a real, physical Jesus who ascended into a real, physical place (heaven). The reality of heaven is also supported by Mark 16:19. After Jesus spoke to real disciples, He was physically transported to a physical place.

It is within this real place that Jesus promised to have real, physical mansions prepared for us (John 14:2). It is this hope (Col. 1:5), and to be a part of what eyes have not seen nor ears heard (1 Cor. 2:9), which buoys us up. However, the greatest beauty of heaven will be to behold Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb.12:2), and to dwell with Him forever.

Lo, He Comes (1 Cor. 6:9–11; 1 Thess. 4:13–18)

We have established that heaven is a real and beautiful place, with the eternal presence of Jesus as its crowning glory. So how do we get there? First Corinthians 6:9, 10 gives a detailed picture of those who would forfeit this free gift. The list in these verses is not exhaustive, but they include some of the characteristics of those who choose not to allow the Holy Spirit to transform their stony hearts into hearts of flesh (Ezek. 11:19). According to 1 Corinthians 6:11, those who do reach heaven were not always “angels.” They were filthy and therefore unworthy before God’s presence. What made the difference? They were washed by the blood of the Lamb.

The Greek word *apolouo* (pronounced ap-ol-oo-o) seems to suggest more than just a wetting. It implies that something was washed away or washed fully. The inhabitants of the new heaven would not have had just a superficial relationship with Christ. They would lovingly have abided in His presence, allowing His Spirit to wash them completely, cleansing them of all sin. So there is a comforting hope for the believer (1 Thess. 4:13–18) about those who died in Christ. We are not to fear death, for Jesus’ loud, triumphant, panoramic reentry into this sin-battered earth shall awaken the righteous dead from their graves. Then those who are alive and in Christ, will be caught up with them to meet Him in the air.

The End of the End (Rev. 21:1–5, 8)

In Revelation 21:1–4, the apostle John was given a vision of a new heaven and a new earth. The new earth was without sin. He also saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, prepared for those who had overcome. Then a great voice told him that God will dwell with His people in the New Jerusalem, and that He will wipe away all tears from their eyes and put an end to all pain, suffering, and death, making all things new and reigning with them forever.

Amen and amen.

REACT

1. What are some of the things you can do to help someone who does not believe in the existence of heaven?
2. What destiny awaits those whose choices exclude them from heaven?

Monday
May 25

"Oh, the Wonders of Redeeming Love!"

TESTIMONY

Isa. 65:17, 18

"Before the ransomed throng is the Holy City. Jesus opens wide the pearly gates, and the nations that have kept the truth enter in. There they behold the Paradise of God, the home of Adam in his innocence. Then that voice, richer than any music that ever fell on mortal ear, is heard, saying: 'Your conflict is ended.' 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

"Now is fulfilled the Saviour's prayer for His disciples: 'I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am.' 'Faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy' (Jude 24), Christ presents to the Father the purchase of His blood, declaring: 'Here am I, and the children whom Thou hast given Me.' 'Those that Thou gavest Me I have kept.' Oh, the wonders of redeeming love! the rapture of that hour when the infinite Father, looking upon the ransomed, shall

behold His image, sin's discord banished, its blight removed, and the human once more in harmony with the divine! . . .

"The length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of redeeming love are but dimly comprehended.

The plan of redemption will not be fully understood, even when the ransomed see as they are seen and know as they are known; but through the eternal ages new truth will continually unfold to the wondering and delighted mind. Though the griefs and pains and temptations of earth are ended and the cause removed, the people of God will ever have a distinct, intelligent knowledge of what their salvation has cost."^{*}

REACT

1. What are some ways to ensure that we remain "faultless" unto the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

2. "The people of God will ever have a distinct, intelligent knowledge of what their salvation has cost." Why do you think God allows this knowledge to remain with us?

^{*}*The Great Controversy*, pp. 646, 651.

Going to Heaven!

EVIDENCE

Isa. 65:17-25

Isaiah ministered at a time of spiritual decline and bore messages that pointed to a very bleak future for God's people. With the threat of Sennacherib and the Assyrians and the years of exile in Babylonian captivity, Isaiah and some of the faithful in Judah must have longed for a message of hope, of heaven, for Isaiah pointed to a time when new heavens and a new earth might be realized (Isa. 65:17-25).

The fulfillment of this prophecy in its immediate context depended largely on the attitude and actions of the Hebrews. However, the principles and conditions can be applied to all who have accepted Christ. Isaiah's message suggests that, in a sense, heaven might be a morally transformed earth inhabited by a physically improved population of believers. This position need not be falsified in order to appreciate the certainty of Christ's second coming and the ushering in of a New Jerusalem that descends from heaven.

New Testament writers correctly applied these prophecies to the return of Christ and the millennium which follows (Rev. 20:2-7). Isaiah envisioned for Israel a heaven in which there would be a low infant mortality rate, a long average life span, and a new Jerusalem. The new Israel of God, the Christian church, may enjoy all these blessings. The low infant mortality rate would be elevated to nonexistent and the long average life span would be updated to eternity.

The Christian today certainly has good reason to be encouraged. If only for the temporary benefits, and of course, with the weight of eternity looming on the horizon, heaven must be on our minds. For many unbelievers, heaven and hell are right here and now, and life is what they make it. However, believers can be doubly optimistic, because we can be in heaven even while on our way to heaven.*

REACT

How is the interpretation of Isaiah's image of heaven for ancient Israel similar and/or different with your view and expectation of heaven today?

*This article is based on material from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 329-339.

**For many unbelievers,
heaven and hell are right
here and now.**

Wednesday
May 27

Making the Promise of Heaven Real

HOW-TO

Isa. 25:9; 1 Thess. 4:13–18

"Many were the messages of comfort given the church by the prophets of old. 'Comfort ye, comfort ye My people' (Isaiah 40:1), was Isaiah's commission from God."* The apostle Paul also spoke words of comfort and hope to the Thessalonians who were mourning their dead (1 Thess. 4:13–18). Today, we are permitted to look beyond the trials of our present life to the triumphs of the future when Jesus will come to take us home.

When Christ comes again, Scripture says that "he will swallow up death in victory; and . . . wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isa. 25:8). "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

Christ also said that He was going to prepare a place for us, and that He will come again for us, so that we could be with Him where He now is (John 14:2, 3). These and many more Scriptures point to the end of life here on earth and the beginning of life in the new heaven and earth.

**You can create a little
heaven on this earth.**

What can we do to ensure that heaven is not just a state of mind, but a real, physical place? Following are two important steps:

Study and meditate upon the Scriptures that deal with both Christ's return and heaven. During your daily devotion, read Scriptures and Spirit of Prophecy passages relevant to the subject. Ask God for His Spirit to instruct you and enable you to believe and trust His Word.

Share some of your time in serving the underprivileged. You can create a little heaven on this earth by visiting the sick, bringing cheer to the depressed, caring for the elderly, and befriending children and teens in crisis. By performing these acts of kindness, you will have experienced a foretaste of heaven here and now.

REACT

In what ways has the promise of the second coming of Christ impacted your present life?

* *Prophets and Kings*, p. 722.

Simple Enough for Me

OPINION

Eccles. 9:5; Rev. 21:4

Her tones were hushed and solemn, her body tense. She returned the phone to the cradle and summoned my brother and me to my room. We obeyed without argument. Mom never appeared this serious even after we willingly disobeyed. The situation demanded unquestioning obedience.

All three of us sat down on the bed, and mom broke the news that my aunt had been killed in a motorcycle accident. As a third-grader, I understood these words immediately. My fun-loving aunt would not be spending another summer taking care of my brother and me while my mom took continuing-education courses. No more gymnastics in the front yard. No more television shows that normally weren't allowed. She taught me how to tie my shoes. She told me what the people were arguing about in the car next to ours (she was deaf and could read lips). She gave me a deeper understanding of any individual's potential. She was amazing! I cried uncontrollably.

Mom let us cry; then she read several passages from the Bible, including Ecclesiastes 9:5 and Revelation 21:4: "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing"; "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." I felt such peace and hope. In the midst of her own pain, my mom shared the gift of God's words and presence.

**Mom let us cry; then she
read several passages from
the Bible.**

I understood and was so thankful someone trusted me to comprehend the message meant for even a small child. This early experience marked the beginning of my journey with the Bible and allowed me the privilege of knowledge beyond the realm of human words. My mother's decision to share God's words of comfort rather than her own have proven entirely beneficial. I'm thankful that my first experience with death and heaven came from the most trustworthy Source.

REACT

1. What are some common contradictions between popular belief and reality, which could easily be clarified with biblical passages?
2. Look back to your first experience with death. How did you react to it? How does knowing the truth about death help you to deal with death now?

More Than Imaginings

EXPLORATION

Acts 1:1–10; 1 Thessalonians 4; Revelation 21; 22

CONCLUDE

Like a siren's song, John Lennon's beautiful, haunting tune lures us into his "Imagine," and lulls us away from the magnificent hope we have in heaven. The melody of the song is so beautiful that even now it draws more than seven million viewers on YouTube. As Christians, we can be lured away from truth and hope. It really is easy to give in to the hypnotic pull of the world—imagine nothing better than what we ourselves can work to accomplish here and now. But Jesus left us with a burning hope for eternity. He has given us a solid hold on heaven. Only as we deliberately contemplate Him and this hope will we live not just for today, but with eternity in mind.

CONSIDER

- Writing free-association style about what you imagine heaven will be like.
- Reading Revelation 21 and 22. Did you notice anything you haven't thought about before? Compare or contrast that to what you wrote.
- Listing and counting all the physical descriptions of heaven (and the spiritual ones you perceived) as you read through Revelation 21 and 22.
- Drawing a picture or designing a graphic or montage that portrays scenes of what heaven might be like—or if you prefer, finding an art object or painting that portrays it.
- Meditating upon all the ways the hope of heaven impacts your life; how you live and how you interact with others and plan your future; your attitudes about life and death; your urgency to witness, etc.
- Interviewing people about their views of heaven. Share the results with your Sabbath School class.
- Planning for team evangelism—based upon your interviews and the answers you receive. Work together with another person or a small team from your Bible study group to refine your interview questions and develop a strategy for witnessing to individuals in the context of those questions.

CONNECT

The Desire of the Ages, chap. 87, "To My Father, and Your Father."

Discipleship



“ ‘This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples’ ” (John 15:8, NIV).

Dedicated-to- Death Discipleship

INTRODUCTION

Rom. 8:18; Rev. 14:12

The following piece was written by a young Christian pastor in Zimbabwe. It was found in his office shortly after he was martyred: "I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His and I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. . . .

"I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, or first, or tops, or recognized, or praised, or rewarded. I live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, [am] lift[ed] by prayer, and labor by Holy Spirit power.

"My face is set. My gait is fast. My goal is heaven. My road may be narrow, my way rough, my companions few, but my guide is reliable and my mission is clear.

"I will not be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed.

"My colors will be clear!"

"I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, or hesitate in the presence of the adversary. I will not negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the

pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

"I won't give up, shut up, or let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, or preached up for the cause of Christ.

"I am a disciple of Jesus. I must give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes. And, when He does come for His own, He'll have no problem recognizing me. My colors will be clear!"*

Discipleship means more than learning about Christ or imitating Him. It means following Him even unto a suffering that cannot be compared to the reward that awaits us.

REACT

What does the inventory of your life reveal about your determination to follow Christ?

* "Christian Commitment: My Colors," <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/commit.htm> (accessed April 3, 2006).

Evidence of Discipleship

EVIDENCE

1 Samuel 24; John 15:5, 8

Being a disciple of Christ involves two things—abiding in Him and bearing fruit. As we abide in Christ, we will bear much fruit. And as we bear fruit, we show that we are truly His disciples.

Abiding seems easy. Synonyms for the word *abiding* include staying and remaining. But what about bearing fruit? Is that easy? What is the fruit that we, as disciples, are to bear or produce? Read Galatians 5:22, 23.

These attributes are the characteristics of those who are abiding in Christ. They are the *evidence* of the Spirit of Christ in the life of a disciple. Let's explore one of these attributes as it is revealed in the Bible.

Peace

David was running for his life, when he and his men took refuge in the wilderness of En Gedi. There they came upon a cave where they could find shelter and stay hidden

David was running
for his life.

from view. While they rested, an unexpected stranger entered the cave to attend to his needs. To their surprise, this was no stranger, but the very one who sought to kill David—it was King Saul himself. David's men saw this as an opportunity for David to be free of his predator. So they urged him to kill Saul. But because David saw it as an opportunity to make peace with his enemy, he quietly cut off a corner of Saul's robe. When the unsuspecting king later discovered that David had spared his life, he repented of his hatred and his evil pursuit of David. Although as the story continues, this really would not be the end of the king's desperate determination to end David's life, David sought only to make peace with the king to the very end—until Saul's death.

In many modern-day situations, we find ourselves faced with the same choice as David—to fight or to retreat. However, the fruit of the Spirit is *peace*. Christ's disciples must often choose to be at peace rather than to retaliate or to take revenge on someone who has treated them wrong. During such times, let us all remember that disciples of Christ choose to “live peaceably with all” (Rom.12:18, NRSV).

REACT

Are you in a situation right now in which you must choose to fight or retreat? How can today's lesson help you in the decision you must make?

Who, Why, and How

LOGOS

Exod. 18:13–27; Matt. 4:19; 9:9; Mark 3:13–19; 8:31–38; Rom. 8:18

“And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people’” (Matt. 4:19, NRSV). Here now was a new job opportunity, a new career in Christ’s school. Though the deal was not fully understood, these disciples had teachable hearts. A teachable spirit is necessary to the ultimate success of any student, and is mandatory for a true disciple of Christ. In Mark 3:14, 15, Jesus calls His men and women to three basic activities. First, that they be with Him; second, that He would send them out to preach; and third, that they would have the power to heal and deliver people from Satan. So let’s explore each of these activities of discipleship.

Be With Jesus (Exod. 18:17–27; Mark 3:13–19)

It is vitally important that Christ’s disciples understand the value of *being* with Jesus. Jesus understood the principal that knowledge is gained by association.¹ “The godly give good advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray” (Prov. 12:26, NLT). Clearly it *does* matter who we hang out with. There is no escaping the influence of our friends. Furthermore, as disciples make associating with Christ their

So what is there to lose?

first work, they will discover balance and direction. In Exodus 18, Jethro warns Moses to refocus his energies. It is of interest that Jethro does not immediately launch into his famous organizational plan until later in the chapter. His first concern was that Moses not fail to “stand before God.”

When Christ’s disciples make this first crucial step of being with Jesus a daily priority, they can then look to God for a mission.

Experience the Mission (Exod. 18:20; Matt. 10:7; Mark 3:14)

The second phase of discipleship found in Mark 3 says, “That He might send them out to preach” (verse 14, NKJV). Preaching and teaching are the natural out-working of spending precious time with Jesus. In fulfilling this part of the commission, Jethro charged Moses in Exodus 18:20 with his duty to teach. The laws and statutes revealing Jesus and the characteristics of His government were to be the subject. In Matthew 10:7, Christ says that the kingdom of God is to be the focus of each testimony. Every disciple of Christ needs to keep in mind that, “our influence upon others depends not so much upon what we say as upon what we are. Men

may combat and defy our logic, they may resist our appeals; but a life of disinterested love is an argument they cannot gainsay. . . . The word of God, spoken by one who is himself sanctified through it, has a life-giving power that makes it attractive to the hearers, and convicts them that it is a living reality."²

Share the Power (Exod. 18:20–23; Mark 3:15)

The third phase of discipleship is that His disciples would "have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons" (Mark 3:15, NKJV). Christ equips His disciples with convincing evidence of the truthfulness of their message. "They are charged to proclaim the advent of the kingdom of heaven, and to confirm their message by performing signs . . . the message becomes an event, and the event confirms the message. The kingdom of God, Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the justification of the sinner through faith, all this is identical with the destruction of the devil's power, the healing of the sick and the raising of the dead."³ Jethro counsels Moses to " 'show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. . . . Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them' " (Exod. 18:20, 21, NKJV). How much more convincing is a disciple's message than when it is accompanied by evidence of his personally having experienced the healing power of Jesus over sin in his life and Satan's control?

Is there any fine print to read about Christ's discipleship class? As a matter of fact, there are a few things to remember. Philippians 1:29 says, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (NKJV). Bonhoeffer declares, "The messengers of Jesus will be hated to the end of time. They will be blamed for all the divisions which rend cities and homes. Jesus and his disciples will be condemned on all sides."⁴ However, Romans 8:18 says that, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (NKJV). A few verses earlier, we're told that Christ's disciples will experience wonderful internal freedom (Rom. 8:15). Proverbs 11:25 promises that in sharing with others, we'll enjoy abundant blessing. John 14:27 pledges peace, while 2 Timothy 1:7 claims that we'll experience no fear. So what is there to lose? Christ says, " 'Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you' " (Jer. 1:8, NKJV).

REACT

1. Where is your experience in this progression of discipleship?
2. What do you hear God inviting you personally to do?

1. Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Spire Books, 2000), p. 39.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), pp. 207, 208.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

Tuesday
June 2

Discipleship: Factored From the Love of Christ

TESTIMONY

Matt. 10:1

What could be the reason for Christ to choose disciples? "God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ's, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy, the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice, we must participate in His labors for their redemption."¹ God makes us His agents to communicate to others the riches of His grace.

Is love required in the life of a disciple? "Love must be the principle of action. Love is the underlying principle of God's government in heaven and earth, and it must be the foundation of the Christian's character. . . . If we love Jesus, we shall love to live for Him, to present our thank offerings to Him, to labor for Him."² This is the religion of Christ.

Can we succeed in the work of Christ without sacrifice?

Can we succeed in the work of Christ without sacrifice? "No man can succeed in the service of God unless his whole heart is in the work and he counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. No man who makes any

reserve can be the disciple of Christ. . . . Wherever He leads the way, they will rejoice to follow."³

"Among the publicans a widespread interest was created. Their hearts were drawn toward the divine Teacher. In the joy of his new discipleship, Matthew longed to bring his former associates to Jesus. Accordingly he made a feast at his own house, and called together his relatives and friends."⁴

REACT

How evident is the love in your work/living for Christ?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 49.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 273.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 273, 274.

Receiving High Distinction

HOW-TO

John 8:31; 13:35

Christian disciples are like students in every sense. The more we practice what we learn, the more we get the hang of it. The disciples, except for Judas, took a while to start practicing what they learned. Most students find calculus difficult, but eventually they will learn it if they have an excellent teacher and are willing to practice. The same applies to us as Christians. Jesus, the Master Teacher, will show us the way. Like the disciples who championed His cause, we, too, can receive the highest distinction in the greatest course ever—discipleship.

If we desire to be true disciples, we must do the following:

Respond to the call. As the fishermen responded, so are we to respond to Jesus' call to "fish for people" (Matt. 4:19, NRSV). It doesn't matter what our status in life is. When He calls, we are obliged to respond.

Submit to God. A life of constant busyness is not necessarily healthy for a life of discipleship. In order to submit to God, we must find time to abide with Him through study and meditation of His Word and through prayer.

Love like Jesus. Jesus is the perfect example of what it means to be a true witness. Every word and act of His was borne out of love. He

It doesn't matter what our status in life is.

said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35, NRSV). Effective discipleship must begin among those of us who profess to know Christ, and our lives must reflect that knowledge.

Make the sacrifice. The Lord said through David the psalmist, "Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Ps. 50:5). Are we prepared to do what it takes to learn how to be a true disciple? Are we prepared to deny ourselves the pleasures of this life in order to help others gain the victory? Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24, NRSV).

REACT

1. Why is it important for you to be a true disciple?
2. What are some of the likely distractions you would need to give up in order to become a true disciple?

Thursday
June 4

The Science of Reproduction

OPINION

John 8:23; 15:19

What is the best way to make identical copies of something? If it's a document, you might photocopy it. If it's a music CD or a DVD film, you might burn a copy. Another question: How do you make an identical copy of a person? Cloning would seem to be an obvious answer, even though the ethical and scientific challenges have yet to be completely dealt with.

Now let us consider another type of being to be reproduced. The Son of God became a unique being in that He is a miraculous combination of divinity and humanity. Our Creator wants to have His image reproduced in every one of us; but before we ask how, let's ask why He wants to do this.

Since we have inherited a sinful nature, the only way possible for us to get rid of it is to "be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). Yes, it is true that Jesus' disciples should obediently follow in the footsteps of their Master, but do we become like Jesus simply by imitating Him?

The reason that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6) is that they spring from a sinful nature. So in order for the character of Christ to be reproduced in us, we must have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5).

How do you make an identical copy of a person?

How then do we attain to the divine nature? As you contemplate

the following verses, look for ways the life of Christ can be reproduced in you: 2 Peter 1:4; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:13.

REACT

1. Since the Son of God can no longer be everywhere on earth in His human form, think of one way He can be "seen" everywhere on earth.

2. How can we as disciples maximize our efforts to spread the message of salvation?

The Discipline of the Christian Life

EXPLORATION

John 15:8

CONCLUDE

In a way, the term "Christian discipleship" is redundant, like "end result." A Christian is someone who follows Christ, in other words, a disciple. The idea that a Christian is someone who gives assent to a list of beliefs and then goes about his or her business is probably a major source of the misconceptions many secular people and adherents of other religions have about "those Christians." If you call yourself a Christian, you must make an effort to follow Christ, to be His disciple. Even though you may not always achieve this perfectly, your goals and the prevailing tenor of your life will reflect it.

CONSIDER

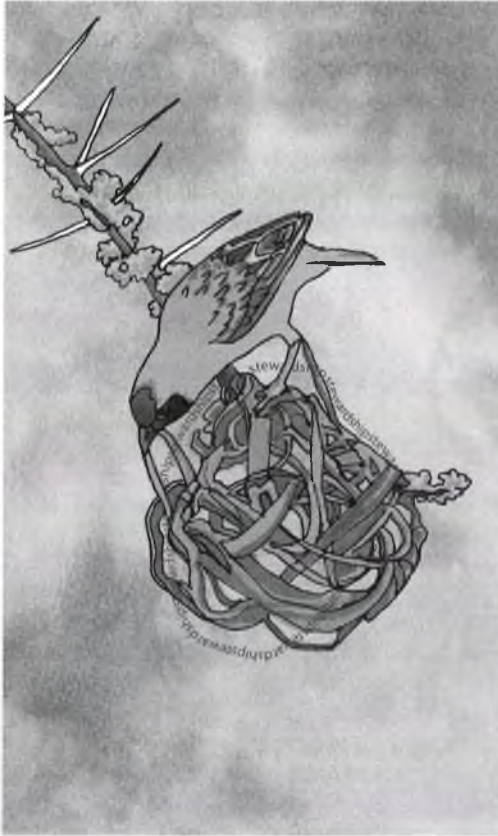
- Watching a film about a well-known Christian who exemplifies discipleship for you. There are excellent films available about figures such as Mother Teresa and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example.
- Comparing the lifestyle you live and the choices you make as a Christian disciple with your possible lifestyle and choices if you were not. Where might either path lead?
- Writing a brief paragraph on what discipleship means in your life.
- Examining your musical choices in light of your commitment to Christ. What songs/styles/artists motivate you to be a better disciple?
- Using your physical energy and strength to serve God (for example, by volunteering with Habitat for Humanity).
- Making an effort to find and associate with a few other people who also have made a commitment to be disciples of Christ. In many churches, these people meet in small study or prayer groups.
- Praying every morning that God will give you some special task that day.

CONNECT

Matt. 25:34–45.

The Desire of Ages, p. 678.

Stewardship



" 'For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away' "
(Matt. 25:29, NRSV).

Shepherd or Hireling?

INTRODUCTION

John 10:13

Two men went out one morning to tend sheep. One man was a shepherd, and the other was a hireling. The shepherd walked a great distance until he found a pasture with lush green grass on a hilly terrain. He left the sheep in the shade while he watched over them. At midday he took the flock to the brook so they could have fresh water to drink. Later in the day, drama unfolded. Two wolves invaded the flock. The shepherd chased the attackers away and led the flock to safety.

On the other side of the village, the hireling took his sheep to the first pasture he came upon. The grass was parched, and there was no water. He left the sheep in the sun while he found a shaded area for himself and went to sleep. Just before dusk fell, he was awakened by the bleating of the sheep being scattered by wolves. He took his bag and made a quick escape, leaving the flock in danger.

What made the difference between the shepherd and the hireling? According to John 10:13, the hireling ran away because he was a hired hand and didn't really care for the sheep. The shepherd, like the hireling, might have been employed to look after the sheep. Both were stewards over the flocks. The difference was that the shepherd cared for the sheep, and that made him a good steward.

Later in the day, drama unfolded.

We also have been appointed as stewards. But we don't raise sheep. This may be your situation if you are living in certain parts of the world, such as the West Indies. The truth is, God expects us to be stewards over whatever possessions He has given us. Our property, talents, time, health, relationships, natural environment, and the truth are given to us by God to manage on His behalf.

Like the good shepherd, we are to care for the possessions God has blessed us with, and we are to use them for His service. We should not allow the devil, the archwolf, to invade these possessions. If we do not use the things we own to the glory of God, then we are mere hirelings—having no care for the things we are appointed to manage.

One day, the true Owner of everything will ask for an account of the properties He has entrusted to us. In this week's lesson, we will explore what He requires of us in regard to our stewardship. May we be found faithful stewards when our Lord returns. Since "it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Cor. 4:2, NRSV).

Stewardship

LOGOS

Deut. 8:18; Ps. 50:12; Mal. 3:8–12; Matt. 24:45–47; 25:14–30; 1 Cor. 4:1, 2; 6:19, 20; Rev. 2:10

The History of Stewardship (Gen. 1:26–30)

Stewardship began when God created Adam and Eve. At the end of Creation, God gave Adam a charge, which, when summarized, simply says, “Be my steward.” Adam was to manage the affairs of God in the Garden by ensuring that the plants and animals were well taken care of. In return, they would provide food, shelter, and happiness to Adam and Eve. In addition, God established an intimate relationship with humanity. As a result, we are now stewards of our time, as this relationship could be developed only by spending time with the Creator. This shared image and intimacy are fundamental to understanding the spirit and dynamics of biblical stewardship.

There is a natural law that states that every action has an opposite and equal reaction. Divine wisdom has set forth

**The principle of the Cross
is the principle of giving.**

this law so that fallen humans could be restored to communion with the Father. This law makes the work of beneficence, in all its branches, twice blessed. People who give to

the needy bless others, and are themselves blessed.¹

It was Jesus who said that if you do good to the least of these, you’ve done good to Him (Matt. 25:40, 45). However, what does this have to do with being a good steward? Let’s face the facts. How can you help someone if you yourself are in need? How can you avoid being in need if you are not a good steward? Remember that a steward manages the master’s possessions. So when God blesses us with wealth or talent, and we use it to do our own thing instead of blessing others, are we being good stewards?

Every good thing was placed on earth by God as an expression of His love. He has made us His stewards, entrusting us to benefit others with these means. Therefore, we are the medium through which God distributes His blessings to the world. Are we distributing His love? Or are we keeping it to ourselves for our own selfish gain? Through this system of stewardship, we become united with God. Such stewardship is the easiest way to win souls for Christ.

The Impact of Stewardship (Matt. 25:14–30)

According to Matthew 25:14–30, God keeps an account of every human being in the world. He knows what portion He has given each person to manage. He knows each opportunity we've had to save a soul and to distribute His love. When the day of reckoning comes, He will not use favoritism to judge. Instead, we will be judged based on our willingness to be His faithful stewards. There are some who claim to be stewards. However, they keep their blessings to themselves and say, "I have worked hard to get here." They boast about their accomplishments, and like the Pharisees of old, think that God has to bless them for their efforts. There also are those who, when they have done the will of God, sit around waiting for the praises of others; but when they don't receive them, they complain about others' ungratefulness.

Faithful stewards, however, take no credit for themselves. They know that without the entrusted gift there would have been no increase. They feel that in faithfully discharging their stewardship, they have but done their duty. They know that the praises do not belong to them, but to God. In addition, they know that the capital was the Lord's, and that only by His power were they able to trade upon it successfully. Without the entrusted capital, they know they would be bankrupt for eternity.²

Such stewards view working for the Master as a great opportunity. They are willing to lose all for His cause, knowing that in losing they are really gaining a stronger relationship with Him, eternal life, and a crown of righteousness. They follow in the footsteps of Him who sacrificed all in order for us to receive all. "The spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven. Christ's self-sacrificing love is revealed upon the cross. That man might be saved, He gave all that He had, and then gave Himself."³ The principle of the Cross is the principle of giving. Self-sacrifice is the true fruit of the Christian life. We perpetuate God's love as manifested in Christ when our hearts go out in love to others who are without God and hope. He has given us salvation, but we are not to keep it for ourselves. We are to manage well and to distribute at His bidding.

When this is accomplished, Christ will return, and all faithful stewards will receive their just rewards. What are you expecting to receive?

REACT

1. Are you being a good steward?
2. What barriers in your life prevent you from being a good steward?
3. How has the subject of stewardship impacted your life?

1. *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 13, 14.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 112.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Stewardship: Part of God's Plan

TESTIMONY

Luke 12:42, 43

"Every good thing of earth was placed here by the bountiful hand of God as an expression of His love to man. The poor are His, and the cause of religion is His. The gold and the silver are the Lord's; and He could rain them from heaven if He chose. But instead of this He has appointed man His steward, entrusted him with means, not to be hoarded, but to be used in benefiting others. He thus makes man the medium through which to distribute His blessings on earth. God planned the system of beneficence, in order that man might become like his Creator, benevolent and unselfish in character, and finally be a partaker with Christ of the eternal, glorious reward."¹

"The love expressed on Calvary should be revived, strengthened, and diffused among our churches. Shall we not do all we can to give power to the principles which Christ brought to this world? . . . As you stand before the cross, and see the Prince of heaven dying for you, can you seal your heart, saying, 'No; I have nothing to give?' "²

**"In this life our possessions
are limited."**

From a purely economic point of view, stewardship says, "I belong to me, and all that I have is mine." From a Christian point of view, however,

stewardship is a theological issue. It says, "Stewardship is how I manage, tend, or care for the gifts God has given me: my life, my relationships, and my possessions."

"In this life our possessions are limited, but the great treasure that God offers in His gift to the world, is unlimited. It comprehends every human desire, and goes far beyond our human calculations."³ However large or however small our possessions, let us remember that they are only entrusted to us. We will render an account to God for how we used gifts and abilities.

REACT

Why do you think God makes stewardship a part of being a faithful Christian?

1. *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 15.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Faithful Stewards

EVIDENCE

Exod. 23:10, 11; Deut. 5:3; 15:11; Matt. 25:29

In Deuteronomy—the last book of the Law—Israel stands on the brink of entering the Promised Land after 40 years of aimless wandering. It is here, during his final stage of life, that Moses instructs the nation to follow God wholeheartedly in the new life ahead. Inevitably, he provides the people with one final overview of the law, because he was well aware that within the new land, the problems of old would continue to arise. Regardless of soon inhabiting a land described as flowing with “milk and honey,” he knew all too well that human greed would not be stamped out overnight. Therefore, he took one last opportunity to remind his people to live with outstretched arms and tolerance toward the poor in the land (Deut. 15:11).

One of the more interesting ways that the early Israelites were to provide for the less fortunate relates to their land and agriculture. They were to leave their fields unplowed during the sabbatical year, thus giving the poor free access to land and food (Exod. 23:10, 11). Perhaps we could question the fairness of taking one person's hard earned labor and freely giving it to another. However, the Bible clearly warns that “‘for everyone who has will be given more’ ” (Matt 25:29, NIV). Thus, it is the diligent and fortunate worker who is secretly blessed for his or her generosity toward those in need. However, irrespective of God's secret blessings, the act of giving alone provides the worker an inner peace that is indescribable to much of modern secular society. How different the world could be today if we would follow the principle of putting others before our own gain.

**The challenge still remains
for Christians today.**

While this truth seems simple enough, the challenge still remains for Christians today. Perhaps the most worrying thought is that each of us must someday give account for the ways in which we currently share our resources. It is unwise to think that we do not have a role to play in bridging the gap between poverty and our own blessings. As Moses told the early Israelites, “It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us” (Deut. 5:3, NIV).

And so it is today.

REACT

1. Are you prepared to get ahead in life at the cost of someone else's misfortune?
2. How can we begin to bridge the poverty gap? Why is it our responsibility to do something?

Stephane Millien, New South Wales, Australia

Wednesday
June 10

Never Too Poor to Give

HOW-TO

Mal. 3:10

There are those of us who blame our unfaithfulness regarding stewardship on poverty. However, we must realize that poverty is an opportunity for God's children to depend on Him with even greater devotion. Despite any poverty in which we might find ourselves, God still expects us to be good stewards with the little we do have.

In 1595, Sir Walter Raleigh discovered a 114-acre lake on the island of Trinidad. The most interesting feature of the lake was the amount of asphalt it contained. Over the years, the lake gave of its resources to pave many roads. Over four hundred and ten years have passed, but the lake continues to give; and all the while, the level of the lake remains the same. With whom can you compare this lake? Can you compare it to your own life?

If you are not wealthy with worldly goods, here are some ways in which you can be a good steward:

**Let God be God. Try Him
today.**

Give of your time. Regardless of our worldly wealth, we all have the same amount of time on the clock. Share some of that time with someone who needs help. Are you a good

mechanic? Perhaps you know a retired person who needs help with his car. Are you a good cook? If your city has a homeless shelter, perhaps you could donate some time to cook there. Other service organizations in your city might also need the type of help you could give.

Share your talents. What are you particularly skilled at doing? What spiritual gifts has God given you? If you play the piano, is there a children's division in your church that needs a pianist? Maybe you enjoy teaching. Sabbath Schools are always in need of good teachers.

Here again, all Christians are wealthy, because God has given all Christians certain spiritual gifts. How can you use your gifts to glorify the Lord in His service?

By being faithful stewards of our time and talents, God will count us as His faithful servants. If we want to be prosperous, if we want to live a happy life, we must give to God what is His. He urges us, "Test me in this . . . and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Mal. 3:10, NIV).

Let God be God. Try Him today. Learn to live in harmony with Him.

Wrapped in a Napkin

OPINION

Deut. 8:18; Matt. 24:46

A table napkin is useful in the world of etiquette. If one is eating, there will probably be residue left on the mouth or the surroundings thereof that need to be wiped clean. However, people have utilized the napkin in other ways, such as placing in it a food item that is not so pleasant to the taste. Children will do this if they don't want to eat their vegetables. When used this way, the napkin becomes a "dangerous" item. Eating vegetables can help us to be healthy, but not if they are hidden from a parent in a napkin!

Do we hide the spiritual gifts God has given us for our spiritual health and the health of the church? Do we bury these gifts He has intended for us to use in His service?

Ellen White wrote, "One great cause of weakness in the . . . church has been that, instead of improving their talents to the glory of God, they have wrapped them in a napkin and buried them in the world." Like the vegetables the child thinks of as being unpalatable, we might view our gifts as unimportant if we compare them to other people's gifts. If a child doesn't eat vegetables, that child will not be as healthy as he or she could be. Likewise, if we do not use our talents, they will not improve, and we will not be as spiritually healthy as we could be.

**When used this way,
the napkin becomes a
"dangerous" item.**

Ellen White also wrote, "Although some may be restricted to one talent, yet if they will exercise that one, it will increase. God values the service according to what a man has and not according to what he has not. If we perform our daily duties with fidelity and love we shall receive the approval of the Master as if we had performed a greater work."²

REACT

What are some of the things that cause you to bury your talents? How can you overcome these things and resist the temptation to bury your talents?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 618, 619.

2. *Ibid.*

Friday
June 12

Love to Give

EXPLORATION

Matt. 25:14–28

CONCLUDE

God likes to delegate. He could micromanage this world and its resources to ensure that His purposes are fulfilled; but He chooses to make us a part of the process. He gives us all a piece of the pie. Some receive more than others, but everyone receives. Then, He lays in our hands the responsibility to use wisely all He has given us and to multiply it by investing in His service. God does not need our money, our talents, or our time. The benefit of dispensing of those gifts is all ours. We become more like Jesus and we learn to depend more on Him.

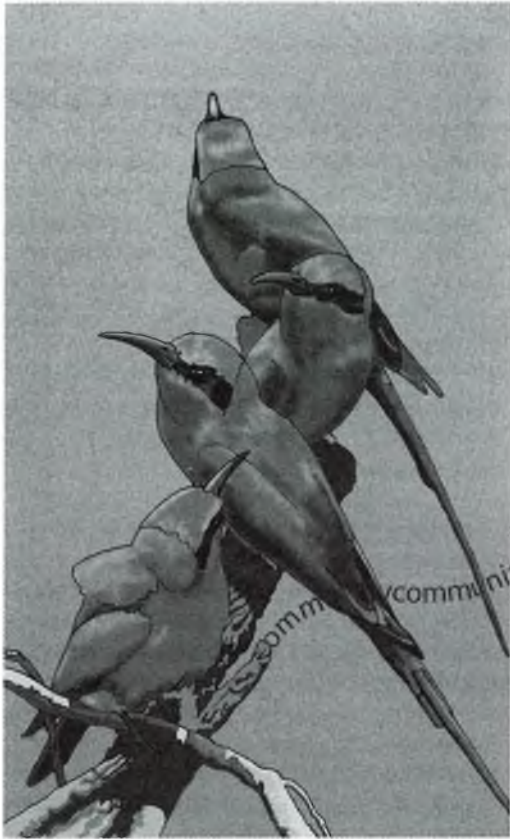
CONSIDER

- Identifying your spiritual gifts after reading 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12.
- Journaling every day for a week. Specify how you use your time in your daily routine. Evaluate your time management in light of Christian stewardship.
- Collecting an extra piece of garbage or litter in your neighborhood without worrying about who left it there. Think about how we are accountable to God for the health of our planet.
- Participating in a project to help people less fortunate. You could help out in a soup kitchen, tutor a child, or give away clothes you don't use.
- Designing a budget and committing to follow it. Don't forget to include your tithes and offerings.
- Re-writing the parable of Matthew 25:14–28 to fit modern times. Which of the servants depicts you best?
- Planning a party. Invite people who are in need of your kindness.

CONNECT

Mal. 3:10; Matt. 19:16–21; Mark 12:41–44.
The Desire of Ages, pp. 638–641.

Community



“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:27, NIV).

Connected by Love and Encouraged in the Journey

INTRODUCTION

Col. 2:2

I am one of seven siblings. All of us are married and living in different cities or countries. Even in Brazil, the closest one lives more than 600 km (373 miles) from me. To keep in touch, we've created a family newsgroup on the Internet. When anyone from our group posts a message, we all receive it at the same time. This way, we're constantly in touch with one another.

In the beginning, it wasn't easy. Some had a hard time with the new technology, but the interest in keeping our family united encouraged everyone so that now we share news about our trips, sorrows, and joys. The news and photos strengthen our love for each other.

Unfortunately, not everybody is blessed with a family such as mine. Nevertheless, we all have the privilege of becoming a part of God's family—the church.

**We all have the privilege
of becoming a part of
God's family.**

Sometimes, some members of God's family have problems with communication, like our family did when we started our newsgroup. However, the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to continually improve our communication skills. The apostle

Paul prayed for and encouraged the church to be "united in love" (Col. 2:2, NIV). In the verses that follow, he gives the impression that this union depends on our daily, personal, and uninterrupted relationship with Jesus. He wants us to have the comprehension, conviction, experience, and knowledge of the Father's plan of salvation, which is Jesus Himself.

The church is a divine initiative. It is the body of Christ (Col. 1:24). That's why He Himself is said to be the Head, and we are the members of the church body (Col. 1:18; 1 Corinthians 12). We must be connected to Christ all the time, so that with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can do our best to maintain the unity of the body. We belong to the body, and our union is His wish.

This week our heavenly Father invites us, one more time, to remain united and committed to His cause and to the community He started. At the same time, we are not to lose sight of the glorious promise that Jesus will soon return to reunite our great family, whose members reside everywhere in the world. Then we will be able to inhabit together the many dwellings in the house of our Father. Then, finally, we will all speak the same language, and there will be no inequality or separation or distance.

Keeping the Unity in Community

EVIDENCE

Eph. 4:1–3

God chose Paul to bear Jesus' name "before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15, NKJV). As Paul fulfilled that mission, he became a victim of persecution and imprisonment. While in prison, his great love for Jesus and for the Christian community helped him to forget about himself. In Ephesians 4:1–3, Paul urged the church to be united. The following promptings toward unity are just as valid for the church community today:

"Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (verse 1, NKJV). It is an honor to take part in God's family—a great community of people from every nation, tribe, and language on earth. When we become a member of this community, we become God's children and desire to live as His children should live. Read Ephesians 5:8.

"Be completely humble and gentle" (verse 2, NIV). God's children must be humble. We cannot leave any space in our hearts for pride. To be gentle is to be submissive, obedient, and flexible when it comes to God's plan for our lives.

**We are pressed to do more
and more in less time.**

"Be patient, bearing with one another in love" (verse 2, NIV). It seems that in the twenty-first century, we are pressed to do more and more in less time. This makes it difficult to be patient, but it is possible to be so in Christ. To bear means "to tolerate." This suggests that we are not to dwell on things we do not like, that we should be patient and forgiving toward one another. God is patient with us. We should, therefore, be patient with each other.

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit" (verse 3, NIV). Here Paul exhorts the Ephesians to make every effort to be united.

We know that Jesus loves us and desires to save us. In John 17, He prays to the Father for those who would become members of the great community of believers who would answer His call. Read John 17:20–23.

Jesus prayed for our unity. What effort have you been making to keep it?

REACT

What are the gifts God gave us, and how do they contribute to unity? Read Ephesians 4:11–13.

God's Family

LOGOS

Gen. 11:1–4; 12:1–3; 1 Cor. 12:12–27; Eph. 4:1–13; Rev. 22:1–6

When I was younger, I wanted to have enough money to travel to interesting and famous places. I thought that life would be better if I could frequently explore new places and people from different cultures.

Even though I could never make that wish come true, I realized through the short trips I have taken that, best of all, is having a home and a family to return to. It's good to belong to a community of people who love you and miss you.

Members of the Same Family (Eph. 2:19)

In our second year of marriage, my husband was invited to work for the church far away from our relatives. In the beginning, it hurt me a lot to live so far from my family. I was not a tourist exploring a new culture and then returning to “my world.” I would have to learn to live in that new environment and adapt myself to a wide variety of cultural differences. Fortunately, we belong to God's family, and this fam-

ily shelters us wherever we are in the world. The accent was different, but there was Sabbath School; the familiar hymns which lifted me close to our God; the Christian love that united us; the facts that we all loved Jesus, our

It hurt me a lot to live so far from my family.

Savior and Friend, and that we all believed in the Word of God.

Walking through the streets of the city, I felt I was in a strange land. When I arrived at church, however, I felt I was closer to my home.

In one of our trips, a car kept up with us and a woman showed us through the window a Sabbath School lesson and a Seventh-day Adventist hymnal. They must have seen the sticker with the logo of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on our car and wanted to let us know that they, too, were part of this family. Although I did not know them, I felt that strong tie that united us.

It is the same in every church we visit. My husband is often invited to preach in different places, so we get to know many church families. We do not always know who will receive us and take us home for Sabbath dinner; but whoever does, we always feel as if we have known them for a long time, because we are part of God's family.

Although every person has his or her own attributes, all of us are equally important to God. He has a special work that suits each one of us—a work that no one else could fulfill as well. Every person has his or her role in God's work. The diver-

sity of spiritual gifts presents a complete whole; and many hearts can be reached when we work together. Some people prefer dynamic, high-energy preachers and leaders. Others prefer to listen to calm people. In our visits to different churches, we notice the diversity of gifts at work. Each leader has a different approach, but each leader would be ineffective if he or she tried to do everything alone. The church can reach its aim when all members work beside each other—from the person who is responsible for maintaining the building to the one who brings the news to the members. We need to consider each small effort that contributes to a good result.

The Body (1 Cor. 12:27)

The comparison Paul gives us on the function of the church and the parts of the human body is most interesting. If a body part whose function seems rather simple stops working, the entire body is affected. If just one church member buries his or her gift or considers that gift unworthy and does not use it from the heart, all members will suffer the lack.

"Using the analogy of the body, Paul emphasizes the importance of each church member. . . . If a seemingly insignificant part is taken away, the whole body becomes less effective. Thinking that your gift is more important than someone else's is an expression of spiritual pride. We should not look down on those who seem unimportant, and we should not be jealous of others who have impressive gifts. Instead, we should use the gifts we have been given and encourage others to use theirs. If we don't, the body of believers will be less effective."*

Whatever may be the work God calls you to perform, do it with love for Jesus, knowing that you also will be helping His family—the family to which you belong. We are not perfect yet; faults will be part of our lives until Christ returns. But above all things, we need to help each other along the way to heaven. We need to be able to keep sight of the God we are serving.

REACT

1. What if you live in a place where there is only one Adventist church, but that church is cold and unfriendly?
2. As you read 1 Corinthians 12:12–20, think about the body's parts and systems in relationship to your abilities and talents. How do you see yourself using your abilities and talents for your local church?

**Life Application Study Bible*, New International Version (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1991), p. 2082.

Many Crops All Grown Here

TESTIMONY

1 Cor. 12:25, 26; Gal. 5:22-25

I once met a farmer who grew only corn and beans. For a long time, he thought those were the only crops his dry land could produce. However, he discovered that if he cultivated several different plants close to one another, nature would manage to develop them. The plants that stored water shared it with the other plants when there was no rain, and the plants that grew taller gave shade to the shorter ones.

Like these plants, God created us to serve. "Selfishness is death. No organ of the body could live should it confine its service to itself. . . . We are members one of another, and the soul that refuses to impart will perish."

It's sad that in order to live we think we must follow earthly aesthetics, behavioral, and academic models. We buy these patterns for principles; and they teach us that what matters is not to give shade and water, but to crush the weak.

"Love for souls for whom Christ died means crucifixion of self. . . . The Christian is ever to realize that he has consecrated himself to God, and that in character he is to reveal Christ to the world. The self-sacrifice, the sympathy, the love manifested in the life of Christ are to reappear in the life of the worker for God."²

"Selfishness is death."

You are important to God. His purpose for the Christian community is "that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:25, 26, NIV).

The land of the farmer I met is now producing not only corn and beans, but also sweet potatoes and cashew trees. In the Christian experience, we are called as individuals and as a community to grow another kind of fruit. "Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain."³

REACT

1. How can we produce the fruit of the Spirit as a community?
2. What are some characteristics of a healthy community?
3. What must we do in order for others to feel part of God's family?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 417.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.

Living Happy in Community

HOW-TO

Acts 2:44; Phil. 2:3, 4; Heb. 10:25

The Christian community (the church) is made of people from different cultural, religious, and professional backgrounds, with diverse attributes and aptitudes. Most individual church members will have different thoughts and outlooks from one another, even if their goals of obtaining salvation and heaven are the same. Although it isn't desirable to establish inflexible and resolute rules, some of the following ideas might help church members to get along with one another:

Do not think that only your ideas and concepts are valid. Some Christians think that, because of their experience or knowledge about certain topics, they don't need to listen to other opinions or even consider them. They resist another person's point of view and refuse to learn anything from anyone. However, we should learn to follow the biblical advice written by James. Read James 1:19.

Do not leave your church community because of any relationship problem. In certain situations, the human tendency is to leave a group when interpersonal relationships become tense. However, an ember removed from the fire will quickly grow cold, so the ideal is to keep meeting together. Remember that the main reason to go to church is to meet with God.

**An ember removed from
the fire will quickly grow
cold.**

Develop altruism. A good antidote to differences that divide is to volunteer to work for others. Whoever is engaged in helping someone is less likely to care only about themselves.

Point out other people's positive characteristics. Drawing attention to a person's abilities and potential needn't be flattery, but a biblical and efficient way of getting on well with others. It is evident that, when there's a mistake, it may be necessary to have a straightforward conversation with the people involved; however, the important thing is to concentrate on the best somebody has to offer to a community. Read Romans 12:18.

REACT

What are you experiencing now in your church that could be solved by one or all of the above points?

We Are God's Best

OPINION

John 13:35

Jesus Christ's life is the greatest demonstration of love the world will ever have. The most important lesson we need to learn is how to love. As we learn this lesson, we start to be like Him, and we learn that it's impossible to practice love alone. Each one of us is part of a complex plan—original creatures, precious, with distinct functions and responsibilities, a part of Christ's body.

It's our Father's will that we have a personal and constant relationship with His family on earth. Love isn't just a feeling. It's also an action. We need to get involved with other people, so we can develop the ability to love. When we love, we start to achieve the purposes for which we have been created. It's time to act, work, and love.

Love should be our highest priority, our main objective and major ambition. Love is not just a good part of life. It is the most important part of life. Four out of the Ten

**Love isn't just a feeling.
It's also an action.**

Commandments tell us about our relationship with God, and the other six tell us about our relationship with other human beings. God's law is reasoned in relationships, and love is the foundation of eternity.

Jesus said that people will know we belong to Him because of our love (John 13:35). I believe that God measures our spiritual maturity in various ways; but perhaps the most important one is by the quality of our relationships. We know when something or someone is important to a person by the time spent with that person or thing. Time is one of our greatest donations because we receive a fixed amount of it. And that's why the major gift we can give to someone is our time.

Always when you give your time, you are sacrificing, and sacrifice is the essence of love. Jesus was the perfect example. "Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:2, NKJV).

Because each one of us is part of Christ's body, everyone has a function. It's an immeasurable privilege to know the biblical truths and to be a member of God's family. We can give without loving, but we cannot love without giving. We are God's best because He offered the most precious gift on earth: the gift of love.

REACT

1. What can you do to transform "the feeling of love" into the "action of love"?
2. As a fundamental member of Christ's body, what functions have you been developing to keep it alive?

Community United by Love

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 12:27

CONCLUDE

As followers of Christ, we are all members of God's family. We are related to Christ and to each other. To stand in unity, we must have a mutual care, love, and concern for others. There are no little *i*'s or big *I*'s, because each of us is important to the unity of the community. Your gift is no less important than the gift I have been given. We all are to use our gifts for the betterment of our community, because we are knit together in love.

CONSIDER

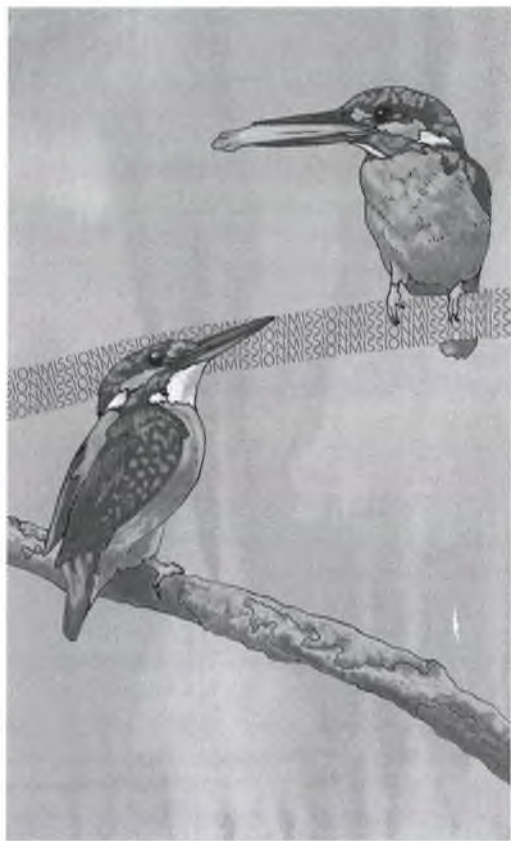
- Completing a spiritual-gift inventory and discovering what gift you have been given. How can you use that gift to foster unity in your church?
- Discussing what you, as class members, can do to make others feel part of your community. How can you start to implement these ideas?
- Thanking God for loving you.
- Meditating on Ephesians 4:3. Ask God to show you how you can exhibit unity within your church body.
- Spending the next week praying as to how you can model to others, by your actions, that you are part of the community and knit together in love.
- Interviewing church officers to find out what gifts they have and how they feel that by using these gifts they have contributed to the unity of the church.
- Getting a group together to prepare a choral reading based on the responsive reading of numbers 776 or 777 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*. Make arrangements to present your reading during a Sabbath School program or during a church service when your minister preaches on the topic of spiritual gifts and/or unity.

CONNECT

First Corinthians 12 and 13.

Steps to Christ, "Growing Up Into Christ," chap. 8.

Mission



“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15, NIV).

Missions for Every Stage of Life

INTRODUCTION

Rev. 14:6–12

As a two-year-old, Cecilia loved Jesus. When the opportunity came for her to participate in Ingathering (a church program where money is collected—at that time, usually from community people—and used for ministries of the global church), she was excited! Her mother dressed her warmly and then put a white cape over her coat. They drove to a safe neighborhood where the homes were close together. Cecilia walked up to a door. Her mother stayed in the shadows behind her. Cecilia had a container for money in one hand and a paper to give the people in the other. She rang the doorbell and waited for someone to come. She gave them a smile and promptly said, “I’m just a little missionary, out trying to do my part. / I’m not knocking at your door, I’m knocking at your heart. / And if you love King Jesus, and want to do your part, / Just drop an offering in my basket, and I’ll say thank you and depart.” Although some of the words may have been hard to understand, they understood her love for Jesus and hurried off to get an offering.

During elementary school, mission stories were a wonderful inspiration to Cecilia. As she read them, she daydreamed about being a missionary. But how could she be involved in missions when she

**She daydreamed about
being a missionary.**

came from a family that didn’t have money for overseas mission trips? Each year she went Ingathering! Her speech was more mature and mentioned a nearby Indian group that received help from the Ingathering funds.

As a teen, the academy Cecilia went to was in the country, but whenever possible, she helped with witnessing trips to town. She also cared for girls who were homesick or lonely. She was a local missionary.

After she began to teach school, Cecilia heard that the Pathfinders would be taking a trip to the Dominican Republic to help an orphanage. On the way there, she comforted a teenager during her first plane ride. Upon arriving at the orphanage, she helped in the kitchen and worked on sewing skirts for the orphans. On Sabbath, she visited some local homes where medical help was needed.

In each stage of life, the reason behind Celia’s mission experience was to share Jesus with others. It didn’t matter where on earth she was, but that she was actively portraying Jesus. She was helping to spread the three angels’ messages.

So what can you do? First, get your heart right with God, and then ask Him to show you where and how you can serve Him. But be prepared. It might be to a place you haven’t even thought of!

Karen Pires, Ooltewah, Tennessee, U.S.A.

Sunday
June 21

Fighting for the Lord

LOGOS

Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46, 47; John 14:6; Eph. 4:11–15; 2 Pet. 2:1–3

Our Mission and Purpose (Mark 16:15, 16)

The Great Commission is our mission statement, our purpose as followers of Christ. We are blessed to have a wonderful Savior who is willing to save *anyone* who believes in Him. “Here is the commission. As obedient servants, you are to work in close connection with Christ Jesus of Nazareth. May the Lord grant that the people who sit in darkness shall see great light.”¹

Many people live in the darkness of this sinful world. They have never heard that there is a God who loves them and died to save them. Until every person has been given a chance to choose either salvation or condemnation, Jesus won't come (Matt. 24:14). Jesus wants as many people in the kingdom as possible (2 Pet. 3:9), and He has given us the privilege and responsibility of showing them the way.

**We are His messengers,
reaching out to the world
around us.**

Pre-planning and Action (Luke 24:46, 47)

When Jesus gave His disciples their work of sharing His gospel, He didn't do it spontaneously. It had been written through His prophets

before He was ever born. His death gave everyone the option of salvation. Everyone has to make a choice for or against Him, and to do that, they first have to hear the gospel story. Starting in Jerusalem with the first disciples and continuing through each age until He comes, His followers are to tell everyone about the salvation He offers. “The disciples were to work earnestly for souls, giving to all the invitation of mercy. They were not to wait for the people to come to them; they were to go to the people with their message.”² We are to actively seek ways to tell everyone about our awesome God. Jesus said, “ ‘Therefore go and make disciples’ ” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). Notice the word *go*. This is a word of action. Jesus took action in dying for us, and just as His suffering, death, and resurrection were planned from the beginning, so was our role in telling the world. We are His messengers, reaching out to the world around us.

How It Works (John 14:6)

The message we are to tell is that Jesus, who died and rose again, is “ ‘the way and the truth and the life’ ” (John 14:6, NIV). Many people try to find salvation, but

go about it all wrong. They think that if they are good enough, they can earn heaven or deserve God's love. Many strive in this impossible endeavor all their lives, or they give up on Christianity entirely. But there is hope! True, everything we do is worthless to God (Isa. 64.6). However, Jesus came so that we would have a way to the Father. Jesus' sacrifice makes us clean in God's eyes. Salvation is through the Son of God alone.

Our Individual Roles (Eph. 4:11–15)

Every Christian is given the mission of spreading the gospel. Some people think this means going to a far-off country to serve the Lord. But that is only a small part of what God's people are to do. Some are called to foreign missions, but others are called to stay where they are, serving Christ as pastors, teachers, business people, writers, evangelists, etc. In fact, "the Lord would be pleased to have those who are engaged in any part of His service, guard against the tendency to take upon themselves responsibilities that they are not called upon to bear. . . . Every laborer is to strive to do well his part, leaving to others the duties entrusted to them."³ When we are all filling our individual roles and growing together in understanding and faith, we will mature as Christians. It will be harder for us to be confused and swayed by false doctrine, because we will be so focused on God's truth and obeying the Word of the Lord. The more we focus on Christ and serve Him, the more like Him we will become.

Avoiding the Traps (2 Pet. 2:1–3)

Even in churches there is still sin, because we live in a fallen world. We can't believe everything we hear. Not everyone is honest or well-informed. At times, false doctrines slip into the church. We need to be careful, because "many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up" (2 Pet. 2:2, 3, NIV). We should test every new or different doctrine through personal study and prayer. This way, we will not fall for the devil's lies. Fortunately, we can be assured that God will serve justice and will not fall asleep on the job (2 Pet. 2:3).

REACT

1. Are you serving God with all your heart and spreading the gospel to the fullest extent of your ability?
2. Are you working where God wants you? Are you willing to step out of your comfort zone if He asks you to?
3. Have you proven the validity of your beliefs to your own satisfaction? Can you recognize the true from the false?

1. *Bible Training School*, December 1, 1905.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 28.

3. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 5, 1905.

Monday
June 22

“Are Your Missionaries Rich?”

TESTIMONY

John 14:6

“If our people had the love of God in the heart, if every church member were imbued with the spirit of self-sacrifice, there would be no lack of funds for home and foreign missions; our resources would be multiplied; a thousand doors of usefulness would be opened; and we should be invited to enter. Had the purpose of God been carried out in giving the message of mercy to the world, Christ would have come, and the saints would have received their welcome into the city of God.”¹

“Never can the church reach the position that God desires it to reach until it is bound up in sympathy with its missionary workers. Never can the unity for which Christ prayed exist until spirituality is brought into missionary service, and until the church becomes an agency for the support of missions. The efforts of the missionaries will not accomplish what they should until the church members in the home field show, not only in word, but in deed, that they realize the obligation resting on them to give these missionaries their hearty support.

**“God calls for workers.
Personal activity is needed.”**

“God calls for workers. Personal activity is needed. But conversion comes first; seeking for the salvation of others, next.”²

If we would choose to deny our appetite and give that money in support of our missionaries, God would bless us abundantly. Even the children can be a part of this. “Let the children have an intelligent part in this work. We are all members of the Lord’s family, and the Lord would have His children, young and old, determine to deny appetite, and to save the means needed for the building of meetinghouses and the support of missionaries.”³

REACT

What does our support of missions have to say about our spiritual life?

1. *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 37.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 48.

3. *Counsels on Health*, p. 131.

Finding the Way

EVIDENCE

John 14:6

Have you ever made friends with whom you wanted to keep in touch? You probably exchanged telephone numbers or e-mail addresses; and if you really liked these people, you might even have invited them to visit you.

In John 14:6, Jesus was talking to His 12 closest friends on the evening of the Last Supper. For three and a half years, He had grown exceptionally close to these people. To Him, they were like brothers.

Though they were clueless, Jesus knew that His mission on earth was about to end. However, He didn't want His time with these friends to stop. He wanted these friendships to continue in His heavenly home. So He gave them, and us as well, a way in which we could spiritually get in touch with both Him and His Father at any time.

However, His best friends just didn't get it. Not only did they not realize that the next day Jesus would be crucified, they didn't comprehend that for the past 1,200 days, they had been privileged to have the Way, the Truth, and the Life right there walking with them. It would take a while to soak in, but eventually they would see that the way to their Friend's house was by allowing His loving disposition to permeate their very being. Ultimately, His friends (except for Judas) would choose to do this as they became more like Him and His Father.

**His best friends just didn't
get it.**

Why did God give to the disciples and to all of us the spiritual connection, the spiritual road map to be able to reach heaven? You see, not only did Jesus want us earthlings to come to Him, but God the Father Himself deems each one of us His precious children.

Because of this, God sent us something better than e-mail, cell phones, or maps. He sent us His Son, who is the embodiment of Himself, so that we might know the Way, become more like the Way, and follow the Way to our heavenly home.

Lead us home, Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.

REACT

If the disciples were clueless after living with Jesus for 1,200 days, then what can we surmise about our own personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

Changing the World

HOW-TO

Mark 16:15, 16

Every Christian is called to be a missionary for God. It doesn't matter how old we are, where we've come from, or how talented we might be. He can use each one of us to further His kingdom. He's made each of us unique and has given us all different talents; and He needs all of us to work together to spread His name throughout the world.

Now, how can we change the world? How can we make a difference and be missionaries for Jesus? It just might be simpler than we thought. Here are a few steps:

Share a smile with those around you. The simple act of sharing a smile with strangers can brighten their day. You don't know what they're going through, but by acknowledging them, you are sharing God's love. You are being a missionary. From personal experience, I can testify that getting a smile from someone else warms the heart.

Speak encouraging words. Throughout Jesus' life, He often spoke words of encouragement to those around Him. Encouraging words lift people up and boost self-confidence. By encouraging others, you are showing them a glimpse of who Jesus is.

Getting a smile from someone else warms the heart.

Share your testimony. People tend to think that because nothing extraordinary has happened in their life, they don't have a testimony to share. This, however, just isn't true. Every day that you wake up, you have a testimony to share. You have breath and life. Simply sharing how Jesus is working or has worked in your life, no matter how small, is a way to minister to those around you. Sharing how Jesus has worked in your life helps others to see how awesome He truly is.

Help with a local mission project. Being part of a local church or community project to help the less fortunate is missionary work. Helping in either a Sabbath School or church program is being a missionary. You never know who might be walking through those church doors searching for a Savior.

REACT

1. How will you begin changing the world today?
2. What are five ways God has lead in your life this far? Share those with someone in your life today.

A Missionary to Everyone

OPINION

Eph. 4:11-15

What are today's youth doing to share the mission of our church? Are we studying to become pastors or missionaries in distant lands? I think the majority of us haven't chosen or haven't been called to do that work. So I want to show you that in whatever profession we're in, we can share our church's mission.

Satan is working with sly craftiness. He causes us to think that being busier is better. He tries to keep us so busy with good deeds that we become exhausted and ill. He also has made us feel that talking about God is not cool, and that if we do talk about Him, we should do so quietly. We cannot, however, allow Satan to overpower us. God is awesome, and He doesn't want to be treated like a frail great-uncle. He wants to be our best Friend and closest Confidant.

Our church's mission is to share God with anyone we meet. So how can we do this if Satan's traps ensnare us? I think we need to break those traps and throw them back in his face. We can do this by following these down-to-earth steps.

[God] doesn't want to be treated like a frail great-uncle.

First, we need to think of God as a real Friend. An easy way to think of Him as a Friend is to pour out our hearts to Him. Especially praise Him for the good things about our lives. Then set a goal of finding one blessing each day that He has given us. Then tell someone else about that blessing. Doing these things will put a smile on our faces *and* on the faces of others. As He becomes more of a Friend to us, we'll begin reading and studying the Bible more. We'll pray and ponder our blessings, especially on the Sabbath. Then, when Satan sees us actually getting joy from relaxing on that special day, he'll be defeated by our peace of mind.

As we shine with a positive attitude, we'll be sharing God with our friends, family, and colleagues as they see how truly happy we are. We also won't be ashamed to talk about God, and we'll share with others the blessings He has shared with us.

This is the ultimate way to be a missionary to the people we meet every day, even the people who really want nothing to do with God and Christianity.

I hope you live to let your light shine (Matt. 5:16).

REACT

1. Why is being positive the best way to shine among the people of this world?
2. How will you choose to defeat Satan and live more for God?

EXPLORATION

Matt. 28:19, 20

CONCLUDE

When you really boil it down, not obeying Jesus' command to go is a lack of faith and trust in the Lord. Jesus has told us that we have the highest authority in the universe on our side. He has even gone so far as to say that He will always be with us. Yet often we don't believe it. If we took Jesus at His word, we would speak with boldness. We would immediately notice that He will give us the words to say, and He would put them right into our mouths. But do we really believe He will follow through? Take Him at His word. Try it and see.

CONSIDER

- Thinking of creative ways to share the gospel through the mail, e-mail, the phone, visiting, and giving.
- Contemplating what the following means, "You can only lead others to Christ as far as you are yourself." How might this phrase apply to you? And how can you change your life to lead others further along?
- Imagining that Jesus is living your life. Ask yourself what He would do to win souls. How might you incorporate these activities into your life?
- Listening to the song "People Need the Lord" by Steve Green, and thinking of ways to share Jesus with others.
- Making plans to go on a mission trip within the next year. If you've already been on one, invite others who have not gone to go with you next time. Share your experience to encourage them to go.
- Organizing a Sabbath outreach program in which you will interact with nonbelievers and share your faith with them.

CONNECT

Luke 5.

Gospel Workers, pp. 136–139; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 422.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Loved and Loving: John's Epistles

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for third quarter 2009, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Jesus and the Johannine Letter

Logos: The three epistles of John

Memory Text: "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14, NKJV).

False teachers spreading error among the saints? Deviant views on the nature of Christ? Power struggles in the church? Theological errors spreading in the pews? Folk needing assurance of salvation? Others needing to know that faith must lead to obedience to the law?

Sounds like our church today, right?

These, however, were some of the issues that John dealt with almost two thousand years ago in his three short epistles in the New Testament.

How true were Solomon's words, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9, NKJV).

John, though, does not concentrate on the problems only. He points to God the Father and the Son; he portrays who They are and what They have done for us, and thus what we must do in response.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we believe that John wrote these epistles? To whom was he writing? What were his concerns? How does he address those concerns? What does John tell us about Jesus? What promises can we take away from these books?

Lesson 2: Experiencing the Word of Life

Logos: Deut. 4:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:4-8; 1 John 1:1-4; 5; Rev. 19:13

Memory Text: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3, NIV).

In court a man stands charged with murder. He swears, vociferously, that he is innocent, that he didn't do it, and that he wasn't even at the scene when the crime occurred. He sounds very convincing too. From his words alone, one could be tempted to believe him.

Then, however, witnesses appear. One after another, the eyewitnesses say the same thing: they saw the accused at the scene of the crime, and they saw him (and even in some cases heard him) commit the crime. Though individual details differ, depending on where they were at the time of the incident, their eyewitness accounts are overwhelming, and the man's guilt becomes obvious.

In a similar way, John introduces his letter by claiming that he belongs to the circle of eyewitnesses who, having seen and personally experienced Jesus, are able to share this life-transforming information with others.

The Week at a Glance: Why is Jesus the "Word of life"? What does John hope to accomplish by writing this introduction? How can we, even today, be eyewitnesses to Jesus? What role does community have in the life of a Christian?

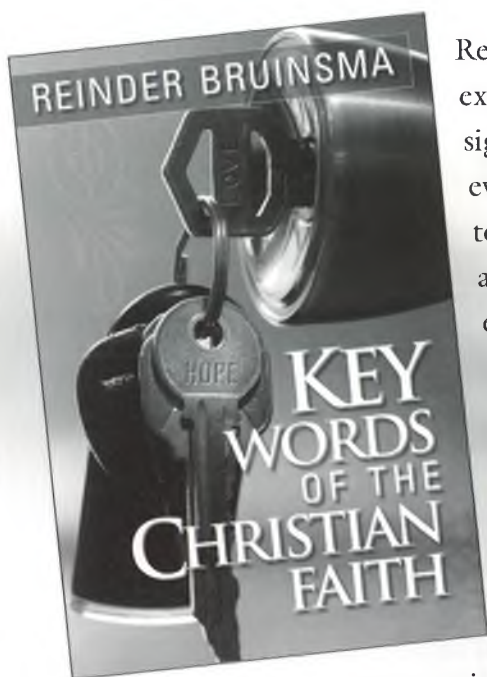
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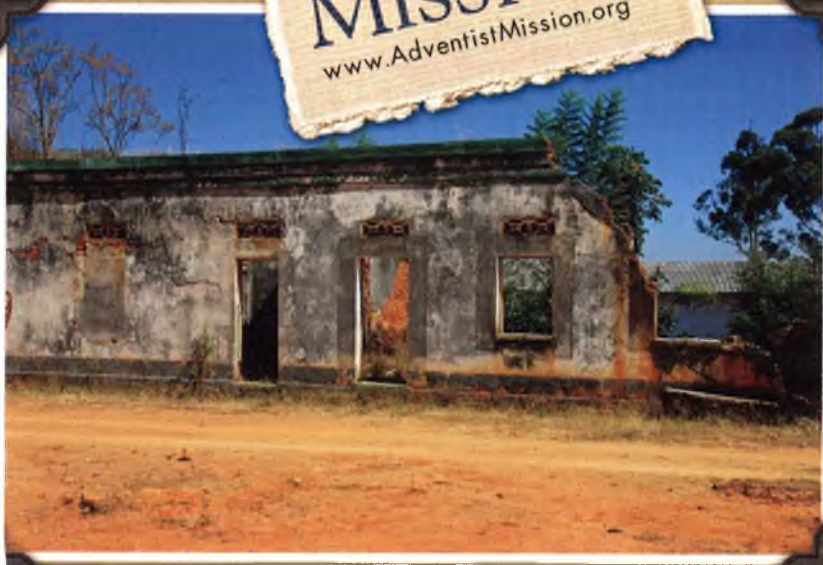
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Imagine living in a war zone. Imagine a child walking to school and finding the school in ruins—burned, pillaged, deserted. Imagine knowing that his only hope for an education lies in the ashes under his feet.

The children of Angola know the feeling. For 35 years their country was wracked by civil war, war that left lives and buildings in ruins. But in 2002 the war ended. The people now live in freedom. But many of the Adventist schools still lie in ruins. Hope for an education must wait a while longer.

I want to help these children get the education they deserve. I want to see them learning to read and write and praise God. I'm glad that this quarter part of our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help rebuild two Adventist primary schools and will help the Adventist university in central Angola. I've seen the face of despair. And I've seen the face of hope. For me it's personal.



ECQ090401