

JULY–SEPTEMBER

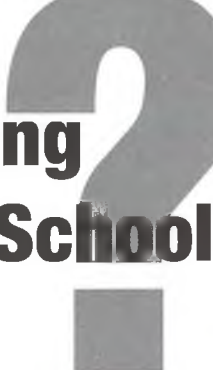
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2009

Loved and Loving: John's Epistles



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults

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Loved and Loving: John's Epistles

JULY—SEPTEMBER 2009

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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



When Anastasia Oliver did the art work for this quarter's *CQ*, she was living in Collegedale, Tennessee, U.S.A., where she has been home-schooled since the second grade. Her goals in life are to major in journalism and minor in history and the culinary arts. She also dreams of opening a restaurant with her mother and backpacking across Europe with her friends. Other interests include writing, bike riding, spending time with her dog Isabella, and being a counselor for Pathfinders.

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.

Jesus and the Johannine Letters



"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14, NKJV).

From the Beginning

INTRODUCTION

1 John 2:24

On July 1, 2002, in the airspace above Germany, Flight 2937 collided with Flight 611. All 71 passengers aboard these two planes were killed. The dead included 45 schoolchildren.*

Perhaps most regrettable is the fact that both aircraft were equipped with a functioning Traffic Collision Avoidance System (TCAS). This safety system is designed to transmit and receive signals from TCAS of nearby aircraft, and then to instruct each pilot on how to avoid a collision.

Through some error, the two aircraft found themselves on intersecting flight paths. Working within regrettably inadequate circumstances, flight control instructed Flight 2937 to descend. With little time to avoid a collision, Flight 2937 followed air traffic control's instructions. These instructions directly contradicted the aircraft's TCAS directions to climb. Flight 611 descended as directed by its TCAS, and the two aircraft collided at 35,000 feet. It's distressing to think how the tragedy could have been avoided had both pilots followed their TCAS flight instructions. They had received the most reliable directions available to them.

**It's distressing to think how
the tragedy could have
been avoided.**

In three short letters to the developing church, we hear the apostle John speak with the same urgency used to warn the pilot of Flight 2937.

In John's time, as in our time, false teachings abounded, and the aged apostle reminded his readers that he wrote as an eyewitness (1 John 1:1). He stressed that he was not writing some new theology, but rather something they had heard from the beginning (1 John 2:24). He reminded them that this message emphasizes loving one another and involves loving God, which manifests itself in obedience to His commands.

John wants all Christians throughout all time to understand that what he is writing is foundational to our walk with Jesus. Read 1 John 2:24. This message that we have been given from the beginning is even more vital than instructions given from any TCAS. The lessons this quarter will focus on this very important message.

* "Bashkirian Airlines Flight 2937," Wikipedia,

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bashkirian_Airlines_Flight_2937 (accessed April 14, 2008).

Jesus Alone

LOGOS

Rom. 8:32–34; 1 John; 1 John 4:1–4, 20; 2 John; 3 John

Denounce Them (1 John 1:1, 3, 5–10; 2:1–9)

Understanding the Johannine letters requires a basic knowledge of Gnosticism. During John's day, this theology became so infectious that many church members were defecting (1 John 2:19).

Gnostics compartmentalize humans into two distinct halves—the flesh that is evil and the spirit that is good. This leads to a questioning of Christian beliefs:

1. *The Gnostics said* that God, the perfect Spirit, could not possibly take on flesh, the ultimate evil. Therefore, some believed that Jesus had no humanity in Him and that His body was an illusion. Other Gnostics believed that the divinity of Jesus resided in His body only between His baptism and crucifixion.

John responded with a strong defense based on personal experience. His aim was to denounce Gnosticism by proving that Jesus was simultaneously divine and

human. Using the pronoun *we*, John referred to the other disciples and himself as those who heard, saw, and touched Jesus (1 John 1:1). These firsthand encounters with Jesus were recent enough to verify because there were more than one

Love between God and humans is a three-way relationship.

witness to His life on earth as man and God incarnate. Some of the believers who walked with Him were alive when John wrote, making it possible for the younger believers to vicariously experience the same things they did. John invited them to do just that in order to strengthen their faith (1 John 1:3).

2. *The Gnostics chose* one of two extreme lifestyles. Some lived a hedonistic life, saying that because only the spirit's goodness matters, the body can do anything it wants. Others lived an ascetic life, saying that the body, being evil, must be denied all pleasure.

John responded that body and spirit cannot be separated; both are parts of a person who is accountable for actions as one unit, one individual. The only way to distinguish evil from goodness is to note the absence or presence of God. Using the familiar analogy of light (1 John 1:5–10), John wrote that there are two lifestyles—one of light, which includes Jesus' cleansing blood and fellowship with other Christians; the other of darkness that leads to destruction, in which choices are guided by self.

"There is a prevalence of gnosticism today in the modern church and in the

emerging church. That is, the belief that the sins we commit in the flesh are not really that considerable and do not significantly negatively impact our relationship with God or our eternity. The thought that while the sins of the flesh are not optimal, they are not eternally momentous, is supported with the idea that what really matters is what we 'believe' in our minds and 'feel' in our hearts. . . .

"Gnostics do not think this is possible—put sin to death and repent of sin as it is revealed in our lives. They are forgetting that when we are in Christ it is as though we died with him and were raised with him in newness of life having victory over sin and death. This newness of life starts immediately and the victory over sin is immediately available and should begin to produce results. This is what John is talking about. What we do in the flesh, in and with our bodies, matters. It displays our hearts and is a gauge of whether we have truly submitted to Christ, accepted him as savior, and remain only in him."*

Accept Him (1 John 2:2)

John's answer to all the confusion raised by Gnosticism was simple: Look to Jesus. First, to emphasize that Jesus is both divine and human, John elaborates on His role as our Advocate. Then he draws attention to the life and teachings of Jesus that illuminate what people have known and practiced through generations.

John is saying, *I vouch for Jesus and so can you! Just experience Him, and you can be a personal witness.* We know that a true love for God results in obedience (1 John 5:2, 3), but Jesus' life on earth shows how love for God results in more than obedience to the law. He shows us how love between God and humans is a three-way relationship: God's love for us is expressed in forgiveness; our love for God results in obedience to God's love; God sharing an intimate relationship with us results in love for others.

John shows how body and spirit are interdependent, how faith results in actions. These epistles forcefully defend the outcome of God's incomprehensible act of love in allowing Jesus to be man and to take up the cross of sin. God allowed the incarnation so we could use His divine power to overcome evil, so we could live divinely despite sin.

A divine Jesus became fully human so we could be divine despite being human.

REACT

Identify elements of Gnosticism in our world today. How can we safeguard our spiritual growth and belief system against its subtle infiltration?

*Eric Jones, "Are You a Modern-Day Gnostic? Maybe You Know One?" Transformed Daily blog, posted on May 27, 2007, <http://www.transformeddaily.com/> (accessed April 14, 2008).

Light Rather Than Darkness

TESTIMONY

1 John 1:5-7

"The Lord loves His people, and would lead them step by step onward under the banner of truth, the third angel's message. . . . In these last days we have the benefit of the wisdom and experience of past ages. The men of God, saints and martyrs, have made confession of their faith, and the knowledge of their experience and their burning zeal for God is transmitted to the world in the living oracles. . . . This hereditary trust has been gathered up by faithful witnesses that the bright light shining upon them in the knowledge of God might enlighten those living in these last days; and while they appreciate this light, they will advance to greater light. . . .

"The Source of all light still invites us to come and absorb its rays. Light is not placed where the followers of Christ cannot obtain its benefits. It is not cut off from

**"The Source of all light still
invites us to come and
absorb its rays."**

the world so there is no more or increased light to shine in greater clearness and more abundantly upon all who have improved the light given of God.

"God's people in these last days are not to choose darkness rather than light. They are to look for light, to expect light. . . . The light will continue to shine in brighter and still brighter rays, and reveal more and more distinctly the truth as it is in Jesus, that human hearts and human characters may be improved, and moral darkness—which Satan is working to bring over the people of God—may be dispelled. . . . As we near the close of time there will be needed a deeper and clearer discernment, a more firm knowledge of the Word of God, a living experience, and the holiness of heart and life which we must have to serve Him."*

REACT

1. Who has God used to be "the living oracles," and how do we get the "knowledge of their experience" for ourselves so that we might benefit?

2. What are the ways in which a person can obtain this light that God wants "to shine brighter and still brighter" in our lives?

**That I May Know Him*, p. 347.

The Second John 3:16

EVIDENCE

1 John 3:16

The three letters written by the apostle John address issues of his day and portray a framework for Christlike love in a sinful world. We can ascertain the authorship of these letters because the language and tone are quite similar to the Gospel of John. There are comparable phrases and ideologies listed in all four books, and there are several references to John's firsthand experience as an eyewitness to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (1 John 1:1, 7; 4:9, 14; 2 John 12; 3 John 12).

When John wrote the three letters, he was already an aged man, presumably the last remaining apostle. He wrote from Ephesus, a city in the province of Asia. Ephesus (located in modern Turkey) was an ideal location because correspondence could easily be sent via trusted friends on the fine Roman highway system.

John wrote his three letters during a tumultuous time in the Christian church. Jerusalem already had been overthrown by the dominant anti-Christian Romans in A.D. 70. Individuals attempted to introduce incorrect views on the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ. These false doctrines and convictions penetrated the early Christian faith. John had to take decisive action!

**John had to take decisive
action!**

First John is a direct response to the worldly problems enveloping God's people. The theme throughout is love. When we are embraced with Christ's love, we reflect Him to others. We also show our love by adhering to His commands. John lived a life of Christian love.

After reading the three letters, one cannot help but conclude that John revealed the love of Christ to others. He desired to give the early Christian church advice on avoiding the follies of sin. These ancient words are applicable and most appropriate for today. As we ponder war, hate, and the many other consequences of sin, we must remember Jesus' gift to humankind (1 John 3:16). We will not receive His love if we cannot bestow this love on humanity.

REACT

1. How can we show love to those who are difficult to love?
2. What does it mean to lay down one's life for another person?

Not of This World

HOW-TO

1 John 2:1, 5

John's three epistles transcend generations. They speak to a church in turmoil—lost, confused, and rife with hypocrisy. They reassure a young church in desperate need of counsel and earnestly waiting the coming of the Lord. They bring the hope of salvation to those who abide in Christ and reflect His love. They speak to the three churches in Corinth. They speak to the Adventist Church today.

John shows us the way we, as a church, ought to act. We should "not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18, NKJV). Yet he speaks of people acting to the contrary. It's easy to become disillusioned in an environment where people say they are in the light yet hate their brother or sister (1 John 2:9). It's frustrating when we see flaws in the church we lean on for spiritual support.

How can we stay focused on Christ and His gospel in spite of all the distractions around us? In his letters, John shows us how:

1. *We are not of this world.* When we encounter the ugliness of this life, we must remember that it does not come from God (1 John 2:16). Even though these things may be evident in your own church, don't be discouraged. It isn't a true reflection of God, but of the world.

We all will falter in our walk with God.

2. *Christ is our Advocate.* We all will falter in our walk with God. It's our nature to do so. And when we do, what a blessing it is to know that Jesus will stand before the Father on our behalf (1 John 2:1). God loves us so much that He calls us His sons and daughters (1 John 3:1).

3. *Love above all else.* God's infinite love manifested itself in the gift of His Son. As Christians, it is our duty to reflect this love in all we do (1 John 4:11). And it is this love that gives the hope and assurance that our faith is based upon. It enables us to look beyond this world's pettiness and toward salvation and an eternity with our Creator (1 John 4:17, 18).

REACT

1. How do you feel when you or your church community fails to live up to the standards in which you all believe?
2. How do John's epistles apply specifically to your church?
3. John wrote these letters about two thousand years ago. Yet it seems the church is still struggling with the same problems. Does that mean we haven't grown? Have we become stagnant? Be able to explain your answer.

Jezeanah Fowler Kline, Medford, Oregon, U.S.A.

The Common Thread

OPINION

3 John 4

The interest in reality television comes from the idea that because it's not scripted, you never can tell what will happen. The truth is, if you watch enough of these shows, you begin to see the same pattern. It starts out great, seven strangers in a house, everyone is being nice and friendly; but let them get comfortable, and you begin to see the cracks forced open by our human nature.

This was the problem within the early church. It had started great with new members, new ideas, and a new message to share. But people started to get comfortable. Soon cracks began to show in this new family. John states in 1 John 1:6, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (NKJV). These new believers were putting their desires first, before God and other people. John reminded them that if they hated their brothers and sisters, they would walk in darkness. He wrote to a respected woman, warning her to be careful of those who are in the world, deceiving the faithful followers of God. The third letter went out to his trusted friend Gaius, encouraging him to continue showing hospitality to the traveling workers who were being treated poorly by a church leader.

Now that would be reality worth watching!

The common thread tying together all three letters is found in 1 John 4:7, 8: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (NKJV). It's as if he were trying to say, "When you love your brothers and sisters as you love yourself, it fills up those cracks forced open by our human nature."

And therein lies the problem with 1, 2, and 3 John—and reality television. If we were all to take John's advice and love each other as God loves us, then there would be none of the shockingly distasteful things, which people are willing to do just to be seen. I often wonder if those who like to flash signs that read "John 3:16" could also put 1 John 4:7, 8 on the other side. Now that would be reality worth watching!

REACT

1. What steps are you willing to take to better encourage your church family?
2. How does our desire to make positive impressions often deter from true fellowship?

Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory . . .

EXPLORATION

1 John 4:13

CONCLUDE

In 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John, the aged apostle speaks with urgency regarding false teachings about Christ, having seen Christ firsthand. He emphasizes love for one another and love for God manifested in obeying His commands. He implores us to experience Jesus so we, too, can be personal witnesses and always look to Jesus so as not to become discouraged by what we see around us.

CONSIDER

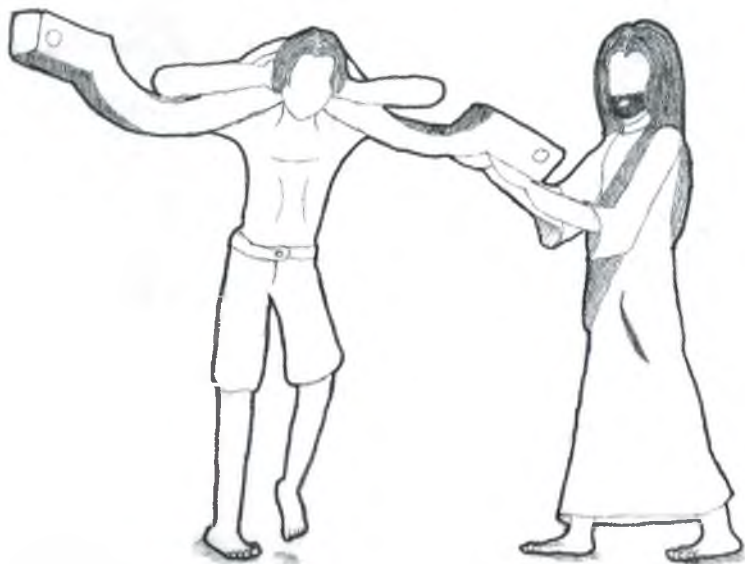
- Thinking of a time you attempted to tell a friend about something amazing you'd seen or experienced. Did your friend readily believe what you were saying? Or did your friend dismiss it as too fantastic to be true? Compare that to the challenge faced by the apostles as they described their experience with Jesus to those who had never seen Him.
- Creating a drawing or poster about what Jesus means to you without using any words.
- Performing a skit in Sabbath School class this week that illustrates how focusing on Jesus is of paramount importance when faced with possible disillusionment by observing what's happening in the world.
- Singing "Behold What Manner of Love."
- Observing evidence from nature that God is love. Share your observations with your Sabbath School class this week. The classic devotional *Windows on God's World* can be helpful.
- Baking a cake to share with your class on which you have written the scriptural references to the love of God found in 1, 2, and 3 John (implicitly, explicitly, and as seen in a Christian life; see for example John 1:9; 1 John 2:5; 1 John 3:1; 1 John 4:7; 2 John 3; 3 John 6; etc.).
- Brainstorming some creative ways you can share God's love with those around you.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ.

Douglas Cooper, *Living God's Love*; James A. Tucker, *Windows on God's World*.

Experiencing the Word of **Life**



“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).

Baskets of Burdens

INTRODUCTION

Rev. 19:13

All Christians experience God at least once in their life. It may be a small experience, but it is there. John T. Faris must have experienced Jesus in a special way to tell this story so well. "A father was carrying a heavy basket and his son asked to help him. The father cut a stick and placed it through the handle of the basket so that the end toward the boy was three or four times as long. Each took hold of his end of the stick, and the basket was lifted and easily carried. The son was bearing the burden with the father, but he found his work easy and light because his father carried the heavy end of the stick. Just so it is when we bear the yoke with Christ; He sees to it that the burden laid on us is light and He carries the heavy end."*

Every day God carries baskets of burdens for many people. One example is the story of a teenager. Mary was born into a poor Christian family in Myanmar. One day a friend told her she could go to Thailand to earn good money. So with the friend's help, Mary traveled there.

"Are you ready to escape?"

She followed the friend to a big building and was told to go inside to see her manager. Mary never saw the friend again. Mary had

been sold into prostitution.

Mary asked God to help her escape. She prayed and cried all day. That night, her door opened, and a Thai man walked in. Mary poured out her troubles. When she finished, he said, "Don't worry, sister. I will help you."

Every night the man came to her room to leave a sheet. One night he said to her, "Are you ready to escape? I think this rope is long enough to reach the ground!" The man helped Mary escape, and the two are now married.

When I find things tough, I remember John's and Mary's stories. God always helps us carry our baskets of burdens. So when a thick fog of doubt hangs low around us, we can still walk on, confident that our Father is carrying the burdens for us. As we study about Jesus, the Word, this week, may we sense that our burdens are being lifted.

*J. T. Faris, *His Yoke Is Easy* (Williamsport, Penn.: Coslett Publishing, 1938), p. 13.

The Word

EVIDENCE

1 John 1:1–4; Rev. 19:13

The Greek word *logos* is interpreted in English as “word.” It means “an account,” “a reckoning,” “a reason,” or “a thought.” We use it to designate areas of study in words such as *theology*, *psychology*, and *biology*.

However, Greek philosophers came to understand *logos* as a logical principle that gave order to the universe. Therefore, it was equated with the idea of God.* When the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek Septuagint, *logos* replaced the Hebrew word *dabar*, which means “a word,” “a thing,” or “an event.” *Dabar* was a vibrant word used to portray the conveying of God’s communication to His people, especially the prophets.

John is the only one who gives Jesus the title of Word. He uses it three different times. Read John 1:1, 1 John 1:1, and Revelation 19:13. The personhood of Jesus and His life were the direct communication of God. It was God conveying Himself not only to the people of Jesus’ time, but also to each one of us.

**The personhood of Jesus
and His life were the direct
communication of God.**

First John 1:1–5 and John 1:1–5 parallel each other in their ideas.

John wanted to make sure that this truth about Jesus was central to what Christians should believe. By stating that Jesus is the Word of life, he was clarifying any uncertainty that may have existed about how to obtain eternal life. It could only be found in the person of Jesus Christ. Just in case there were people who didn’t believe him, John verified it by what he had experienced through his senses.

If Jesus is Someone we know a lot about and can talk about successfully but don’t have a personal relationship with, our witness to others will be empty. But when we personally experience Him in our lives, our testimony is powerful.

REACT

1. What areas in your life could you allow God to work in more fully, so that you can experience Him in your life more powerfully?
2. How can you be sure you have eternal life?

*Trent C. Butler, ed., *Holman Bible Dictionary*, electronic ed. (QuickVerse 2005) STEP files.

Experiencing the Word of Life

LOGOS

Deut. 4:1–4; 1 Cor. 15:1–8; 1 John 1:1–5; Rev. 19:13

Obedience Breeds Life (Deut. 4:1–4)

God's call to humanity to hear and obey His voice and word is the theme of the Bible from the beginning (Gen. 2:15–17). God's secret to real living, prosperity, health, and happiness is found in compliance and cooperation with His laws (Deuteronomy 28).

Even the laws of nature on earth and in space reveal the importance of compliance with God's governance in order for there to be stability and functionality. God spoke the universe into existence and gave laws to maintain order (see Genesis 1:1–31; Job 38:1–42:6).

Obedience is the essence of relationships. As we develop relationships, we learn to respect each others' boundaries and decisions. We learn to give a little and hold back a little in order to find balance and cohesion. The words we speak to

**The greatest law of life and
happiness is the law of giving.**

each other, the issues we sort out, the important decisions we make, and compromises in balancing what's best for both, build relationships. When we cooperate with God's plan for

our lives, we begin to experience life the way God planned it from the beginning.

Christ's Resurrection Has Not Lost Its Spiritual Life-Giving Vitality Today (1 Cor. 15:1–8)

When Christ came to this lost planet, He demonstrated that He was the Word of God (John 1:1–16). Whatever His Father spoke, Christ did (John 4:33–35; 6:38, 39). We, too, can experience Christ as the Word of life, just as He experienced it with His heavenly Father. His Father is our Father, and we are called to find intimacy and oneness—the obedience of love and worship—with our heavenly Father (John 17).

Paul believed that Christ was just as real to him as Christ was to His disciples, even though Paul didn't see Christ in the flesh the same way they did. The demonstration and power of Christ's resurrection gave Paul confidence so that he, too, experienced the transforming power of Christ's presence (1 Cor. 15:3–8; 9:1). As Paul obeyed the Scriptures, he was, in essence, experiencing the Word of life (John 17:6; 1 John 2:5). This can be our experience also.

The Word of Life Becomes Incarnate in Us (1 John 1:1–5)

The greatest law of life and happiness is the law of giving (John 3:16). When we receive motivation, inspiration, and instruction from God's Word, we assimilate it by believing and acting on that belief. This is what we call faith. By beholding Jesus in His Word, we become like Him in thought, word, and action. It is only when we obey by faith that we experience Christ's likeness in us. When we disobey, we become spiritually disillusioned and disoriented (James 1:8).

To experience the Word of life is to know Jesus experientially (John 17:3). And when Christ does find His place in the heart, God's Word becomes a powerful influence in the life of the believer (1 Thess. 2:13). Then that influence becomes contagious and appealing to others (2 Cor. 2:14–17; 3:3).

Christ, the Word of God, Is the Source of Spiritual Life (Rev. 19:13)

Christ is . . . the *Power* of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:24).

Christ is . . . the *Heart* of the everlasting gospel (John 3:16).

Christ is . . . the *Wisdom* and the *Knowledge* of God (Col. 2:1–3).

Christ is . . . the *Way*, the *Truth*, and the *Life* (John 14:6).

In essence, Christ's life, death, and resurrection paved the way for us to experience His fullness (Eph. 1:18–20). His self-sacrificing love is the source of our motivation to obey and to love unselfishly (Gal. 2:20). We read the Word. We obey the Word. We live the Word. We share the Word, and we anticipate the coming of the Word a second time. This is experiencing Christ—the Word of life—to the fullest (John 10:10). Giving Christ to others each day through our kind words and deeds helps others to sample the joy that could be theirs in this world and into eternity.

"The kingdom of God comes not with outward show. It comes through the gentleness of the inspiration of His word, through the inward working of His Spirit, the fellowship of the soul with Him who is its life. The greatest manifestation of its power is seen in human nature brought to the perfection of the character of Christ."*

REACT

1. How can you experience Christ in your life today? What prevents it or makes it difficult? Why?
2. What does it mean to obey God's voice?
3. How can others know or see that you are experiencing the Word of life?

* *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 36.

From the Book to Your Heart

TESTIMONY

Ps. 119:105

How do we experience the Word of Life in the life we live today?

Taking the Word of God and applying it to our lives is where faith meets practice. Unless we find ways to bridge the concept to application, what are we really doing? Though it is true that there are facets to our faith and Scripture that our human minds cannot fully comprehend, perhaps the key moment that clears the confusion is when we reach out to our Savior to help us make the connections. He never fails to pick up a soul that is struggling to find Him, and His Word appropriately outlines the path to take.

"The Bible unfolds truth with a simplicity and a perfect adaptation to the needs and longings of the human heart, that has astonished and charmed the most highly cultivated minds, while it enables the humblest and uncultured to discern

**"The great storehouse of
truth is the word of God."**

the way of salvation. And yet these simply stated truths lay hold upon subjects so elevated, so far-reaching, so infinitely beyond the power of human comprehension, that we can accept them only

because God has declared them. Thus the plan of redemption is laid open to us, so that every soul may see the steps he is to take in repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, in order to be saved in God's appointed way."¹

"The great storehouse of truth is the word of God—the written word, the book of nature, and the book of experience in God's dealing with human life. Here are the treasures from which Christ's workers are to draw. In the search after truth they are to depend upon God, not upon human intelligences, the great men whose wisdom is foolishness with God. Through His own appointed channels the Lord will impart a knowledge of Himself to every seeker."²

REACT

1. How do you use Scripture to discern what God's will is in your life?
2. Do you think Scripture provides clear directions all the time, or only general guidelines?

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

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 125.

Keeping It Real

HOW-TO

Phil. 2:12, 13; 1 John 1:1–5

It's obvious from 1 John 1:1–5 that John wants his readers to share the joy he feels from knowing Jesus as a real person. How can we overcome the barriers of time, language, and culture and of having heard it all before to share John's joy and keep it real?

Compare. Going back to see how an older translation expressed a particular idea can add a different angle. Newer translations can help by using familiar words, thus making it more relevant. This also can help us to use "normal" language when we're sharing Christ.

Contextualize. Learn what you can about the setting of a biblical passage. Comparing the different accounts of Jesus' resurrection can create a fuller picture of how events unfolded. Other sources can fill out the picture, provide independent verification, or add meaning to the ideas being discussed. For example, understanding what the cities were like that Paul visited can help us to better understand his writings.¹

Challenge. Clichés can be useful shorthand. But they can also prevent us from thinking in fresh ways or more deeply. They also can be a barrier to communicating with others. Ask, "How would I explain this to someone who has never heard about this before?" Some musicians and other artists are able to express their faith in nontraditional ways and, as a result, engage a wider audience with their work. We have something in common with most other faiths. Finding this common ground can be a great way of starting a conversation from which all involved may benefit.

Create. Rethinking biblical stories, characters, or ideas to fit into the world we live in can bring them to life. What person in today's world can be compared to King David? Who are the "orphans and widows" of our day? (James 1:27). Expressing these ideas in a different art form could be an act of worship—and perhaps even an inspiration to someone else. Add practical expression to our beliefs by finding creative and meaningful ways to serve others in our churches and our communities.²

Clichés can . . . prevent us from thinking in fresh ways.

1. Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 2005), chap. 2.

2. Troy Bronsink, "The Art of Emergence," in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, eds. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007), pp. 60–73.

Twenty-First-Century Witnesses

OPINION

Gal. 5:22, 23

The disciples enjoyed fellowshiping with the Word of Life—God's character revealed to humanity. Some of us may struggle as to how we, being so far removed from the historical event of Christ's life on earth, can experience a genuine relationship with Christ so powerful that it will reflect in our lives. Can we become eye-witnesses of truth for others to see?

Evolutionist Richard Dawkins said that we live in a universe that has "no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference."^{*} And he is right if we simply view the length of our lives as the meaningless "three score and ten" (Ps. 90:10). What else are we to do then but create our own meaning and happiness? We may bring many things into our lives in search of purpose, yet in the end be left completely unsatisfied. Without the power of the Word of life, there is no real power and no second chance.

The truth is no longer hidden.

Have we taken hold of the power of God's Word so we can live radically changed lives that point to a Power greater than ourselves? As witnesses for Christ, we need to have a living experience

with Him through the Holy Spirit. Nurturing an intimate relationship by consistently meditating on the Word of God, studying Christ's life on earth, and living by faith and for God's glory, will change us from armchair Christians into living witnesses who will touch others. We will be challenged to live as effective Christians—glorifying God through active concern for the welfare of our fellow human beings; standing for truth, justice, and mercy; and being mindful of all God's gifts, just as Jesus was when He walked this earth.

Through Christ, John the beloved experienced the essence of what God is—overwhelming, unquenchable love. It's that same love God has for each of us. As this truth grows into a heartfelt reality, the desire to sustain a real relationship with the one and only God becomes overwhelming. The truth is no longer hidden. We want to share this amazing reality with others. Our hearts are changed, and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) become new and recognizable character traits. Now that's a personal, living, and real experience!

REACT

1. How does involvement in the Christian community strengthen personal witnessing?
2. How does the power of the Holy Spirit relate to the power of the Word?

^{*}R. Dawkins, "God's Utility Function," *Scientific American*, November 1995, p. 85.

The Reality of Relationship

EXPLORATION

Matt. 7:21–23

CONCLUDE

There's a big difference between knowing about Jesus and actually knowing Him and having a relationship with Him. In Matthew, Jesus clearly states that many people will claim to know Him. They will claim to have done good things in His name, but they will not enter the kingdom of heaven because they didn't really know Him. He will tell them, “ ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ ” (Matt. 7:23, NIV). These strong words should help us to place proper importance on cultivating and maintaining a relationship with Jesus. We need to have heart knowledge about Jesus, not simply head knowledge.

CONSIDER

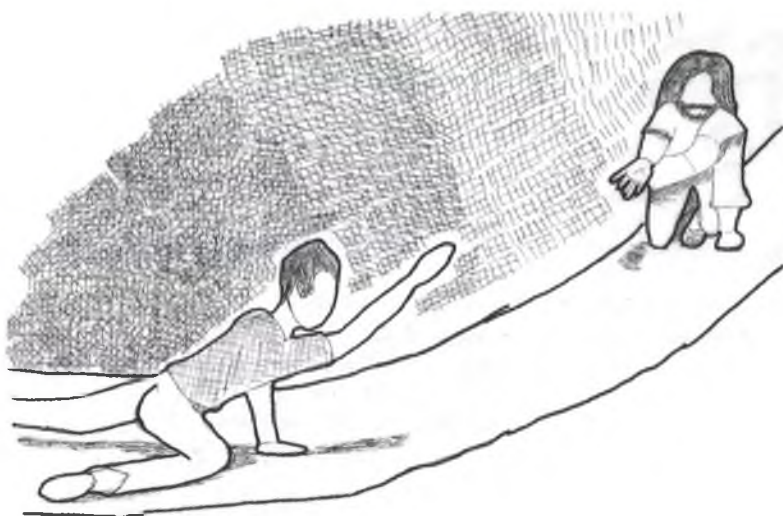
- Writing a letter to Jesus. Tell Him about yourself, and ask questions. Write the letter as if He were really going to read it.
- Viewing pictures of nature and reflecting on what each tells us about Jesus. Nature is God's second book. What does nature tell us about God?
- Interviewing someone you don't know well. Reflect on the types of questions you asked and how they helped you to better understand that person. Apply what you learned from this interview to your relationship with Jesus to help you get to know Him better.
- Keeping track in a journal the questions you have for Jesus. Document how He supplies answers to your questions over time. Pray that God will help you ask the right questions.
- Using charades, try to get across to someone else the different aspects of God's character. Consider the many ways God speaks to us without words.
- Using calligraphy (or your best handwriting), draw the name of Jesus in the center of a piece of paper. Fill in the blank space with words describing Jesus from your own experience with Him.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ.

David Nasser, *Glory Revealed: How the Invisible God Makes Himself Known.*

Turning Away From Sin



“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NASB).

True Light

INTRODUCTION

1 John 1:5

It's amazing that I find myself in Your favor,
Though I'm unrighteously forsaken
And after all the silly mistakes I've made,
The fact that I occasionally find comfort in sin's shade
You still want me for Your child.
Little did I realize
That Your eyes are still upon me,
Even when I'm walking blindly
Through the circumstance You'd prefer me to avoid
And often, through that darkened void
I come to the light.
For realization is just actualization of truth
And truth is who and what You are
So when I finally find the lit road
I know I am not alone
For I walk in the truth
I walk in the Light
All this inevitably means:
I walk with You.

It's so easy to get comfortable with darkness and remain there.

Have you ever found yourself so engrossed in conversation while driving or walking that you end up in a location that is unfamiliar to you? This has happened to me several times. What makes this situation ironic is that it can occur not only in the literal sense but in the spiritual sense as well. How often do we find ourselves on the wrong path, away from God's light, turning right into the face of sin, never understanding or realizing how we arrived there?

I wrote the poem above so that you might be able to reflect on the significance of walking in the Light as opposed to walking in spiritual darkness. It's so easy to get comfortable with darkness and remain there, but as 1 John 1:5 says, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (NKJV). So how do we steer back to the Light and, subsequently, the truth found in that Light? In John 8:12, Jesus affirms, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12, NRSV). If only we would pick up our heavenly GPS systems (our Bibles) and follow Jesus in our hearts and minds, back to the road of truth and light. Only then will we have a better understanding of what it means to walk in the Light and turn away from the darkness of sin.

"Let His Light Shine!"

LOGOS

John 3:17, 19; 8:12; Rom. 3:10-20; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 John 1:5-2:2

Light Aversion (John 3:19; 8:12)

It is a scientific and biological fact that when you have been in the dark for a long time, your eyes get used to it. It becomes easy to navigate the darkness and to operate in the shadows. It is also a spiritual fact that when you have been in spiritual darkness for a long time, you become quite used to operating in ways that are less than godly. All of humanity has been born in the darkness of sin. David declared, "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5, NKJV). This is a statement about the essential reality of all humanity.

We were all born under the dark cover of sin, and it is next to impossible for us to recognize, much less appreciate, the "Light of righteousness." This may explain why the Jews of Jesus' time and all of us living today find it hard to appreciate the fact that God has sent us the Light, which is His Son, Jesus Christ. We love the dark because it's all we have ever known. But perfect Love would not let us live in the darkness! The Father sent us His Son, the Light, so we could see how we are living and how we could be living (John 8:12). Jesus came to save us from the

darkness of perpetual and eternal sin and to bring us into a new way of living. He came to turn on the "light" so we could see Him for who He really is.

**God's Light can never be
put out.**

The Light of Love (John 3:17, 19)

One of the greatest challenges we have is accepting the light of God's love. In John's understanding, the reason why our heavenly Father sent the Light was because of His love for us. This radical love challenges our human reasoning. We struggle to believe that the Light was not given to condemn us. However, the Scriptures tell us that God sent the Light to us not to condemn us but to save us (John 3:17). The only condemnation we receive is the one we bring upon ourselves by loving our evil deeds more than we love the One who came to rescue us from them (John 3:19). Both our sin and our resistance to Christ endanger us. The reason why the Jews of Jesus' time rejected Him is the same reason why we often reject His love today. But God's Light can never be put out. His love and mercy are available to all who will believe in Him. No evil deed can overcome His love.

The Light of Confession (Rom 3:10–20; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 John 1:5–2:2)

The darkness of sin fools us into thinking that we are living better than we really are. If you've been in the dark long enough, you can get around and navigate with some degree of success. But when the lights are turned on, you can see things you could not see before. The truth is we all have sinned and continue to do so (Rom. 3:10–20). Jesus helped us to see our need for Him when He came to this world and showed us His sinless example and His perfect love. Confession and repentance are the ways we accept Jesus and His forgiveness. The word *confess* in the Greek means "to agree." Therefore, John is saying in 1 John 1:9 that if we agree with God that we have sinned and that He is the One to make us clean, He will forgive us. Confession is not just a stating of the sins you have committed. It is an agreement that you are in need of a Savior and that Christ is the only One who can cleanse you from your sins and rebellion. Paul confessed to Timothy that he was yet a sinner (1 Tim. 1:15). This humble confession pointed to his understanding of the need for consistent confession and repentance. We can never turn away from sin until we turn the Light on it and claim Him for who and what He is. Jesus promises us, through His servant John, that if we confess, He will forgive us and clean us up. After all, that is what He came to do.

The Light and the Law (Rom. 3:19, 20; 1 John 2:1, 2)

The law shows us how to avoid walking in darkness. It displays how a person who is in Christ should aspire to live. God gave us the law to give us knowledge of our sin, but we can never be justified by the law. Neither should the law be the focus of our attention. Whenever we become fixated on its requirements, we become discouraged due to our lack of success in keeping it. Turning away from the darkness of sin is not a fanatical legalism that obsesses over keeping the law. Remember, our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). But if we trust in our Savior, our lives will be ransomed from eternal death, and we will shine with the light of Christ's character, which is exemplified in the law. We cannot satisfy the requirements of righteousness, but, thank God, we have an Advocate who speaks up for us and shines brighter than our sin. Accept His love. Trust His character. He is the Light of the World!

"Into His Marvelous Light"

TESTIMONY

John 8:12

"In the manifestation of God to His people, light had ever been a symbol of His presence. . . .

"God is light; and in the words, 'I am the light of the world,' Christ declared His oneness with God, and His relation to the whole human family. It was He who at the beginning had caused the 'light to shine out of darkness.' 2 Cor. 4:6. He is the light of sun and moon and star. He was the spiritual light that in symbol and type and prophecy had shone upon Israel. But not to the Jewish nation alone was the light given. As the sunbeams penetrate to the remotest corners of the earth, so does the light of the Sun of Righteousness shine upon every soul."

"Christ does not find His subjects fitted for His kingdom, but He qualifies them by His divine power. Those who have been dead in trespasses and sins are quickened to spiritual life. . . .

**"He is the light of sun and
moon and star."**

"Christ draws them to Himself by an unseen power. He is the light of life, and He imbues them with His own Spirit. As they are drawn into the spiritual atmosphere, they see

that they have been made the sport of Satan's temptations, and that they have been under his dominion; but they break the yoke of fleshly lusts, and refuse to be the servants of sin. . . . By beholding Jesus, by obeying His requirements, they increase in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. Thus they become changed into His image from character to character until they are distinguished from the world, and it can be written of them: 'Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light . . .' (1 Pet. 2:9)."²

REACT

1. If you are living in sin, what steps can you take to permit Christ to draw you into His light and allow that light to heal you and free you from the prison of darkness?

2. Christ has called us to be a peculiar people. How then can we live lives that will be a light in this dark world?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 464.

2. *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 51.

John's Discourse on Light

EVIDENCE

1 John 1:5–2:2

The First Epistle of John was originally written in ancient Greek by the same apostle who wrote the Gospel of John. First John was written to counter the heresy that Jesus did not come “in the flesh” (1 John 1:1) but as a Spirit. First John also defines how Christians are to discern true teachers: by their ethics, their proclamation of Jesus in the flesh, and by their love. First John 1 begins by stating that Christ is light and our antidote to sin.

In several places in the Old Testament, God is compared to light (Pss. 27:1; 36:9). In addition, the light/darkness motif is presented in a number of places throughout the New Testament (2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8). When John says there is no darkness in God (1 John 1:5), he is being more than poetic. He is making a theological and philosophical point: in this world we encounter good and evil, darkness and light. Just as we cannot remove darkness without adding light, we cannot remove evil without doing good.

John notes that there is no fellowship in the darkness (1 John 1:7), because people in darkness cannot see each other. If you walk in darkness, you are your own authority, and everything you do is to benefit yourself. Those who walk in darkness are inherently wrapped up in themselves. It is not possible for selfish people to build a community, because selfishness and community contradict each other.

**Selfishness and community
contradict each other.**

When we walk in the light, we represent God to the world. Any community that confesses one thing and acts in a contrary manner is deceiving itself. If people know that God is light, yet act in shadowy ways, they undermine the very truth to which they testify. John presses this matter by constructing a series of parallel “if we” statements. If, for example, we say we have fellowship while walking in darkness, we lie. This blunt language points to insincerity and hypocrisy among members of the community. As the community of God, we must remember that light and darkness have nothing to do with each other. There is no overlap; we cannot hold on to our sin and walk with God at the same time.

REACT

1. What are some biblical principles for living and walking in the light?
2. How do you know whether your own claim of being in fellowship with God is true?

Wednesday
July 15

Walking Toward the Light!

HOW-TO

John 8:12

When some people have a near-death experience, they believe they see a bright light and if they choose to walk away from the light, they will live; but if they choose to walk toward the light, the next scene will be their funeral. However, the truth is this: we are to follow Christ, the Light of the world. In this case, we must walk toward the Light in order to live. In a practical way, what does it mean to follow Christ?

Keep your eyes on Him. Have you ever followed friends to an unknown place? You had to keep your eyes fixed on their car. When they turned, you turned. You stopped when they stopped. You did this because you didn't want to get lost. Similarly, we are navigating our way through this world. We don't want to get lost, so we must keep our eyes on Christ (John 8:12).

Stay connected. It's difficult to follow someone we don't trust. Likewise, if we don't have a real relationship with Christ, we cannot feel secure in following Him. We can stay connected to Him by spending time with Him every day. Joshua 1:8 talks about meditating on the Word of God day

**Jesus is calling us to check
our bags with Him.**

and night. This is how we come to know Christ, the Light we are walking toward.

Drop your baggage. If you've ever traveled by airplane, you can appreciate the satisfaction of having all your bags checked. You don't have to fight to get your belongings from the overhead bin when you arrive at your destination, and you don't have to worry about lugging your bags through the airport. When we follow Christ, He calls us to lay down our burdens. We can be free if we take His yoke. Think of how much easier and faster we can move when we aren't weighed down. Jesus is calling us to check our bags with Him and to travel freely (Matt. 11:29, 30).

Do not quit. As Christians, we are all intimately acquainted with struggle. We experience failure and defeat. In spite of all of this, we must persevere. Proverbs 24:16 states that the righteous are distinct from the unrighteous in their response to calamity. Righteous people will get up even if they fall seven times. Our God is so gracious that when we fall, He picks us up and helps us to get going again.

REACT

1. What does following Christ mean to you?
2. What is holding you back from following Jesus completely?

The Three-Step Approach

OPINION

Luke 17:5; John 8:12

Some Christians believe that confessing their sins is enough. But Christ encourages us to turn from them as well. Easier said than done? Not really. Yes, it requires effort, but nothing worth attaining ever comes easy.

Every woman wants to be wooed and made to feel as though she is the apple of her suitor's eye. She wants to know that her suitor is willing to go that extra mile to make sure she is happy and content. That is the kind of dedication Christ wants us to have for Him. Don't just say you love Him. *Show it.*

To do this we must follow three rules: First, practice the words of John 8:12 and follow Christ. During His tenure on earth He never sinned. He accomplished this seemingly impossible feat by relying on His Father for His every need. When tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Christ prayed. When feeding the five thousand, He prayed. When facing His executioners, He prayed. First Thessalonians 5:17 advises us to "pray without ceasing."

The second rule is in Luke 17:5. "And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." Faith is not tangible, and although defined in the Bible, it is still a concept many struggle with. It's hard to

understand how faith works and how to grasp its elusive reality, but without it, "it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6, NIV). Numerous biblical accounts tell of individuals who expressed their faith. When God told Gideon to fight the Philistines with only three hundred men, he relied on faith. When He told Moses that he, a stuttering shepherd, was to lead the children of Israel from captivity in Egypt, he went forth in faith. When Esther's uncle told her to go before the king uninvited, she exhibited faith.

After you have prayed for the desire and have expressed your faith in God, act on it. This is the third rule. Don't sit back and wait for God to carry you. Get up and move. Become involved. Work for the Master. Demonstrate how much you love Him by doing what is necessary to turn from sin. This may require changing your habits and altering your lifestyle, but ultimately it will be worth it.

Don't just say you love Him. *Show it.*

REACT

1. What are some changes you need to make in your life to take a step toward turning from sin?
2. Do you believe it is possible to be completely without sin? How can one accomplish this?
3. What do the words "turning away from sin" mean to you?

Carla Fider, Loma Linda, California, U.S.A.

Walking With the Light

EXPLORATION

Matt. 5:14–16

CONCLUDE

Few spiritual metaphors are more potent than that of light. Light represents Christ, in whom there “is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), and all that He brings to our lives. If we keep focused on Jesus, He’ll lead us through life’s darkest passages. Jesus’ light also reveals to us our sins, while His love promises forgiveness and strength to overcome. Jesus tells us He is the Light of the world, and yet, as we reflect Him through our attitudes and actions, we share and spread His light to a world full of darkness.

CONSIDER

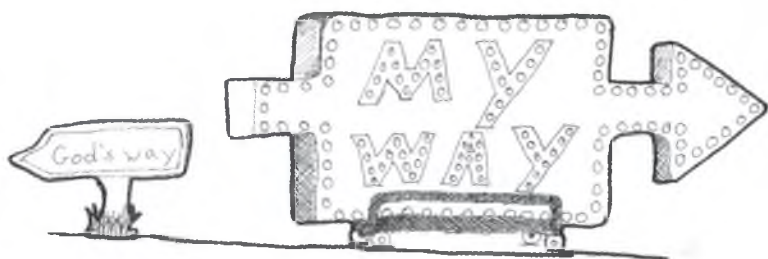
- Brainstorming practical ways you can illuminate the darkness around you with the light of God’s love.
- “Painting” with light by setting your camera to a long exposure and strategically moving a light source as the shutter is open, creating images that play on spiritual metaphors.
- Writing a poem about how Jesus’ light impacts your heart and the world around you.
- Listening to the dc Talk song “In the Light.” Consider how true its words are in your life, and how much the song may reflect your feelings and spiritual desires.
- Paraphrasing Matthew 5:14–16 using modern imagery.
- Searching your heart in light of 1 John 1:9.
- Researching how the mind interprets what the eyes see. Ponder what this tells you about the Creator and any spiritual applications you discover.

CONNECT

Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, chap. 4.

Karl Haffner, *Out of the Hot Tub, Into the World: The Cure for Comfort Zone Christianity*.

Keeping His Commandments



“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3, NKJV).

The Brighter Side of Things

INTRODUCTION

John 3:20

It's not always easy to do the right thing. Today's world offers so many options that would have us deviate from God's plan, causing us to wonder and even to question if what we are doing is necessary for our salvation. The evil one seeks out our vulnerability and takes advantage of our human shortcomings as he works on our minds to stray further and further from God's light. Thankfully, we serve a God who is well aware of the burdens we face and who promises not to place on us more than we can bear. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

The cares of this world can hold us back from seeing what God has in store for us. They can leave us feeling burned out and full of doubt. With this doubt comes a feeling of loneliness and despair, leading us toward a darkened pathway. It's at this crossroad where we have to decide which way we will go. The road that seems rough and full of obstacles does not appeal to us in our state of confusion and

**God has promised to never
leave us alone.**

fatigue. Our mind, submissive to the will of Satan, causes us to dread the thought of more difficulties and hardships, more hurt and pain, more turmoil and strife. So, with tired thoughts and defeated

souls, we take the road that offers more worldly delights and pleasures. This road requires little of our devotion but all of our mind and spirit, because at the end of that pathway lies a pit of regret and a lifetime of sorrow, an end that promises nothing but destruction and total separation from our Lord and Savior. "There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death" (Prov. 14:12, NRSV).

The road less traveled is the road we are meant to take, the road that purifies and makes ready our souls for salvation. The trials we go through, the obstacles we overcome, the loneliness we endure are all a process in which our hearts, minds, and spirits are refined for the Master. God has promised to never leave us alone; and He means for friendship to be a support in our Christian journey. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, NKJV).

Hate Your Family to Be Jesus' Disciple?

Sunday
July 19

EVIDENCE

Luke 14:26

The author of Luke claims the book to be a "carefully investigated" and "orderly" account (Luke 1:3, NIV). But any casual reader may find Jesus' use of harsh language in this particular text anything but carefully investigated and coherent with the rest of His teachings. The word that may cause this apparent contradiction is *hate*. Why would the same Jesus who taught His disciples to love even their enemies contradict Himself by asking them to hate their closest of relatives in order to follow Him?

The Greek word *miso* translated as "hate" is not to be interpreted in the usual sense. This word goes back to an Aramaic word meaning "to love less." This text also can be understood in light of Matthew 10:37, where Jesus says, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37, NRSV).

There are no shortcuts.

J. Willcock adds a new twist to the interpretation of this text when he states that hate in Luke 14:26 cannot mean that we ought to love our relatives and friends with a diminished affection. This also would be opposed to the teachings of Jesus. He alludes to the point that there can be no limit to the agape love that Jesus calls His followers to bestow upon their fellow human beings. Willcock believes that the key to understanding this text lies in the phrase "[hate] even life itself" (NRSV). For him, we should not "hate" ourselves in the bad sense of the word, but as we stand in rebellion against God and His will. So Christ's disciples may love their relatives and wish them all good things in life but hate what is selfish in them that will draw them away from Christ and God's will.*

God has revealed His general will to us through His commandments. He also directs our paths according to His specific will in particular instances of everyday life. The hating of self and preference of Christ above all else has to begin with obeying His commandments and then asking for His specific will. There are no shortcuts. The rich young ruler (Luke 18) kept the commandments but failed to obey God's specific will. The question comes to us, "Are we keeping the commandments of God but failing to ask Him for His specific will to be done in our lives?"

*J. Willcock, *A Homiletical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary, vol. 23 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 399.

A Sign of Good Health

LOGOS

1 John 2:3–11

An Urgent Need (1 John 1:1–7)

The beginning of 1 John echoes the beginning of John's Gospel. Both books start with the Incarnation. The Gospel's Word (John 1:1) that became flesh (John 1:14) is an obvious reference to Jesus Christ. The Word of life in 1 John became audible, visible, and tangible. Jesus became a human being and revealed the divine life to us. The incarnate Word of life left such a deep impression on John and his associates that they could not help but joyously proclaim this life (1 John 1:4). This life—the eternal life hidden in Jesus—is so potent that it creates fellowship with God the Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and other Christians (verse 3).

The Word of life reveals that God is light and that there is no trace of darkness in Him (1 John 1:5). Thus, if we seek fellowship with God and with other Christians, we must leave the life of darkness behind and walk in the light. Notice how the text does not advise standing in the light, but rather walking in the light, getting on with

The life of hatred is indeed a perilous life.

life under the illuminating and restoring rays of the light. If we walk in the light, we avail ourselves of the cleansing (justifying and sanctifying) power of the blood of Jesus (verse 7). There is no more

urgent need that a human being has than to be set free from the condemnation and power of sin. When our sins are forgiven, we are ready to receive everything else God has to offer.

A Test (1 John 2:3–6)

Once we have learned how God forgives our sins, we are presented with a test. This test involves obedience to God's commandments. People who know God and who fellowship with Him confirm that knowledge and fellowship through obedience. In 1 John 2:3, John emphasizes that obedience to God's commandments is a sign of our relationship with Christ.

Fellowship with God affects the heart in different ways. The heart of a Christian comes to know God (verse 3) through heart-to-heart fellowship. The heart of a Christian welcomes God and all that is real in His eyes (verse 4). The heart of a Christian is employed in perfecting the love of God (verse 6). The expression "the love of God" (KJV) is ambiguous. It can refer to both the love God has for us and

the love we have for God. Finally, the heart of a Christian remains in God (verse 6). All these spiritual realities form the foundation of the inner life of a Christian and produce obedience. Therefore, we must bear in mind that obedience to God's commandments is not of our own making. We do not keep the commandments merely because we want to. Obedience is a sign of a new spiritual reality within us. It is a sign that God reigns in our hearts. It is a sign of health.

The Test Answer (1 John 2:5–11)

Next John emphasizes that obedience itself is also complex and many-sided. He desires us to think of obedience in more comprehensive and Christocentric ways. Those who keep the commandments are not to focus exclusively on the Ten Commandments or other explicit imperatives of Scripture. Rather, they are to keep the whole Word of God (1 John 2:5). Thus, all who wish to obey God should develop an attitude of openness and humble attention to the Word of God (Matt. 4:4).

However, John raises the bar higher by stating that obedience is walking the same way Jesus walked (1 John 2:6). The answer to the question, "Which type of obedient life confirms that we are walking in the light?" must always be this: "The type of obedient life that duplicates the obedience of Christ."

First John 2:7–11 names one specific example of the commandment that indicates whether we fellowship with God and walk in the light—the old/new commandment to love our fellow believers. John claims that a Christian who does not love fellow believers is in a grave predicament. Notwithstanding appearances and professions of faith, such a person is not only still walking in darkness, but this darkness has degenerated into blindness (verse 11). Whoever hates a brother and sister cannot see and cannot find the way to the light. The life of hatred is indeed a perilous life. But we must not resign ourselves to living this way, because "the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (verse 8, NRSV). We are already immensely blessed because "it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6, NRSV).

REACT

1. Which spiritual signs does your life show? Are they signs of health or disease?
2. How did Jesus keep God's commandments?
3. How can you be free of the darkness and blindness of hatred?

Tuesday
July 21

The Extension of Obedience

TESTIMONY

1 John 2:5, 6, 9–11

Walking in the light has a lot to do with the love we show toward one another. Love is an action that results from our obedience to God.

“Supreme love for God and unselfish love for one another—this is the best gift that our heavenly Father can bestow. This love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found. ‘We love Him, because He first loved us.’ In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the ruling principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, and ennobles the affections. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the life and sheds a refining influence on all around.”¹

Attempting to love through our own effort opens the door to danger.

“There are those who profess holiness, who declare that they are wholly the Lord’s, who claim a right to the promises of God, while refusing to render obedience to His commandments. These transgressors of the law claim everything that is promised to the children of God; but this is presumption on their part, for John tells us that true love for God will be revealed in obedience to all His commandments.”²

Love is an action.

As Christians, we should be careful to not solely “profess” our obedience to God’s commandments. The Bible tells us there is only one way to know whether we are in harmony with God: “But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:5, 6, NIV).

Ultimately, true love for God will reveal itself in the path we choose to walk. “If we abide in Christ, if the love of God dwells in the heart, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions, will be in harmony with the will of God. The sanctified heart is in harmony with the precepts of God’s law.”³

Obedience and love come together beautifully when we remember to keep Christ in the center of our lives!

REACT

1. Through our own good intentions, can we produce the love in our hearts that is needed to keep God’s commandments? Why or why not?
2. What’s the test of knowing God’s character?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 551.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 562, 563.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 563.

Walking in the Light, Even When It Gets Dark

Wednesday
July 22

HOW-TO

Gen. 39:7–12; Dan. 3:8–18

The Bible is full of stories and examples of people who faced hardships but who still remained faithful to God's commandments. Some of us may fall into the trap of dismissing these stories as not applicable to modern times. However, God inspired people to write down these stories for a reason. It's up to us to learn from them and apply them to our daily walk with God.

So what are you waiting for? "The purpose of life is to live a life of purpose."* Start your walk with God the right way by following these steps:

Make a workout plan. If you are going to succeed at anything, you need to have a plan. Decide what it is you want to attain in your relationship with God and determine what will help you to get there.

Create a good environment. Although we live in a world of sin, we can still control how our environment affects us. Stay away from the secular crowd.

How do you expect to follow a diet if you constantly pull up to a McDonald's drive-through window?

The radio, TV, even friends can severely distract us from walking in the light. How do you expect to follow a diet if you constantly pull up to a McDonald's drive-through window? If we make an effort, God will take us the rest of the way.

Communicate. Communicate. Communicate. Remember that it's not only a journey, it's a relationship! And all relationships require constant healthy communication. Daniel had a health regimen that allowed him to build a strong bond with God. Daniel 9 illustrates how his communication skills strengthened as a result of such a healthful practice.

Don't sweat the small stuff. Let the Holy Spirit calm you and fill you with the peace and happiness you need. How can He do that? By not allowing stress to overcome us. God can help you only if you let Him. This is a hard rule to apply, but the end results are worth celebrating for all eternity!

REACT

1. Why does it sometimes seem easier to walk in the dark than in the light?
2. Why is it that some of God's commandments seem easier to follow than others?

* "Quotations About Life's Purpose," *Follow Your Dreams*, <http://www.followyourdreams.com/purpose.html> (accessed May 1, 2008).

A Lifetime of Growing in God

OPINION

2 Pet. 3:18

The existence of confrontational “mature” believers is nothing new. In Christ’s time on earth, the Pharisees and Sadducees boasted about their commitment to uphold the Old Testament traditions of the prophets and priests.¹ They thus considered themselves better than the common believer. The Pharisees in particular believed themselves to be so good that they loathed to associate with “common sinners.”² Such spiritually superior attitudes seem to contrast greatly with the counsel of 2 Peter 3:18, from which one can deduce that growth in grace and knowledge of God is ongoing, rather than an action to be performed until a sufficient level is reached to warrant spiritual complacency.

The dangers of complacency in one’s spiritual growth are conveyed in Luke 7:36–50. In these verses, a sinful woman

**It was evident who the
immature believer was
that day.**

decided to visit Jesus when she learned that He was having dinner at the home of a local Pharisee. Upon her arrival, she wept at His feet, washed them with her tears, and anointed them with ointment from an alabaster box she had brought

with her.³ The Pharisee was disgusted that a sinner as great as she would touch someone like Jesus, whom people believed might be a prophet. Knowing the Pharisee’s thoughts, Jesus stated that the woman’s sincerity toward Jesus was greater than the sincerity of the Pharisee. He was content to simply invite Christ to a meal at his home, but the sinful woman was willing to humble herself and pour out her heart before Him. It was evident who the immature believer was that day.

And so, let us not become stagnant in our spiritual growth. Instead, let us ever be filled with a humble heart and a receptive mind regardless of where we are in our walk with Christ.

REACT

Contemplate your Christian growth thus far. How do you think your Christian growth might be different if you lived in another country?

1. Karen Dockrey, Johnnie Godwin, and Phyllis Godwin, *The Student Bible Dictionary* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Books, 1993), pp. 183, 207.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

3. Ronald F. Youngblood, ed., *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), pp. 806, 807.

Straight Ahead

EXPLORATION

1 John 2:3–11

CONCLUDE

While the straight and narrow path seems like it should be easy—certainly going straight ahead cannot be too difficult—it is fraught with danger. This path requires concentration, keeping the attention up ahead to see where God is leading. Glancing to the left or to the right will cause the traveler to wander off the path of righteousness. God provides light for the journey by giving us His commandments. Obedience to these commandments, the whole Word of God, demonstrates our love for Him, which shows in everything that we do.

CONSIDER

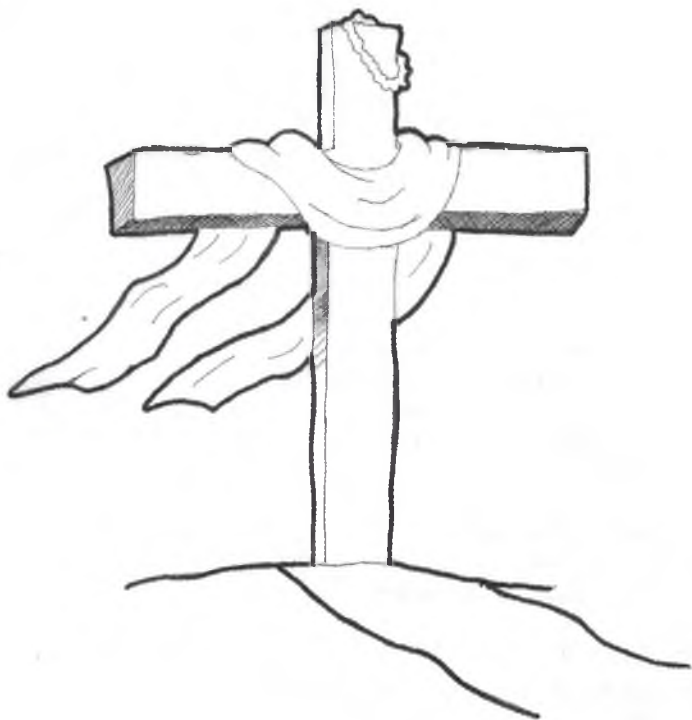
- Creating a 60-second news segment highlighting the journey a Christian takes. Feature the challenges faced along the way and the excitement of the traveler as the destination nears.
- Evaluating your responses to various challenges that were strewn across your spiritual path in the last six months. Remember that while some of our greatest challenges can be mundane, the devil uses whatever he deems to be most effective. How have you grown spiritually based upon your reliance on God during difficulties?
- Rephrasing the Ten Commandments as positive statements (You shall . . .) rather than negative statements (You shall not . . .). Modernize the language, thinking about the application of each of the commandments to your own life.
- Developing a skit based on a person in the Bible who faced adversity but remained true to God's laws. Demonstrate the relevance of the story you chose for today.
- Observing a flower or the intricate markings on a bird. Think about the care God took in creating the smallest of details. How much more care did He take in giving us His commandments?

CONNECT

Mark 12:28–34.

Pilgrim's Progress, part 1.

Renouncing Worldliness



**“Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world”
(1 John 2:15, NRSV).**

Visiting or Dwelling?

INTRODUCTION

Col. 2:8

In the Inter-American Division, the 2008 adult devotional book was entitled *A través de la Biblia (Every Day With My Bible)*.* In addition to the text for each day and the devotional reading based on that text, one could also read between three and four chapters of the Bible per day in order to read the Bible through during that year. Now for some of us, it was difficult to keep up with these daily Bible readings. After all, there are many demands on our time. We have to work and relax, as well as commune with our Maker; and some of these chapters are so long!

But wait a minute. Psalm 91:1 tells us that Christians dwell in the secret place of God. This means that we do not just visit. It means that we do not just snack but that we feast on His Word. Psalm 1 reiterates that a blessed person meditates day and night on God's Word. Therefore, in order to renounce worldliness and walk in the light, we have to put God first and get our priorities right. We have to spend quantity and quality time with God's Word.

It should be the greatest longing of our lives.

Colossians 2:8 definitely speaks of being led astray by false theories. Our only defense is the Word of God. Our earnest desire should be to assimilate that Word. We should pant after it, "as a deer longs for flowing streams" (Ps. 42:1, NRSV). It should be the greatest longing of our lives—getting to know Jesus intimately through His Word. This should eclipse every other burning desire in our lives. In this way, everything else will fall into place. We will lose our love for earthly things that do not please God, and we will become more like Jesus. Our lives will be a glowing testimony of the awesomeness of our Creator and Redeemer, so much so that everyone we meet will be curious to learn about Jesus for themselves.

As we focus on this week's study, let our dwelling in the secret place of the Most High teach us the answers to the following questions.

REACT

1. How can we know that our sins are forgiven?
2. What does it mean to know God?
3. What does it mean to hate the things of the world?
4. What is the ultimate fate of the world?

*Israel Leito, *A través de la Biblia* (Doral, Fla.: Inter-American Division Publishing Association, 2008).

Sunday
July 26

Walking in the Light— Motivated by Love

LOGOS

Dan. 5:13; John 15:19; Col. 2:8, 13, 14; 2 Pet. 3:10–12; 1 John 2:12–17

What Does It Mean Not to Love the Things of the World? (1 John 2:15; Phil. 2:6–8)

Anyone who loves the world is pursuing a course that is hostile and directly antagonistic to God. According to this week's memory text, the child of God who is in love with the Father does not love the world or the things of the world. So does that mean we should not have the ambition of gaining a college education? Is it saying that a child of God should not aim for a comfortable home, a fine vehicle, and the finest clothing? Should we assume this is a command that the follower of Christ should not aspire to hold the highest corporate or political office? We cannot take such a simplistic approach to this text. To appreciate the admonition John is giving, let us first examine the word *love*.

The word *love* is such a generic term. Because it has such variation in meaning, especially in the English language, we cannot always adequately grasp its es-

sence and depth. The love John refers to in 1 John 2:15 is an attitude (and principle) that transcends feelings, and it must be understood in the context of Philippians 2:6–8. Read those texts now. In this passage, Jesus

**Because of love, He was
ready to risk His relationship
with the Father.**

demonstrates the power of love. For the love of humanity, He was prepared to give up everything. He willingly stripped Himself of divinity and readily succumbed to a death we were meant to die—the death of eternal separation from God. Because of love, He was ready to risk His relationship with the Father.

Therefore, John is saying that the child of God will not pursue or devote himself or herself to the world or anything in the world to the extent that one becomes a slave, or even forfeits his or her life.

Why is John cautioning God's people against such love?

What Is the Ultimate Fate of the World? (Col. 2:8; 1 John 2:15, 17)

There is a constant effort to make us believe that our future and happiness depend on what we possess. The child of God, however, is strongly cautioned against this falsehood. Read Colossians 2:8.

Additionally, seeking happiness, meaning, fulfillment, and peace from anything or

anyone but God not only proves to be illusive, it eventually enslaves. Instead, John wants to direct the mind of the Christian to the essence of life. He points us to the temporary nature of the world. "The world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever" (1 John 2:17, NRSV). Also read 2 Peter 3:10.

Thus, there is a call for all true seekers of God not to love the world or anything in it. In fact, 1 John 2:15 makes it clear that anyone who seeks after the world does not love the Father. Anyone who builds the foundation of his or her happiness on sensual pleasure, riches and wealth, or honor and applause bears testimony to the fact that he or she does not know God.

What Does It Mean to Know God? (John 15:19; Col. 2:13, 14)

At some point in our lives, we're all most likely to believe that the things of this world will bring us peace. Paul, however, wants us to understand that it is Christ who gives the child of God a new hope, that Christ alone brings us peace and helps us understand that true happiness lies only in Him. Read Colossians 2:13, 14.

Now read John 5:24. Those who know God pay attention to His Word. That is, they do the will of God. They refuse to be enslaved by the things of the world, knowing that true peace and happiness lie only in Him. They don't merely recognize that this world will pass away. Their lives bear testimony to that fact.

Because children of God live at variance with the world, they find themselves at odds with the values of the world. This is why Christ instructs His children that the world will not love them as one of its own (John 15:19). Nevertheless, children of God commit to walking in the light of God's Word, knowing that this world will never offer them true happiness, that their struggles are momentary, and that soon this world will pass away.

REACT

1. Must a child of God sacrifice something of the world to be saved? Explain your answer.
2. What about this world can a Christian enjoy and still inherit God's kingdom?
3. Who gets the chance to develop to their fullest potential, the children of God or children of this age? Explain your answer.

Stand in or Stand Apart

TESTIMONY

Matt. 6:24; 1 John 2:15-17

Many of us try to live the Christian life with one foot in and one foot out. It is evident, according to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, that such an existence is impossible. " 'They can secure but one world. In order to acquire the heavenly treasure, they must sacrifice the earthly. They cannot have both worlds.' I saw how necessary a continuance of faithfulness in watching was in order to escape the delusive snares of Satan. He leads those who should be waiting and watching, to take an advance step toward the world; they have no intention of going further, but that one step removed them that much further from Jesus, and made it easier to take the next; and thus step after step is taken toward the world, until all the difference between them and the world is a profession, a name only. They have lost

"The continual worry is wearing out the life forces."

their peculiar, holy character, and there is nothing except their profession to distinguish them from the lovers of the world around them."

"There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world's standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. In order to gratify ambition and worldly desires, they wound the conscience, and bring upon themselves an additional burden of remorse. The continual worry is wearing out the life forces. Our Lord desires them to lay aside this yoke of bondage. He invites them to accept His yoke; He says, 'My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' He bids them seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and His promise is that all things needful to them for this life shall be added."²

REACT

1. Do you believe it is possible to stand apart in this world? If so, how?
2. Identify men and women of the Bible who were "in the world" but who stood out. What characteristics were evident in their lives?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 193.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.

Faith for Fulfillment

EVIDENCE

1 John 1:1–4; 2:15–17

John lists 3 fundamental human desires in 1 John 1:1–4: eternal life, fellowship, and joy. In today's scholarly world, some suggest 16: power, independence, curiosity, acceptance, order, saving, honor, idealism, social contact, family, status, vengeance, romance, eating, physical exercise, and tranquility.¹

How worldliness and Christianity approach the fulfillment of desire is also quite different. Worldliness is often recognized by its failure to realize fulfillment of desire. We hear that 41 percent of the United States workforce is unsatisfied with their current jobs² and that the divorce rate in America is over 40 percent.³ We even read that dissatisfaction and yearning are driving Protestants to switch churches.⁴ This dissatisfaction reveals itself in two distinct characteristics. First, it corrupts true desires (such as those mentioned by John), converting them to lust. Their pursuit of fulfillment degenerates into things such as sexual immorality, spiritualism, jealousy, anger, and selfish ambition (Gal. 5:19–21). Second, dissatisfaction drives them to action in an attempt to gain fulfillment of desire. They change jobs, spouses, fashions, technology, and even churches in this pursuit.

**Dissatisfaction and yearning
are driving Protestants to
switch churches.**

For the Christian, however, true desire is pursued much differently. First, our desire remains pure. We long for things such as love, joy, peace, and goodness (Gal. 5:22, 23). And second, while the worldly are caught up in frenzied action in the pursuit of desire, the Christian is quietly, peacefully pursuing it through faith and faith alone. See Galatians 3:14.

1. Jeff Grabmeier, "New Theory of Motivation Lists 16 Basic Desires That Guide Us," *Ohio State Research*, June 28, 2000, <http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/whoami.htm> (accessed May 1, 2008).

2. "Many U.S. Employees Have Negative Attitudes to Their Jobs, Employers, and Top Managers," Harris Interactive, May 6, 2005, http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=568.

3. Americans for Divorce Reform, "Divorce Rates," Americans for Divorce Reform, <http://www.divorcereform.org/rates.html> (accessed May 1, 2008).

4. Cathy Lynn Grossmann, "Dissatisfaction, Yearning Make Churchgoers Switch," *USA Today*, April 22, 2007.

Escape the Rat Race!

HOW-TO

Col. 2:8

How many of us are in a cycle of relentlessly scurrying about, wondering if and when it will change? What are we afraid will happen if we change focus? Perhaps our reputation is at stake, or we might fall behind the competition. What's the point of all our activity anyway? Are we somehow being threatened with extinction? If we recognize that worldliness is robbing us of crucial temporal blessings, as well as eternal life, how do we go about ridding ourselves of such a monster? Below are some simple steps we can take in the pursuit of freedom from worldliness:

Spend time daily meditating on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "If all would bear in mind, and could in a small degree appreciate, the immense sacrifice made by Christ, they would feel rebuked for their fearfulness and their supreme selfishness."^{*}

Examine your thought patterns. Read Proverbs 23:7. If we are constantly focused on self, we are more likely to be wrapped up in the exhausting pursuit of worldliness.

**Obviously not everyone can
be trusted to play the game
of life fairly.**

Spend much time in prayer and Bible study. When we bow humbly before

Christ, He will respond with an understanding that usually challenges our worry, covetousness, selfishness, and a fear of want.

Be faithful in returning tithes and offerings. Read Malachi 3:8-12. Rather than restricting our comfort, the act of giving more often results in a profound sense of freedom.

Read Colossians 2:8. Are we listening to the right people? Obviously not everyone can be trusted to play the game of life fairly. Escape the rat race! Dare to trust God.

REACT

1. Considering John 15:19, what are you willing to endure in order to renounce worldliness?

2. Is profound freedom from worldliness found only in relinquishing material things? Explain your answer.

^{*} *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 198.

Renouncing Class Attitude and World Outlook

Thursday
July 30

OPINION

1 John 2:15

It's not unusual to see class snobbery toward less fortunate brothers and sisters. They are the ones who are no longer invited to dinner because they will not be able to converse with our friends; or when we invite them, we make them acknowledge our largesse in subtle ways. At church, the least wealthy are hardly given positions of leadership anymore because the perceived prerequisite for being an elder has become a college degree. Class attitudes are further manifested when the poor are reminded to rely on God, while others invest in all types of financial vehicles to make sure they have enough money to enjoy their old age. Now there is nothing inherently wrong with planning for one's future, but it is the attitude in which it is done. Do we think of sharing financial information with the less fortunate among us, or do we see them as people who are doomed to be poor because they have no vision of the future?

We have become so secular that it is almost impossible to see the difference between the way we respond to economic injustice and the way the world

It's not unusual to see class snobbery toward less fortunate brothers and sisters.

responds to it. According to the world, some people will be poor because they lack initiative, and others will be rich because they are industrious. Thus, many assume that poverty is of one's own making. Sometimes the world takes pity on the poor and gives them some food and boasts about helping them. Yet the systems that create poverty go unquestioned. The church at times does the same. We have Adventist Community Services, but we hardly talk or preach about the conditions that create economic injustice. Instead, we argue that the church should not be involved in politics.

But how can we bear the suffering of other human beings without questioning it and while claiming that we are different from the world, while listening to Sabbath sermons that have almost become vacuous self-help harangues on how to be successful?

REACT

How does Scripture speak out against social injustices? Read Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25:31-48.

Andy Joseph, Somerville, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

Who Holds Your Heart?

EXPLORATION

Deut. 6:5; 1 John 2:15

CONCLUDE

Jesus came to show us that we are no longer hostage to the trappings of this earth. If we choose, He will enable us to surrender our hearts and desires to Him. He is the only one who can pry our gaze away from this world and fix it on the eternal. As Christians, we often think we can hold the hand of God while our feet are strapped to the things around us. But it is impossible to be devoted to this world and to God. Jesus asks for an undivided heart. In full surrender to Him, we'll discover that He's everything we need.

CONSIDER

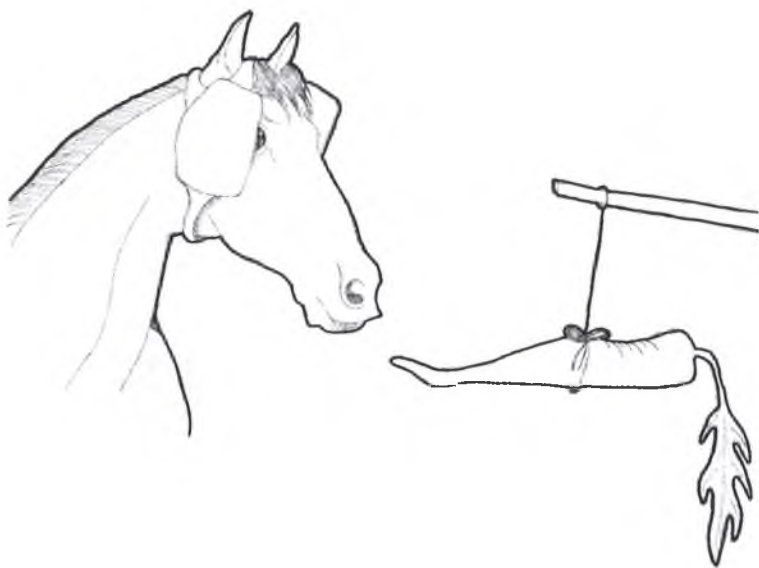
- Looking for a definition of *love* in the dictionary. Write down ten things you love, according to the definition. How many of the things on your list are God-centered?
- Keeping a diary of what you do from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed. Group your activities in three categories: time for me; time for others; time for God. Display your results in a pie chart. Are there any changes you want to make?
- Reading Job 1:1–22; 19:25–27. Brainstorm with other students on the character traits Job might have had that contributed to both his business and spiritual achievements.
- Performing a skit for the class based on Ecclesiastes 2:26. After the skit, read the text and ask the class, According to this verse, what must the pursuit of happiness involve?
- Making a collage of your dreams. Use pictures from magazines or write words that remind you of things you have always wanted. Write on the bottom of your collage the words of Jeremiah 29:11.
- Praying for God to help you experience the fullness of His presence in your life. Ask Him to fill every corner of your heart and turn your desires and longings toward Him.

CONNECT

Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings.

Ben Carson, *Think Big*; Jim Hohnberger, *Escape to God*.

Rejecting Antichrists



**"Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either;
he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also"
(1 John 2:23, NKJV).**

Be Not Deceived

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 24:5, 11, 24; 1 John 4:1

Be not deceived by the things of the world.
The world isn't as dazzling as it seems. It's like a post that appears to be beautiful and strong but rotten on the inside.
Be not deceived by the devil and his traps.
He tries to do all he can to capture our minds, because he wants us on his side.
Be not deceived by the entertainment industry: the clothes, the music, the lifestyle, and the jewelry.
Let none of us be deceived by these things.
If anyone among us seeks to be wise in this age, let them become a fool that they may become wise.
The level of deception is increasing as time seems to be wrapping up for the very elect's sake.
Remember that the devil is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.
Trust in God. Stand on His promises, and you will not be deceived.
Be not deceived!

Read Matthew 24:5. Over the years, we have seen people who claim to be sent by God, people who claim to heal the sick, and people who prophesy, but by their fruits we shall know them. We are approaching the end of this earth's history, and Satan is working as never before. He is striving to act as director of the Christian world.

Trust in God. Stand on His promises.

As Christians, we need to trust in God and not attempt to make our own choices. Our decision to walk with the Lord should not be based on tradition, friends, or even family members. We must bear in mind that neither friends, family, nor tradition can save us. Rather, we need to try the spirits for ourselves to know whether or not they are of God (1 John 4:1).

As we study this week's lesson, ask yourself how you can walk in the light, and remember that we are living in the last days and that the only way we can be rooted in Christ is to allow His Holy Spirit to guide us. We need a personal connection with Jesus, and we need to guide others to the truth.

Man of Sin, Man of Light

EVIDENCE

1 John 2:22

"In the days of the apostle Paul, the Thessalonian brethren were laboring under the erroneous impression that the Lord would return in their day, and Paul wrote to correct this false impression, stating what events must transpire before the advent could take place. He declared: 'Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.'"

Antichrist, from the Greek word *antichristos*, means "opposition to the Messiah." (*Christ* is the Greek version of the Hebrew term for *Messiah*.) The word *antichrist* is found five times in the Bible and is used by John in two of his epistles. An antichrist is anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ and exalts himself or herself above God's will and work.

The spirit of the antichrist is far more widespread than any of us can imagine. In our society today, many religions and denominations are surfacing that do not uphold Christ's teachings. If we are not careful as Adventist Christians, we can easily be deceived. It is important for us to daily search the Scriptures and be in constant communion with Christ so He can show us the light and guide our footsteps. As children of God we also need to lift Christ higher and higher, so others can see His light shining through us. Read John 8:12.

An antichrist is anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

When we stand up for Christ, we will be condemned by many and hated by family and friends. However, let us be prepared, trusting our Creator at all times, allowing Him to lead and direct our lives. God will honor those who love Christ and who are willing to be partakers with Him in His sufferings.

Let us not exalt human reason or set the opinions of others above the revealed wisdom of God, for this gives Satan an opening. May it be our desire to stay connected with God in all that we do.

REACT

1. How can we be deceived by the antichrist, and how can we stay connected to the real Christ?

2. What should we do to ensure that we are walking in the light? Use Scripture to defend your answers.

*Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 910.

The Antichrist ... a Deception

LOGOS

John 15:4–10; Acts 2:15–17; Rom. 6:2, 11; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4;
Heb. 1:1, 2; 2 Pet. 2:19; 1 John 2:13, 18–29; 4:1–6

What Is the “Last Hour”? (1 John 2:18)

The Bible shows that there will be a deceptive power called antichrist in the last days. The Bible also identifies several periods during which certain truths became present truth, critical for the church and the world (for example, Noah preaching about the Flood; John the Baptist preaching about the coming of the Messiah; and John the revelator writing about a people who have the faith of Jesus and who keep God's commandments). In addition, the Bible specifically identifies a period of massive deception just before the close of human probation and the Second Coming. This deception is spearheaded by Satan, the archantichrist, as he acts through his various agents who also are antichrists (2 Thess. 2:1–12; Rev. 13:13, 14). That period is indeed the last hour for anyone to accept salvation.

The antichrist is Satan himself.

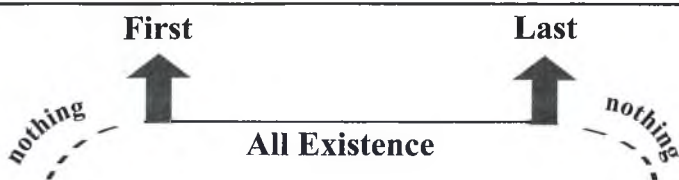
About What Threat Was John Warning His Readers? (Dan. 7:25; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4)

John warned that the last days of earth's history will be characterized by lies that would lead to the loss of souls. Daniel 7:25 tells us about the antichrist who lies about God's law by changing it. And 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4 tells us that there is an underlying spirit that characterizes all antichrists.

Is There a Difference Between the Antichrist and Antichrists? (1 John 2:22)

The antichrist is Satan himself. Antichrists are those who choose to be his agents. They proclaim that Jesus did not come in the flesh. They deny the equality of Jesus with God and the true relationship between the Father and Son. Furthermore, they go so far as to call themselves God. They say they have the ability to do things only God can do, such as forgive sins. “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22, NRSV).

The Bible clearly states that there is only one true God. Not even He knows of any other god (Isa. 44:6, 8). He defines Himself as the First and the Last. That is, He forms the boundaries of all existence.



God sent His own Son in the likeness (*homoïoma*—"form") of sinful flesh and condemned sin in the flesh so that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:3, 4). Because the flesh is weak, the righteous principles of God's law cannot be demonstrated in sinful flesh without outside help.

"The Lord God came down to our world clothed with the habiliments of humanity, that He might work out in His own life the mysterious controversy between Christ and Satan. He discomfited the powers of darkness. All this history is saying to man, I, your substitute and surety, have taken your nature upon Me, showing you that every son and daughter of Adam is privileged to become a partaker of the divine nature, and through Christ Jesus lay hold upon immortality."*

The spirit of antichrist says that Christ came in a special form that could not sin, thus denying or rejecting the accomplishment of Christ, excusing sin in the flesh, and declaring that nobody but Christ can live above sin since Christ's flesh was different from ours. These are the foundation stones of antichrist theology, which form such concepts as the immaculate conception or the Arian view that Christ is a created being. With this knowledge, one can not only identify the essential spirit of antichrist but also avoid it.

John tells us that if we abide in Christ, we can escape antichrist lies because the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth. We must partake of the truth that transforms us into the image of Christ. We are not to believe every doctrine, no matter how plausible it seems, unless it is in accordance with God's Word. Teachings from God show that because Christ actually came in the flesh, He was able to leave us an example of how to overcome sin. And if the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, we will be able to follow His example. The spiritual teaching that we can never overcome sin in this life is one of Satan's deadly lies. Overcoming sin is not an option. It is essential to the plan of salvation.

REACT

1. In what ways is our spiritual existence different after we accept Christ?
2. When do we finally get rid of sin? Before death, at death, or in heaven? Explain your answer.
3. Describe some of the ways we can abide in Christ.

**Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 379.

Walking as Christ Walked and Identifying the Antichrist

TESTIMONY

1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7

"It is not a conclusive evidence that a man is a Christian because he manifests spiritual ecstasy under extraordinary circumstances. Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love."

"It is our individual duty to walk humbly with God. We are not to seek any strange, new message. We are not to think that the chosen ones of God who are trying to walk in the light, compose Babylon. The fallen denominational churches are Babylon. Babylon has been fostering poisonous doctrines, the wine of error. This wine of error is made up of false doctrines, such as the natural immortality of the soul, the eternal torment of the wicked, the denial of the pre-existence of Christ

prior to His birth in Bethlehem, and advocating and exalting the first day of the week above God's holy, sanctified day. These and kindred errors are presented to the world by the various churches. . . .

**"Holiness is . . . trusting
God in trial, in darkness as
well as in the light."**

"Fallen angels upon earth form confederations with evil men. In this

age antichrist will appear as the true Christ, and then the law of God will be fully made void in the nations of our world. Rebellion against God's holy law will be fully ripe. But the true leader of all this rebellion is Satan clothed as an angel of light. Men will be deceived and men will exalt him to the place of God, and deify him."²

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:3-6).

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51.

2. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Sept. 12, 1893.

How to Know "Aunty" Christ

HOW-TO

Matt. 24:24; Luke 11:23

In my childhood years, when I first heard the term *antichrist* and before it was fully explained to me so that I could understand it, I used to think it was "Aunty Christ." After all, I was quite familiar with "Aunty." She was my Sabbath School teacher—a kind, loving individual who tended to my every need. "Aunty" was also my mother's sister who brought gifts whenever she visited us. "Aunts" were good people, and as far as I was concerned "Aunty Christ" must be nice as well. It wasn't until I increased in knowledge that I realized my misinterpretation had resulted in a grave error. "Aunty," who I thought was a friend of Christ, was actually His enemy!

So it is that many are drawn away from truth because of misinterpreting the Bible. Deception is probably the strongest weapon used by Satan, and we must be especially vigilant against it. It is the oldest trick in the book, because sin entered the world when Satan deceived Adam and Eve. We know from Matthew 24:24 that Satan's deceptions will be so strong, that if it was possible, even the very elect would be drawn away from God. However, Jesus never leaves us. He has provided in His Word practical solutions we may employ.

The following are some of them:

Study the Word of God to rightly handle the Word of truth. This helps us to recognize false doctrines (2 Tim. 2:15, NIV). It was not until I learned the true meaning of *antichrist* that I could see the error of my thinking.

Get to know Jesus. Just as you would with a new friend, spend time with Jesus in prayer and in His Word. Only then can you know His voice, answer His call, and obey His will (John 10:27).

Do the first two steps on a daily basis. Once you know Jesus and His Word, do not entertain anything that goes against Him (Ps. 119:15, 97).

I used to think it was
"Aunty Christ."

REACT

1. Should we witness to antichrists or just pray for them? Explain your answer.
2. Is it wrong for believers to question beliefs? Why or why not?

OPINION

Ps. 119:105; 2 Tim. 2:15

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). The truth is that some Seventh-day Adventists have walked away from this light, instead of being reflectors of it. Jesus calls us to be light bearers to illuminate a dark and sinful world. Yet how can we radiate His light when we neglect our primary Source of that light—the Word of God? Can we exclaim with the psalmist, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105, NIV)?

A growing concern in our churches is the neglect of quality time spent in personal devotions. Far too little time is devoted to prayer and studying the Bible. Jesus reminds us that we are to be the "light of the world." This means that we should transmit our Savior's love to everyone we meet. If we are to walk in the light

**We should transmit our
Savior's love to everyone
we meet.**

and recognize antichrists, we must be connected to the Source of light. Just as we rely on our daily food for physical strength, so must we partake daily of the spiritual food God has prepared for us through His Word.

As the apostle Paul admonished young Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Great is our call to diligence in developing a positive attitude toward our personal devotion. "The time devoted to a study of God's Word and to prayer will bring a hundred-fold in return."

In the final days of this earth's history, we will need to have fortified minds to be able to stand against all of Satan's attacks. "Let us study our Bibles more than we have done. Let us read the word of God with an earnest desire to understand the meaning of the revelation of God. Let us live lives of prayer."²

As we walk in the light, our purpose, conviction, and hope will be strengthened so that we will be light bearers reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ.

REACT

1. What are some ways you can improve your personal devotion?
2. List some things that steer us away from the path of light.

1. "What the Word of God Is to Us," *The Signs of the Times*, June 25, 1902.

2. "Restaurant Work," in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, p. 180.

Stand Firm in Christ

EXPLORATION

1 John 2:23

CONCLUDE

This world is full of deception—things or people that pull us away from God or even claim to take the place of God in different forms. God calls us to develop a close relationship with Him, spending time daily in prayer and Bible study. If we are faithful in that, He will keep us from being deceived by Satan or anyone Satan uses to try to lead us astray. As long as we have a strong connection to Jesus, we can stand firm against the deceptions that surround us.

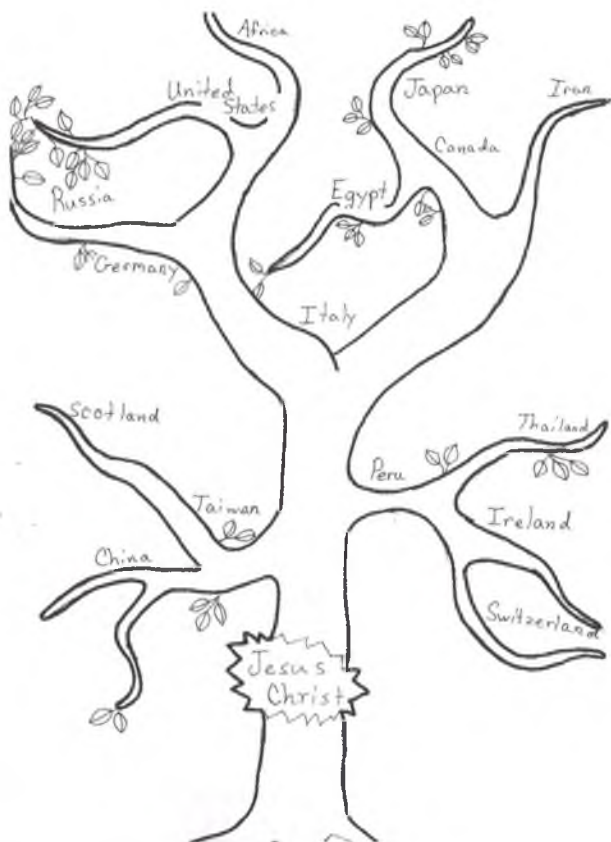
CONSIDER

- Making a list of the things or people in your life that may be forms of antichrists or that might be of greater importance to you than spending time with God. Pray that God will help you readjust your priorities.
- Spending some time outside to see how God uses light in His creation. How is God's light important in our lives?
- Assessing your time spent with God. What are some ways you could make your time with Him more meaningful?
- Explaining the concept of the antichrist to someone who doesn't understand it. (First, you should make sure you have studied the topic carefully.)
- Brainstorming with a small group on how you can learn to trust God more and allow Him to lead more completely in your life.
- Evaluating Jesus' statement, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV).
- Purchasing a prayer journal if you don't already have one. Decorate it with pictures that you feel represent your relationship with God.

CONNECT

John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, chap. 9 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 140–156; Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, chap. 24 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 185–192.

Living as Children of God



"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! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him" (1 John 3:1, NIV).

Growing in God's Heart

INTRODUCTION

1 John 3:1

How big is your family? Most families have a mother and a father, and perhaps brothers or sisters. I have only have one brother, but my wife has seven brothers and sisters. Unfortunately, not all families have two parents at home, and even those with two parents at home don't always have a positive family environment. This is the reality of the world we live in. Ever since sin was introduced into this world, Satan has been trying to disrupt God's institution of family. Every one of us has, at one time or another, experienced, or perhaps suffered from, the imperfection of human parents.

However, there is one perfect Father. We are all familiar with His one begotten Son, Jesus. But having one Son is not enough for Him. So great is His love that He needs others to share it with. He has invited all of His created beings to become part of His family, to become His children. Obviously, it's not possible for us to be His begotten sons and daughters, but we can accept His offer to become His adopted children.

An adopted child was once asked if she knew what it meant to be adopted. Her reply was that "being adopted means that I grew in my mommy's heart instead of her tummy." We may not have been conceived by the Holy Spirit, but we all have grown in God's heart. How awesome is that! Even if we have been neglected or feel unloved or unwanted by our earthly parents, God has a place in His heart for each and every one of us. He loves us like no earthly parent ever could.

**God has a place in His
heart for each and every
one of us.**

Of course, being a child of God does have some obligations. We need to try to emulate our Father. We are not able to be in His physical presence right now, but He has revealed enough of Himself in His Word, in His creation, and in our fellow brothers and sisters so that we can see Him all around us. By learning how to become like Him, we can reflect His character to others, so that everyone we meet will know that we are indeed His children.

This week we are going to study what it means to live as a child of God now, even as we look forward to the time when we can be with our heavenly Father in person!

A Life-or-Death Decision

LOGOS

Gen. 3:5; Ps. 51:4; Isa. 1:2; John 1:12; Heb. 9:26, 28; 1 John 3:1-10

Choosing Poorly (Gen. 3:5; Isa. 1:2)

Love requires freedom of choice, and God created us with that freedom. In Eden, Adam and Eve had only one rule, only one thing to avoid. But Eve disobeyed God because she felt she was being prevented from reaching her full potential. Adam desired companionship with Eve more than fellowship with God. Much of the rebellion by Christians today falls along one of these two lines. Either we think our ideas are superior to God's, or we desire the company of our fellow humans more than His fellowship.

Another Opportunity to Choose Wisely (Heb. 9:26, 28; 1 John 3:8)

God's perfect justice requires sinners to die. But God's perfect love refused to destroy us. The only solution to this dilemma? Christ's death. It assured justice without requiring our eternal loss. Christ's sacrifice destroyed Satan's hold on us and gave us another chance to live with God forever. At His second

**Do you know whose child
you are? Are you trying to
decide?**

coming, Christ will save His children and destroy Satan's children, eliminating sin from His creation forever.

Choosing to Join God's Family (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1)

Through no choice of our own, we have been sinners since birth. This hardly makes us deserving of being in God's family. But if we will accept Jesus as our Savior and surrender our wills to Him, we have the right to be called children of God.

Choosing to Live in God's Family (Ps. 51:4; 1 John 3:4-8, 10)

We have become quite creative in manipulating God's Word to match our choices instead of making sure our choices match God's Word. Rather than admit our sin and repent as David did, we rationalize our actions or deny that the responsibility for our choices is ours alone.

In the noble pursuit of acceptance and tolerance, we often find ourselves following the popular mantra "Don't sweat the small stuff." But regarding our spiritual

destination there is no “small stuff.” It’s the things that we tell ourselves are inconsequential that can lead us away from God. Either we are in step with His precepts and His character or we are lawless.

Choosing to Pursue Perfection (1 John 3:2, 3, 9)

The southern live oak can live for hundreds of years, growing 60 feet high and 100 or more feet wide. Its wood is hard and strong. The USS *Constitution* was nicknamed “Old Ironsides” during the War of 1812 because the cannonballs of the British literally bounced off its live oak hull. All the instructions this mighty tree needs to attain its full potential are contained in its seed, an acorn no more than an inch long.

First John 1:10 tells us that no one is free from sin. So what is John talking about when he says that those who are “born of God” will not sin? The key is God’s “seed” that each child of His receives. As long as a child of God follows the instructions in the seed, she or he will be growing toward the perfect character of God.

A live oak sapling isn’t very impressive, but a live oak is truly remarkable when it matures. As young, struggling Christians, we aren’t impressive either. But John tells us that when Christ returns, we’ll finally be the way God intended in Eden—perfect in love, obedience, and service—resilient to Satan’s cannon fire.

“Choose Ye This Day” (1 John 3:10)

Do you know whose child you are? Are you trying to decide? Are you perhaps biding your time until you’ve got a few things on your life list checked off—the ones you’re sure will be awesome but are afraid will not match up with God’s plan? Well, the apostle John has some news for you. You’re already in a family. You always have been. John makes it rather clear—either you’re a child of God or you’re a child of the devil. There are no orphans, no emancipated minors. So whose family are you in? The choice is yours, every moment of every day.

REACT

1. Based on your recent choices, whom are you growing closer to—God or Satan?
2. Are any of the choices you make totally unrelated to your salvation? If so, why?

The Transformed Character

TESTIMONY

Eph. 5:8–13

"Perfection of character is based upon that which Christ is to us. If we have constant dependence on the merits of our Savior, and walk in His footsteps, we shall be like Him, pure and undefiled. Our Savior does not require impossibilities of any soul. He expects nothing of His disciples that He is not willing to give them grace and strength to perform. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was."

"Hearts that respond to the influence of the Holy Spirit are the channels through which God's blessing flows. . . . Though the wicked know it not, they owe even the blessings of this life to the presence, in the world, of God's people whom they despise and oppress. But if Christians are such in name only, they are like the salt that has lost its savor. . . . True character is not shaped from without, and put on; it radiates from within. If we wish to direct others in the path of righteousness, the principles of righteousness must be enshrined in our own hearts. The consistent life, the

"True character is not shaped from without, and put on; it radiates from within."

holy conversation, the unswerving integrity, the active, benevolent spirit, the godly example, these are the mediums through which light is conveyed to the world."²

"Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ."³

REACT

1. Which challenges do you often encounter in living as a Christian?
2. How can you be an effective representative of Christ at home, work, and the wider society?
3. What impact would Christians exert in the world today if we all lived true to our calling?

1. *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 230.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 306, 307.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 70.

Potapos Anyone?

EVIDENCE

1 John 3:1

What manner of love is this? *Potapos* is the Greek for “what manner.” This idiom not only asks us to examine the type of love depicted here, but also implies a sense of amazement. Witnesses of Jesus calming the mighty sea wondered, “What manner of man” was this? They weren’t wondering about His appearance. Rather, they were astonished that Someone could command the sea! John is amazed by this love. Though it is impossible to grasp entirely, he urges us to at least look at it—to behold it. There’s power in doing so.

Compare 1 John 3:1 with John 1:12 (KJV). The first verse reveals that “love” bestowed to us makes us children of God: love + bestowed = sons of God. The second verse reveals that “power” bestowed to us makes us children of God: power + bestowed = sons of God.

Love and power are nearly interchangeable here. In essence, God’s love is powerful. Behold it daily and experience your transformation into a child of God—the transformation of becoming like Him (1 John 3:2). That’s power.

Satan creates doubt by causing us to dwell on our past experiences. Doing so allows those doubts to lower our concept of what it means to be God’s children. That’s not beholding God’s love for you; that’s beholding your love for God. And that kind of love never changed a single soul. Is it any wonder that when we look at our own past experiences, we lose hope?

This thought is at the crux of the rest of 1 John 3—hoping in something better than what our own experience has taught us. *Hope* is the key word here. Hope purifies us. It gets us on the right path.

In Isaiah 59:17, Jesus is wearing a breastplate and helmet. Why? As the Christ, His army of believers on earth follows His example. His breastplate is righteousness; ours is faith and love. The helmet is salvation. Ours is the hope of salvation. This hoping in salvation protects our spiritual lives from receiving a fatal blow, just as a physical helmet would do. Continuously hope and aim to be like Him, to be a child of God.

**Hope purifies us. It gets us
on the right path.**

Ensuring Your Royalty

HOW-TO

2 Cor. 3:2, 3; 1 Pet. 2:9

Many people are yet to be adopted into God's family because many of God's family members forget that they are walking sermons (2 Cor. 3:2, 3). To be considered good letters, we must crucify our world-loving nature and abide in Christ. Only then do we qualify to be members of God's family, privileged to call Him "our Father." How does one obtain and retain the privilege of being the child of God and of inviting others to God's party?

Abide in Christ. Read John 15:4–6. Being in Christ makes one a child of God and helps us live accordingly, which attracts many others to God's family. "Those who abide in me . . . bear much fruit" (John 15:5, NRSV). We are constantly being "read" (2 Cor. 3:2, 3).

Be loyal to the principles of God's family. Members of the royal priesthood are a peculiar people (1 Pet. 2:9) because they keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12). Loyalty to Him makes us royalty, which by faith enables us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts . . . live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11, 12). Loyalty ensures royalty.

The children of Israel failed to effectively represent God because of their malignant complaining and copying of the world to the extent that they failed to recognize and receive Jesus (John 1:11). The children of God in this generation cannot

Loyalty ensures royalty.

afford to misrepresent God; through their piety, they must endeavor to live to their calling as the salt of the world.

"The glory of the church of God is in the piety of its members; for there is the hiding of Christ's power. The influence of the sincere children of God may be esteemed as of little worth, but it will be felt throughout time, and rightly revealed in the day of reward. The light of a true Christian, shining forth in steadfast piety, in unwavering faith, will prove to the world the power of a living Saviour. In His followers Christ will be revealed as a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. Although scarcely known to the world, they are acknowledged as God's peculiar people, his chosen vessels of salvation, his channels whereby light is to come to the world."*

REACT

1. What qualities of God's family do you display in your daily walk?
2. To what extent are you abiding in Jesus?

*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, March 24, 1891.

Learning to Love

OPINION

Matt. 5:39–48; 1 John 3:1, 10

I was walking to meet a friend at the local university. I was on a busy street with many shops and homeless people begging for money. I happened to see one of them at the corner. He was a large man sitting in a wheelchair. As he struggled to disentangle his pack from his metal confines, I stopped to help. He thanked me and then struck up a conversation. He was on his way to a parking lot up the street and was wondering if I had time to give him a push. Wanting to be helpful, and figuring it would be a quick task, I agreed. As we maneuvered our way around the sidewalk's bumps, cracks, and curves, we exchanged bits of information about our lives. At first it was interesting, and I found myself glad that I'd taken the time to help someone in need.

These feelings soon changed, however. As we neared our destination, he decided that he wanted to be taken to a restaurant "just down the street." I already was several minutes away from where I was to meet my friend, and I was going to be late. What did this man mean by changing his destination when we were so close? Surely he was taking advantage of my willingness to do a good deed. This whole "helping your brother" thing was getting way out of hand.

This whole "helping your brother" thing was getting way out of hand.

Slowly though, as I continued to push the wheelchair, I realized that this was exactly what Jesus meant when He said there was no higher calling than to love God and love one's neighbor. This man, in his way, was showing me what type of love it is that Jesus desires of us—a love that is unconditional, that is actively taking place during good times and bad. A love that goes the extra mile, sometimes literally.

It made me think, *Do I really love my neighbor?* Do you?

REACT

1. We have all been made sons and daughters of God by reconciliation through Jesus. Therefore, we are brothers and sisters to one another. What does it really mean to be someone's brother or sister?

2. How can we actively show God's love?

3. What are some barriers to showing people God's love? How can we overcome those barriers?

Tanya Henry, Durham, North Carolina, U.S.A.

Companion of the Angels

EXPLORATION

1 John 3:1

CONCLUDE

The amazing fact that God has chosen each of us to be His child leaves us with the question, Should I choose to become a member of His family? We must remember that accepting a place in God's family obligates us to live as a part of His family. Fortunately, He will teach us how to live like that. "A transformation of character takes place. He becomes a son of God, a member of the royal family, a child of the heavenly King. He is fitted to be the companion of the angels."*

CONSIDER

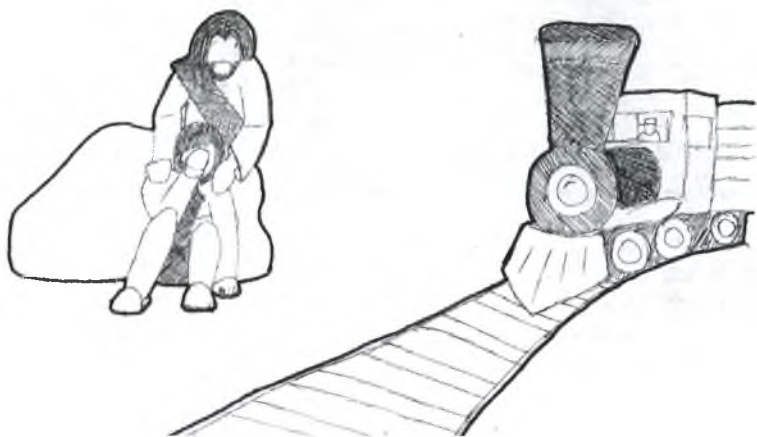
- Creating a "family" tree that shows the people with whom you interact on a regular basis as your family members. Think about how many people you impact without even being conscious of it.
- Comparing and contrasting the ways in which you could demonstrate God's love to specific people who might not be receptive to straightforward witnessing.
- Writing a letter to your heavenly Father to thank Him for choosing you to be His child. Explain what differences this has made in your life.
- Compiling a list of Christian songs (both hymns and contemporary Christian music) that are about being a member of God's family, a child of God.
- Volunteering as a big brother or big sister for a child in your community. Mentoring and learning from a child is one way to feel the connection you have with the greater community.
- Reflecting on ways in which God's love can infuse your life with love for others. Think about times you have prayed for patience or more love for others and how God has answered your prayer.

CONNECT

Romans 8; 1 John 5:1–3.

**Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 342.

Loving **Brothers** and **Sisters**



"The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also"
(1 John 4:21, NRSV).

Staying Close to the Rock

INTRODUCTION

1 John 3:18

Philip and his little sister, Tamar, were in the valley picking flowers, chasing the butterflies, and eating some of the fruit. Suddenly, the sky darkened. Philip asked Tamar to collect all of her things so they could leave as soon as possible.

They began to walk fast, and at times, they even ran. Soon they reached the tunnel through which they had to walk and through which a railroad passed. Philip got down on his knees and put his ear on the track to feel if there were any vibrations from an approaching train. There were none, so he held Tamar's hand and began to run into the tunnel. After a few steps, he again put his ear to the track. It was getting dark, and the tunnel had no lights. Philip didn't mind traveling through the dark, but little Tamar was afraid. However, she trusted her brother. Soon they reached the middle of the tunnel. Yet again, Philip got down on his knees to listen

**It was getting dark, and the
tunnel had no lights.**

for a train; and when the grip of his hand became tight, Tamar knew they were in danger. They didn't know which direction the train was coming from. Philip didn't know what to do. He knew very well that

there was just enough room for the train to pass through the tunnel.

He placed Tamar near a rock beside the railroad track. Soon the sound of the train became louder. Philip began to shout at the top of his voice, "Sister, stay close to the rock! Stay close to the rock!" After the train passed by, Philip rushed to his sister. She leaped into his outstretched arms and cried, "I love you! You placed me close to the rock to save my life."

We must stay close to Jesus, our Rock of Ages, as we learn about His love for us and our love for our fellow humans in this week's lesson.

The Dimensions of Love

EVIDENCE

John 14:15

God's law reflects His character. Jesus came to this world to reveal His Father's will and character. With this in His mind, He tried to teach people who misunderstood the principle of love governing God's law. Read John 14:9 and Matthew 5:17.

The law is the reflection of God's character, and the core of His character is love (1 John 4:8). Therefore the law, first and foremost, reflects God's love. In turn, the law of God is reflected in the life of His children through loving acts. The religious leaders of Jesus' time had forgotten and corrupted this intrinsic relationship between God's law and His love. They believed the law was devoid of love and felt that the law was more important than love. This was contrary to God's purpose for the law, which is to reveal His love. Jesus took this concept one step further when He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15, NKJV). True obedience to the law is a result of our love for God.

First John reveals the dimensions of Christian love, thus elaborating on what Jesus had summarized when He discussed the law with the scribes and Pharisees (1 John 3; 4). God's love has a vertical dimension. The love God has for humans was proven by Jesus on the cross (1 John 3:1, 16). Because we were made in the image of God, there is a part of each of us that desires to have that image restored in us. This desire causes us to engage in the vertical dimension of God's love.

**True obedience to the law is
a result of our love for God.**

However, God's love also has a horizontal dimension—the love in God's children for their "brothers and sisters" (1 John 4:21, NRSV). We can experience this love only insofar as God dwells in our heart (1 John 4:11). Our love for our "brothers" and "sisters" must be action packed, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18, NKJV). It even requires us to be ready to make the supreme sacrifice just as Jesus exemplified in His life and death.

REACT

1. What should be our first response to God—to love Him or to obey Him? Explain your answer.

2. Is love for our neighbor more important than our love for God? Explain your answer.

Love All the Way Through

LOGOS

Mark 12:28–31; John 14:15; James 2:15, 16; 1 John 3:11–24; 4:7–5:4

The main theme of 1 John is love. This epistle emphasizes the following: God is love (1 John 4:8); love is of God (verse 7); God loved us and sent us His Son, therefore, we also ought to love one another (verses 10, 11).

The First and the Last Commandment (Mark 12:28–31; 1 John 3:23)

By Jesus' time, the Jews had accumulated hundreds of laws—613 by one historian's account. Some religious leaders tried to distinguish between major and minor laws, and some taught that all laws were equally binding and that it was dangerous to make any distinctions.

Because of this confusion, a scribe wanted Jesus to tell him the greatest commandment. To his astonishment, the Master gave him a convincing reply by mentioning two commandments: one from Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, and the other from

Leviticus 19:18. Both were about love. Thus, Jesus said in simple terms that all of the commandments were given for two simple reasons: to help us love God and to help us love others.

**Christianity is not an outward
show, but a religion of the
heart.**

Love as the Foundation of Commandment Keeping (John 14:15; 1 John 3:22–24; 5:1–4)

Love motivates us to obey.¹ This motivation makes commandment keeping easy. Moreover, love is like a thread that runs through all the commandments, placing them on a common platform.

True Love Toward Our Sisters and Brothers Removes Death (1 John 3:11–15)

John reiterates Jesus' teaching that anyone who hates another person is a murderer at heart (Matt. 5:21, 22). Christianity is not an outward show, but a religion of the heart. Bitterness against someone is dangerous, because it ultimately will turn against you like a boomerang.

While the phrase "love one another" appears frequently in the New Testament (for example, John 13:34; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11), "love the brethren" occurs only

in 1 John 3:14 and may be given a wider interpretation. All of us who claim that we “have passed from death unto life” should not restrict our love to our immediate circle of acquaintances, but share it with all fellow believers. By doing so, we prove that we have left the world of death and have entered into the realm of everlasting life. This love shows that we already have begun to exercise the eternal virtues of heaven.

Love in “Deed and in Truth” (James 2:15, 16; 1 John 3:16–21)

True love is not just a feeling but an action that produces selfless and sacrificial giving. This involves the giving of oneself for others with no thought of receiving anything in return. It involves putting the desires of others before our own desires. Our Savior taught the same principle of love in John 15:13.

“There are [people] who do kind deeds without feeling real affection for those whom they are helping. They may be acting only from a sense of duty or from a desire to gain praise. Therefore John stresses the need for genuine love. Our loving deeds should be inspired by a genuine affection for others, particularly for those in need.”²

God Is Love (1 John 4:7–21)

When we think about God being love, we should not think about worldly love, which is selfish and shallow. When we say that God is love, we are talking about a holy love that is perfect. His love explains why He creates, why He cares, why we are free to choose, why Christ died, and why we can have eternal life (1 John 4:9, 10).³

With our sinful nature, seeing God can be difficult. But the apostle John gives us a wonderful *modus operandi* to see Him—so that we can love each other. If we love each other, God lives in us, and His love is brought to full expression in us (1 John 4:11, 12).

God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect (1 John 4:16). Such love is without fear, because perfect love expels all fear (verse 18). And He gave us this command: those who love God must also love their brothers and sisters (verse 21).

REACT

Do you think a true Christian should take the initiative to care for his or her brothers and sisters in times of need without expecting anything in return? Explain your answer.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1036.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 656.

3. *Life Application Study Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, Ill., and Grand Rapids, Mich.: Tyndale House, Inc. and Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 2282.

Commandments Wrapped in Love

TESTIMONY

Mark 12:28-31

God's "commandments are an expression of the principle of love. The first cannot be kept and the second broken, nor can the second be kept while the first is broken. . . . And only as we love God supremely is it possible to love our neighbor impartially."¹

In our daily association with others, we should learn to practice godly love in deed and in truth. "There are those who profess holiness . . . while refusing to render obedience to His commandments. . . . True love for God will be revealed in obedience to all His commandments. . . .

" . . . If the love of God dwells in the heart, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions, will be in harmony with the will of God."²

Jesus is our greatest example in this regard. That same devotion, self-sacrifice, and subjection to the Word of God that was manifest in Christ must be seen in us. "His character reveals the true significance of the law, and shows what is meant by loving our neighbor as ourselves. And when the children of God manifest mercy,

kindness, and love toward all men, they are also witnessing to the character of the statues of heaven."³

**God has shown us His untold
love in the gift of Christ.**

"All who have been born into the heavenly family are in a special

sense the brethren of our Lord. The love of Christ binds together the members of His family, and wherever that love is made manifest there the divine relationship is revealed. . . .

" . . . Every deed of kindness done to uplift a fallen soul, every act of mercy, is accepted as done to Him."⁴

God has shown us His untold love in the gift of Christ. He has given us the best of all that Heaven could give. In response to that matchless love, let our love for one another burn like sacred fire on the altar of our hearts.

REACT

In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus told us that whoever is in need of our help is our neighbor. How many times have we been a true neighbor?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 607.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 562, 563.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 505.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 638.

Living a Christlike Love

HOW-TO

Mark 12:28–31; James 2:15–17; 1 John 3:11

All Christians, through faith and baptism, have entered into the New Covenant established by Jesus Christ through His sacrifice on the cross. What love! As we enter into this covenant relationship, we become committed to our fellow beings and agree to support one another.

In order to respond to what God is doing among us, in order to be the people He is calling us to be, we give our whole lives—past, present, and future—to Him. We will follow His Son, Jesus, and live more and more in the Holy Spirit, to share a common heart, mind, and purpose with our brothers and sisters in Christ. With this faith and abundant joy in our hearts, relying upon His power and grace to sustain us, we enter into the covenant of love with God as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The subsequent practical implications may help us better understand this:

Genuine love for one's neighbor is the same as our love for God. It is a purposeful, intentional, and active choice, not merely sentimental and emotional. And it is measured, Jesus said, by our love for ourselves (Matt. 22:39).

Each of us is concerned with
caring for ourselves.

Love others as you love yourself. When a person is hungry, that person eats. When a person is thirsty, she gets a drink. And when someone is sick, he takes medicine or sees a doctor. Each of us is concerned with caring for ourselves. We do not simply think or talk about food, water, or medicine. We do whatever is necessary to provide those things for ourselves. Likewise, don't just tell someone who is cold and hungry to "go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill" (James 2:16, NRSV) without doing something to meet that person's needs.

REACT

1. Some people don't love themselves. How is that self-hatred manifested, and what, if anything, can we do to help them?
2. How well do you measure up to Jesus' commandment to love one another?
3. Do you find yourself being jealous of other church members who have some things you don't? Do you find yourself thinking that you are too busy to help when you hear that a fellow member is in need?

**Reflecting Christ, p. 51.*

The Religion of Love

OPINION

1 John 4:20

The Indian poet who wrote that the world has but one religion—the religion of love—may sound irreverent or blasphemous. However, the following paraphrase of his vernacular lines should help us see differently:

*Here's one who's too blind to behold his next-door brother;
how then would he see a God who's invisible?*

The poet seems to have been inspired by the words of the apostle John, who said, “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20, NRSV).

This week's study calls us back to practical Christianity as emphasized by Jesus while responding to a scribe who asked Him to name the foremost commandment (Mark 12:28–31).

**The entire Bible
has been commanding us
to practice these twin
aspects of divine love.**

Jesus not only shared with him the greatest commandment, but a second one without which the first remains ineffective.

The “first” and “second” commandments (the synopsis of the Decalogue) obligate us to love the true God with our entire

being and our neighbor as ourselves. From the beginning of human history, both by precept and precedent, the entire Bible has been commanding us to practice these twin aspects of divine love.

Nothing short of loving our fellow humans—even to the extent of laying down our life, if need be—can adequately reciprocate God's ultimate love, which sent His Son to the cross in our place. That one cannot hate one's visible brother or sister, and still claim to love an invisible God, is vividly illustrated by Cain who, professing to love God—but without a grasp of that love—offered a wrong sacrifice and hated his brother Abel so bitterly as to murder him.

As God's children, we will develop a love like His and happily keep His commandments. If we show no Christian charity for the less fortunate, how can we say we love God and practice His commandments? If we are grounded in God, we will exhibit His love in concrete ways and have confidence for the Judgment Day.

REACT

Why is it impossible to hate our fellow humans and still love God?

T. I. Varghese, Pune, India

Practical Christianity

EXPLORATION

1 John 4:21

CONCLUDE

This week's lesson centers on practical Christianity—how our love for God generates a love for others. But expressing that love toward others may not come easily. Within our love toward God and toward others must also be a degree of self-love, a self-valuing as a son or daughter of God. It sometimes seems that those most difficult to love may also be those who are closest to us, such as our actual brothers or sisters or our Christian brothers or sisters. The desire to put others ahead of ourselves is a natural outcome for the Christian who is living God's love.

CONSIDER

- Discussing with your brother or sister, or within your Sabbath School class, why it is that those closest to us can sometimes be difficult to love.
- Reflecting on why some Christians seem so down on themselves.
- Evaluating if having brothers and sisters in Christ from cultures different from your own influences how loving you may feel toward them.
- Summarizing each of the Ten Commandments as our love toward God and our love toward others. Sketch an illustration of how the Ten Commandments fit into these two categories.
- Interviewing some classmates or church members about times they have been helped (loved) by others—perhaps during physical suffering, emotional turmoil, financial need, or a death in the family.
- Using love as the theme, compose a poem that speaks to the two aspects of love Christ focused on when someone asked Him about the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28–31).
- Recalling a time when someone cooked or baked for you as an act of love. Do the same for someone you love.

CONNECT

Keith Burton, *The Compassion of the Christ*; James Coffin, *A Different Church for a Different World*; Mark Finley and Steven Mosley, *A Religion That Works*.

Believing in the Son of God



**“Who is it that conquers the world but the one
who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”**

(1 John 5:5, NRSV).

The Roads of Belief

INTRODUCTION

1 John 5:5

In *Prince Caspian*, the second book of The Chronicles of Narnia, the Pevensie children are called back to Narnia, a magical land they had previously stumbled into 1,300 Narnian years earlier. In the first book, the children had been part of the symbolic great controversy in which a Christ figure in the form of a lion named Aslan is slain by the enemy so that Narnia and one of the children—Edmond, a betrayer—could be redeemed. Now they are summoned to rescue Narnia from the Telmarines, a controlling enemy force that has all but obliterated the kingship of Aslan and the way Narnia was intended to be.

Upon their return to Narnia, Lucy, known for her steadfast, childlike faith, is the first to see and talk to Aslan. She knows he will come through for them just as he has in the past.

He is ready to fight to the death for Narnia's redemption.

Lucy's older brother, Peter, does not doubt Aslan's existence, but he finds it difficult to believe that Aslan will return and assist them in rescuing Narnia. This has a huge impact on his leadership. If Aslan doesn't appear when called upon, he'll take charge and lead the troops alone.

Prince Caspian, the Telmarine's rightful heir to the throne, has been secretly taught about Narnia and Aslan. However, his uncle, a usurper to the throne, tries to hide the truth about Narnia, claiming that it is only make-believe. Even so, Caspian loves the stories about Narnia and believes that they are true. So he is ready to fight to the death for Narnia's redemption.

Trumpkin is a Narnian dwarf captured by the Telmarines. When the Pevensies rescue him from certain death, Trumpkin enlists their help in restoring Caspian to the throne and Narnia to its original state. Even though he should believe in Aslan and the lion's ability to restore Narnia, he simply does not—until near the end of the story when he personally encounters Aslan himself.

What each of these characters believes about Aslan is revealed in their attitudes and actions. And their presuppositions determine how they relate to and interact with Aslan himself. So it is with us. We've heard about Jesus Christ, and we have ideas about who He is. These ideas define how we relate to Him and how we live our lives. This week, we will look at what the Bible teaches about belief in Christ and how that belief transforms our lives.

Grounds for Belief

LOGOS

Matt. 16:24, 25; John 1:1–3; 3:36; 5:24; Rom. 6:1–6; Heb. 12:4; 1 John 5:1–12

Believing in Jesus and His work on the cross is the basis of our salvation (John 3:16). Faith in this belief is what binds sinful humans to a holy God. Yet it is difficult to understand exactly what it means to believe. We say that we believe many things: "I believe that so-and-so is going to win the election," or "I believe that this is the best meal I've ever eaten." However, to believe in the biblical sense means more than having an opinion about something. It means to know that something is true and to act based on that knowledge (John 3:36). What exactly is the Bible calling us to believe? What do we need to know about Jesus and His work here on earth?

God Has Sent Witnesses to Testify About Jesus (1 John 5:1–12)

God doesn't expect us to believe in a Man who lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago without providing evidence, nor did He expect the people of that time to believe

**God will not forget the tears of
sorrow we have shed.**

in One of many rabbis without proof. There are three witnesses God has given. Read 1 John 5:7, 8. Some commentators suggest that this text refers to the opening of Jesus' ministry—His bap-

tism—the close of His earthly ministry—His death—and the giving of the Holy Spirit,* all times when God gave to humanity clear signs about Jesus.

He Is the Creator (John 1:1–3)

Jesus is the divine, eternal Son of God. He is also the Creator. As humans, we are called to worship the Creator (Rev. 14:7). Though Jesus came to us as a man, we must believe that He is worthy of our adoration as our Creator, and that His words are authoritative in our lives (1 John 5:1–5). As our Creator and our God, we also must believe that Jesus was present in the time of the Old Testament and that He has been involved with the plan of salvation from the beginning (Rev. 13:8).

He Is the Savior (Rom. 6:3–5)

God's justice and mercy combined on the cross. Though we deserve death for our sins, no matter how small, Jesus took our punishment upon Himself and gave us His reward in exchange (Rom. 3:23–25). The way we participate in the reward

is through baptism, because by baptism we die with Christ and we will be raised with Christ one day (Rom. 6:4, 5). It is important to note that baptism is an outward gesture of one's belief in Christ and His work on the cross. Though baptism is an essential symbolic activity, it is the blood of Christ that accomplishes our salvation.

He Can Free Us From Sin (Rom. 6:1–6)

Christ's death cleanses us from sin and erases our guilt. However, Christ wants to do more than forgive our sins over and over. He wants to help us stop sinning. By cultivating a relationship with Christ, by "watching" Him as we read about His life in the Bible, we understand who He is and how to relate to both God and each other. As a result, we continually transform into His likeness (2 Cor. 3:18).

He Will Set Things Right (John 3:36; 5:24)

Jesus wants us to believe not only in His divinity and in His power to save us from sin in this life, but also in His power to raise the dead at the end of time to grant rewards and punishments (Rom. 6:5). As believers in Christ, we look forward to the time when those who have died are reunited not only with the living, but also with Christ Himself (1 Thess. 4:13–17). We also believe that He will punish the unrepentant for the pain they have caused in this world. This gives us hope that justice will be done for those who have been tortured, oppressed, mistreated, raped, murdered, and abused. God will not forget the tears of sorrow we have shed.

Believing in Him Requires Self-Sacrifice (Matt. 16:24, 25; Heb. 12:4)

Jesus knew that there would be consequences in this life for following Him. We know that His disciples were martyred one by one, beginning with James (Acts 12:2). As Christians, we believe that this life won't be easy, and that is OK. No one has a truly carefree life, though some have a worse time than others. As Christians, however, we know that when we sacrifice our time, our resources, and yes, even our lives, Christ will care for us and there will be a reward on the other side—eternal life. We must not be like the rich young ruler who felt that the cost of following Christ was too expensive (Matt. 19:21, 22). No matter how hard it is, we must believe that to live and reign with Christ for eternity is worth any struggle here on earth. This belief enables us to live in peace and freedom, whether or not we are in earthly chains.

REACT

1. When the Bible tells us to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, that belief has many aspects. With which aspect do you struggle?
2. How has your belief in Jesus affected your everyday life?
3. With the help of Jesus, how would you like your life to change?

*Daniel L. Akin, 1, 2, 3 *John*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), pp. 196–198.

You've Got to Stand for Something . . .

TESTIMONY

Matt. 7:24–27; Acts 16:30–32

Many times it is easy to doubt or question. And when you vacillate between ideas, it's easy to stumble. We must believe in Christ, not only as our Friend but as a powerful and mighty Redeemer who is recklessly in love with us! We know that belief is not merely an intellectual aim but something that changes who we are and how we live. The results of a true belief in Jesus and His claims are astounding.

"Our belief in Christ is not to be a casual belief, but a belief that enters into every part of the life. Such a belief leads us to ask for his help because we realize that he is our only dependence. A casual belief admits that he is the Redeemer, but does not honor him by receiving him as a friend, a helper. Those who have such a belief work at a great disadvantage; for they do not take Christ into their confidence."

"There is peace in believing, and joy. . . . Believing brings peace, and trusting in God brings joy.

**The results of a true belief in
Jesus and His claims are
astounding.**

Believe, believe! my soul says, believe. Rest in God. He is able to keep that which you have committed to His trust. He will bring you off more than con-

queror through Him who hath loved you."²

Our belief in Christ spurs us to action in asking for divine aid and in following Christ's example. Not only do we have the chance to show God to the world by choosing Jesus as our pattern, but we also reap the benefits of peace, joy, and rest for our souls by coming into contact with the Divine through our Savior, Redeemer, and Creator—Jesus Christ the Lord.

REACT

1. Is a beginning belief in Christ different from being connected with the Living Vine? If so, how?
2. What biblical accounts do we have of belief changing lives and the world?
3. What are some beliefs today that are absolutely necessary to cling to if one is to avoid falling for anything?

1. *The Review and Herald*, May 5, 1904.

2. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 121.

Brilliantly Vibrant and Free

EVIDENCE

1 John 5:12

Human thought often reflects the reality that the human condition needs to be fixed. Stoics sought to be free from human suffering by using logic to break the bonds of suffering. Confucius taught the necessity of the ethical way of life. Buddhists seek personal enlightenment as the state in which we become immune to suffering. Muslims find submission to God to be the path of salvation. Some atheists and other groups acknowledge that humans are born with destructive tendencies but confess that there's little that can be done about it.

Christians, however, have a unique way of approaching this dilemma: Jesus, who claimed to be God Himself. Jesus, the incarnate Answer, came to a world that thinks it has all the answers. He didn't simply teach a better way; He lived it. Read John 1:4. Jesus is life at its Source. Not the frail, fleeting, dark kind, but life in its purest strain: brilliantly vibrant and free. And no matter how ethical or enlightened we aspire to be, we'll never make it on our own. Countless generations of good men and women have proven that. Our only hope is Jesus.

But what does it really mean to believe? Believing in a God we can't see or touch requires too much faith for some. Yet, it requires just as much faith to believe

**What does it really mean to
believe?**

God doesn't exist. Either way, we can't prove that He exists or that He doesn't. Even the evolutionary theory requires some faith.

Still, our belief in God is more than just a probability or wild guess. Through the ages, millions of men and women have developed a real relationship with Jesus, and this relationship has profoundly transformed them into agents of societal change. The ensuing beauty that flows out of a life of service, sacrifice, and more changed lives, is the greatest evidence of faith.

No, belief in Jesus is never a thing of chance. It is firmly based on a living experience with the God who is Life—a God whose actions in the Bible unpack universal realities and whose guidance and teachings make a lot of saving sense in a world gasping for breath. And we, too, can share in that life through faith. No tricks. No superhuman efforts. Simply believe.

Stand Your Ground!

HOW-TO

Mark 9:23, 24; John 14:6

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life.” It provides ample evidence to support this claim. And for those of us who are new to the faith or who’ve slacked off in studying and assimilating biblical truths into our lives, note with awe the beautiful transforming freedom and vibrancy of lives passionately connected with Life Himself. We want that reality in our own lives, don’t we? And we choose it, right? But daily busyness clogs our spiritual pores, tragedy thrusts its blade straight through to the heart where belief has been safely stored, or poisoning doubt slowly seeps in. Even comfortable living has a way of eroding our dependence on God. How then do we protect our belief in God or navigate the murky waters of a weakening faith? Here are a few suggestions:

Ask Jesus to help you believe. Remember the father of a boy possessed by an evil spirit who comes to Jesus? Read the story in Mark 9:17–24. In her account of this story, Ellen White wrote, “You can never perish while you do this—never.”*

Memorize Bible promises.

Choose ones that are meaningful to your situation. If you don’t memorize texts easily, then read them again and again. Are you wondering whether Jesus is God? Then

Even comfortable living has a way of eroding our dependence on God.

read John 1:1–14. Do you doubt His love? Memorize Zephaniah 3:17. Do you wonder where He is when you suffer? Check out Romans 8:35–39. Purchase a book of Bible promises for ready access.

Reflect on and share with someone what God has done for you and/or others. He knew the Israelites’ faith would be tested through trial, comfortable living, and seductive influences, so He commanded them to recount to each other and to their children how He had previously rescued and cared for them. This practice of celebrating God’s past activity forms much of the content of David’s psalms, and it helped to sustain the early church in persecution.

REACT

1. What are the most common experiences that challenge your faith today? How could these experiences serve to strengthen your faith?

2. When have you experienced strong faith and trust in God? What were the circumstances?

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 429.

Doubting the Son of God

OPINION

Acts 4:12; Heb. 2:3

Belief in the Son of God is considered pointless in an age that requires scientific evidence before something is considered believable. We have been trained to be skeptics, and it is unhealthy skepticism that harms faith. Faith is necessary in our earthbound relationships, as well as in our relationship with God. Albeit in somewhat different ways, skepticism can kill both.

What about doubt? Does faith require us to stop asking questions? In Alister McGrath's book *Doubting*, we are given concise definitions of what doubt and skepticism are. "In the first place, doubt is not skepticism—the decision to doubt everything deliberately, as a matter of principle. In the second, it's not unbelief—the decision not to have faith in God."¹ Doubting, really then, is thinking critically.

Belief and faith in a saving Son of God need to be approached from a perspective beyond definitive proof. Belief and faith have to be taken at face value.

**Good things do not necessarily
happen overnight.**

There is nothing to prove or disprove them beyond a shadow of a doubt. They are a risk and a leap with consequences that could very well provide just the answers we long for. Could it be that salvation is real and not a construct of the mind? Could it be that salvation is more than a coping mechanism?

Christian giants throughout history have been careful to reveal belief in a saving God as an exercise in faith, a lifelong journey. Although born to Christian parents, C. S. Lewis² very early on embraced atheism. It wasn't until his late teens that he acknowledged the existence of God, and then, a bit later, that he accepted Christ as his Savior. It was a slow process that involved some serious doubting.

Good things do not necessarily happen overnight. A pumpkin grows in a season, but a sturdy oak tree grows into its magnificence over many years. It is a process. Thankfully, our questioning does not scare God away. He continually works with us right where we are, doubts and all. He comes down to us and asks if He can bring us up to Him. If we say Yes, we are accepting His invitation to salvation, for both the now and the "not yet."

1. Alister McGrath, *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 13.

2. C. S. Lewis, *The Joyful Christian* (New York: Touchstone, 1977).

Reasons to Believe

EXPLORATION

Matt. 16:24, 25; John 1:1–3; 3:36; 5:24; Rom. 6:1–6; 1 John 5:1–12

CONCLUDE

Christianity is not like any other world religion or philosophy. Jesus—God, *the* Creator—came to us not with a system of achievement but with an offer of a vibrant relationship with Himself. Jesus doesn't direct us onto a path to life—He *is* Life itself. He *is* the Creator who offers to redeem us and re-create His image in us, inviting us to enter into His life and transforming us by His Spirit. Our faith is not based on a system of works, but on Christ. He is the center of our faith and our reason to believe. That belief should change our lives.

CONSIDER

- Expressing your faith in Christ by stringing together scripture verses that encourage you in your faith. Instead of writing the verses in lines, put them together in an image. Your scripture string can form an expanding circle, a heart, a plant, a cross—anything that gives shape to your faith. Then frame your scripture art for your wall or use it to share your personal expression of faith with a friend who doesn't believe.
- Building your own case for faith in Christ. With Bible and concordance, find verses about faith. Note the definition of faith, the actions or thoughts that surround faith, and the people referenced with faith. Then list your reasons for belief and add your own personal experience or journey in faith.
- Interviewing at least two non-Christian friends about what they believe and why. Prepare a list of questions ahead of time to bring out what they believe about God, salvation, life after death, sin, forgiveness, and so on.
- Sharing your interview results with your Sabbath School class and discussing a strategy for how you might be able make a case for Christian faith with a nonbeliever.
- Developing and implementing a plan to do some witnessing and/or outreach in your community.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 36, pp. 342–348.

Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*.

Confidence



**“And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if
we ask anything according to his will he hears us”
(1 John 5:14, RSV).**

Burying Your Will

INTRODUCTION

1 John 5:14

It was a bright morning, and expectations were high. *What would our new teacher be like? Would he be willing to answer every question we might have?* These were some of the questions running through the minds of most of the freshmen. When the teacher announced that the foundation of the class would be freedom of speech, the entire class shouted, “Yes!” like spectators celebrating a goal. “However,” the teacher continued, “any questions you ask must be relevant to the topic I teach.”

“Is that real freedom?” some of the students wondered out loud.

A similar propensity can be traced in us when we read 1 John 5:14, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we *ask anything* . . . he hears us” (RSV; emphasis supplied). We tend to enjoy leaving out the condition “according to his will.”

How often do you end your prayers with “Thy will be done”?

Yes, our loving Father in heaven hears and grants whatever supplication we make to Him, but only if it is according to His will. The Greek word *parresia*, translated “confidence,” can be interpreted as “freedom

to speak frankly.” Do you consider the condition “according to his will” as a limitation to this freedom of speech in the sight of God? Or do you see it as a key to the upper room of heaven? Like the freshmen, we often come to God in prayer with preconceived notions and egocentric wishes without seeking to know His will. How often do you end your prayers with “Thy will be done”?

The general will of God is manifested in Scripture, but His ultimate will is exemplified in the overall purpose of saving us from sin. Thus, we may be sure that if we offer any petition regarding our salvation, the Savior is more than ready to hear. He will be waiting to fulfill that request. Can we say the following with Karl Barth? “Therefore, to thee we hand over our existence—to thee, who has invited and commanded us to pray, to live for thy cause. Here we are. It is now up to thee to concern thyself with our human cause.”

Come on board this week as we explore our confidence in God as revealed in the book of 1 John.

Keep on Believing

EVIDENCE

Isa. 40:30, 31; 1 John 5:14

Most success, in business and in life, is built on self-confidence. The actualization of one's dream is based on optimism and perseverance. It seems that every facet of human life is rooted in the concept or the spirit of "can do" or "not possible." In this world, everything is done with determination; but with God, it's all about trust.

The Greek word for *confidence* is usually translated as "dependence, reliance, or trust." However, in the context of the key text for this week (1 John 5:14), the word translated as *confidence* most likely means "freedom of speech."¹ Though the Lord knows all our needs before we express them, He wishes His children to make those needs known to Him in our own language, not according to our will but to the will of the Father.

In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul illustrates how our constant struggle with sin should be. He refers to the ancient boxing or fistfights of the Greeks to demonstrate the fierce nature of our conflict with sin. The gloves used were made of an oxhide band fortified with brass knuckles. Every Christian must be disciplined and exercise self-denial in order to gain victory over all the passions of this world. "The promptings and cravings of the natural appetites and passions must be destroyed."² This expresses the severity of the fight and the necessity of praying according to God's will.

Yes, the battle of sin is not won easily, yet "steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord" (Ps. 32:10, NRSV). If we want to be conquerors, we need to surrender all to Jesus by believing in Him. Believing in the Son is a daily affair. To be once in grace is not sufficient; we must remain in grace if we want to enter the kingdom of God. Not believing in God implies a rebellious state of mind. Indeed, the state of one's mind determines the course of one's life.

**The state of one's mind
determines the course of
one's life.**

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 677.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 737.

Confidence Is Belief

LOGOS

John 3:36; Acts 4:29; 1 Cor. 9:27; Heb. 4:16; 1 John 5:13–21; Rev. 12:9

Believe in the Son. In John 3:16, we read of the intention of God and the obligation of humans in gaining eternal life. This is one of the most common texts universally taught to reveal the purpose of Christianity for human beings: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Our duty is to believe in the Son given to us for redemption through the inestimable love of God.

In most religions, the first step is to believe in the deity and what he, she, or it does. So it is with Christianity. Believing in the existence of God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, sets us apart from condemnation and death, as written in John 3:36. If we say we believe in Jesus, our bodies, our words, and our attitudes will show it. Believing takes place in our minds, but it manifests itself in our words and deeds. "A man's standing before the Father is determined by his attitude toward the Son." This is why Paul says he disciplines himself in his body and brings it into subjection in order not to be disqualified by what he preaches. What we believe governs what we do.

Believing takes place in our minds, but it manifests itself in our words and deeds.

If anyone does not believe in the Son, he or she is subject to the wrath of God. So does

this force us to believe in Jesus? Absolutely not, but our salvation is only through Christ our Lord. Even though the Judgment is not yet here, we know where we stand both if we believe and if we do not believe. John 3:18 says, "But he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (NKJV). Thus believing in Jesus Christ as the only Son of the Father is a prerequisite to salvation. However, the reverse is also true. The distinction between who is saved or condemned is expressed in deeds. Deeds of darkness are to condemnation as deeds of light are to salvation (John 3:19, 20).

Trust and Obey (Acts 16:31; 1 Cor. 9:27)

In the Old Testament, Christ was symbolized as a Lamb. Even though Christ was not yet on earth, He was still the focus of salvation. The patriarchs believed they were forgiven through the blood of the lambs sacrificed to God. All who believe in Jesus after His death also have eternal life. His death fulfilled the ritual slaying of lambs in the sanctuary.

Anyone who believes in Christ and obeys Him out of faith has life eternal. Paul and Silas confirmed this to the Philippian jailer when the prison door opened miraculously. The jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:30, 31, NRSV). The Bible says that all his household was baptized that same day. Peter emphasized in Acts 4:12 that there is no other name under heaven by which we could be saved other than the name Jesus Christ. Our confidence in Christ as our Savior saves us from death and grants us citizenship in heaven.

Confidence and Boldness (Heb 4:16; 1 John 2:12; 5:13–21)

Even while striving to follow Christ's example, we still err. Yet when we do, our sins are forgiven in Christ's name. "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of his name" (1 John 2:12, NRSV). We gain great confidence and assurance in faith. Jesus is our High Priest, who sympathizes with our weakness. Because He is at the right hand of God, interceding for us, we can boldly appear before the throne for mercy and grace in time of need. He is always available when we seek Him.

Again, we have confidence in Christ Jesus, in that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. When Peter was imprisoned, the church gathered to offer constant prayer to God for his release, and their prayers were answered (Acts 12:1–18). The church had not forgotten the promises and assurances Jesus had made—that whatever we ask in His name, God will do, so that He may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13). "God stands back of every promise He has made."² It is the confidence we have in Him that works miracles. For it is written in James 1:6, 7 that we are to ask in faith "never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord" (NRSV).

REACT

Is God indirectly forcing us to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, when He said that if anyone does not believe Him, he is already condemned? Explain your answer.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 934.

2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 147.

Christ, Our Anchor

TESTIMONY

Heb. 6:19

We have hope in our hearts that Christ is our Anchor, but do we really believe that He is? Sometimes the crucibles of life wear us down so much that we forget and even doubt the existence of God. Yet Christ's promises to us never change. His victory on the cross as the Savior of the world "brings a glow of perfect peace, perfect love, and perfect assurance" that we also can overcome the troubles of this life.

With this perfect assurance, our hope is our buoyant force in the ocean of life. Let us hold fast to the Rock that cannot be moved. Let us be grounded, firm and deep. "When we are securely anchored in Christ, we have a power that no human being can take from us. Why is this? Because we are partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world."²

**"Jesus consents to bear our
burdens only when we
trust Him."**

If only we can have even a little confidence in Him and not in our intelligence, knowledge, wealth, skills, and talents, Christ will carry us as if on wings. He will not leave us to be swallowed by the frustrations of the world.

The Lord "estimates every weight before He allows it to rest upon the hearts of those who are laborers together with Him. To every one of His workers our loving heavenly Father says: 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.' Psalm 55:22. Let the burden bearers believe that He will carry every load, great or small.

"Jesus consents to bear our burdens only when we trust Him. . . . Let us trust Him. Worry is blind and cannot discern the future. But Jesus sees the end from the beginning, and in every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Abiding in Christ, we can do all things through Him who strengthens us."³

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 420.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 187.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 297, 298.

The Broad Assurance

HOW-TO

1 John 5:14, 15

First John 5:14 and 15 are about the confidence we can have in approaching God. Thus, the subject of prayer is introduced. How are we to pray?

"If we ask anything" (verse 14, NIV). The indefinite pronoun *anything* refers to any desire or need we may have. There is no limitation. *Anything* implies the confidence about which John has just spoken (verse 14). Although the Lord knows all of our needs before we express them, He wishes for us to make those needs known to Him in our own language.

"According to his will" (verse 14, NIV). The assurance we have is quite broad, qualified only by the phrase, "according to his will." Our requests must be in harmony with His will for us.

When we pray according to God's will, His truth can begin its work in our hearts. Christ is our truth. He is to be the power in our life and character. If we receive Him and cherish Him in our hearts, He will transform our entire beings.

We do not desire to be saved any more ardently than He desires to save us.

When we pray according to God's will, we will depend upon Him and not be ashamed of that dependency. Our omniscient, benevolent Lord knows what is for our good and disposes His grace and power for our happiness and salvation. We do not desire to be saved any more ardently than He desires to save us. His will is bent on our redemption much more firmly than is our own.

Therefore, we may be sure that if we offer any petition regarding our salvation, God will be more than ready to hear us. He will be waiting to fulfill that request. We may be sure that every sincere prayer is heard in heaven and will be answered in the best way for us. This assurance holds true for the smaller as well as the greater matters of daily life. He, who numbers the hairs of our head, is not indifferent about the lesser details of the lives of those for whom He died (Matt. 10:26-31).

Absolute Confidence to You!

OPINION

Prov. 3:5

Confidence is an absolute trust that does not allow a taint of doubt or skepticism, irrespective of the circumstance. Can God have confidence in us to the point of asking Satan, "Have you considered my servant [put your name here]?" This is a question that demands absolute confidence. God was so confident in Job that, come what may, Job would never utter a word against Him (Job 1:8).

But this absolute confidence, which is synonymous with faith, did not emerge out of a vacuum. Job's confidence was based on making God's will the ultimate objective of his life. He manifested this in all his ways. Read Job 1:20, 21.

Confidence develops through an intimate relationship with our Creator. Such a relationship calls us to come boldly before His throne of grace for remission of our sins.

**Confidence develops
through an intimate relationship
with our Creator.**

"I saw that there was a great lack of faith with the servants of God, as well as with the church. They were too easily discouraged, too ready to doubt God, too willing to believe that they had a hard lot and that God had forsaken them."*

This lack of faith (confidence) is a result of perceiving God to be like a father who tells his child to jump but then actually refuses to catch that child.

Confidence is based on three principles: (1) what a person did for us in the past when we were in great need and all hope was lost; (2) a person who consistently provides for our needs (for example, what our parents do for us); and (3) a person who never fails to honor the promises she or he makes. Still, these are all tied to perishable things. Our absolute confidence should be in God, who is preparing a place for us and will come to take us to that everlasting kingdom.

REACT

1. If your confidence in God is measured, what percentage will you score, and why?
2. How does 1 John 5:14, 15, change your confidence in God?

* *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 120.

God-Confidence

EXPLORATION

Ps. 71:5

CONCLUDE

If anyone can exhibit true confidence, it's a Christian. Life throws plenty of chaos and confusion at us, but Christians know that they can trust God no matter what assails them. Confidence is the enactment, be it tentative or bold, of true faith. Much pop psychology today focuses on self-confidence, believing in one's inherent capabilities. However, confidence in God goes far beyond such wish fulfillment. Self-confidence is attractive, but God-confidence, faith, is inspiring. Faith recognizes that though the battle is long and challenging, our victory is certain as long as we keep our grip on God.

CONSIDER

- Performing a skit of Paul and Silas and their incredible confidence in God's presence and guidance (Acts 16:16–35).
- Meditating on the role confidence has or hasn't played in your life.
- Discussing with a close friend or relative the things you wish you could achieve or overcome if only you could focus and amplify your confidence in Christ.
- Researching the Bible's usage of the word *confidence*.
- Photographing subjects that illustrate varying forms of confidence.
- Interviewing fellow church members about how their confidence in God has been shaken or grown.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chap. 6.

Robert Shank, *Life in the Son*, chap. 14; Karl Haffner, *The Cure for Soul Fatigue*, chap. 6.

Important **Themes** in **First John**



"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2, NASB).

How Would You Answer?

INTRODUCTION

John 3:16

Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists, made the following argument on a television broadcast against Jesus' existence: "Well, I'm here to give the reality point of view, I guess. Because the reality is, there is not one shred of secular evidence there ever was a Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ and Christianity is a modern religion. And Jesus Christ is a compilation from other gods: Horus [sic], Mithra, who had the same origins, the same death, as the mythological Jesus Christ." Johnson and a blue-ribbon panel of religious leaders were discussing the question, "What happens after we die?" on a *Larry King Live* broadcast.

The usually unflappable King paused reflectively, then replied, "So you don't believe there was a Jesus Christ?" Johnson responded, "It is not what I believe. There is no secular evidence that JC, Jesus Christ, ever existed."²

Once when King himself was asked what person from all of history he would most like to interview, he immediately replied, "Jesus Christ. And the first question I would ask would be, 'Are you indeed virgin born?'" The answer to that question would interpret all of history."³

"The answer to that question would interpret all of history."

Many might wonder why King would prefer to interview Jesus Christ over other great people like Alexander the Great, Muhammad, Moses, Buddha, or Confucius. Others might wonder about the significance of Jesus' virgin birth to Larry King. Presumably some religious leaders have argued that it is because none of these other great leaders claimed to be God, and Jesus' virgin birth would authenticate His divine origin.

If you were being quizzed on a *Larry King Live* broadcast panel, what would you say about Jesus having been born of a virgin and being the Son of God?

In this week's lesson, we see how John the beloved settles the argument about Jesus' deity in the three letters he wrote to the early Christians.

1. Ellen Johnson, interview by Larry King, "What Happens After We Die," *Larry King Live*, CNN, April 14, 2005, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0504/14/lkl.01.html> (accessed July 21, 2008).

2. Ibid.

3. Ravi Zacharias, "The Peg on Which the Coat of Christianity Hangs," Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, <http://www.rzim.org/USA/Resources/Read/ASliceofInfinity/TodaysSlice.aspx?aid=8996> (accessed July 21, 2008).

The Mystery of Godliness

LOGOS

Matt. 5:13; John 14:6; Eph. 4:25–5:21; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John

Not too long after Jesus returned to heaven, some of His followers lost sight of the flesh-and-blood reality of His earthly mission. It seems incomprehensible to us today that barely a lifetime after the men and women who had seen and touched the God-man, there were teachers who spiritualized away His actual, corporeal existence and the practical lessons of obedience to the will of God that He modeled for them. We call them Gnostics now. We describe them as pseudo-Christian, because they effectively removed Christ and His teachings from the level of reality. He became a spiritual presence. His words were seen as mere allegories of a higher truth.

No wonder Paul was insistent that his “son” Timothy appreciate the “mystery” of godliness. First Timothy 3:16 sums up the reality of the Christ: “manifest in the flesh,” “justified in the Spirit” (that is, connected to the Divine), “seen of angels” (both from heaven and on earth), “preached unto the Gentiles” (a universal God), “believed on in the world” (plausible—not a secret knowledge), and “received up into glory.” Come to think of it, this sequence goes a long way to unwrapping the mystery and applying it to human logic.

**[First John] is a jewel of
deep sentiment.**

The Way to God (John 14:6)

In John 14:6, Jesus is answering Thomas, who was known by his later refusal to believe that Christ was risen until he touched the scarred hands and side of His Master. Jesus was telling His followers that He must leave for His Father’s house, but that He would return for them. “Where I go you know,” said Jesus, “and the way you know” (verse 4, NKJV). “How can we know the way?” asked the doubter (verses 4, 5, NKJV). The verses following that question mostly have to do with Jesus revealing the Father to His followers by His words and actions, the love that they share, and the proof of that love in keeping His words.

Created in Righteousness (Eph. 4:25–5:21)

These verses follow Paul shadowboxing with the dangerous teachings of false preachers. It seems they were teaching a libertine gospel. The way of Jesus, according to Paul, is of “the new man,” a man “created in righteousness and true

holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Significantly, he inserts the words "which after God" before "is created." He is connecting the miracle of regeneration—the mystery of godliness in the life of a Christian—with the miracle of the literal revelation of God in Jesus. The following verses are not a checklist of what to do in manifesting that life. Rather, they show the results of the creative miracle of the new birth.

I am always a little cautious about using the erudite but often tainted concepts of C. S. Lewis. However, I happily admit to gaining an epiphany when reading his book *Mere Christianity* some years ago. He speaks of the distinction between good men and new men. It is the distinction between the legalist and the saint—between the overachiever and the overcomer—between the products of self-will and the change wrought by total surrender to a new model of behavior.

Keep Yourselves From Idols (1 John)

Those of us who preach regularly are always on the lookout for good sermon material. It's amazing where the ideas come from. Some major in sports analogies. Others tell stories about themselves, their family, or even past—usually unnamed—parishioners. Some are able to dissect a text into its constituent parts using Greek and Hebrew.

We've all toyed with these approaches. But now and then, it hits some of us that the Bible has given us a few sermons pretty much in toto. The entire book of 1 John is one of them. In my Bible, it is three and a half pages long, and when read aloud with feeling, it fits well within the modern divine service attention span. It is a jewel of deep sentiment and a rational explanation for why and how we can become like Christ. After all, John was the most empathetic of the disciples. Jesus warmed to him as to no other. He entrusted His mother to John's care. He revealed Himself to John in a special revelation late in the beloved apostle's long life.

Scanning again John's words, I note that he talks often of following the commandments of God and of not sinning. He dwells carefully on the power of God to forgive us because of our Advocate. And he lovingly writes of God's promise to make us anew.

The words of John make it both impossible to deny the call to a renewed life with Jesus and unlikely for that to result in any futile sense of self-improvement. "If we walk in the light," reminds John, "as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

REACT

1. What was it that gave such immediacy to the words of the apostles?
2. How did Jesus reveal the Father?
3. Notice the parallel between the final prayer of Jesus in John 17 and the letter/sermon in 1 John.
4. What modern idols might we be keeping in our lives?

“How Careful Is the Lord”

TESTIMONY

1 John 2:3–6; 2:1–12

As stated in yesterday's Logos article, two of the great themes in 1 John are following God's commandments and the power of God to forgive because of the Advocate we have in Christ Jesus. Following are two quotes from Ellen White regarding these themes:

1 John 2:3–6. “True religion is the imitation of Christ. Those who follow Christ will deny self, take up the cross, and walk in His footsteps. Following Christ means obedience to all His commandments. No soldier can be said to follow his commander unless he obeys orders. Christ is our model. To copy Jesus, full of love and tenderness and compassion, will require that we draw near to Him daily.”

1 John 2:1–12. “How careful is the Lord Jesus to give no occasion for a soul to despair. How He fences about the soul from Satan's fierce attacks. If through manifold temptations we are surprised or deceived into sin, He does not turn from us and leave us to perish. No, no, that is not our Saviour. Christ prayed for us. He was tempted in all points like as we are; and having been tempted, He knows how to suc-

**“How careful is the Lord
Jesus to give no occasion
for a soul to despair.”**

cor those who are tempted.

“Our crucified Lord is pleading for us in the presence of the Father at the throne of grace. His atoning sacrifice we may plead for our pardon, our justification, and our sanctification. The Lamb slain is our only hope. Our faith looks up to Him, grasps Him as the One who can save to the uttermost, and the fragrance of the all-sufficient offering is accepted of the Father. Unto Christ is committed all power in heaven and in earth, and all things are possible to him that believeth. Christ's glory is concerned in our success. He has a common interest in all humanity. He is our sympathizing Saviour. . . .

“He is making intercession for the most lowly, the most oppressed and suffering, for the most tried and tempted ones. With upraised hands He pleads, ‘I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.’ God loves to hear, and responds to the pleadings of His Son.”²

1. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 949.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 948.

Clinging to Christ

EVIDENCE

1 John 2:18–29

Bible scholars agree that 1 John was written somewhere between A.D. 80 and 90 and possibly to a group in the area of Ephesus. Although it doesn't have a specific group of people named as its intended audience, it is apparent that the author is writing to Christians. Furthermore, the letter takes a pastoral tone, lovingly written to people the author knows and cares about.

By the time this letter would have been written, Christianity was moving into its third and fourth generation of believers. Many were being converted who had never personally heard Christ speak. Those who were first generation Christians may have been losing some of their zeal to follow what they believed and to tell others of Christ.

As this group of believers had begun to drift and conform, false teachers from within the group (1 John 2:19) began to teach ideas other than pure Christianity. They garnered their influence by claiming to be prophets (1 John 4:1). Much of what they taught was called Gnosticism.

The basic tenets of Gnosticism are that only spirit is good while matter or material is evil. The teachers of this idea subsequently hated the world because it was matter.

They carried this further by hating the body also because it, too, was matter. This led some of the false teachers to say that Jesus didn't truly have a physical body while He was here on earth. Additionally, if He didn't have a physical body, He didn't suffer pain at the crucifixion. Both of these ideas would subsequently invalidate the teaching about the incarnation of Christ.

There were some teachers of Gnosticism who taught that in order to be a real Gnostic, one had to have experience in both the best and worst of life. In other words, a person was supposed to partake in both the good and evil sides of life to the greatest degree possible. This could easily lead to the idea that Gnostics were required to sin.

A third kind of Gnostic belief taught that its followers, having shed all material things and released their spirits from this bondage, have reached the state of perfection on this earth. John refers to these believers in 1 John 1:8–10.

How different are these beliefs from some we hear swirling around us today? Will we conform? Or will we be discerning and cling to the Christ we follow?

A person was supposed to partake in both the good and evil sides of life to the greatest degree possible.

Deena Bartel-Wagner, Spencerport, New York, U.S.A.

From Whence Cometh Your Salvation?

HOW-TO

Ps. 62:1, 2; 1 John 5:4, 5

Satan is only too eager to present falsehood as truth. So we need the ability to know truth from error. As Christians, John implores us not to believe everyone and everything, but to test whether or not a teaching is truly biblical. Despite all the ideology being discussed these days, Christians ought to know that Jesus Christ is the only basis of our salvation. If there is one truth that would set us free, it is that salvation belongs to the Lord alone. With this in mind, how can we guarantee salvation?

Confess. All we have to do is call on the Lord, and He will hear us. His blood is sufficient to cover us. If we confess our sins, He can repair the damage and restore us.

Repent. Receive the gift of forgiveness (Ps. 86:5). Ask for forgiveness. If we confess and repent, we will be forgiven. Jesus' death is enough to cover our sins, and He promises that He will cast them in the sea of forgetfulness and remember them no more. Accept this gift today!

Accept this gift today!

Have faith. Just trust God. (John 3:14–36; Rom. 1:17). God sent His Son to deliver us, but we must believe in Him so that we will have the assurance of salvation.

Regenerate. We are new creations (John 3:3–8; 1 John 3:9). We must be born again. If we want to guarantee our salvation, we must know that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that we must follow Him. We must surrender our life totally to Him.

Study Scripture. Have a passion for His Word (2 Tim. 3:14–17). We need to study, share, and live by Scripture. Scripture can be applied to every aspect of our lives; and when we study the Word of God, there will be great improvements in our lives and in the lives of those with whom we share Scripture.

If we follow these steps, we will definitely have assurance of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. "Truly my soul silently waits for God; / From Him comes my salvation. / He only is my rock and my salvation; / He is my defense; / I shall not be greatly moved" (Ps. 62:1, 2, NKJV).

Love, Truth, and Knowing God

OPINION

1 John 4:7–21

"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." These words by Mahatma Gandhi echo the mood and opinions of so many individuals who have been burned by the church as an institution, church members, or both. Gandhi's sentiment speaks to the overwhelming failure of Christians to accurately represent Christ's character, grace, and posture of acceptance. The first epistle of John is a challenging reminder that our embracing of truth always leads to an embracing of people. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:8, NIV). According to John, to claim knowledge of God is inseparable from demonstrating the love of God. God calls us to more than a cognitive restructuring of beliefs. He invites us to participate in active, social, merciful love to those around us. After all, love is at the very core of God's being.

As an Adventist, I am proud to possess the truth. But to be honest, I am not so proud of how my church has treated people over the years.

We are quite good at claiming special knowledge of God but not so good at loving our neighbors unconditionally. According to 1 John, such behavior is an oxymoron. Truth is not so much an abstract thing to be acknowledged, as it is a set of values to be lived out. More important, truth is a Person—a living, breathing, active Person. Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6, NIV). Claims on absolute truth (as valid and rational as they may be) are nullified if we are cold, judgmental, and unmerciful to those outside the Adventist circle. I pray and long and yearn for the day when we are known for our love, as well as for our truth.

**Truth is a Person—a living,
breathing, active Person.**

REACT

1. What feelings do the words *Christian* or *Adventist* evoke for you? How do these feelings relate to your previous life experiences?
2. Which is more important, to be kind or to be right? Be able to discuss your answer with your Sabbath School class.

Keeping It Real

EXPLORATON

1 John 4:7-21

CONCLUDE

Can you imagine being the only one in a room who had ever seen a beautiful sunset? How would you describe it so that the others would understand it? Tough, huh? That's nothing in comparison to the task John had in describing to others what it was like to live with God. He had the experience every Christian dreams of having. Instead of reading God's words in a book, he got to physically hear them and see them lived in everyday life.

CONSIDER

- Listing the ways God speaks to you and looking for new ways you can hear Him instruct and direct you in everyday life.
- Checking out your local library for books or DVDs that can teach you something about nature you haven't experienced before or know little about. Try to see the personality of God that can be found in the way He created whatever you are learning about.
- Trying to find a new way to look at the people around you. Whether it be your family, classmates, or the person in front of you in the grocery store line, ask God to help you see in that person a characteristic of His that can help you love that person more.
- Realizing that though you have not physically lived with Jesus, you do have knowledge and experience that others don't have. Take what you've learned in this lesson and from some of these exercises to find a way to share your personal experiences with someone who knows little or nothing about Jesus.
- Looking at the differences in other religions and at how they are similar and what parts of them we as Seventh-day Adventists would agree with.

CONNECT

John F. Ashton, ed., *In Six Days: Why Fifty Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation*; Alton Gansky, *Uncovering God's Mysterious Ways*; Planet Earth DVD series.

John's Letter to the Chosen Lady



"Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ,
but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in
the teaching has both the Father and the Son"
(2 John 9, NRSV).

A Chosen Unknown Lady

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 13:2; 2 John 1

My father was a missionary pilot for a small school in Chiapas, Mexico. One day, a woman who worked at the school became quite sick. So my father flew her and her husband to a large hospital. Normally, my dad would have landed the plane and taken the couple to the hospital. However, it was late in the day when she had fallen ill, and the weather was becoming very bad. The husband, therefore, would have to help her to the hospital and pray that they wouldn't have to wait in the waiting room. Sometimes people could wait there for days; but she didn't have days to wait!

As they were debarking from the plane, a woman in a red car drove up to take them to the hospital. Because of the urgency of the situation, my father did not question the woman. He just helped the couple into the car. The woman in the red car drove them to the hospital, dropped them off, and disappeared. After checking in, the couple saw a man walk through the waiting room and put on a doctor's coat. He then told the nurse he wanted to see the ill woman right away. She was in the room with the doctor for only about five minutes, during which time he told her she would be fine and to not let anyone bother her until the next day. Instantly, the woman felt better.

Who was the woman in the red car?

The next day, when they were being released, someone on the hospital staff asked the couple why they had brought their own doctor to the hospital. The couple was surprised. They hadn't brought their own doctor. They also learned later that the hospital had not sent anyone to meet their plane.

Who was the woman in the red car? Who was the man who told the woman she would be fine? And who was the elect lady and her children to whom John addressed his second letter? Might the first two mystery people have been angels sent by God during a time of great need? Might the elect lady and her children have been a specific person and her children? Or perhaps the lady was a church and her children were its members.

Whatever the case in either set of circumstances, we are heartened by the fact that God still cares enough for His people to send special help when it's needed the most. This week, as you study 2 John, may you feel the presence of angels. And may you read John's words as if you, too, are part of the elect woman's family. For if you love Christ, then indeed, that is what you are.

Sincerely, John

EVIDENCE

2 John

John was a great writer. Not only is he credited with writing the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation, he also wrote three letters to followers in the church. Although these letters are addressed to individual churches and people, he was really writing words that would transcend generations and centuries to reach the church and its people with the necessary knowledge to unite with God in eternal life.

The styles used in the three letters possess similar vocabulary, and the same topics are addressed. In addition, all three letters focus on love and John's desire for each of these three churches to succeed. The first letter of John was written more as a sermon, while the other two letters are like actual letters.

The first book of John expands on the Gospel of John. It teaches about following God and being united in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in order to achieve eternal life. Second John concludes that while it is important to gain oneness with God, we must also be aware of false prophets, false teachings, and false gods. Finally, 3 John wraps up the messages providing hope, encouragement, and strength to those in the church. Each letter may have

We need the hope of eternal life and the knowledge of how to gain it.

been written to different churches in different areas, but when combined in a series, they provide a helpful and meaningful message.

These letters address situations that the churches were facing in John's day. However, this does not mean that they don't relate to situations in today's world. If we look beyond the time period and the literal words written by John, we can see that there is a relation with today's world. We need the hope of eternal life and the knowledge of how to gain it. We need to be aware of false prophets and teachings that may take us away from the truth and the light. We need to stay away from those people who may cause us to stray, and we need to surround ourselves with people who give encouragement and strength.

REACT

1. Why does John focus so much on false teachings and false prophets?
2. How would you restate the message of John to fit your life today?

The Love, the Truth, and the Commandments Team

LOGOS

Exod. 20:1–17; Rom. 6:17; 2 Thess. 2:9, 10; Heb. 13:2, 3; 2 John; Rev. 2:14, 15; 14:12

The Rule Book (Exod. 20:1–17)

There are many different analogies about how one should live life. We've heard that life is a dance or a path through the woods, but what if we were to compare life to sports? Let's pick baseball, for example. The first decision one needs to make is which team to be on. One could be a Red Sox or a Yankee, or even part of the Orioles. In real life, the decision comes down to two teams—those who follow Christ and those who don't. Unlike most baseball seasons, where no one knows for sure which team will win the World Series, we do know which team will win in life—those who follow Christ. Just like for all sports teams, God has given us a set of rules—the Ten Commandments—to help us win. Exodus 20:1–17 covers the Ten Commandments as relayed from God to Moses to the Israelites.

Part of serving Christ is living the truth.

A Slave No More (Rom. 6:17)

Being part of Christ's team is an incredible and exhilarating experience. Read Romans 6:17. We used to be slaves to sin. But because of trusting in God, we are able to change teams. Christ welcomes us to His team. This doesn't mean, however, that because we love God and are saved, we can do whatever we want without suffering the consequences. As Christians, we should not feel that we are suddenly in a position to commit sins without consequences. Otherwise, there would be no need for the Ten Commandments. Read Romans 6:18. Because we have been set free from sin, we can choose to follow righteousness, to dedicate ourselves to Christ and righteousness, and to become slaves to righteousness.

A Love of Truth (2 Thess. 2:9, 10)

Second Thessalonians 2:10 states that people will "perish because they refused to love the truth" (NIV). So how does loving the truth fit into Christ's team? In Romans, we learned that being part of Christ's team sets us free from sin and makes us slaves to righteousness. Slavery usually has a negative connotation of people forced to do something they don't want to do. However, when we become slaves to righteousness, or the truth, we do so willingly. We make the choice to love the truth and to live our

lives by it. *Love* is a word of excitement. When you love someone, you want to do everything you can to take care of that person and treat that person well. This also applies to the truth. Part of serving Christ is living the truth.

Love Others as Yourself (Heb. 13:2, 3)

A woman wearing bright red lipstick, dangling earrings, and layers of jewelry clanking around her neck, wrists, and fingers, walked into a small church. Now you may be thinking that this is another story about a church being too set in its ways to be nice to such a person, to someone who might make a living standing on a street corner waiting for a business opportunity. Normally, in a story beginning like this, the church either stares at the woman in a cold, unsmiling way, or nobody will sit with her or talk with her. However, the people of this church acted as if she were one of them. They did sit with her and talk with her. They showed Christian love to her. "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2, NIV).

The Chosen Woman (2 John)

Now what if the adorned woman in the previous section was a deceiver and not one with God. Then and only then, one must beware and not welcome her (2 John 10). God has given us many commands, including that we love each other and walk in His truth. If the adorned woman is a person who wants to walk with the Lord, she should be shown love.

Be Patient and Know God (Rev. 2:14, 15; 14:12)

Christ's team is made up of those who follow Christ in all things. His team loves the truth and obeys His commandments. It is a very special team, and although we know it is the winning team, it can sometimes be difficult when there are teachers on the team who try to lead God's people astray, as in the case of Balaam. There is hope, however. Revelation 14:12 says, "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus" (NIV).

REACT

1. How is love defined in 2 John 6? How does that definition affect each of us?
2. Read each of the commandments in Exodus 20:1–17. How does each one show love for either God, humans, or both?
3. How is it possible for us to keep God's commandments out of love? Provide biblical texts to support your answer.

The Appearance of Truth

TESTIMONY

2 John 9-11

"Elder Jones, . . . You speak rashly. You are not sanctified by the truth you handle. Your spirit needs to be refined. Then Christlike words will flow from a heart imbued with the Holy Spirit. You are too self-confident, too sure that everything you say possesses a power which will obtain assent to it from those who hear.

"Unless you are converted, your unguarded statements will destroy the force of the most powerful sermons you can preach, for they reveal that you are not speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit, but that 'another spirit' has taken possession of you. All in your words and actions that is coarse and rough, all that savors of a reckless self-confidence, greatly injures the force of the truth that you proclaim. Unless you change, your careless speech will make fruitless the most precious truths.

**"You must come to the
feet of Jesus."**

"Speak guardedly. When your words are weighted with the Holy Spirit, when you stand where you should as a man who is proclaiming the sacred truths of the Word of God, your unsuspected weaknesses of

character will not be developed as something worthy of imitation. If you keep humble before God, self will not appear. It will be unmistakably seen that Christ is abiding in the heart, sanctifying the life. Show by your careful, holy profession that you are receiving into your soul the water of life, to send it forth to others in sweet, living currents. The religion of Calvary and the gospel is a triumphant argument to the transforming power of the grace of Christ. Unless your spirit is decidedly changed, your course will greatly detract from your influence. God does not want the ways and words of A. T. Jones to be woven into your discourses. You must come to the feet of Jesus. 'Learn of Me,' says the divine Teacher, 'for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.'

"Cover yourself with the righteousness of Christ. Let not unadvised words and actions injure your influence. Do not think that your course of action is perfect, and that no one should question it. Our people will certainly question your course unless they see that you are moving under the influence of the Holy Spirit in all meekness and lowliness of heart. . . . You need to be melted over by the Spirit of God. You need to cherish the gentleness of Christ."*

*Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 11, pp. 209, 210.

Strangers and Friends

HOW-TO

2 John 4, 7, 8

I am not now a father, but I plan to be one in the future. This past fall, I married a wonderful woman, and we have started discussing the possibility of having children. As we have had these discussions, one important question always comes up. Where should we live once we do have children? We want to raise them in an environment where they can have the type of friends who won't lead them away from God.

God wants us to live and participate in an environment in which we can grow as Christians, rather than be led away from Him. So how do we evaluate the people around us? How do we know if the people we are talking with or sitting with are going to be a positive or negative influence? Following are some possible ideas.

Whom do we want to be like? We should want to be like Jesus. The more we study the Bible and meditate on its principles, the more we will become like Him. He wants to help us choose the right friends, and He has promised not to put us in a position we cannot handle. If we trust Him, we will strive to be like Him.

Is there ever a time we
should eat with the
"Gentiles"?

Whom do we spend time with, and why? Do we spend our time in front of the television or surfing YouTube? Is there ever a time we should eat with the "Gentiles"? We need to go out into the world and teach others about Jesus, but at the same time, we need to be cautious of becoming more like the people we are trying to help, rather than becoming like Jesus.

Who influences our heart? By spending time in prayer and reading the Bible, we are allowing Jesus to influence our heart.

Do we want to entertain angels? Although Jesus counsels us to be cautious of our friends, we need to be open to His will. We need to be willing to help people and to love one another. Angels will come our way, and we should help them. At the same time, we should be strong in our relationship with Jesus. Pray, and He will be with you.

REACT

1. How can we influence others to come to God without being influenced by them to leave God?
2. How does God help us to choose our friends and companions?
3. How can questioning our actions and our friends help us?
4. How can we be the type of friend who draws others closer to Jesus?

Beware of Rocks That Float

OPINION

1 Tim. 4:1-7; Rev. 2:12-16

The eastern Sierras in California have many different types of volcanic rock. Most of the rocks, such as basalt and obsidian, are heavy, and if thrown into the water, they sink. Pumice is unusual in that, on the outside, it looks like it should be a heavy rock; but it is so porous that when it's thrown into the water, it floats. Outward appearance is not the way to tell the difference between the heavy rock and the light rock. Tests need to be performed. The rocks need to be weighed and put in water.

We always need to be careful not to judge the wrong qualities. We need to carefully study the Bible and pray to God. The Bible will guide us toward people who are truthful and away from those who will try to be deceptive.

The gospel is about living an abundant life because a gracious, loving God died to save us from sin.

First Timothy 4:1-7 clearly states that near the end of time people will leave the church to follow deceptive people. Revelation 2:12-16 backs up this idea with the example of Balaam. Balaam taught followers of God to sin by eating food that had been sacrificed to idols and to commit

immoral sexual acts. Clearly, it is important to be able to distinguish between people who walk with God and people who live in deception.

However, we are not supposed to judge people. By judging in fear and not looking in love, many innocent people are killed either literally or by having their reputations ruined. The Bible is about spreading the gospel. And the gospel is not about living in fear of being destroyed by an angry God. It is about living an abundant life because a gracious, loving God died to save us from sin.

REACT

1. What modern examples are there of people leaving the church to follow a deceptive person or group? When contrasted to Christ, what characterized these deceptions? For example, check the Internet for Jim Jones and David Koresh.

2. How can we know if someone is a good influence or not?

Free and Clear

EXPLORATION

Ps. 119:1–16; John 8:31, 32; 15:1–5

CONCLUDE

It is important to God that we be firmly grounded in the truth. In a society in which gray areas are favored, and black and white are considered extremism, some might want to suggest that truth is a matter of opinion. Well, it is. Truth is a matter of God's opinion. In His infallible Word, the Bible, He has delineated the rules and principles we are to live by. God's law is our highest and only standard for truth. As we commit to walking in truth, we will experience freedom and clarity in the journey to our heavenly home.

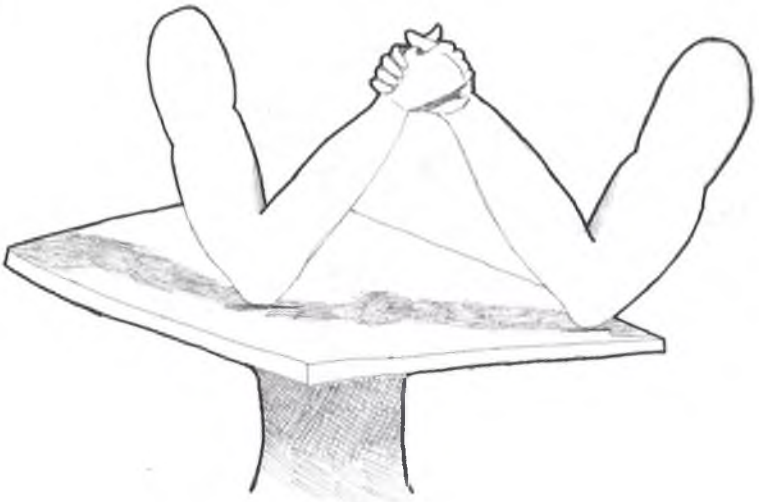
CONSIDER

- Analyzing the following Bible verses—Numbers 23:19; Psalm 51:6; Matthew 5:18; Titus 1:2—and then answering the question, What is truth?
- Designing a road map with clues on how to recognize a false teacher. Use the following texts to help you: Psalm 119:105; Isaiah 8:20; John 3:21; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 5:9; 1 John 4:6.
- Paraphrasing the Ten Commandments using today's language. Use your life experience to make it personal.
- Reading Psalm 119:1–16 every day this week during your devotional time. After you read it, write your reaction. Your response might be different each day, thus broadening your understanding of this passage.
- Drawing, painting, or sketching whatever comes to mind when you hear the words *truth*, *obedience*, and *love*.
- Contacting a few friends to form a Bible study group. Meet as often as you can, and use materials that will help you better understand Scriptures.
- Composing a song for God based on Psalm 86:11, "Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name" (NIV).

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 50; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 145–147.

Power Struggle



“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God” (3 John 11, NRSV).

Which Parent?

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 26:3, 4

Thirteen-year-old Mariah sat dazed in the judge's chambers. All she could hear was his gnawing question, "Which parent?" The Gregorys had been married nearly 15 years. They were professionally employed and provided a comfortable lifestyle for their only daughter. They went to amusement parks, beaches, and many other vacation spots, which in Mariah's mind solidified her concept of a strong, impenetrable family bond.

But suddenly, Mariah's world had collapsed. Her parents were seeking a divorce, and both of them wanted Mariah. Goose bumps appeared on her arms, indicating her fear and discomfort. She then began to return to reality, and she heard the judge say, "I know

this is hard for you. But I need your help in deciding the best place for you to live. Which parent?" She was in the midst of a power struggle. It was at that

Suddenly, Mariah's world had collapsed.

moment Mariah heard her grandma's words of encouragement, "Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—in peace because they trust in you" (Isaiah 26:3, NRSV). She knew her only way out was to trust God. And so she prayed, "God, I love both my parents and feel that it's really unfair that I have to make such a difficult decision. So I'm depending on You to send me an answer."

At that moment, a bailiff walked into the room and whispered into the judge's ear. The judge's forehead wrinkled as he assimilated the information provided. Then, as the bailiff left the chambers, a smile emerged on the judge's face. "Young lady, your parents have decided to stay together and receive counseling, but in the meantime you'll be living with your grandparents."

Many of us have experienced some sort of trial involving a power struggle. It may have been a power struggle between you and a manager at work, or between you and one of your parents, or between you and your spouse. And we all are involved in the ultimate power struggle between good and evil, between Christ and Satan. Fortunately, this is a power struggle that is already won for us when we choose Christ. For God will never leave us, even in the mist of the most formidable power struggle.

Take time now to read 3 John. Notice the power struggles John is writing about. As you study the rest of this week's lesson, be thinking about how such struggles are manifested in your life and how God is helping you to overcome them.

David Allen Jacobs, Helena, Alabama, U.S.A.

"Will the Real Power Broker Please Stand Up?"

LOGOS

Isa. 14:13, 14; Mark 9:35; 1 Cor. 12:7–31; 1 Corinthians 13; Phil. 2:3; 3 John;
Rev. 14:6

Power Struggles (Isa. 14:13, 14)

Sandra and her husband were battling in a heated argument when the counselor asked, "Do you want to be happy, or do you want to be right?"

Tension seemed to escalate as parishioners demanded an explanation or a resignation from the pastor, who, although faithful, was now under fire.

A livid manager lets the employee know, "It's my way or the highway."

Two roommates painfully divide their dorm room into equal sides, each daring the other to "cross the line."

Do any of these scenarios sound abysmally familiar? They illustrate what contemporary authors define as a power struggle. The rhetoric goes like this: if I can't get you to see things my way, if I want something you have, if I feel an overt need

**If I can't get you to see
things my way . . . then it
will cost you.**

to defend what's mine, or if you won't go my way in spite of your resistance, then it will cost you. At this point, the person decides to apply power, withdraw love, or issue some punitive consequence. A power struggle ensues.

The Church Is Not Immune (3 John 9)

Power struggles exist in every facet of life. They can prevail in relationships on the job, in the classroom, within families, and also in our spiritual lives. In fact, our society today is inundated with the desire for power. "A common, almost worshiped trait of human existence is power. Power to manipulate. . . . Power to make things happen. Power to get what I want. Power to get you to do what I want."

The church is not immune to this disease. From the pulpit to the pew, and might I add, from the pew back to the pulpit, power struggles do creep up. How does this happen? What resolution does the Bible offer?

Let's first establish what power is. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines power as "a person or thing having great influence, force, or authority." So where does the struggle come in? Power becomes a struggle only when it moves from influence to outright manipulation. Power is expressed in relational terms. If we look at the Bible, there are many positive examples of power used rightly. However, we also will find many examples of power struggles. It is somewhat comforting to know

that we are not the only ones who experience such trials. So let's look at some stories in Scripture to find out how our spiritual predecessors dealt with this issue.

Moses was painfully familiar with power struggles. Numbers 16 takes us back to a day when three men led a rebellion. We see that power struggles can happen when some are dissatisfied with leadership. It started with Korah, the leader in this movement. Ellen White notes that "he was a man of ability and influence. Though appointed to the service of the tabernacle, he had become dissatisfied with his position and aspired to the dignity of the priesthood."² She goes on to say that he "finally conceived the bold design of overthrowing both the civil and religious authority."³ The rebels, because of their hard-heartedness, were eventually destroyed.

What can we learn from this power struggle?

Lesson 1. Pride and ambition open the door to envy and a striving for supremacy. (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 403, 404.)

Lesson 2. To persist in a power struggle does not pay its worth in dividends.

Saul perpetuated a power struggle between himself and David. First Samuel 24:4–8 highlights the climax of this struggle. Saul was already a king, so he had the power of a king. So why did he struggle so? He forfeited his own royal destiny by disobeying God in an earlier test with the Amalekites. His choice ultimately affected his spiritual destiny.

From Saul, we can learn the following:

Lesson 3. His struggles were fueled by jealousy. He viewed David as a threat because David possessed what Saul forfeited—God's favor.

Lesson 4. It is better to obey than to sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22). It's not worth it to sacrifice your relationship with God for temporary gratification of power.

Last, but not least, Peter offers wise counsel and timely comfort for us in 1 Peter 5:2, 3. Take time now to read these verses. In John 13:1–12, the Bible clearly directs us to serve others and control ourselves. Our spiritual duty leads us to ask these questions of ourselves: What am I willing to sacrifice for Christ? How does God use His power to save, redeem, and love me?

In the final analysis, it's not about whom we can control, but Who controls us. Who is the real power broker in our lives? Is it Jesus Christ?

"'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6, NKJV).

1. Steven L. Haley, "The Push for Power," in *Fit Forever: One-a-day Devotionals for Body, Mind, and Spirit*, compiled by Kay Kuzma, 2005.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 395.

3. *Ibid.*

Make Love, Not War!

TESTIMONY

Ps. 37:27-40; 1 Pet. 3:8-12; 1 John 4:7-11

It is evident that a major cause of the power struggle within the church is the lack of love at the individual level. However, an awareness of God's love for us individually and an extension of that same love to our brothers and sisters helps resolve these power struggles.

"After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the disciples went forth to proclaim a living Saviour, their one desire was the salvation of souls. They rejoiced in the sweetness of communion with saints. They were tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth's sake. In their daily association with one another, they revealed the love that Christ had enjoined upon them."¹

"But gradually a change came. The believers began to look for defects in others.

**"It is not the opposition
of the world that most
endangers the church
of Christ."**

Dwelling upon mistakes, giving place to unkind criticism, they lost sight of the Saviour and His love. They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies, more particular about the theory than the practice of the faith. In their zeal to condemn others, they overlooked their own errors."²

"It is not the opposition of the world that most endangers the church of Christ. It is the evil cherished in the hearts of believers that works their most grievous disaster and most surely retards the progress of God's cause. There is no surer way of weakening spirituality than by cherishing envy, suspicion, faultfinding, and evil surmising. On the other hand, the strongest witness that God has sent His Son into the world is the existence of harmony and union among men of varied dispositions who form His church."³

REACT

Is it possible to experience total unity within the church despite our differences? If so, how do we achieve such unity?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 547.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 548.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 549.

Bubble, Bubble, Toil, and Trouble . . .

EVIDENCE

3 John 3–11

Diotrephes was “prating” against church members “with malicious words” (3 John 10). The Greek word means bubbling,¹ implying a lot of froth and hot air, and that Diotrephes was accusing John with no basis in truth. Furthermore, he interfered with those who would assist the brethren, disfellowshipping them. “The false nature of Diotrephes’ ministry . . . [is that] he views the public office as that of boss. The congregation to him is not a visible manifestation of the Holy Christian Church, but merely an organization—his underlings!”²

How could John deal with this situation? Proverbs 26:4 says, “Do not answer fools according to their folly, or you will be a fool yourself” (NRSV). John couldn’t stoop to Diotrephes’ level by accusing him, for that would lend credibility to Diotrephes’ gossip. However, Proverbs 26:5 says, “Answer fools according to their folly, or they will be wise in their own eyes” (NRSV). John could not let Diotrephes continue unabated in his rebellion, because that would destroy the fledgling church. To answer or not to answer? That was the question!

John stated, “If I come, I will call to mind his deeds.” John would not go and “duke it out” with Diotrephes for supremacy. Instead, he would present Diotrephes’ deeds and actions and let them speak for themselves. Whenever false accusations and false teachers arise, the best defense against them all is the truth.

Sometimes we can safely choose not to answer. However, many times we will have to stand up and face the opposition. Yet even then, we need not sink to the level of counteraccusations and personal attacks, and we don’t have to lend credibility (or fodder) to vicious speculation by trying to explain situations. When faced with a power struggle, we must always take the high road no matter how great the temptation is to join the muck. Treat dissenting parties with the respect they may not give you. Grant them the patience they may not grant you. Stand fast in the authority of Jesus Christ, and let the truth expose their errors for what they are.

**Many times we will have
to stand up and face the
opposition.**

1. Luke C. Werre, “The Third Epistle of the Apostle John: Exegesis and Commentary,” <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/920> (accessed June 12, 2008).

2. Ibid.

Who Is in Charge Here?

HOW-TO

Prov. 17:27, 28; 18:2; Phil. 2:3-5

The struggle for power is a normal, albeit sinful, characteristic. Just look at a baby, and you will realize we were born with the need to be in control. A baby cries when it wants something and often will not stop crying until it gets it. As children, we like to argue, because we want everyone to get on board with our ideas. As adults, we like to prove our point to show that everyone else is wrong. Like Samson, we enjoy having power over our parents. Even though his parents were against his marriage to Delilah, he went through with it. This marriage would later lead to his demise.

Have you ever been in a situation where two or more people wanted to take control? Have you ever been the person who wanted to take control? We all go through our own episodes that highlight our need for control. Whether it's in the workplace, school, or daily social interactions, conflicts involving the need for power seem to be everywhere. How can we deal with these power struggles? Here are some ideas:

It is important to put away our selfishness and think of others.

Eliminate stubbornness. Advocate compromise. Whenever they're in a conflict, people tend to think about themselves, often adopting a "my way

or the highway" mentality. How many times have you pushed for something and gotten your way? But was your way always the best way? Or did the situation end in disaster? We must learn that stubbornness leads to disaster. Our ways are full of imperfections that we often fail to recognize. It is important to put away our selfishness and think about others. Doing this will soothe the power struggle bug.

Stop. Push the pause button. People often say things they regret during an argument. Stopping to evaluate the situation may seem odd during the heat of an argument, but it may result in something positive. Pushing the pause button allows us to consider our actions and their consequences, thus providing a more logical outlook that limits conflict.

Turn to the Bible. Pray about it. There is no shortage of power struggles in the Bible. Reading and understanding those examples can give us insight on how to properly handle our own power struggles. Also, prayer is important in helping us to find a way out of any struggle. Prayer helps to clear the mind by allowing us to re-focus and reevaluate the situation in a Christlike way. In order to take control of our lives, we first must give control of our lives to God.

"My Way or the Highway!"

OPINION

3 John 9, 10

Questions on Doctrine is a book published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1957. It includes responses of church leaders to questions posed by certain Christian writers. The book was the catalyst that helped Adventism become more acceptable to the wider Christian community.¹

Adventist theologian M. L. Andreason disagreed with *Questions on Doctrine's* position on the nature of Christ and His atonement, and he began a campaign against Adventism for promoting an "erroneous view." This led to schisms in the church, and the ripple effects continue today.²

I want to look at three areas that I believe could have been dealt with differently.

1. Leadership erred in not inviting Dr. Andreason to be part of the book's review process. They had nothing to do with him and sidelined him from participating, when he had much to contribute. An open invitation would have built goodwill.

2. Dr. Andreason erred in seeking his own way. It pained him to see his church go in a direction he thought wrong. Yet what mattered most to him was his view of things. While some may say his anger at being snubbed was justified, his divisive methods did not benefit anyone.

**They had . . . sidelined him
from participating.**

3. Rather than facilitating discussion, some members drew battle lines. While Dr. Andreason reconciled with the church about his methods before his death, the strife between his followers and the church continue today.

John spoke of Diotrephes' desire to be "first." This desire is what drove Lucifer to rebel. This desire can also be the downfall of those who may be on the correct side, as they cherish their incorrect methods. Whenever power struggles erupt, we must remember that "might does not make right" and that "a soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

REACT

Is it wrong to compromise with or tolerate dissent? Explain your answer.

1. *Questions on Doctrine*, 50th Anniversary Conference, <http://qod.andrews.edu/> (accessed June 12, 2008).

2. Ibid.

Who Has the Power?

EXPLORATION

3 John 11

CONCLUDE

We all have a desire to be in control. This need for power is evident not only in humanity at large but also in the church. Even expert leaders Moses and John were not exempt. So what's the solution? One of the major contributing factors in power struggles is a lack of love. We need to experience Christ's love in our own lives so we can pass it on to those around us. Finally, the true question is not about whom we can control, but who controls us. Allow Christ to have all the power in your life.

CONSIDER

- Praying for church leaders whether or not you agree with them all the time.
- Making a list of people who have wronged you; then do two things—forgive them and pray that God will bless them.
- Doing something nice for the people you listed in the previous activity.
- Discussing with a small group ways you can become less judgmental. Hold each other accountable.
- Memorizing all or parts of Psalm 37:27–40. As you review the passage, think about how it applies to your own Christian experience.
- Composing a song that reminds believers how to love each other in Christ and resolve conflicts in a Christlike way.

CONNECT

Counsels for the Church, chap. 33, "Criticism and Its Effects," pp. 174–179;
Steps to Christ, "The Work and the Life," pp. 77–83.

Next Quarter's Lessons

People on the Move: The Book of Numbers

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 2009, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: A New Order

Logos: Gen. 15:14–16; Lev. 10:1–11; Numbers 1–4; Jer. 23:23, 24; John 14:15–18, 23.

Memory Text: “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

Lesson 2: Preparing a People

Logos: Numbers 5, 6; Ezek. 33:15; Luke 19:8, 9; Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.

Memory Text: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 2).

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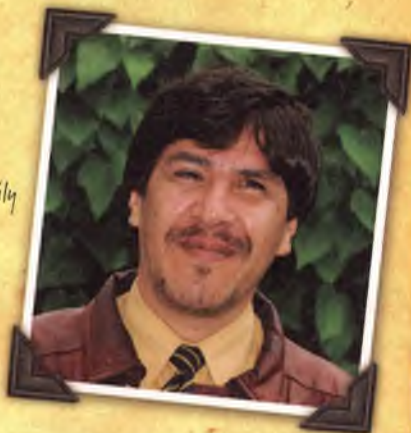


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