

cq

Collegiate Quarterly

2010


October–December

background characters
in the **old testament**



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide for Young Adults

ever think about writing a Sabbath School quarterly



Why not? Each year, 300-plus young adults from around the world participate in the CQ (*Collegiate Quarterly*) writing program. CQ gives Seventh-day Adventist young people, ages 18 to 35, a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the church.

You are the most important ingredient in our CQ formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you would like to participate in the writing of a lesson—and get paid for it—write us today:



CQ (*Collegiate Quarterly*)
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904 U.S.A.

E-mail: chiomentil@gc.adventist.org



background characters in the **old testament**

october–december 2010

Staff Editor:
Lyndelle Brower Chiomenti
Editorial Assistant:
Shirlee J. Ingram

Reading Committee

James Black
May-Ellen Colón
Kwabena Donkor
Falvo Fowler

Jonathan Kuntaraf
Armando Miranda
Hiskia Missah
Julio C. Muñoz

Tim Poirier
Luis A. Schulz
Bonita J. Shields
Gary Swanson

CQ is written by Seventh-day Adventist young adults and their friends around the world.

Editorial Office: Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600, U.S.A.

Place orders with Pacific Press® Publishing Association, P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A.

Other than the King James Version, Scripture versions used in this Bible study guide are as follows:

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Scripture taken from *The New American Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

New International Version (NIV)

Scripture texts credited to the NIV are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

New King James Version (NKJV)

Scripture texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Bible texts credited to NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

CQ (ISSN 0744-2939). Volume 33, no. 4. Published quarterly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD, 20904, U.S.A., and printed by Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A.

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

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

Copyright © 2010 by the Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Printed in the U.S.A.

background characters in the **old testament**

- 10 *Lesson One Story and **History***
Winslow Benn, Tamara Bloom, Samuel Bowen, Shawna Carter,
Paul Collymore, Eleanor Meki
- 19 *Lesson Two Caleb: Living With the **Wait***
Helyne Frederick, Enoch Isaac, Keisha McKenzie, Raul Peters,
Shirley Roberts, Devon Superville
- 28 *Lesson Three Hannah: Learning to Be
Someone*
Andrea Jackson, Jeff Jackson, Geddes Stewart, Kymberly Tolson,
Melvin Tolson, Alexandra Yeboah
- 37 *Lesson Four Jonathan: Born for **Greatness***
Julene Duerksen-Kapao, Kevin Gredig, Juliana Henry, Glenda
Higgins, Lindsay Morton, Tamar Paul
- 46 *Lesson Five Abigail: No Victim of
Circumstances*
Patience Barnes, Kayla D. Beard, Tresa Beard, Larie S. Gray, Ann
Stewart, Sarah Stewart
- 55 *Lesson Six Uriah: Faith of a **Foreigner***
Audrey Andersson, Lars Eric Andersson, Patrick Boyle, Amy
Browne, Elizabeth Lawrence, Michele Vitry
- 64 *Lesson Seven Abiathar: The **Priest***
Carlington A. Clarke, Luan Debbie Hamilton-Bogues, Sanjo
Jeffrey, Howard Kelly, Rory Mendez, Cheryl Stewart



- 73 *Lesson Eight Joab: David's Weak*
Strongman
Rose Anyango, Saline Khavesta, Florence Kurema, Norbert Kurema, Samson Oguttu, Julius Nyerere
- 82 *Lesson Nine Rizpah: The Influence of*
Faithfulness
Bianca Acosta, Enock Mochache (assisted by Barbra and Josene), Joshua Mochache, Trufosa Mochache, Elvis Mogoi, Obed Soire
- 91 *Lesson Ten The Man of God: Obedience Is*
Not Optional
Bongga L. Agno, Raleigh Herbert G. Ampuan, Samuel D. Bagano Jr., Madonna Lourdes D. Morenos-Felicitas, Alfred H. Selin, Girlie G. Sumawang
- 100 *Lesson Eleven The Widow of Zarephath:*
The Leap of Faith
Danelle Eckright, Ryan Ernst, Lea Hardy, Karen Pires, Sylvia Reese, Renee Zaharie
- 109 *Lesson Twelve Gehazi: Missing the* **Mark**
Caroline Mwelu and L. J. Brauer, Mwendwa Kakui, Eliot Mairura Masongo, Daniel Maingi Mbuku, Earnest Munyao Mule, Charles Nyaranga
- 118 *Lesson Thirteen Baruch: Building a Legacy*
in a Crumbling World
Jill Manoukian, Steven Manoukian, Arthur Parrino, Sandy Prevost, Neil Richmund, Doug Taylor

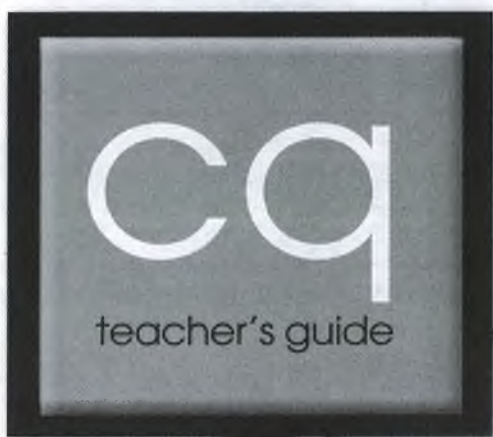
The CQ Insiders for This Quarter Are

Alanie Lewis, Jamaica	Kirsha Cambell, Jamaica
Chard Forsyth, Granada	Myrtle Reynold, Trinidad and Tobago
Tommica, Granada	Karlene D. Beckford, Jamaica
Danniella J. P. Hamlet, Trinidad and Tobago	Tony Phillip Oreso, Kenya
Edson Simon, U.S.A.	Mpabansi Protais, U.S.A.
Andrew Lawrence, Jamaica	Stacy-Ann McSween, Trinidad and Tobago
Fayeann Crawford, U.S.A.	Worthy Habla, Philippines
Gesine Schuchert, Germany	Alejandro Juarez, U.S.A.
Junior Metayer, U.S.A.	

There are times when life is more than the update on Facebook, the tweets, the IMs, and texts. Sometimes, the important times, it's about looking beyond the abridged, the instants, the clichés. It's about discovering what God is really trying to say to you.



**SABBATH SCHOOL
TEACHER PREPARATION
IN MINUTES...**



<http://www.cqbiblestudy.org/article.php?=#3>



JUST CLICK AND SERVE!

This Quarter's **Illustrators**



Teresa Morris and Amanda Purcell

The illustrations for this quarter were thoughtfully put together by Teresa Morris and Amanda Purcell at McClearen Design Studios (www.mcclearendesignstudios.com), an advertising and design firm in Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A.

As designers, we have experienced art, graphic, video, and technology change at a rapid pace during the past 25 years, and with that race we have continually chosen the way we create our craft. It is fun to think back on the days when we struggled to keep a clean line with a repidigraph pen or cringed as someone got too close to an airbrush painting that had massive hours of labor in it. A careless fingerprint or a sneeze could ruin weeks of work! So in our world of drawing on the computer, a simple “undo” (a move in the computer program that lets us back up a step when we draw a bad line or make a mistake) has been quite a blessing!

The Lord has led us into many exciting, diverse areas of work as we rely on Him daily. Many times we are stretched out of our comfort zone and wondered why it seemed we are forced into this growth. But always we strive to count it a privilege to take special care in the marketing, product, and advertising strategy for our small independent as well as our corporate accounts. We are grateful to be able to love them and count them as our family.

Thank you to the staff of the *CQ* Bible study guide for inviting us to illustrate these lessons. To enhance the stories within each week's lesson, we chose to incorporate current twists to some works of the “old masters” that are in the public domain. It seems appropriate that we compliment our precious Master and His lessons for us in this way.

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.

About 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 72,500.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.

3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.

4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CQ AND THE CHURCH

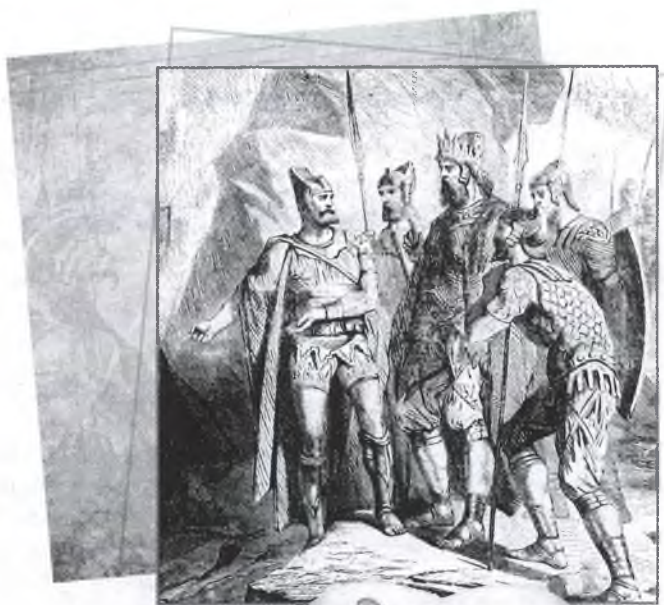
CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

lesson one

SEPTEMBER 25–OCTOBER 2

Story and History

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NRSV).



original illustrator unknown

Rom. 15:4

Introduction

More Sides to the Story

Not everyone likes studying history. Still, it seems somewhat extreme that a group of young lawbreakers should have to choose between that and jail. Declared guilty of glorifying Nazism, young extremists were offered a course in the history of the Holocaust instead of a prison sentence. The rationale was that looking at the past can open our eyes and motivate us to change.¹

Have you ever seen a photomosaic?

To do that, however, history must be more than lifeless facts. In many languages, story and history are the same word. Even in English, one is not-so-subtly hidden inside the other, with the second actually meaning the first as well.

The truth is, *story* and *history* need each other. History is so much more than names and dates. “Doing history is a way of bringing the past to life, in the best tradition of the storyteller.” When history is given such a life, it becomes more than “just a bunch of facts.”² This is perhaps why God gave us more than facts in His Word. Scripture is replete with real stories about real people—“warts and all.” Every jot of His Word is worth our consideration.

Yet sometimes our attention focuses on the most eye-catching feature before us, while we often overlook the finer details. Have you ever seen a photomosaic? From a distance, it looks like just a photograph; but as you get closer, you see that it’s made up of hundreds of tiny images of things or people relating to the main subject. The Bible is like a huge photomosaic. When we consider its context, when we see the bigger picture, it all points to Jesus. Making up that whole, however, are many portraits of individuals and their walk with God. Sometimes we focus on the same favorite pictures, ignoring less obvious ones in between or around the edges. When we do that, we can miss important lessons God has placed in His revelation to us.

We might not have been offered a university course to keep us out of jail, but in our quest to be free from the imprisonment of sin, we, too, can be changed by looking at the past. This week, we’ll consider the background behind some of the accounts in Scripture as we prepare to zoom in on the detail of God’s stories and discover history’s lessons for us today.

1. *The Times Higher Education*, “Go to jail or study history, Nazis told,” February 9, 2001, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=157221§ioncode=26> (accessed June 21, 2009).

2. *The Basics of History*, <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/History/Basics.html> (accessed June 21, 2009).

Logos *Is It Choice or Chance?*

Gen. 39:6–12;
Josh. 3:9–17;
1 Sam. 24:1–7;
1 Kings 12:1–16;
Job 1:1–12

Obeying a Dreamer (Gen. 39:6–12)

We all respond differently to the varied experiences of life. The question is whether we respond to our experiences by choice or gut reaction. One would think that after taking into account the numerous challenges in his life before being sold into slavery, Joseph would have developed a negative attitude. This attitude could even have been extended to the slave/master relationship, since he would have been accustomed to freedom when he was with his family. Yet Joseph must have chosen a somewhat positive attitude toward his circumstances based on the fact that Potiphar, his master, left him in charge of his possessions.

It is no different with us.

We recognize also that even in prison, Joseph was placed in charge. However, even at this juncture in his life, he was faced with another challenge, namely the attraction of Potiphar's wife and what do to about it. He refused to dishonor not only his master but, more important, his God (Gen. 39:8–10). Potiphar's wife consistently pursued Joseph, but praise be to God, this young man repeatedly spurned her advances. As a result, we see Joseph again being imprisoned. An interesting idea to examine is that Samson, when faced with a similar challenge, succumbed twice (see Judges 14; 16). Was it by choice or by chance?

A Soldier in the Army (Josh. 3:9–17)

Joshua also is placed in a position of authority in which he leads God's people across the Jordan River. In Joshua 3:9–13, we see him speaking with boldness and clarity regarding the manner in which the Israelites should enter the Promised Land. Could there have been other more experienced and mature people to carry out such an awesome task? Perhaps someone who had a doctorate in leadership? Was Joshua's availability based on simply a matter of chance, or was it due to a deliberate decision on his part? Can we say that God was even instrumental in placing this young man in that influential position?

Chasing a Mountain Goat (1 Sam. 24:1–7)

After David's victorious campaign against the Philistines, we see him being pursued by King Saul to a hiding place in the mountains. When Saul, unaware of David's presence, sought relief in the same cave, David "crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe" (verse 4, NIV). Yet, contrary to natural human inclination, David chose to honor God. In calling Saul "the Lord's anointed," he remained

faithful to his king. David knew that he would one day be sitting on the throne. Yet he did not seek to hasten that day, for he also knew that “it was not right to strike down the man God had placed on the throne. If he assassinated Saul, he would be setting a precedent for his own opponents to remove him some day.”¹

Obeying Our Elders (1 Kings 12:1–16)

When King Rehoboam sought counsel on how to effectively rule, he first went to the elders of the council under Solomon’s rule. The advice given would have been in the best interests of both Rehoboam and the populace, yet he chose to obey the advice of those who had grown up with him and were now his council. The ultimate result? The secession of the northern tribes. In verse 14, Rehoboam utters his harsh decision. The reference to scorpions underscores how much more exacting Rehoboam endeavored to be. The scorpions referred to here are actually “whips armed with sharp hooks or points, the stings of which were unusually severe.”² The idea was that just as the governmental demands would be more difficult on the populace, so, too, would be the punishment for not complying with those demands.

The question here is whether Rehoboam’s statements were chance statements or part of a divine plan. The latter is implied in the context that there was an aforementioned punishment on David’s house for Solomon’s idolatry and breaking the covenant with God. (See 1 Kings 11:9–13; 12:15.)

Curse God and Die (Job 1:1–12)

Job’s story teaches us how choices can affect one’s eternal position. In Job 1:1–5, his character and accompanying blessings set the stage for Satan’s attack. Of key importance is the fact that God had faith in Job. He actually allowed Satan to attack him, but only within certain boundaries (verse 12). As we contemplate this story, we should remember that Job feared God (verse 1) and that God referred to Job as “my servant” (verse 8). In this case, being God’s servant implies that God chose Job to have a special relationship with Him.³

All the people we studied about in today’s lesson were placed in situations in which they had choices to make that would affect their eternal destinies. It is no different with us. The question for us to ponder is whether we will choose our response or simply react.

REACT

1. What role does intellect play in deciding how we will respond to situations in which we find ourselves?
2. Does God control our environment? Explain your answer. How might we ourselves create circumstances in which we simply react?

1. *Life Application Study Bible*, New International Version (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1991), p. 478.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 790.

3. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Servant.”

Testimony

Big Little Things: What's Your Flavor?

Matt. 5:13-16

“Integrity, justice, and Christian kindness, blended, make a beautiful combination. Courtesy is one of the graces of the Spirit. It is an attribute of heaven. The angels never fly into a passion, never are envious, selfish, and jealous. No harsh or unkind words escape their lips. And if we are to be the companions of angels, we too must be refined and courteous.”¹

“Find time to comfort some other heart.”

Refining is a purposeful process, where our minute-by-minute choices determine the quality and impact of the effect we have on others. In the Christian walk, what we do has a bearing on where others end up eternally. Consider the following quotes:

“Closely examine your own heart, and the state of your affections toward God. Inquire, Have I devoted the precious moments of today in seeking to please myself, seeking for my own amusement? or have I made others happy? Have I helped those connected with me to greater devotion to God and to appreciate eternal things? Have I brought my religion into my home, and there revealed the grace of Christ in my words and in my deportment? By my respectful obedience, have I honored my parents, and thus kept the fifth commandment? Have I cheerfully taken up my little, everyday duties, performing them with fidelity, doing what I could to lighten the burdens of others? Have I kept my lips from evil, and my tongue from speaking guile? Have I honored Christ my Redeemer, who gave His precious life that eternal life might be within my reach?”²

“Find time to comfort some other heart, to bless with a kind, cheering word someone who is battling with temptation and maybe with affliction. In thus blessing another with cheering, hopeful words, pointing him to the Burden Bearer, you may unexpectedly find peace, happiness, and consolation yourself.”³

REACT

Do you consider the little things you do or say, even in the simplest of situations, as testimonies to how desirable following Christ is?

1. *Our High Calling*, p. 229.
2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 122.
3. *Our High Calling*, p. 64.

Gen 37:23–36

Evidence *What's Life Got to Do With It?*

Pearl Harbor! Thirteen Days! The Passion of the Christ! These are Hollywood films based on history. Some may argue that their story lines deviate from the complete truth. But be that as it may, the human race always has been fascinated at peeking

What can modern-day, knowledgeable humans like us learn from Joseph while he was “stranded” in ancient Egypt?

into our past to learn about the actions of our predecessors and the consequences of those actions. For some, historical films are merely entertainment. Yet many other viewers come away from them with new perspectives and knowledge that make them aware that the world still reels from the effects of actions taken long ago.

Why study history? Why create large museums? Why keep financial records? Why write diaries and read biographies of individuals? Because we learn from our past. Because our past affects our future.

Whereas the secular world uses the past for secular gain, God has spiritual reasons for all of us to learn from events recorded in the Bible. For example, imagine a teenager who apparently is destined to be nothing more than a shepherd. He is a nomad living in tents; but after being imprisoned in a well, he suddenly becomes the property of a prestigious man who spoke Arabic. This teen has to adapt to different foods and to the stone buildings, traffic, and opulence of Egypt. Most of us in this situation would be intimidated and might even want to jump back into the well. This teenager could have sung a sad song and fallen prey to a life of promiscuity and deceit. But he did not. Eventually he became one of the most influential men in Egypt. Such was the life of Joseph. (See Genesis 39:6–12; 41:41–46.)

What does his life have to do with us? What can modern-day, knowledgeable humans like us learn from Joseph while he was “stranded” in ancient Egypt? First, consider that Egypt was equally as menacing to Joseph as our fast-paced society is to us. It was equally easy to abandon God then in Egypt as it is in our modern Egypt. Joseph experienced abandonment, fear, and loneliness as we do in our world. Because of his story, we learn that despite frightening circumstances or a bleak future, we can still remain uncompromised to the evil around us.

Hence, it is no surprise that God’s divine wisdom enabled Moses to record this story of Joseph and others like it. God saw a world filled with selfishness, and He knew that a simple story of the actions of an inexperienced youth can encourage us to do right.

How-to Living Like Jesus

Phil. 3:13, 14;
Heb. 12:1-3

Every nation boasts of a unique history which, though fraught with stories of peace and war, liberty and slavery, triumphant victories and bitter defeats, is one to be cherished. National monuments tell the proud stories for centuries to come and create a sense of national identity as *His* story becomes *my* story, and subsequently *our* story.

When He says to press on, don't focus on the battle raging around you.

As God's people, we have a rich history found in God's Word. It's refreshing to know that Jesus Himself—the one who gives us spiritual identity, the one who guarantees our salvation—is central to this history. Each day our lives pen new chapters in this account. Does looking back help us to chart the way forward and write manuscripts worthy of reading? Yes! And it all depends on our perspective. In 1 Samuel 7, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who had captured the ark during battle. There seemed to be no hope. Yet on the day Samuel set up the monument Ebenezer, there was victory. That victory didn't come from focusing on the Philistines. Rather it came through appealing to their all powerful God. Thus Samuel could say, "Thus far has the Lord helped us" (1 Sam. 7:12, NIV).

As you read and study the stories of the Bible this quarter, do the following:

Imagine yourself in the roles of the personalities you study. Don't be quick to judge or question their choices and actions. Explore your own choices and actions. See God through their eyes. How did He use them where they were? How can He use you?

Know that your story can be one of victory. God has done it before. He promises to do it again. When He says to press on, don't focus on the battle raging around you. Obey! Then victory will be yours.

Believe that God has a plan designed just for you. As you embrace the stories of old, ask Him to reveal that plan to you. Sad things, even bad things, may be a part of your story, but be assured that "God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him."^{*}

^{*} *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 479.

Matt. 25:21

Opinion

Who Needs These Stories Anyway?

There is an intrinsic educational value obtained when reviewing history. One learns what civilizations have been able to achieve, who the major “movers and shakers” were, and what mistakes to avoid making. I believe that just as secular history lays before us a precedent, so does the history presented to us in the Bible. Through the testimonies of various biblical characters, one learns about their great battles against sin. One learns of their triumphs, their falls, and most important, how effective grace is in healing the woes of humanity.

What story are you writing? And who needs it anyway?

For us today, the truth is that historically, the substance of humanity’s life stories has hardly changed. In fact, our existence seems to be bound by an uncanny repetitiveness. In the overall controversy of spiritual warfare, there is truly nothing new under the sun. So what relevance do these stories have for us today? Above all else, I believe God’s purpose in inspiring men to write His story through the real-life performances of individuals was to expose His intense interest in the everyday affairs of each of us (then and now).

How can we know that we can trust these stories? What is trustworthy about them? “God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith.”*

The questions I pose today are these: What story are you writing? And who needs it anyway? Though there will not be another Bible written, detailed records of our lives are being made in heaven even now. Someday, in the judgment, each of our histories will become even more important than they are now. Who needs these stories? God does, in order for Him to say, “‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’ ” (Matt. 25:21, NIV).

**Steps to Christ*, p. 105.

Exploration

Source Material

2 Tim. 3:16, 17

CONCLUDE

Historical source materials contain stories of the past. Analyzing past experiences or events can impact our lives today. Repositories such as archives and historical societies provide source material useful for our temporal lives so that we do not repeat failed policies, reinstate failed programs, or retry failed practices. Using the Bible as source material to benefit our spiritual lives and to lead us to eternal life connects us to the Source of all wisdom and is useful “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness” so that we might be “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16, 17, NKJV). How well equipped are you?

CONSIDER

- Interviewing a living historical source (some classmates or older church members) who can relate one or more experiences about when they honored God by choosing how to respond to a challenging situation as opposed to simply reacting to it.
- Discussing with a friend times in your life when you responded to a situation by choice as opposed to simply reacting to it.
- Creating a collage of praise by building on Monday’s lesson and using “Making Choices That Honor God” as the theme. Illustrate in your collage how God may be honored even by little choices.
- Recalling a time when your life was affected by someone choosing to help you in a time of need.
- Comparing the challenges to living a God-honoring life in biblical times to the challenges that exist living such a life in the twenty-first century.
- Reviewing your family’s experience in Christ. Go back as many generations as you know about. Chronicle the stories you find and present the results during a special family event.
- Observing the natural world outside your house, apartment, or dormitory. How many natural items within view look like they do because Adam and Eve chose to go against God’s command?

CONNECT

The following are excellent source materials of experiences and events that can impact our lives today: Various authors, *Changed: Real Lives in a Real World* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2009); Bible Characters card game (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1998); George Knight, *1844 and the Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1994).

Rick Blondo, Clarksville, Maryland, U.S.A.

Caleb: Living With the
Wait

*“My soul waits for the Lord
More than those who watch for the morning—
Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord;
For with the Lord there is mercy,
And with Him is abundant redemption” (Ps. 130:6, 7, NKJV).*



unknown illustrator circa 1894

Introduction *Courageous Caleb*

Num. 13:1–30;
14:1–38

What makes somebody courageous? Is it power, possessions, or popularity? “If power could have done it, Joseph Stalin would not have been afraid to go to sleep at night, or would not have been so paranoid that he appointed a soldier to guard his very tea bags! If possessions could have done it, fear would not have caused the late billionaire, Howard Hughes, to live like a hermit and die alone. If popularity could have done it, John Lennon’s biographers would not have described him as a fearful man who slept with lights on and was terrified of germs.”*

He measured the giants against God and saw that they were no match! Indeed they were mere grasshoppers.

True courage comes from a deep abiding trust in God, who gives us power over the enemy (Luke 10:19) and who always keeps His word! Caleb knew God. That was the source of his courage. When the overwhelming majority was going one way, Caleb held to his convictions and went the other way. He was aware that God plus any number, even one, is a majority; so despite the negative reports given by ten spies, he stood firm.

Caleb experienced passing through the Red Sea. He witnessed the subsequent drowning of Pharaoh’s army. He saw water gush from the rock and drank that same water. He ate of the manna that came down from heaven. He measured the giants against God and saw that they were no match! Indeed they were mere grasshoppers.

Caleb was prepared to do what leaders are supposed to do—lead. His response was, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it [Canaan], for we will surely overcome it” (Num. 13:30, NASB). The people, however, were intimidated by and afraid of this mammoth new venture. Their fear degenerated into panic, and they wanted to stone this leader who was encouraging them to move forward in faith. However, Caleb chose to move forward with optimism, faith, and courage.

As we focus on Caleb throughout this week, let’s consider how we as young people can demonstrate bravery, courage, and faith as we face the mountains and giants in our path.

*Bob and Debby Gass, *The Word for You Today* (Feb.–Apr. 2004), p. 56.

Evidence *Unlearning Helplessness*

American psychologists Martin Seligman and Steven Maier have explored how intelligent creatures respond to challenges. In one experiment, dogs received random electric shocks but were also given a lever to control them. Other dogs had no controlling lever. The dogs that trained with a lever learned to meet random trauma, reduce pain when possible, and bounce back from adversity. The dogs that trained without a lever learned to be helpless. Faced with uncontrollable trauma, they expected to fail, and so never tried to succeed.*

Caleb . . . believed that God's commitment to them trumped their circumstances.

When Caleb returned from the 40-day spy mission, he and his peers shared what they had seen. They also brought with them physical evidence of the land's fruitfulness, including a grape cluster so big that two men had to carry it. But after a trying wilderness journey coupled with years of Egyptian enslavement, the Israelites became overwhelmed by the thought of freedom and the work required to secure it. They overestimated their obstacles, underestimated their power under God's care, and threatened to pack up and return to Egypt (Num. 13:27–14:3).

These naysayers never occupied the land that Caleb and Joshua described for them, and the two visionaries had to wait another 40 years before their preview became a lived reality. Caleb had undergone the same shocks in slavery that the other Israelites had, yet he and Joshua believed that God's commitment to them trumped their circumstances. They did not separate their personal destinies from the nation's destiny. At 80 years old, Caleb was a strong, capable soldier. If anyone could have broken away and tried to carve out some of the Promised Land on his own, he could have. But he didn't (Num. 14:38–45). He knew he was part of an indivisible nation, and he refused to abandon hope in the people or the God who had plans for them all.

REACT

Caleb's sense of God's commitment helped him unlearn the helplessness of slavery and kept him motivated in the wilderness. If you've ever felt helpless, what "lever" helped you bounce back and move ahead with your life?

*Christopher Peterson, Steven Maier, and Martin Seligman, *Learned Helplessness: A Theory for the Age of Personal Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Logos *What Do You See?*

Numbers 13; 14;
Joshua 14

Can You Encode? (Num.13:27, 28)

Encoding (in cognition) is a basic perceptual process of interpreting incoming stimuli. It involves attending to cues that are relevant while ignoring cues that are not. The men who went with Joshua and Caleb to explore the land of Canaan were not blind. Neither were Joshua nor Caleb. The difference between these two spies and the rest was their ability to encode. Listen to the larger group of spies: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But . . ." (Num. 13:27, 28, NIV). The conjunction *but* negates all that was previously said and shown. In other words, "Forget about the milk and honey; and don't look at the fruit we brought back."

Are our eyes trained to see the working of God in our lives?

Thankfully, Joshua and Caleb saw the same landscape and people and came up with a different interpretation because they knew what was important. How?

A Trained Eye (Num. 13:30)

Like all the other Israelites, Caleb escaped from slavery in Egypt and traveled through the wilderness and on to the borders of the Promised Land. During this span of time, he, along with all the others, saw God do the impossible. They witnessed the first Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna, and many more miracles. So why did he believe they would be able to overtake Canaan (Num. 13:30)? What mattered to Caleb was not the challenge before him but rather who was with him to meet those challenges.

It is good to consider whether our eyes are trained to focus on things that are relevant while ignoring things that are not. Can we draw on our past experiences or the experiences of others? Many Christians find it difficult to recall times during which God intervened for them in extraordinary ways. Usually this is not because God hasn't intervened. More likely, it is because, like the other spies who witnessed His miracles, those miracles were never encoded. They never took the time to notice, to make mental records of God's workings. Are our eyes trained to see the working of God in our lives?

Hebron Given to Caleb (Josh. 14:6–15)

God rewards His faithful believers. Many examples in the Bible show He is faithful to those who trust Him beyond immediate sight. Because Caleb saw what others did not see, and because he followed God wholeheartedly, he was able to inherit Hebron. Although it took 45 years, Caleb had something to pass on to his posterity.

“Caleb was faithful from the start. As one of the original spies sent into the Promised Land (Num. 13:30–33), he saw great cities and giants, yet he knew God would help the people conquer the land. Because of his faith, God promised him a personal inheritance of land. . . . Here, 45 years later, the land was given to him. His faith was still unwavering. Although his inherited land still had giants, Caleb knew the Lord would help him conquer them.”*

This lesson was written during a time when many people were experiencing hardship all over the world. The economic recession hit every country and every person in one way or another. Many students worried about how to finance their education, while others lost their homes. Did we then see what others didn't? Did we look over “the giants in the land” yet behold the “fruit” God had secured? Our ability to encode that which is most important in difficult times, to see what God sees, might very well determine our inheritance.

REACT

1. What is the economy like now? Is it still difficult to see the “fruit” God continues to secure for you? What are some “giants in the land” that today are blocking your view of the “fruit”?
2. How can we train ourselves to be sensitive to God's workings in our lives?

**Life Application Study Bible*, NIV (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan®, 1984), p. 356.

Testimony

Caleb: Chosen and Faithful

Prov. 23:26;
Eph. 6:11

As God's chosen people, it's important for us to detect Satan's counterfeit. To do so, we must live daily by the word of God. The faithful servant Caleb is a great example for us. He "comprehended the situation, and, bold to stand in defense of the word of God, he did all in his power to counteract the evil influence of his unfaithful associates."¹ But ten of the spies rebelled by warring against the believer. These spies, "having entered upon a wrong course, stubbornly set themselves against Caleb and Joshua, against Moses, and against God. Every advance step rendered them the more determined. They were resolved to discourage all effort to gain possession of Canaan. They distorted the truth in order to sustain their baleful influence. It 'is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof,' they said. This was not only an evil report, but it was also a lying one."²

"God had interposed to check their murderous design."

"The unfaithful spies were loud in denunciation of Caleb and Joshua, and the cry was raised to stone them. The insane mob seized missiles with which to slay those faithful men. They rushed forward with yells of madness, when suddenly the stones dropped from their hands, a hush fell upon them, and they shook with fear. God had interposed to check their murderous design."³

The people of Israel, including the faithful, had to wait 40 years before entering the Promised Land, and the original Israelites who escaped from Egypt died before they got there. But God promised that Caleb would live to inherit Canaan. Moreover, the Israelites who were born after the Exodus were given a second chance to turn from their selfish ways. But they only partially surrendered, for they attempted to conquer Canaan with their own strength and failed miserably.

Efforts to advance our own agenda over God's seldom work out. We first have to believe in Him. There must be total surrender. "My child, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways" (Prov. 23:26). This is exactly what Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua did. "Yet without a murmur they accepted the divine decision."⁴ We must allow the Lord to lead us and wait patiently for the blessed hope.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 388.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 390.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 392.

1 John 4:18

How-to Living With the Wait

Caleb displayed a great example of courage, confidence, and faith in God despite the mountain of adversities that he encountered. When I was a child, my mother often said, "Don't grow up too fast." Today, however, everything seems fast. A person can hardly keep up with the latest advances in technology; and at times, patience seems to be nonexistent. God has asked us to be patient and to wait on Him. Caleb's example in this is worth contemplating. Following are some tips to help us wait on God:

Cast all your cares upon God (1 Pet. 5:7). With courage and confidence, lay your cares, concerns, and tasks before Him. He demonstrated to Caleb that He cares. He will do the same for you. Face your giants with courage, and you will become stronger in doing the Lord's will.

Fortify your mind with His Word so that you may know His will and promptly follow His lead when He calls.

Act in a definite way, even if it means going against the majority (Num. 13:30). As you wait, listen for God's voice and act promptly when you hear Him. Many times we procrastinate. The result is that we miss the many blessings God has in store for us. Today, make a commitment to promptly follow His voice.

Let God lead you, and willingly follow (Josh. 14:8). In a world where there are often competing instructions and opposition to God's way, fortify your mind with His Word so that you may know His will and promptly follow His lead when He calls.

Exercise and strengthen your faith (Josh. 14:14). Caleb lived to inherit what God had promised, because his faith in God never wavered. Caleb could demonstrate such bravery and courage while facing opposition, mountains of difficulty, and giants in his path only because his faith was rooted in Christ.

Be patient (Ps. 37:7). Those 40 years of wandering in the wilderness must have seemed at times like an eternity. But Caleb's unwavering trust and commitment to God during those troubling years (that were no fault of his own) were a testament to his character as a child of God.

REACT

1. How else can we face the giants we might encounter while waiting for Christ to return?
2. How can you slow down, so that hearing God's voice will be easier?

Helyne Frederick, Mount Rose, St. Patrick, Grenada, West Indies

Opinion *Bravery at Any Age*

Josh. 14:11

Caleb was 85 years old when he took on the sons of Anak. About the character of Caleb we read that “Caleb was born a slave in the land of Egypt, he knew the wretchedness, the defeat, and the constant humiliation of bondage. He was tired of being kicked, cursed, beaten, and bullied. He was tired of being treated as an animal, hence his determination to conquer and achieve the unthinkable.”¹

One of the important lessons from Caleb’s life is this: It is never too late to start tackling giants. However, it is better to start when you are young. Another very important point to consider is this: We may become weak in body but can always be strong in spirit, strong enough to say to God as Caleb did, “Give me this mountain.”

In the struggles of life, let the novice and tenderfoot be content with the

No foe should daunt us, no fear should haunt us.

easy path. But all true soldiers must be willing to take a mountain before they die. Caleb’s extraordinary service can be attributed to his philosophy of life and to his resolve to follow the Lord. As a spy, Caleb saw cities reduced to rubble, while the others saw themselves as grasshoppers in the eyes of the enemy. No foe should daunt us, no fear should haunt us, and no one must be allowed to turn us aside. We must be willing to go wherever God is going.

Caleb’s philosophy of life was cradled in the abiding presence of the Lord. “He was successful because he counted on the Lord’s power; he was indeed successful because he rested on the Lord’s promise. His faith never wavered. Even in the face of possible failure, he remained steadfast.”²

Our personal and corporate battles may be difficult, tedious, and even sometimes dangerous. But if we are determined, if we refuse to be deterred, we will eventually taste the fruits of the Promised Land.

REACT

1. Do you think the life and actions of Caleb suggest that retirement should not be planned or considered?

2. What are some essential elements in life that one must possess in order to achieve success?

1. John Phillips, *Introducing People of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1991).

2. *Ibid.*

Numbers 13; 14;
Joshua 14; 15

Exploration

Faithfulness Is a State of Mind

CONCLUDE

Caleb's lifetime of faithfulness inspires us. He experienced slavery in Egypt and deliverance and forty years of wandering in the wilderness. His absolute faith in God framed his perspective of what he saw as a spy. Oversized people were nothing to God who had drowned Pharaoh's army. Unfortunately, ten of the spies were neither leaders nor true believers. Consequently, the only people who both left Egypt and entered the Promised Land were Caleb and Joshua. At 85 years of age, Caleb was assigned Hebron, where the giants of Anak lived. He had waited for 45 years to see the giants again, and he immediately set about conquering them.

CONSIDER

- Writing a guiding principle for your life that demonstrates commitment to flexibility; for example, "When you get lemons in life, make lemonade."
- Visiting a park that is new to you. Take pictures or sketch pictures of items and elements that would help you explain to your friends why they absolutely must visit this park.
- Researching the stories about perseverance that have been passed down in your cultural heritage.
- Getting a large bunch of purple grapes and some dates and eating them while you outline a script for a play that features Caleb.
- Doing an Internet search on biblical art. Look for artwork featuring Caleb and the spies and the dividing of the Promised Land among the tribes of Israel.
- Rewriting Psalm 37:1–9 in the first person, inserting your name and other details to personalize this passage. How does this change your perspective? What giants are you wanting God to help you conquer?
- Making a list of difficult issues that you face. Reframe these difficulties in positive words, thus making it easier to define action plans for tackling these challenges.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 388–392, 511–513, 664, 697.

V. Gilbert Beers, *The Book of Life*, vol. 5, pp. 123, 126–129; vol. 7, pp. 135, 138–141; *Life Application Study Bible*, NIV, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House), p. 239; *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Caleb," at <http://www.bible-history.com/>.

lesson three

OCTOBER 9-16

Hannah: Learning to Be Someone

“Then Hannah prayed and said: ‘My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God’ ”

(1 Sam. 2:1, 2, NIV).



original illustration by Charles Joseph Staniland

1 Samuel 1; 2:1-26

Introduction
*Defining Oneself
Through God*

Consider this parable. A man walks into church one Sabbath morning. He's dressed in simple, clean clothes. He walks past the greeters and up the aisle to the platform at the front of the church. Then he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a huge pile of cash. He hands this cash to the pastor, explaining that for years all he wanted was to win the lottery. He just knew that doing so would make his life so much easier. Then one night he promised God that if he won the lottery, he would give all the winnings to the church.

Her breath came and went in gulps. Although her mouth moved, no sound came out.

How far is your faith going to be tested? Will you, like Abraham, be asked to sacrifice your only son? Will you, like Job, have your property and children taken away from you? Or will you be like Hannah? She was a good person; and she believed in the One True God. She was also a person who didn't feel that she was worth much because she had no children. As she prayed in the tabernacle for a child, tears streamed down her cheeks. Her breath came and went in gulps. Although her mouth moved, no sound came out. In fact, Eli the priest assumed she was drunk. When she explained to Eli what she was praying for, he responded by saying, " 'Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him' " (1 Sam. 1:17, NIV). Immediately, Hannah knew that God had heard her.

One thing that makes Hannah's story different from Abraham's and Job's is that Hannah told God the sacrifice she was willing to make. In Abraham's case, God told him to sacrifice his son. In Job's situation, God allowed his possessions and children to be taken away. Hannah, however, offered to give her son back to God. Another interesting thing about Hannah is that after Eli told her to go in peace, she immediately relaxed and believed. She didn't question Eli or ask for details. She simply went home and was no longer sad. Her faith was rewarded with the birth of Samuel; and she kept her word to God. As soon as Samuel was old enough to be away from her, she took him to the temple. After Samuel, God blessed her with several more children.

As you study Hannah's story this week, may you also learn how to define yourself through God.

Logos
Returning the Gift

1 Samuel 1;
2:1–11, 21;
2:12, 13;
Ps. 46:1, 10;
Matt. 6:19, 20;
Mark 14:32–44;
Luke 12:15–21

Trust and Dedication (1 Samuel 1; 2:1–11, 21)

You might call this a typical family for the times. One man, Elkanah, with his two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. The Bible seems to indicate that Elkanah put up with Peninnah, maybe because she bore him children, but that he loved Hannah, who had borne him no children.

The central figure in this portion of the story is Hannah, who was constantly reminded by Peninnah of her inability to have children. This story is not so much about the pitfalls of this type of family structure. Rather, it is about Hannah's faith in God. Her story reminds us of the One we can run to when no one else can help. It teaches us the importance of honoring the vows we make to God. And it shows us that we must be willing to dedicate everything we have to the One who gave it to us.

In our darkest moments, the best friend we can have is Jesus.

The Best Friend (1 Sam. 2:12, 13; Ps. 46:1, 10)

There are times when even our closest friends—sisters, brothers, children, parents, spouses—can't provide the words of comfort we need when our heart aches. Indeed, a friend's word of comfort may actually exacerbate our anguish. In distressing situations, sometimes the best thing friends can do for us is remain silent!

Job's friends recognized this at first. But then when they did finally speak to him, their words only distressed him all the more. Neither did Elkanah understand when he asked Hannah, " 'Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?' " (1 Sam. 1:8, NIV). Hannah's response was to talk to the only One who was truly listening to her.

Not even Eli could recognize the outpouring of a wounded heart. Like Job's friends, he rebuked Hannah as a sinner unworthy to present herself before God. But with a calm and gentle spirit, Hannah responded to the High Priest, who, moved by the Holy Spirit, confirmed God's approval of her request.

Read Psalm 46:1. In our darkest moments, the best friend we can have is Jesus. Only He can provide the answers and the healing that a suffering heart longs for. All we need to do is let go of the problem, and let God work it out.

Holding on to What Matters (Matt. 6:19, 20)

Philanthropists call it "charitable giving." Christians call it "returning." We

recognize that it is God who has given us everything that we dedicate and return to Him. The sincere Christian experiences more joy in giving than in receiving. Hannah was happy when she bore a son. But this did not compare to the joy she expressed when she gave Samuel to Eli so that her son could minister to the Lord. Read 1 Samuel 2:1.

God is not enriched by our gifts. Instead, it is our unselfish giving that brings us closer to the Gift Giver. It is our willingness to continue to give that helps to perfect Christ's character in us. "Laying up treasures in heaven will give nobility to the character; it will strengthen benevolence; encourage mercy; cultivate sympathy, brotherly kindness, and charity."*

The giving that God requires is not our extra money or unused time. It is giving like Hannah, who willingly returned to the Lord what she desired most on this earth.

Don't Be Stingy (Luke 12:15–21; 21:1, 2)

It is God alone who at times allows some to accumulate much and others to gain little. No matter how much or how little any of us has accumulated, we all have the same responsibility.

As Jesus sat in the temple one day, He observed the Jews who came to deposit their donations in the temple treasury. First came the wealthy who deposited their weighty offerings. Then came a widow, who deposited a mere two mites. Read in Luke 21:1, 2 what Jesus said about these two types of offerings. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that it's not the earthly value of our offerings that show our love for God. Instead, it is our willingness to return everything He has given us that makes Him happy.

In contrast to the widow, Jesus told the story of the rich fool who was blessed beyond measure. And instead of returning to God even a small portion, he chose to build bigger barns to house his wealth so that all could see how successful he was. "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Luke 12:20, NIV). Jesus' point is this: people who store up everything for themselves will have no part in His kingdom.

Peninnah is like that rich fool. She was blessed with many children. However, instead of dedicating her children to the service of the Lord, she chose to use them to humiliate Hannah. On the other hand, Hannah is like the widow in Luke 12. She chose to return all that God had given. This unselfish spirit made her somebody in the eyes of God.

REACT

1. Why did God wait to give Hannah a child until she was in such despair?
2. Do you ever pray to receive something so that you can give it away? Why or why not?

* *Our High Calling*, p. 195.

Testimony *Relating to Hannah*

1 Samuel 1

“Then the second wife, fired with jealousy, claimed the precedence as one highly favored of God, and taunted Hannah with her childless state as evidence of the Lord’s displeasure. This was repeated from year to year, until Hannah could endure it no longer. Unable to hide her grief, she wept without restraint, and withdrew from the feast. Her husband vainly sought to comfort her. ‘Why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved?’ he said; ‘am I not better to thee than ten sons?’

“In those evil times such scenes of worship were rarely witnessed.”

“Hannah uttered no reproach. The burden which she could share with no earthly friend she cast upon God. Earnestly she pleaded that He would take away her reproach and grant her the precious gift of a son to nurture and train for Him. And she made a solemn vow that if her request were granted, she would dedicate her child to God, even from its birth. Hannah had drawn near to the entrance of the tabernacle, and in the anguish of her spirit she ‘prayed, . . . and wept sore.’ Yet she communed with God in silence, uttering no sound. In those evil times such scenes of worship were rarely witnessed. Irreverent feasting and even drunkenness were not uncommon, even at the religious festivals; and Eli the high priest, observing Hannah, supposed that she was overcome with wine. Thinking to administer a deserved rebuke, he said sternly, ‘How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.’

“Pained and startled, Hannah answered gently, . . . ‘I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.’

“The high priest was deeply moved, for he was a man of God; and in place of rebuke he uttered a blessing: ‘Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him.’

“Hannah’s prayer was granted; she received the gift for which she had so earnestly entreated. As she looked upon the child, she called him Samuel—‘asked of God.’ As soon as the little one was old enough to be separated from his mother, she fulfilled her vow.”*

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 569, 570.

1 Sam. 1:13, 14

Evidence

State of the Nation

The story of Hannah took place sometime after the book of Judges, when “there was no king in Israel,” and “all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg. 21:25, NRSV). Society at that time considered polygamy acceptable—especially when the man was wealthy enough to have multiple wives. Israel also took up this practice. It got to the point that even Elkanah, a Levite and a priest of Jehovah—had two wives. Even though Hannah could not have children, she was Elkanah’s favorite wife. Thus, she was ridiculed by Peninnah, the second wife. When Elkanah showed Hannah more regard and affection, the mocking became worse, until one day it even spoiled the Passover feast.

The exploits of Eli’s sons were well known.

Although Elkanah did not follow God’s ideal instruction about marriage, he was a faithful priest and a spiritual man. In a climate of evil and corruption, he took his position seriously and lived to intercede on behalf of the people. The same could not be said of Hophni and Phinehas. These sons of Eli were known to be corrupt. They cheated the people and engaged in sexual immorality within the tabernacle (1 Sam. 2:11–25). Hophni and Phinehas were not suited to be intercessors for Israel. “From childhood they had been accustomed to the sanctuary and its service; but instead of becoming more reverent, they had lost all sense of its holiness and significance.”*

The exploits of Eli’s sons were well known. Added to this was the mixing of religious practices from other nations into the tabernacle services. So it was no wonder that when Eli saw Hannah’s lips moving but heard no sound coming from her mouth, he assumed that she was drunk. He immediately rebuked her for not having the self-control to stop drinking long enough to enter the house of God. Hannah poured out her heart to God in her moment of personal crisis, and God confirmed to her through an imperfect priest that her prayers were not only heard, but answered.

REACT

1. What things do we as Christians do that “seem right in our own eyes”?
2. Considering everything that is going wrong in the world, is God really concerned with our needs? Explain.
3. Consider your own view of the church service. Have you in any way “lost all sense of its holiness and significance”?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 575, 576.

How-to Our Role Model: Hannah

1 Sam. 1:1, 2;
2:1-11, 19-21

Even though Hannah's story took place thousands of years ago, we can still learn from it today. Since the beginning of time, humans have experienced hard times and have felt as if there was no hope. Hannah felt that way. However, she didn't just sit there like many of us do. She took her problem to God. Today, we will break down how to handle hard times with the model Hannah gave us.

God will always provide a way for us to live in peace.

The problem. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not. In those days, it was shameful for a woman not to have a son, let alone no children at all.

Hannah's solution. She recognized that feeling sorry for herself would not solve her problem. So she decided to talk to God about it. She made a covenant with Him, telling Him that if He blessed her with a child, she would dedicate herself and her child to the Lord for His purpose.

Result. God heard Hannah's prayer and blessed her with Samuel.

Response. Hannah brought Samuel to the sanctuary and dedicated him to the Lord. She thanked Him through prayer. This prayer points out key aspects about God: (1) He deserves all of our praise. (2) We can do nothing without Him. (3) God provides for those who are faithful to Him. (4) The Lord knows the beginning from the end. He knows what is best for us. (5) He provides happiness and strength to those who are willing to receive it. (6) Our greatest enemies/struggles do not have power over us if we trust in God. (7) God never promised that life would be easy; however, He did promise that He would always be there for us if we called on Him. Like Hannah, life can leave us feeling helpless, useless, tired, weak, and depressed. Instead of letting our problems consume our lives, we need to ask God to deliver us from our situation. God will always provide a way for us to live in peace. All He asks from us in return is that we thankfully live our lives as a witness to His power.

Do. Pray each morning for deliverance from your situation, and dedicate your life to God.

REACT

1. What struggles are you experiencing?
2. How does Hannah inspire you?
3. What is true happiness?
4. What can you do for God?

1 Sam. 1:1–19,
1 Corinthians 12**Opinion**
Shining in the Background

As a young boy of ten or eleven, Joel didn't know what lay in his future. He just knew that he loved cameras, so he would spend most of his weekends getting the equipment ready for the church service. Upon entering his teens, Joel worked behind the camera during the services. It might not have been apparent to him at that age, but one day he would stand in front of the camera, preaching a message of God's wondrous love not only to the congregation of Lakewood Church but to the entire world.¹

You will shine for the entire world to see.

Sometimes it's easy for us to forget about those who work behind the scenes. Yet their work is just as important as those in the spotlight. Could an award-winning musical have such a stellar performance without the stagehands? Could a lead singer perform without his/her back-up singers and the band?

God still acknowledges people who blend into the background, just as He acknowledged Hannah. She may often have been in Peninnah's shadow because she did not have children. While she may have felt neglected and forgotten, God did not forget about her. She possessed faith and courage, knowing in her heart that God had a plan for her.

The church has many roles for Christians to take part in. Often, we get so caught up with the sermon or the special music that we forget it isn't about being in the spotlight. "To every one work has been allotted, and no one can be a substitute for another."² We all have different places where we excel. Sometimes God is using us right where we are. Although others may not acknowledge the work you are doing, God sees; and His reward is greater than anything anyone here on earth could ever give you.

When used, the God-given talents bestowed to each one of us help to make the church run efficiently. We each have a calling in life. Whether you are on stage singing or sitting in the pew giving an encouraging handshake to the visitor sitting beside you, you are doing God's work, and light will emanate from within you. You will shine for the entire world to see.

REACT

1. How can you serve others while you work in the background?
2. How can you use the talents you possess to glorify God?

1. Joel Osteen, *Become a Better You* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), pp. 72, 73.

2. *Christian Service*, p. 10.

Exploration

Loser Takes All

1 Samuel 1

CONCLUDE

Hannah's nightmare began with Elkanah's pragmatic solution to a childless marriage: a second wife. Driven beyond her limits, Hannah pours out her problems, pain, and petition at the tabernacle, only to be mistakenly reprimanded for being drunk. However, reproach turns to blessing. Hannah gives birth to a son—a gift from God. Having received the gift, she willingly, joyously gives her son back to God, dedicating the child to His service. Her unselfishness made her great in His eyes. By losing in worldly terms, or returning the gift to God, we experience true happiness and fulfillment.

CONSIDER

- Cutting pictures out of magazines or using photographs that show different emotions to create an “emotional collage.” Think of an occasion when you experienced each emotion. How did you react? Could you have reacted differently? How did God fit into each emotional reaction?
- Interviewing people with these questions: What do you value most? In what circumstances would you be willing to give that item away?
- Writing on a card that represents the item you most want or value. Put the card in a box, and wrap the box to reflect the value of the contents. Pray over it, and give your most valued possession or dream to God. Leave the box where it reminds you of your gift.
- Reflecting on how each of the participants in this week's lesson must have felt. Some possible emotions: Elkanah—loving husband, proud father; Hannah—beloved, abused, crushed, happy; Eli—overly concerned; Peninnah—arrogant, insecure, bullish; Samuel—happy, sad, trusting, loving. With friends, role play or pantomime how these people interacted with each other. Which of them do you identify with, and why?
- Listening to a praise song, then writing a song or poem of praise for what God has given you. Share your song or poem with someone else.
- E-mailing or phoning someone who may be struggling with a problem. Find a way to share God's promise to be with us in times of difficulty.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 55.

Stuart Tyner, *Grace Notes* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2007); Mike Jones, *Sometimes I Don't Feel Like Praying!* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2008).

Jonathan: Born for Greatness

“Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, ‘Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few’ ” (1 Sam. 14:6, NIV).



original illustration by Paul Hardy

Introduction

Who's Playing Second Fiddle?

Prov. 18:24

In the movie industry, court cases have been fought and lost over whose name should get top billing in the credits. What does that say about human nature? Batman and Robin, the president and the first lady, Joshua and Caleb, Paul and Silas, Peter and John. Who takes the lead role, and who is the supporting player?

There are four characteristics of an intimate friend.

The amazing relationship that existed between the son of a king and the anointed king-to-be is one that has stretched people's minds for centuries. As one was being elevated to kingship and honor, the other was being reminded that the throne was never going to be his. Yet their friendship was "closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24, NIV). David and Jonathan came together at a crucial time in their lives. They needed each other.

In order for some varieties of orchids to be fertilized, a bee has to crawl in to the top of the orchid flower to get to the pollen and nectar. But it must crawl out another opening. In spite of this, both the flower and the bee's needs are met. Symbiotic?

Most people will have only one—maybe two—intimate friends in their entire lives. However, in every person's life there is a need to be able to share inner thoughts. We all need someone who knows us, warts and all, but loves us just the same.

There are four characteristics of an intimate friend: selflessness, loyalty, unconditional acceptance, and encouragement. Stinginess, however, is not part of a true friendship. You can't impose on a friend, nor can you manipulate. It's share and share alike. Friends don't ditch one another when the going gets tough. When things start stacking up against your friends, you are there to support them. In fact, you'll be there to encourage and cheer them on so that they can be overcomers. They can be themselves when they are around you. They can cry their heart out, and you'll listen. They can make a fool of themselves, and you won't think less of them.

What does intimate friendship look like through your eyes? In your friendship, is one of you more dominant than the other? Is one of you putting in more effort to make the friendship work? If so, is the other in a supporting role?

In our study this week, we will look at some crucial characteristics of an amazing friendship that can set a pattern for your life, but more important, that reflects the friendship Jesus wants with you.

1 Sam. 20:17;
2 Sam. 1:17, 25, 26

Evidence *Jonathan:* *A Man for All Ages*

Despite his status as prince and heir to a kingdom, it's easy to dismiss Jonathan as weak. He knew his loyalty to David would prevent him from becoming king (1 Sam. 20:31), yet he gave up his rightful position. His life was saved by a multitude who intervened on his behalf after disobeying his father's command (1 Sam. 14:45); and he is well known as the one who "loved" in a culture where force was valued above feeling. A closer look into his character, however, reveals that he is indeed a model for men in all ages.

Jonathan's strength . . . was borne of a self-sacrificial love for another.

The necessity to make a distinction between "a lover or a fighter" doesn't apply to Jonathan. He embodied both of these in his strength of character, body, and heart. Much has been made of the relationship between David and Jonathan. While we are used to men kissing each other in biblical times (Gen. 29:13; Exod. 18:7), there are several passages that are used by some to infer that David and Jonathan's relationship was one of homosexuality—a practice detested by God (Rom. 1:27). The Hebrew word *nashaq* (naw-shak') is used to describe kissing in the Old Testament, and refers variously to kisses of affection (Gen. 29:13); of reconciliation (Gen. 33:4); of leave-taking (Ruth 1:14); and of homage (Ps. 2:12). Clearly, a kiss between men was acceptable in Old Testament times.

The descriptions of love between David and Jonathan are perhaps more difficult to grasp as so few instances of such relationships can be found in Scripture. In 1 Samuel 20:17, the Hebrew word *ahab* is used to describe the type of love shared between these men, followed immediately with *kenapso*, a term that refers directly to self.* Far from being romantic or sexual, the love shared by David and Jonathan was a fulfillment of God's command in the Levitical laws and as restated by Jesus.

Jonathan's strength—physical, spiritual, and emotional—was borne of a self-sacrificial love for another.

REACT

If questioned by a person who believed David and Jonathan's relationship provides a biblical precedent for homosexuality, how would you respond?

*G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, H. Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995).

Logos *Best Friends and Worst Enemies*

1 Sam. 14:6–13, 24–46;
18; 19; 31:1–7;
2 Sam. 1:5–12;
2 Kings 6:8–17

DNA (1 Sam. 14:6–13, 24–46)

Jonathan was King Saul's son. Regardless of his DNA, Jonathan proved himself as a hero. In 1 Samuel 14:6–13, 24–46, we find this young prince eager to defend the land of the Hebrews and ready to fight on his father's behalf. Time

This small story in Scripture has huge implications.

and again, Jonathan demonstrated his allegiance to his father, king of Israel. He dutifully followed his father into battle, never questioning his motives or direction. He was a good son and an honest man.

It wasn't until young Prince Jonathan befriended David that we begin to witness the power struggle in his soul. The unlikeliest of friends bonded instantly, as if soulmates. Driven by the same passion for the Lord and excitement for battle, the two young men became inseparable. Imagine King Saul's distress to discover his son's best friend was his majesty's archenemy. It's clear that Saul had little time for David and that he most likely wanted to use Jonathan as a tool in David's downfall.

Yet Jonathan's heart was pulled to David. We don't know for sure what they had in common, but what we do know is that Jonathan began to invest more in this friendship than in his own family. Issues of allegiance and loyalty became evident in Jonathan's life and in the decisions he faced. Does he defend his friend or assist his father?

By lineage, Jonathan was destined to take the throne in Saul's dynasty. But because of Saul's disobedience (1 Samuel 13) in failing to wait for Samuel before offering sacrifices, that would never happen. The dynasty would be given to David, the line through which the Messiah would come.

Danger (1 Sam. 14:24–29; 18–20)

Jonathan knew about his father's dangerous tendencies. In 1 Samuel 14:24–29, we read that Jonathan, although respectful of his father's position and genetic connection with himself, chose to make his own way in life. He did not show open rebuke or disdain; rather, he chose to do things his own way and take the heat when his choices had unpleasant consequences.

Saul was dangerous, calculating, and scheming. Yet as we study Jonathan, we see that the "the apple doesn't fall very far from the tree." Notice how Jonathan chose to leave the Israelite army and attack the Philistines on his own. Hear his

arrogance when he cast doubt on his father's leadership. Consider the danger Jonathan puts himself in when he entered into a friendship with David. He is just as calculating as his father. However, before we wipe him out as just another bad guy from Scripture, let's identify the reasons behind his scheming.

Jonathan's head and heart were in the right place. He seemed to be aware that his father was not doing the best job of being king. Jonathan was loyal yet individualistic—incredibly dangerous for a young man in his shoes. First Samuel 18 outlines Saul's irrational rage and hatred of David as well as Jonathan's connection with David. It seems that Jonathan had reason enough to make his own plans.

Jonathan proved his true colors as a hero of Scripture in honoring David as the anointed king of Israel. "So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, 'May the Lord call David's enemies to account'" (1 Sam. 20:16, NIV).

Destiny (1 Samuel 23; 31:1–7; 2 Samuel 1)

Because of Jonathan's friendship with David and a promise made between these two friends, Jonathan's legacy lived on in David's house through his son, Mephibosheth.

The memory of Jonathan is in two parts. The first is seen through David's lament for Jonathan after he died (2 Samuel 1), "How the mighty have fallen!" (verse 19, NIV). David cried as his heart broke at the loss of his friend in battle.

The second, and more profound, part is seen in the substory of Mephibosheth. After becoming king, David wanted to show honor and gratitude to Jonathan—an age-old tradition when one has lost a friend. He hears of Mephibosheth, a son of Jonathan. Mephibosheth had been five years old when the news of his father and grandfather's death shattered the palace. Running to safety with the child, his nurse fell on him and crippled his legs. This was the state in which David found him.

Imagine Mephibosheth's fear when he heard that King David was looking for him. Then imagine his surprise when David invited him to the palace and to eat at the king's table. This small story in Scripture has huge implications. Jonathan was gone, yet his son remained for David to pay tribute to in his place.

Jonathan's friendship with David defied the dictations of DNA allegiance; his actions proved that he had a dangerous streak and was confident in his ability and choices; and his destiny, although far from being king, resounds through the ages with a story of honor and friendship.

REACT

1. In what ways can you identify with Jonathan's issues of loyalty and allegiance? Was blood really thicker than water in this case? Explain.
2. What do your friendships say about you?

Testimony

"An Instrument in His Hands"

1 Sam. 13:1-13; 14:6

"Because of Saul's sin in his presumptuous offering, the Lord would not give him the honor of vanquishing the Philistines. Jonathan, the king's son, a man who feared the Lord, was chosen as the instrument to deliver Israel. Moved by a divine impulse, he proposed to his armor-bearer that they should make a secret attack upon the enemy's camp. . . .

"To outward appearance, their venture was rash."

"Together they withdrew from the camp, secretly, lest their purpose should be opposed. With earnest prayer to the Guide of their fathers, they agreed upon a sign by which they might determine how to proceed. . . . Approaching the Philistine fortress, they were revealed to the view of their enemies, who said, tauntingly, 'Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves,' then challenged them, 'Come up to us, and we will show you a thing,' meaning that they would punish the two Israelites for their daring. This challenge was the token that Jonathan and his companion had agreed to accept as evidence that the Lord would prosper their undertaking. Passing now from the sight of the Philistines, and choosing a secret and difficult path, the warriors made their way to the summit of a cliff that had been deemed inaccessible and was not very strongly guarded. Thus they penetrated the enemy's camp and slew the sentinels, who, overcome with surprise and fear, offered no resistance.

"These two men gave evidence that they were moving under the influence and command of a more-than-human general. To outward appearance, their venture was rash and contrary to all military rules. But the action of Jonathan was not done in human rashness. He depended not on what he and his armor-bearer themselves could do; he was the instrument that God used in behalf of His people Israel."¹

"If goodness, purity, meekness, lowliness, and integrity dwell in the heart, they will shine forth in the character; and such a character is full of power. Not the instrument, but the great Worker in whose hand the instrument is used, receives the glory. The heart filled with the Saviour's love, daily receives grace to impart. The life reveals the redeeming power of the truth."²

1. *Conflict and Courage*, p. 152.

2. *In Heavenly Places*, p. 237.

Luke 22:31;
Rom. 15:4, 5;
2 Cor. 8:9

How-to Jesus in Jonathan

In his life, Jonathan gives us a picture of true friendship, and in doing so, gives us a glimpse of the loyalty and dedication of the One who calls us His friends. In order to create Christ-centered friendships with each other, reflecting the characteristics that Jesus exemplified in His life, we need to do the following:

Lay aside position. First Samuel 18:1–4 repeats the idea that Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. This led to a covenant between them. But more than that, it led to Jonathan giving David his robe, sword, bow, and belt. Jonathan was the legitimate successor to his father's throne, but in giving his robe and weapons to David, he symbolically indicated that he was willing to give up that right in order for David to be crowned instead. Jesus had to give up His position at the

Have you ever felt as if you're going through a wilderness or desert experience?

right hand of God so that we could be elevated to be citizens of God's kingdom.

Intercede for each other. We see a different side to the friendship of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 19:1–6. Saul again is plotting the death of David, but Jonathan comes to David's aid, interceding and pleading for his life to be spared. Even in His earthly ministry we see Jesus' intercession for others. And today He intercedes for us in heaven.

Encourage those in the wilderness. Having escaped to the wilderness of Ziph, David learns that Saul was still seeking to kill him. Have you ever felt as if you're going through a wilderness or desert experience and that God is silent and the trials of this life seem too much to bear? The picture we have in 1 Samuel 23:15–18 is of Jonathan going into the wilderness to find and encourage David. What a beautiful picture we have of Christ and His encouragement to us through the Holy Spirit in times of trial.

Like Jonathan, we should remind those in the wilderness of God's faithful character in bringing to pass the promises He has made to us through His Word. Jonathan interceded, encouraged, and laid down his rights for his friend. Jesus does all of these things for us, and we are called to show the same friendship to others in need.

REACT

How is Jesus' character reflected in our friendships with each other?

Opinion *Friendship for Eternity*

1 Sam. 13:13, 14;
18:1-4;
John 15:13

Growing up being a twin wasn't always easy. There were times of social favoritism, constant pointing out of similarities and differences, and continual comparison of character. Through it all, however, I always had a friend. Now living far from my twin, I reminisce on the effect she had on my life. She always gave her love completely, willingly, and unconditionally.

You too have probably come across people in your life who you consider close. Such a bond reminds me of Jonathan and the unreserved love and friendship he shared with David.

A true friendship that prevails through life's trials is rare.

Jonathan was a prince—a man of power, strength, courage, and determination. He trusted and loved God and always allowed God's leading in his life. God had chosen David to be ruler; but rather than Jonathan building hate and anger against him, he showed David loyalty, respect, and commitment. Jonathan was drawn to David's boldness, fearlessness, and faith in God. Putting aside all resentment, envy, and lust for power, he humbled himself before David—even interceding to keep him safe. So many things could have destroyed their friendship, yet the love he had for David and the obedience he gave God made their bond stronger.

A true friendship that prevails through life's trials is rare. Even more so is one that lasts for eternity. What a wonderful day it will be when Jonathan and David are reunited in heaven. This friendship is a lasting legacy of the relationship God the Father has with Jesus Christ. God's friendship is always present and available to us. God is waiting to have that deep intense bond with you. He will always stay loyal and protect you in times of danger and fear. It can be hard to trust people because of greed and self-centeredness. Yet as Jesus said to His disciples, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13, NRSV).

What a blessing it is to have a friendship that stands the test of time, filled with love, trust, loyalty, commitment, respect, and admiration.

REACT

1. In what ways does Jesus strive to be a part of your life? Why does He want to be your eternal friend?

2. How can we fulfill our role as true friends?

3. How do social Web sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, help us to develop true friendship? How might they work against friendship?

1 Sam. 13:1–13; 18:1

Exploration

Closer Than a Brother

CONCLUDE

Prince Jonathan meets the youngest boy in Jesse's family, shepherd turned soldier overnight, and something clicks. Jonathan is a heroic soldier himself, but the biggest thing the two have in common is a steadfast devotion to God. Because of his friendship with David, Jonathan has some clashes with his father. It is evident to both Saul and Jonathan that David is destined for the throne, but this doesn't raise jealousy in Jonathan's heart as it does in his father's. Jonathan humbly accepts God's plan to make David king, and he supports and encourages David throughout his life.

CONSIDER

- Writing a description of one of your most treasured friendships. Describe how this friendship has developed over time. Have you had to choose between your friend and other interests in your life? How has your friendship enriched and changed your life?
- Recalling the good friends Jesus loved to visit in Bethany (Luke 10:38–42; John 11:1–44). What must have made this home so inviting? What can you do to be friends with the pastors and teachers you know?
- Spending a relaxing evening with Jesus. What could you do together? Spend some time with Jesus as a friend each day during the coming week.
- Hunting up some old friends you have lost track of during the past few years. Send each one a card or an e-mail. Better yet, call them.
- Inviting someone you know who seems lonely to join you on an outdoor activity, such as a camping trip or a hike.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 649, 652–660, 713; *My Life Today*, p. 210.

Abigail: No Victim of
Circumstances

*“Wisdom is at home in the mind of one who has understanding,
but it is not known in the heart of fools” (Prov. 14:33, NRSV).*



original illustration by Louis De Boullogne

1 Sam. 25:3

Introduction
Abigail

How well do you handle difficult situations: an irritating co-worker, a stubborn spouse, loss of a job or home, or even the loss of a loved one? It's all too easy to tell people what you think—or to walk out on your marriage. It may even be easy to give up on God when things don't go well. Sometimes we find ourselves in difficult situations that we have no control over and didn't create nor ask to be a part of. We pray and wish for things to get better. But it just doesn't seem that God hears us. Sometimes He is preparing us for something, and depending on how we handle the situation, He can use us to accomplish great things.

God knows our hearts, and He always hears our cries.

Most likely Abigail didn't have the luxury of choosing her husband. And, unfortunately, he was "churlish and evil" (1 Sam. 25:3) and probably didn't treat her well. But in the midst of her unknown struggles, she showed patience. She did what she had to do to survive—even to the point of saving her husband and his entire house from David and his army by putting her own life on the line. She asked for Nabal's iniquity to be put on her.

How often do we bear the sins of others? She could have allowed Nabal to reap the effects of his own actions and just have asked David to pardon her and the rest of the household. But instead, she did what was honorable. And God blessed her for it. He not only spared her life, Nabal's life, and the lives of Nabal's household, but in turn God dealt with her evil husband. "Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; / Their foot shall slip in due time; / For the day of their calamity is at hand, / And the things to come hasten upon them" (Deut. 32:35, NKJV).

Let us learn lessons from Abigail's story. First, God knows our hearts, and He always hears our cries. He knows how we feel inside. Second, He allows us to go through trials to bring about His will for our lives or the lives of others, and He is always working for the good of those who love Him. Third, when people do evil against us, we need to continue to do good anyway, to be kind, and to stand back and allow God to deal with them. God is just. He may not handle a situation the way we want or expect, but He will handle it. And more important, He will deal with others the way we want God to deal with us. He is trying to save every one of us.

Logos
*Wisdom or Folly***1 Samuel 25;**
Isa. 28:23; 53:12;
Dan. 9:15–19;
Matt. 15:10;
Rom. 8:34***As Different as Night and Day (1 Samuel 25)***

This week's shadow figure is Abigail. Her story is found in 1 Samuel 25. As we read it, we find a contrast between Abigail and Nabal. She is a woman of "good understanding," but Nabal is "harsh and evil in his doings" (verse 3, NKJV). In fact, we're told that his name means "fool" or "foolish." Let's examine other differences between these two individuals:

1. Nabal was hasty with his words, and he often said the wrong things. Abigail was careful in what she said—speaking words of wisdom.

It was her reverence for God that enabled her to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says in Matthew 15:11 that "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles" (NRSV). And Proverbs 23:7 says that "as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (NKJV). That is because what is in the heart will sooner or later come to light in word or deed. The foolishness of Nabal's heart was seen in both his words and actions. On the other hand, Abigail had a heart of "understanding." She was respectful, compassionate, and grateful; and she was blessed for her words and actions.

2. Nabal refused David's request for help. This was a careless, foolish decision. Abigail, however, was wise in deciding to go quickly to David and beg his forgiveness, bringing him the supplies he and his men needed.

Nabal's carelessness put many lives in danger. Often, the choices we make affect others, even if it is not our intent that they do so. Abigail's choice led her to intervene on behalf of others. She thought not only of herself but of the well-being of the other people who did not deserve to be punished. In Daniel 9:15–19, Daniel prayed for his people, who had been held captive in Babylon for many years. He prayed that God's wrath would be turned away from them and that they would finally be released and free to return to their homes. James 5:16 says that the "prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective" (NRSV). Intercessory prayer is one way we can intervene on behalf of someone; and perhaps our prayers will lead to their salvation.

3. Nabal had a selfish, ungrateful heart. Abigail had a giving, thankful heart. “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7, NRSV).

4. Nabal had no respect for who David was—a man chosen by God to be the ruler of Israel. He was arrogant, and his foolishness led to his death. Abigail recognized that David was a man of God, the one chosen by the Lord to be Israel’s next ruler. She soon was lifted out of her dire circumstances and became King David’s queen. Read Matthew 23:12 and Ezekiel 21:26.

Wisdom Versus Folly (1 Sam. 25:3; Ps. 110:10; Eccles. 7:25)

Let’s look a little closer at the meaning of the words *wisdom* and *folly* (or *foolishness*) as it relates to our story. Synonyms for the words *folly* or *foolishness* are *unwisdom* and *stupidity*. As we learned earlier, the name *Nabal* means “fool.” It also means “wicked.” His foolish words and behavior were evidence of his wickedness. Read 1 Samuel 25:3.

Solomon sought to understand why people do what they do. He wrote, “I applied my heart to know, / To search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, / To know the wickedness of folly, / Even of foolishness and madness” (Eccles. 7:25, NKJV). He recognized that those who are truly wise are those who fear and obey God. Read Proverbs 9:10. Nabal was a wicked person, a fool, because he did not fear God.

Abigail is called a “woman of good understanding” (1 Sam. 25:3, NKJV). The word *understanding* in this context is taken from the Hebrew word *sekel*, meaning “intelligence,” “discretion,” “knowledge,” “prudence,” “sense,” “understanding,” “wisdom,” “wise.” Abigail was wise because she feared God and understood His power. She knew that He would one day exalt David and avenge him of all his enemies. It was her reverence for God that enabled her to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to go meet David. Read 1 Samuel 25:32. If we as Christians are to make wise choices—choices to do right, to do good, and to obey the Word of God—then we too must follow the example of Abigail and fear God. Because the “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10, NKJV).

REACT

1. Think of some of the choices you have made. How did they help or harm others?
2. What choice affects all the other choices we make? (Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15).
3. How do Matthew 7:24–27 and 19:16–22 help you to understand the importance of making the right decisions?

Testimony *A Woman of Peace*

1 Sam. 25:23–31

“ ‘Everyone that was in distress, and everyone that was in debt, and everyone that was discontented,’ resorted to David, ‘and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.’ Here David had a little kingdom of his own, and in it order and discipline prevailed. But even in his retreat in the mountains he was far from feeling secure, for he received continual evidence that the king had not relinquished his murderous purpose.”¹

“Abigail . . . gave to God the honor and the praise.”

“With his band of fugitives he [David] was gaining a preparation to take up the work that Saul, because of his murderous passion and blind indiscretion, was becoming wholly unfitted to do.”²

“David and his men had been like a wall of protection to the shepherds and flocks of Nabal; and now this rich man was asked to furnish from his abundance some relief to the necessities of those who had done him such valuable service. David and his men might have helped themselves from the flocks and herds, but they did not. They behaved themselves in an honest way. Their kindness, however, was lost upon Nabal. The answer he returned to David was indicative of his character: ‘Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?’ ”

“With nothing of ostentation or pride, but full of the wisdom and love of God, Abigail revealed the strength of her devotion to her household; and she made it plain to David that the unkind course of her husband was in no wise premeditated against him as a personal affront, but was simply the outburst of an unhappy and selfish nature. . . .

“Abigail did not take to herself the credit of this reasoning to turn David from his hasty purpose, but gave to God the honor and the praise. She then offered her rich provision as a peace offering to the men of David.”³

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 658.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 665, 666.

1 Samuel;
2 Samuel

Evidence *David and Abigail: Historical Background*

“Following Saul’s rejection, Samuel was called upon to select and train a man according to God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), one who would not set himself above the law but who would obey God. David’s training, like that of Christ, was carried on in the face of jealousy and hatred. Although David sometimes fell into transgression of the law he revered and advocated, he always humbled his heart before that law as supreme.”¹

She quickly and diplomatically pleaded for the lives of her foolish husband and their household.

When Samuel died, David “mourned for him as deeply and tenderly as a faithful son could mourn for a devoted father. . . . While the attention of Saul was engaged in mourning for the death of Samuel, David took the opportunity to seek a place of greater security; so he fled to the wilderness of Paran.”²

Nabal lived in Maon with his wife Abigail. His sheep were in Carmel. “During their stay in the wilderness of Ziph and Maon . . . , before the removal to En-gedi . . . , David and his men had become acquainted with the shepherds of Nabal, and had left a most favorable impression. Living close to the desert, Nabal was constantly exposed to marauding bands.”³

David sent men to request provisions for Nabal’s men. “He had preserved the flocks of Nabal at no expense to their owner. Sheep owners would normally be happy to reward those helping them against loss. David’s request for supplies was legitimate and in harmony with the customs of his time.”⁴

David did not expect the reception his men received. Intent on revenge, David armed his men and headed to Nabal’s home, determined to destroy him and his household! When Abigail heard what happened, she prepared provisions for David and his men and rushed to meet him. She quickly and diplomatically pleaded for the lives of her foolish husband and their household.

David welcomed Abigail’s advice, which stopped him from shedding innocent blood (1 Sam. 25:32, 33).

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 449.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 664.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, pp. 573, 574.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 574.

How-to Facing Difficulties

Ps. 52:8;
Jer. 7:23;
Matt. 16:24–26;
1 Thess. 5:17, 18

Difficult circumstances can be discouraging and depressing, even for the strongest Christian. They can cause you to do one of two things: (1) cling to the Lord while you agonize in prayer for a solution to your problem, or (2) sink deeper and deeper into despair.

Joseph's situation looked hopeless. We can only imagine how he must have felt after his brothers had sold him into slavery. He must have been heart-broken, not knowing what lay ahead of him or whether he would ever see his father again. But he determined that he would trust the Lord and be obedient to all his father had taught him.

She was a woman who could be used by God.

Abigail was also a woman of faith. She was not afraid to take action that saved innocent lives, even though she might have had to face the wrath of her husband later on. As a result of her brave, quick actions, she was able to keep David from doing something he would have regretted. She didn't allow her situation to affect her faith or to change who she was. She was a woman who could be used by God; and she was led by the Spirit to speak to David.

Jesus is our perfect example. He came to earth to save us from our sins. He was deprived and rejected, a man of sorrows, wounded and bruised for our transgressions (Isaiah 53). Nevertheless, He rose above His circumstances to accomplish what He came to do. Whatever your circumstances may be, remember Jesus and the many other faithful men and women in the Bible. Here are a few other things that will help you rise above your circumstances:

Trust the Lord (Ps. 52:8). He knows your situation; He has a solution.

Pray continually (1 Thess. 5:17, 18). Don't let go until God blesses you and shows you what path to take.

Obey (Jer. 7:23). Determine that no matter what, you will be obedient to Him and His word.

Go wherever God leads (Matt. 16:24–26). He will never leave you or forsake you.

REACT

Find other verses for each of the four points above. Memorize the one that speaks to you the most.

1 Samuel 25;
Ps. 107:19

Opinion

Woman of Understanding

Abigail represents all the people who don't let their circumstances bring them down. She knew that her husband's foolishness could cause not only his death, but also the death of innocent people. Many times people allow the foolishness of others to influence them, and they, in turn, make the wrong choices. However, in response to Nabal's foolish actions, Abigail made a wise decision to go to David and ask forgiveness.

She knew there was no time to waste.

Abigail was a woman of understanding. We can see her wisdom in action throughout 1 Samuel 25. First, she listened to what the servants had to tell her about Nabal and David's men. She responded by acting immediately. She knew there was no time to waste. Something had to be done or innocent people would die.

She was organized and thorough in her selection of supplies that she took to David. And she did it all in record time. She gave her servants instructions on what needed to be done and how to do it. And they followed her instructions carefully. As a result, she was able to intercept David before he could reach Nabal. David could see what an intelligent and wise woman she was. He listened to her and repented of his actions.

When Abigail returned home after meeting David, she decided to wait until the next morning to tell Nabal what had happened. That was a smart move on her part. Nabal had been partying and drinking, and she knew that he was not in his right mind. He may not have understood the seriousness of his actions if she had told him that night what she had done. He might have laughed it off in his drunkenness or responded to her in anger. So she waited until the next morning, when he was alert. She wanted to be sure he was fully aware of the impact of his folly—that he could have lost everything, including his life.

Abigail also understood that God would take revenge on all of David's enemies, including Nabal, and she was wise to ask David to remember her (1 Sam. 25:31). After Nabal's death, David did remember Abigail, and he took her to be his own wife.

We can see in Abigail's story how God looks out for His people. In the end, the Lord avenged David of Nabal's ungrateful attitude and behavior. He also freed Abigail from the bonds of a mean-spirited, foolish husband.

Exploration

Becoming an Intercessory Christian

1 Samuel 25

CONCLUDE

Abigail faced an almost impossible situation. How could she calm the anger of two men who held her fate in their hands? Instead of curling up in a heap of weeping and self-pity, she chose to use wisdom to diffuse a potentially lethal disagreement. Her compassion for those around her and respect for “God’s anointed” led her to intercede and place herself between Nabal, who made a foolish decision, and David, who reacted before he thought about the potential consequences of his actions.

CONSIDER

- Memorizing the song “Father, Lead Me Day by Day” (no. 482 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*). Whenever you feel stressed during the next week, think about how the words affect you.
- Role-playing the story of Abigail, David, and Nabal, using a modern setting.
- Beginning an intercessory prayer journal. Record both the people you are praying for and the answers to your prayers. How does praying for someone else help you spiritually? Why do we need to intercede for others when they have the freedom of making their own choices?
- Being a mediator between two friends who are upset with each other. Can you identify the core problem? How can they come to an agreement? Why is it important not to take sides?
- Creating a poster with the name *Abigail* as its focus. Decorate it with items that represent the characteristics that Abigail displayed in her life. Create a second poster using your name and the characteristics you display.
- Analyzing the reactions of David, Abigail, and Nabal. Apply these reactions to a situation in your life. How easily can people be misunderstood? Why do we react so quickly and negatively when we feel someone has mistreated us? As a Christian, what should our response be to those who mistreat us?

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 664–668; Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1022.

Joyce Landorf, “Abigail” in *He Began With Eve* (n.p.: Word Books, 1983).

Uriah: Faith of a
Foreigner

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your
soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5, NIV).*



original illustration by Jan Massys circa 1562

Introduction

Is It Easier to Give in or to Say No?

2 Samuel 11

She hadn't come to church since it had become obvious that she was expecting. She knew all the rules and regulations. She had grown up with them and could just imagine the righteous squad: "*The Church Manual* is clear on questions of morality. There are standards that should be maintained. We need to make it clear that this kind of behavior is not acceptable. We need to make an example of her."

His illicit night of pleasure resulted in an unwanted pregnancy.

She couldn't face the accusing looks, the whispered accusations, or the insinuations. She didn't need them to tell her what was right or wrong. Didn't they understand she knew all too well? She looked down and hugged her newborn baby. It wasn't his fault. She heard a noise and looked up to see the church elders coming toward her. Her heart sank. Couldn't they leave her alone? Before she could get up and leave, she was overwhelmed by flowers, presents, and well wishes.

We are constantly faced with situations for which there are no easy answers: a choice between several alternatives, none of which is ideal. More often than not, the situation is of our own creation.

King David got himself in just such a situation. Israel was at war. The army had destroyed the Ammonites, and they had Rabbah under siege.

David, however, was not with his army. He was at home, where he observed a beautiful woman bathing on her rooftop. He wanted her. But he discovered she was the wife of one of his best soldiers, Uriah the Hittite. In an instant, however, David threw everything away. His illicit night of pleasure resulted in an unwanted pregnancy.

Now David faces a dilemma. The law demands that they both should be put to death (Lev. 20:10). So David embarks on Plan A. He sends for Uriah and asks for a report on the war. Then he instructs Uriah to go home. Instead, Uriah sleeps at David's gate.

Plan B. David gets Uriah drunk and sends him home. Uriah sleeps at David's gate.

Plan C. David writes out Uriah's death sentence and sends him back to the battle where he belonged. Uriah is killed.

In contrast to David, Uriah stands as a man of honor and character, a man with a clear sense of right and wrong who was prepared to do what was right regardless of personal inconvenience or inducements. And so this week's lesson looks at what it means to live out our faith.

Acts 10:34, 35

Evidence *In Every Nation*

Uriah the Hittite was a man accepted of God. This teaches us that the influence and work of the Holy Spirit on human hearts and minds is not confined to certain people groups. God is interested in and seeks to save people from all nations and all walks of life, even soldiers in the armed forces.

The steps to ruin are few and quick.

The Hittites were a powerful nation located in what is now Asia Minor. Israel had many ties to them—some good, others destructive. Abraham bought the field of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite in which to bury his wife Sarah (Gen. 23:10–20). This is an interesting point as God had promised Abraham his seed would be given the land of the Hittites. Esau caused Isaac much grief when he married two Hittite women (Gen. 26:34, 35).

God instructed Israel to destroy the Hittites and other pagan nations (Deut. 20:17). He promised to drive them out with hornets. Regrettably, Israel did not follow His instructions. In fact, they did the exact opposite. They intermingled with the Hittites and worshiped their false gods (Judg. 3:5, 6). Even Solomon married Hittite women (1 Kings 11:1).

Uriah's integrity and David's moral lapse have significant lessons for us. Uriah's faithfulness and his moral integrity remind us that it is not knowledge, ability, or position that God looks upon with favor. Often a Christian may have any one or all of those three, but does not show Christian behavior. Often it is the non-Christian who manifests righteousness and not the believer.

The steps to ruin are few and quick. Our only safety is in our union with Jesus. Without Him, we are failures (John 15:5).

REACT

1. Faithfulness and integrity may not always be recognized or rewarded. How might this lack of recognition cause us to diminish their value?
2. Just because faithfulness and integrity are not always recognized, does this mean we can be negligent in these areas? Explain your answer.
3. Which is more likely to be useful in serving the purpose of God: separation from the world or involvement in the world? Explain your answer.
4. When might separation from the world be recommended? How can a Christian become involved in the world without falling prey to certain sinful aspects of the world?

Logos *Triumph and Tragedy*

2 Samuel 11;
Prov. 23:6, 7;
Jer. 5:1;
John 15:5;
Rom. 15:4;
Gal. 6:7;
Eph. 6:10, 11;
Phil. 4:8

The Weakest Link (Eph. 6:10, 11)

In advising the Christian how the devil works to subvert people, Paul notes that there is a method in his scheming (Eph. 6:10, 11, NIV). The story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah the Hittite illustrate this truth.

Satan attacks us at our weakest point, because it makes no sense to tempt people where they are not likely to respond. The story of David and Uriah illustrates this by detailing the terrible consequences of one moment of folly.

Prevention is preferred to sorrow and guilt.

The Power of Lust (2 Samuel 11; 1 Kings 15:5)

David's faithfulness to God's will and the one flaw in his character are highlighted in 1 Kings 15:5. The one exception became a story full of drama, passion, lust, disaster, and cruelty. Instead of leading the army in warfare, David stayed home in Jerusalem. One evening from the palace, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. Her beauty excited his desire. Discovering who she was, he had her brought to the palace, where he committed adultery with her.

Bathsheba's husband was well known to David. In fact, Uriah was one of David's most trusted bodyguards. David was aware that Uriah was away, fighting with the army in battle. All this made David's behavior even more despicable.

The Delusion of Sin (Gal. 6:7)

Learning that Bathsheba was pregnant, David attempted to cover up his sin. He had Uriah recalled to Jerusalem, his intention being that Uriah would engage in sexual relations with his wife, so that when her baby was born, Uriah would be acknowledged as the father. David's behavior is illuminating. It seems that he attributed to Uriah the same lustful drives which drove him. It's common that we often impute to others our own selfish desires. However, David judged Uriah wrongly. His duplicity is unmasked by the loyalty and integrity of Uriah.

When Uriah refused to go to his wife, David tried another trick. He got Uriah drunk. That didn't work, either, for Uriah still stayed away from Bathsheba. David next decided that Uriah must die. So he wrote a letter to Joab, the general of Israel's army, instructing him to place Uriah in the front of the battle where he most likely would be killed. And that is exactly what happened. Such is the stupidity of humans in their sinfulness. We forget that nothing is hidden from God.

Uriah's integrity and David's callous behavior required justice and retribution. It came when the prophet Nathan confronted David with the nature of

the crime. David passed the death sentence upon himself, but was spared by the mercy of God. What stands out in the story is Uriah's character. He truly was a man after God's own heart.

Sin Pays a Wage (Rom. 6:23)

David's adultery with Bathsheba brought him great suffering and pain. He lost four sons, was denied the privilege of building the temple, and left a terrible legacy to Solomon and the nation of Israel. Prevention is preferred to sorrow and guilt, for sorrow and guilt cannot turn the clock back or cancel the consequences of sin. Thankfully, however, there is forgiveness with God. In this there is hope. David's guilt is a warning; Uriah's integrity, an inspiration.

Virtue Is Its Own Reward (Rom. 15:4)

Uriah's story has a timeless and timely lesson for women and men in every age. There is the loyalty and self-control of Uriah, while David's uncontrolled lust and Bathsheba's compliance are two of the most shameful acts in Scripture.

In our contemporary world of loose morals, the integrity of Uriah the Hittite encourages us to be morally pure. Like Joseph, Uriah demonstrates that we can choose not to give way to lust and passion. There is no inevitability about sexual temptations.

When we study the life of David, we see a great man who achieved wonderful things with God's blessing. He is incomparable in many respects, and God called him "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22, NIV). However, the contrast between the integrity of Uriah the Hittite and David puts a stain on David's life. Uriah has yet to receive his reward. We cannot doubt but that he, a foreigner in Israel, will be named among God's heroes when Christ comes to claim His own.

The brief biography that Scripture gives of Uriah encourages us to live a life that tells for God—a life not driven by lust, the desire for power, wealth, or privilege, but a life possessed of a desire to serve and to be faithful to Jesus, our Lord and Savior. The question is put by the poet: "Who is the happy warrior? Who is he / That every man in arms should wish to be?"¹ A clue to the answer is found in this observation: "There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart and lives a life wholly consecrated to God."²

REACT

1. We are defined by our thinking (Prov. 23:7). How does this explain the actions of Uriah and David?

2. How can we describe the nature of David's sin?

3. In what way should our view of eternal life influence our behavior?

4. Can we truly believe virtue is its own reward? Explain your answer.

1. *Selected Poetry of William Wordsworth* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), p. 510.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 159.

Testimony

A Great Change

Num. 32:23

“Heretofore God’s providence had preserved David against all the plottings of his enemies, and had been directly exercised to restrain Saul. But David’s transgression had changed his relationship to God. The Lord could not in any wise sanction iniquity. He could not exercise His power to protect David from the results of his sin as He had protected him from the enmity of Saul.

“God intended the history of David’s fall to serve as a warning.”

“There was a great change in David himself. He was broken in spirit by the consciousness of his sin and its far-reaching results. He felt humbled in the eyes of his subjects. His influence was weakened. Hitherto his prosperity had been attributed to his conscientious obedience to the commandments of the Lord. But now his subjects, having a knowledge of his sin, would be led to sin more freely. His authority in his own household, his claim to respect and obedience from his sons, was weakened. A sense of his guilt kept him silent when he should have condemned sin; it made his arm feeble to execute justice in his house. His evil example exerted its influence upon his sons, and God would not interpose to prevent the result. He would permit things to take their natural course, and thus David was severely chastised. . . .

“Those who, by pointing to the example of David, try to lessen the guilt of their own sins, should learn from the Bible record that the way of transgression is hard. Though like David they should turn from their evil course, the results of sin, even in this life, will be found bitter and hard to bear.

“God intended the history of David’s fall to serve as a warning that even those whom He has greatly blessed and favored are not to feel secure and neglect watchfulness and prayer. And thus it has proved to those who in humility have sought to learn the lesson that God designed to teach. From generation to generation thousands have thus been led to realize their own danger from the tempter’s power. The fall of David, one so greatly honored by the Lord, has awakened in them distrust of self. They have felt that God alone could keep them by His power through faith. Knowing that in Him was their strength and safety, they have feared to take the first step on Satan’s ground.”*

REACT

1. What is the only thing that can keep us from sin and its consequences?
2. How is your life affected, when, like David, you knowingly commit a sin?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 723, 724.

Heb. 2:1-4

How-to *Drifting With the Current*

Success and failure in life do not happen by accident. “Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, / So a curse without cause shall not alight” (Prov. 26:2, NKJV). No one drifts into heaven; but it is fatally easy to drift away from

Moments of carelessness can lead to a lifetime of regret.

it. One of the most discerning observations in Scripture pinpoints the reason for spiritual ruin—neglect (Heb. 2:3). Jesus rarely described people as evil. He did, however, categorize them as foolish—the foolish virgins who didn’t prepare (Matt. 25:1-13); the foolish homeowner who built on sand (Matt. 7:26, 27); and the foolish Galatians (Gal. 3:1).

Would it be true to say that most, if not all of us, at one time or another have experienced loss, hurt, pain, and even disaster because of our own neglect and carelessness? How true this is of moral failure. As David learned, moments of carelessness can lead to a lifetime of regret. Here are some ways we can prevent such moments:

Study God’s Word. It is not enough to simply read the Bible, desirable as this practice is. We must study it and apply it to our own lives.

Pray. Our prayers should be more than hastily putting together shallow “please and thank You.” As we pray, we should carefully consider our needs and how God has blessed us. We should also simply be still in order to let God speak to us. As the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1), we are also obliged to learn how to pray. No other blessings in life are greater than a good relationship with God.

Desire salvation. Salvation doesn’t happen by accident. God does not force us to accept His grace. We are saved, in part, because we want to be saved. We seek salvation, search for it, because we need it. This is the most serious of all life’s issues. It requires serious daily attention for as long as we live.

It is fatally easy to have the wrong perspective on salvation, to see it as only human efforts, something to be endured not enjoyed.

The rewards of a daily fellowship with God are incomparable. Fellowship with Him is life giving and life enhancing.

REACT

How can daily prolonged exposure to television, computer activities, and texting harm one’s Christian experience?

Opinion *Situational Ethics?*

Matt. 5:21–28

When David sent Uriah to the frontline of the battlefield, he broke the sixth commandment: “You shall not murder.” It’s an open and shut case. However, what if I assassinate my friend’s character with innuendo and gossip? I haven’t physically killed anyone. I haven’t broken the letter of the ninth commandment, because everything I said might be true. However, I have assassinated my friend all the same.

“The formation of character is the work of a lifetime.”

Teenage joyriders steal a car and drive it until the gasoline runs out. During their joyride, they damage the car and other property. They are guilty of stealing. However, what if you live in a war zone and your family is starving? Your only hope of survival is to steal some food. Is this really forbidden by the command “You shall not steal?” Does the situation change the principle?

You often work late, but you don’t get paid for the overtime. You are involved in a mission project at church and copy all the materials you need for it at the office without paying. After all, your employer owes you something for all those extra hours. Does that count as stealing? Or is it payment in-kind?

The absolutes of the Ten Commandments are unpalatable to a post-modern society, which views the world from an individualistic, pragmatic perspective. Society would have us believe that there are no absolutes. If Uriah had lived according to what felt right rather than principle, he might well have gone home to Bathsheba, and everything would have turned out “all right” for David. But he didn’t. And as a result, he died. His integrity stands in contrast to David’s weakness.

When Jesus talks in the Sermon on the Mount about the command not to murder, He extends murder to include anger (Matt. 5:21–26). Angry words, arguments, grudges, or feuds have no place in the Christian’s life. Considering Jesus’ guidelines on adultery, David already had overstepped the mark when he merely looked at Bathsheba with lust (Matt. 5:27, 28).

Character is not made or lost in a moment. “The formation of character is the work of a lifetime.”*

REACT

Uriah’s integrity and faithfulness are a shining example to us. How can we have the same integrity today?

**Child Guidance*, p. 162.

Exploration

David and Uriah—a Sad Comparison

CONCLUDE

Chapter 11 in 2 Samuel is painful to read. It is a study in contrast. Along with Uriah's sense of duty contrasted with David's dereliction of duty, we have Uriah's focus on mission and David's blindness to mission. Uriah stands out in the chapter as a hero. David, however, becomes the worst of villains. How do we make sense of David's scurrilous activities? What would we conclude if this chapter were the only information we had on David? When we consider the many contrasts between Uriah and David, what lessons about temptation, integrity, and forgiveness can we learn?

CONSIDER

- Googling the phrase “sexual scandal and politicians.” Choose one or two recent stories and compare or contrast them to David's scandal and what happened to Uriah.
- Looking through magazines to see if you can find someone you think might have looked like Uriah. If nothing strikes you, try drawing what you think he might have looked like.
- Searching the Web for the Wayne Watson song “The Fine Line.” This song talks about the fine line between good and evil when it comes to many of life's choices. Listen to the song, and write down as many fine-line situations as you can find in it.
- Reflecting on a time in your life when, like David, you tried to cover up something that you did. Did it involve an innocent victim?
- Imagining what it will be like for David and Uriah to meet in the new earth. Write 100 words of what you think they might say to each other.
- Thinking about people in the news who are acting like David in 2 Samuel 11. But how many people like Uriah are in the news? Most likely, no one will celebrate his virtue and integrity until the new earth. Can you find a modern-day Uriah and think of a way to celebrate him or her?

CONNECT

To learn more about the life of David, read 1 Samuel 16 (David anointed king); 1 Samuel 17 (David and Goliath); 1 Samuel 20 (David and Jonathan); 1 Samuel 25 (David and Abigail); 2 Samuel 12 (David and Nathan).

Read *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 71. To read more about David and Uriah, go to <http://bible.org/seriespage/david-and-uriah-2-samuel-115-27>.

Lesson Seven

NOVEMBER 6-13

Abiathar: The Priest

*"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of
him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"*

(1 Pet. 2:9, NIV).



original illustration unknown

1 Samuel 22;
1 Kings 1:5–10;
2:1–26

Introduction *Lest We Forget*

Ogan first came to the attention of the Master Clan at the age of 15. He had lived in abject poverty with his family in one of the remotest parts of the country. But he was incredibly brilliant. His illiterate father observed his sharp mind, how he was able to recall the names of all the plants in his village and all the stories he had been told. His father hoped that someday a Master Clan member would come to their village and recognize Ogan's potential. And that is just what happened.

Can God count on me to the end?

Now, Ogan was the Master Teacher of the Master Clan. He answered everyone's questions on science, philosophy, literature, and law. However, the Master Clan leader was becoming agitated. He did not see that Ogan was preparing to return to his village to seek a successor. And he could not suggest to Ogan that it was about time for him to do that. If he did, he would have compromised his oath of office, and death would be inevitable.

Ogan, similar in some ways to Priest Abiathar, not only had a responsibility to himself but to the office to which he had been called. Abiathar "escaped and fled to join David." David assured him, "Stay with me; don't be afraid. . . . You will be safe with me" (1 Sam. 22:20, 23, NIV). The presence of Abiathar was of great importance to David. He made inquiries of the Lord through the priest. The Lord told David a resounding Yes, and with that David recovered everything that had been taken by the enemy.

Abiathar had firsthand experience with God. Of the hundreds of priests slaughtered by Saul, he alone escaped. He was offered a double assurance: one from an earthly fugitive king and another from the reigning King of Heaven. Yet in the end, he did not support the crowning of Solomon, whom God had appointed as the next king. However, "Abiathar's life was spared, out of respect of his office and his former fidelity to David."¹ But he was removed from his high priestly office. This week, we learn from Abiathar that "God claims our service. There are responsibilities for every one to bear; and we can fulfill life's grand mission only when these responsibilities are fully accepted, and faithfully and conscientiously discharged."² As you study, ask yourself, As a Christian, what are my priestly roles? Can God count on me to the end?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 749.

2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 37.

Logos The Calling

Exod. 28:6; 39:2-7;
1 Sam. 21:1-9; 22:6-23;
2 Sam. 15:13-29;
1 Kings 1:5-10; 2:1-26

The Call to Priesthood (Heb. 5:1)

The Hebrew transliteration *kēhunnah* (priesthood) refers to the office or function of a priest. This office or function has a definitive objective. Hence, the calling was not designed to give status, but to fulfill a specific purpose. Equally, an individual was not called to the priesthood on the basis of his popularity, intellectual capacity, or adherence to the status quo. His responsibility was to fulfill the will of God in

The challenges that confronted Abiathar are not dissimilar to the challenges we face today.

aiding the process of redemption. The Hebrew transliteration *kahan* (priest) means “to mediate in religious services.” The priest, therefore, was to be God’s representative, installed to mediate on the people’s behalf. Hebrews 5:1 states, “Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” (NIV). Indulging in activities that were contrary to God’s purposes therefore resulted in serious consequences.

The Call to Mediate (Exod. 20:19)

The presupposition of the role of the priest is best understood by the definition of sin as a distortion of God’s creative order and a disruption of the communion between God and humans (the vertical relationship). Consequently, God in His mercy responded to the problem of sin (evil) by initiating the priesthood. During the Old Testament period, the high priests would make atonement to God on behalf of the people. The high priest’s service was a dual role. He was the representative of the people to God and the representative of God to the people. Exodus 20:19 says, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (NIV). This illustrates the gravity of evil and the need for a mediator.

The Regulations of the Call (Exod. 28:6)

The priesthood is characterized by numerous detailed regulations. The high priest and subordinate priests were required to dress according to certain specifications in order to reflect the concept of holiness.

The Call to Abiathar (1 Kings 1:5–10; 2:27; 1 Chron. 15:11)

During David's reign, Abiathar was appointed as a priest. He displayed loyalty to King David, which he demonstrated when he carried the ark of the covenant and shared in the king's hardships (1 Kings 2:26). While he was doing what was right in the sight of God, he was protected by Him, and his priestly duties were preserved. First Samuel 22:17–20 relates that Saul had resolved to kill all the priests of God, but Abiathar was the only one to escape. This was indicative of God's protection of Abiathar's life. However, Abiathar became influenced by ungodly behavior and approved the appointment of Adonijah as king. When King Solomon heard this, he removed Abiathar from the priesthood. This is a clear example of how wrong choices can disqualify a person from being a member of the priesthood.

In principle, the challenges that confronted Abiathar are not dissimilar to the challenges we face today. Perhaps the risk of standing up for the right and losing friends as a result was too much for Abiathar; or perhaps the lack of commitment in his relationship with God left him vulnerable to evil.

The Essence of the Calling (2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Pet. 2:9)

Today, we are members of the priesthood as explained in 1 Peter 2:9. How and why is this so? When Christ became our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, the Levitical priesthood ended and Christ's church became "a holy priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5, NKJV). As members of this new priesthood, each Christian is to "declare the praises of Him who has called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (verse 9, NIV). Each church member also has the responsibility of ministering "to others in the name of God."¹

In addition to praising God and ministering to others, we also are to be "transformed into his [Christ's] likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18, NIV). As we behold Christ through Bible study, prayer, meditation, and so forth, we will reflect His character in our own lives.² The phrase "ever-increasing glory" indicates that our transformation is ongoing. The fact that this transformation "comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" indicates that our transformation is a result of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our heart³ (see Ezekiel 36:26). Our transforming lives empower us to be priests and to fulfill the duties thereof.

REACT

1. Consider Abiathar's plight. What actions should he have taken?
2. What are the implications of making the wrong choices?
3. As Christians, what example should we set for fellow believers and for those we know who do not believe?

1. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, second ed., Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2005), p. 172.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 851.

3. *Ibid.*

Testimony

Encourage Yourself; Seek God Again

1 Kings 1:5-10;
2:1-26

Even though Abiathar sided against Solomon as God's appointed heir to the throne, God spared his life "out of respect to his office and his former fidelity to David; but he was degraded from the office of high priest, which passed to the line of Zadok."¹ Like all God's servants before us, we too make mistakes. It is comforting to note that as in the case of Abiathar, while we must face the consequences, God gives us a second chance. Likewise, when Abram lied about Sarai being his wife, God still fulfilled His promise to him by making him a great nation. Have you done something against God? Let these examples encourage you to once again seek Him.

There is a little of Abiathar in all of us.

God can and will change your life if you let Him. Jacob was a birthright thief, yet God changed his name from "supplanter" to "Israel" which means "he who strives with God." There is a little of Abiathar in all of us. So in order for us to have our names changed and gain the victory, with broken and contrite hearts, we must seek God in our difficulties (see Psalm 51:17).

"From [Psalm 51] we may learn what course to follow if we have departed from the Lord. . . . David confessed his sin and humbled his heart, declaring God to be just in all His dealings."²

"A man incurs guilt by injuring a fellowbeing, but his chief guilt is the sin that he has committed against the Lord, and the evil influence of his example upon others. The sincere child of God does not make light of any of His requirements."³

"It is not safe for us to close our eyes and harden our consciences, that we shall not see or realize our sins. We need to cherish the instruction we have had in regard to the hateful character of sin in order that we may repent of and confess our sins."⁴

REACT

1. What can you do to avoid the pitfalls that other servants of God have fallen into?
2. How can you encourage those who have fallen?
3. Is there a sin you need to repent of and confess? What are you waiting for? Why not do so now?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 749.

2. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1147.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

Luke 12:48;
1 Pet. 2:9

Evidence *Live the Name*

Abiathar's name means "the father of abundance" or "the father is preeminent." Did he live up to his name? My first name means "one who appreciates her past." I also have another name—Christian—which means "follower of Christ." I try to live up to the expectations of both names. However, the lesson for this week teaches me that it is more important that I live up to the name *Christian*.

Are you living up to your name as a Christian?

When I accepted Christ, He said, you are a chosen person, a royal priest, you belong to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pet. 2:9, paraphrased). Yes, I belong to God. Therefore, much more is required of me, because much has been given to me.

What is given to me, you ask? Is the Father preeminent in my life? "It is the honour of the servants of Christ that they are God's peculiar people. They are the people of his acquisition, choice, care, and delight. These four dignities of all genuine Christians are not natural to them; for their first state is a state of horrid darkness, but they are effectually called out of darkness into a state of marvellous light, joy, pleasure, and prosperity, with this intent and view, that they should show forth, by words and actions, the virtues and praises of him who hath called them."¹

Are you living up to your name as a Christian? "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."²

Put your life in His hands—live the name!

1. *Matthew Henry Commentary on 1 Peter 2*, Blue Letter Bible, http://biblebrowser.com/1_peter/12-9.htm (accessed October 28, 2009).

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

How-to Prepared for Holy Use

Matt. 5:21–48

One can debate whether or not Abiathar was prepared to be the high priest. However, we must also ask ourselves if we are prepared to be God's children. Below are several ways we can be prepared for the work He has for us to do:

Follow God's guidance given in His Word (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). When we take the name Christian, we cannot stay as we are. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we become changed into the image of our Creator. Studying the Word of God and applying it to our lives is essential to that change.

Keep your eyes only on Jesus. By beholding Him, we will be changed.

Be willing to change (Ezek. 36:22–28). As God's people, we need to recognize that there is a standard we must reach to be considered perfect by Jesus our Lord. Perfection comes only from God, but one has to be prepared to receive it from Him.

Recognize that only God can make you perfect (Ps. 18:32; 1 Thess. 5:23). We are sometimes unable to discern His will for our lives right away; but if we are willing, He will guide our steps as we walk with Him and allow Him to lead. It is important to remember that this process takes a lifetime.

Trust Him (Ps. 91:2; Prov. 3:5, 6). We are assured of His protection when we do so.

Believe that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Phil. 4:13). Here it is important to remember that of our own self, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Walk worthy of the higher calling which is in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior (2 Thess. 1:11). Do not follow the example of Abiathar. He followed God only for a season. After his faithfulness in His youth, he sided against God's anointed. Keep your eyes only on Jesus. By beholding Him, we will be changed (2 Cor. 3:18).

REACT

1. How does Matthew 5:21–47 describe the type of perfection Jesus is talking about?
2. How does this type of perfection prepare us for holy use?
3. Define the role of the Holy Spirit in our being made perfect.
4. With what are you currently struggling? How can the steps listed in today's lesson help you with this struggle?

Howard Kelly, London, United Kingdom

2 Sam. 15:13–29;
Matt. 20:20–28;
Mark 12:41–44

Opinion

So You Want to Be a Superstar?

I've always wanted to be a superstar. I guess, deep down, we all want to be a *somebody*. However, "always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself."* So it's best to be just who God intended you to be. We can't all be superheroes; otherwise there would be no civilians to save.

You could say that the widow mentioned in Mark 12 was a *nobody*. We don't even know her name, and she had only two coins left to live on. Yet she gave them both to God. She became a star in one of Jesus' stories, and people continue to learn a great lesson from her.

We can't all be superheroes; otherwise there would be no civilians to save.

Then there is Abiathar. He was a priest serving during the time of King David. He offered sacrifices on his behalf and helped return the ark of God to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 15:24). We don't hear much about him, but just like a jigsaw puzzle, whether we constitute a large or small piece, we all are needed to make the puzzle complete.

The mother of James and John wanted her sons to be superstars. She requested that Jesus allow them sit on either side of His throne in His kingdom (Matt. 20:21). However, through her, Jesus reminds us to consider whether or not we can handle what we ask for, and that if we want to be first, we must be willing to be last (verses 22, 27).

In reality, God requires all types of people to fulfill His marvelous cosmic plan. It's a plan much bigger than anyone of us, so He needs the big, the small; the rich, the poor, to carry out His will. He knows what He's doing. God's power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Indeed, God's power is made perfect in the background people.

So, do you still want to be a superstar? You already are! God loves you immensely. He's the King, and you're His child (1 John 3:1)!

REACT

How do you feel when you see the difference between how people of differing socio-economic status and popularity are treated in the world? How do you think Jesus views this?

*Max Ehrmann, *Desiderata* (1920), <http://www.fleurdelis.com/desiderata.htm> (accessed September 9, 2009).

Exploration

Spiritual Cornucopias

Prov. 14:12

CONCLUDE

When King Saul started executing God's priests, siding with the fugitive David was an easy choice. After all, where else could Abiathar go for protection and support but David's ragtag group of guerrillas? Over the decades to come, Abiathar proved himself a steadfast servant of God and king, but his support for David's usurping son Adonijah mars his record. What stirred such a lapse in judgment? Though we cannot know for sure, we know the issues that swirled in Israel late in David's reign—pride and greed on the king's part, followed by pride and greed on his sons' parts. Abiathar surely thought he'd made the right stand, but he showed a lack of patience in letting God lead.

CONSIDER

- Contacting a leader in your church and letting that person know he or she has your prayer support—and, if needed, your willingness to help.
- Researching the duties of priests under the law of Moses. See for example Exodus 28–30 and Numbers 18.
- Reflecting on people you've known who lived lives of integrity, despite any number of opportunities they had to compromise.
- Examining your own political stance. Do you lean one way or another because you've come to well-considered conclusions based on all sides of the issues? Or are your views primarily emotional and short-sighted?
- Sketching an illustration of how you picture Abiathar as a young man joining up with David, and then many years later as he loses his place because of his support for Adonijah.
- Journaling about how God has guided and protected you, even when events could have derailed you.

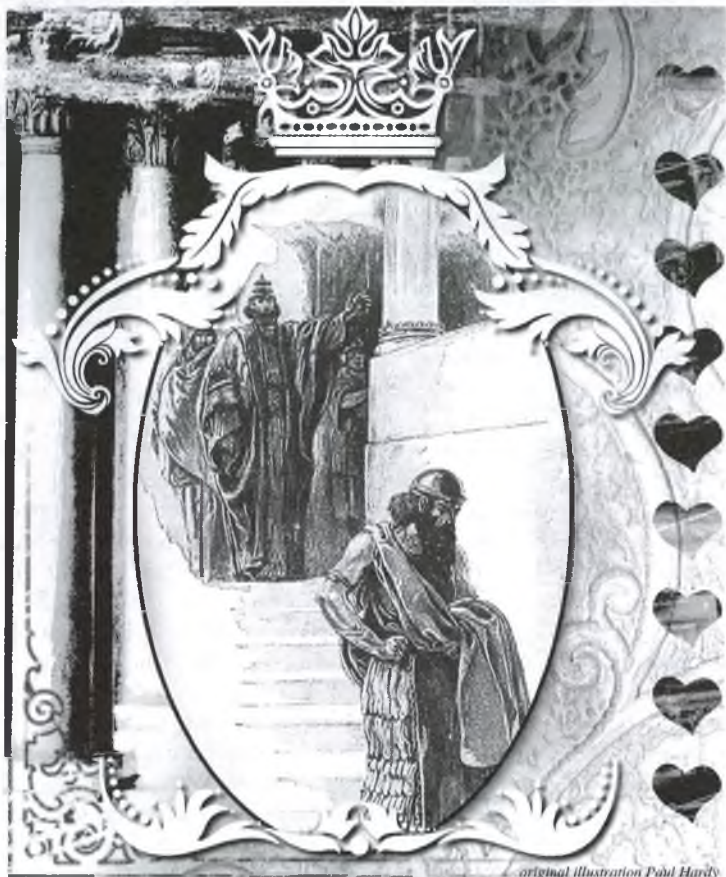
CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 746–755; *Education*, pp. 51–70.

Larry Lichtenwalter, *Well-Driven Nails: Purpose and Perspective for a Final Generation* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1999).

Joab: David's Weak
Strongman

*"All deeds are right in the sight of the doer,
but the Lord weighs the heart" (Prov. 21:2, NRSV).*



original illustration Paul Hardy

Introduction *A Negative Example*

2 Samuel 2;
3:1–26; 11:1–25;
20:1–26;
1 Kings 1;
Matt. 5:22

When I first heard Kassim's* story, I could not believe my ears. As I knew him, Kassim was a good person in church, someone who always effectively carried out his duties as an elder. He delivered captivating sermons, and his bits of advice were always helpful. I considered Kassim to be a true follower. Then one day, I discovered another side of him,

The story I heard about him astounded me. It was so hard to believe. Kassim had killed several people in the past and was still engaged in unspeakable behavior. Another friend of mine knew that Kassim had been hired by a family to seek revenge upon a man who had an affair with a married female family member.

Why do people who claim to follow Christ continue to practice sinful behaviors such as hatred and jealousy?

In light of such information, we need to ask ourselves why people who claim to follow the true God engage in sinful behavior. Why do people who claim to follow Christ continue to practice sinful behaviors such as hatred and jealousy? Why, after deciding to accept Jesus as our Savior, do we continue in sin? Doesn't our Redeemer give us a lasting solution to our character faults?

Also, we need to consider our own attitude toward such people. So many of us are often so quick to judge people who continue to commit even the smallest act of sin once they have accepted Christ as their Savior. A harsh word to someone whom you think needs correcting, a bit of gossip that tastes good upon your tongue, a disapproving stare fixed upon a struggling soul are often the hallmarks of those of us who take it upon ourselves to keep the church pure.

How such people would have disapproved of the person we will be studying this week—someone who is recorded as having been a negative example. As we study each day's lesson, our main goal will be to concentrate not on the negative side of Joab but on how his character might reflect our lives today. We also shall consider the ability of Christ, our risen Savior, to purify and refine our characters so that when others see and hear us they will be seeing and hearing Christ.

*Kassim is a pseudonym.

2 Samuel 2;
3:1-26;
11:1-25;
20:1-26;
1 Kings 1;
1 John 2:9

Evidence *Brotherhood Harmony*

In 1994, genocide tore like wildfire through Rwanda. Close to one million individuals lost their lives. Then in 2007, Kenya experienced post-election violence that left over a thousand people lifeless. How can it be that people can commit such evil acts against one another? How can people kill others they once consider to be friends? How can family members destroy one another?

Wherever we are, whatever we do, our main focus should be on Christ.

It all starts with individuals who have evil thoughts. Joab was one such person who seemed to delight in planning and propagating sin. He is proof that even though a person can hold an honored and trusted position, if that person does not respect in his or her heart the principles of God, their work will be in vain.

Joab was given the honored responsibility of commanding King David's army. He could have used this responsibility to win more souls for God and to expand His cause. However, Joab chose to go in the opposite direction. Neither you nor I may ever be placed in such a position as Joab. We many never be responsible for the welfare of thousands of people. However, the main lesson we can learn from King David's weak strongman is how best to utilize the positions and responsibilities that God sees fit to bestow upon us.

Wherever we are, whatever we do, our main focus should be on Christ, whose presence in our heart through the indwelling Holy Spirit is to transform our sinful character to reflect His sinless character. "It is for our good that God has called us to practice self-denial for Christ's sake, to bear the cross, to labor and sacrifice in seeking to save that which is lost. This is the Lord's process in refining, purging away the baser material, that the precious traits of character which were in Christ Jesus, may appear in the believer."*

REACT

Think about yourself as a Christian in this era. What are you doing in your mind and actions to see that you don't fall into the same traps as Joab?

**Christian Service*, p. 165.

Family Feuds (2 Samuel 2)

In the bigger picture of David's reign and his attempts to unite a country, we come across Joab, the commander of David's entire armed forces. Endowed with the task of organizing and caring for the king's army, Joab used his power and office to accomplish goals which were quite contrary to his master's instructions.

Even in today's churches, such behavior is prevalent.

Today, Joab would likely be tried in a military court of law for such an abuse of office. He was engaged in premeditated murder, jealousy, power politics, and misguided loyalties. In 2 Samuel 2, we find him at the forefront in the war between the houses of David and Saul. The climax of this war involved the murder of Asahel, son of Zeruah. Being Joab's brother, the killing of Asahel plants a seed of revenge in Joab's heart—a seed which gradually germinated into hatred against Abner, and eventually, to his murder (2 Sam. 3:23–27).

How many times in our present day do Christians become engaged in such intrigue? The seed of revenge that took root in Joab's heart can still penetrate our hearts today. It's the same seed that led to the heavenly feud when Satan began waging the great controversy in heaven (Isa. 14:12–14). As Christians, our ethics—whether or not they relate to the social, political, or economic dimensions of life—should always be based squarely on biblical principles.

Christ is our example in all things. The way He ministered to others while on earth is the way we should minister to others. The plan of salvation is based on unselfish love, the type of love we are to develop as the Holy Spirit transforms our lives. We are to help one another bear our burdens just as Christ was Burden Bearer on earth.

Power Politics (1 Kings 1)

The Bible makes it clear that Joab was engaged in divisive power politics. (Things haven't changed much, have they?) He approves Adonijah's secret plan to succeed his father David as king, thus going against the wishes of David himself. Such politics were also rife in the apostolic ages as witnessed by Paul in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10).

As for Joab, he used his influence as army commander to work against even his boss. Adonijah found Joab receptive to his secret plan of succeeding David (1 Kings 1:7).

Even in today's churches, such behavior is prevalent. It is disgraceful to God for church members to make secret arrangements which culminate in divisive power politics. It all comes back to the great controversy between Christ and Satan. "Many, even of the professed followers of Christ, are thinking, planning, and working so eagerly for self-exaltation that in order to gain the sympathy and support of the people they are ready to pervert the truth, falsifying and misrepresenting the Lord's servants, and even charging them with the base and selfish motives that inspire their own hearts."¹

Misguided Loyalties (2 Sam. 11:1–25)

It is common knowledge that soldiers are to be loyal to their leaders and that leaders should be loyal to their soldiers. Uriah, one of thirty leading warriors under King David, was an obedient and loyal man, so much so that he would not even go home and sleep with his wife Bathsheba before he returned to battle. He put duty before comfort and pleasure. Under that degree of loyalty, no sane king would want to dispense with such a soldier. However, this was the man King David vowed to kill: and he used Joab to help him. Joab, through his misguided loyalty, heeded David's instructions and eventually had the innocent Uriah killed.

Misguided loyalty is one of the areas in which Satan delights to tempt us. How often are people today, even Christians, caught up in the same web of jealousy, stubbornness, and a type of survival of the fittest in which we make selfish decisions that have disastrous effects?

Christ, our example, lived a blameless life on earth. Today, He urges His followers to live by His example. Then we shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. "Jesus cheers the life and brightens the path of all who truly seek Him. His love, received into the heart, will spring up in good works unto eternal life. And not only does it bless the soul in which it springs, but the living stream will flow out in words and deeds of righteousness, to refresh the thirsting around him."²

REACT

1. Consider the people and ideals to which you are loyal. Might any of this loyalty be misplaced? If so, then how? What can you do to place your loyalty where it belongs?

2. What are some concepts and ideas that promote power politics in the church, and how can we prevent them?

3. What are some concepts and ideas that promote healthy compromise among divergent opinions? How can these concepts and ideas be put to good use in your church?

4. Think about the life of Joab. What can you learn from him that can help you with your life?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 403.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 412.

Testimony Reality Check

Exod. 20:13

The circumstances and activities surrounding the life of Joab paint a picture of a person entrusted with a rather sensitive position. His involvement in mass and individual killings is an indication that he was a wolf in sheep's clothing.

“He whose heart is not imbued with the love for God and for his fellow men is not a disciple of Christ.”

“All acts of injustice that tend to shorten life; the spirit of hatred and revenge, or the indulgence of any passion that leads to injurious acts toward others, or causes us even to wish them harm (for “whoso hateth his brother is a murderer”); a selfish neglect of caring for the needy or suffering; all self-indulgence or unnecessary deprivation or excessive labor that tends to injure health—all these are, to a greater or less degree, violations of the sixth commandment.”¹

Joab was full of the vices listed in the above quote. The following quote provides us with a reality check so that we don't make the same errors as Joab. “A revival and reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. Reformation signifies reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit.”²

“No matter how high his profession, he whose heart is not imbued with the love for God and for his fellow men is not a disciple of Christ. Though he should possess great faith, and even have power to work miracles, yet without love his faith would be worthless. He might display great liberality, but should he from some other motive than genuine love bestow all his goods to feed the poor, the act would not commend him to the favor of God. In his zeal he might even meet a martyr's death, yet if destitute of the gold of love he would be regarded by God as a deluded enthusiast or an ambitious hypocrite.”³

REACT

How is it that in neglecting the weak and the less fortunate people in our societies we are breaking the sixth commandment?

-
1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 308.
 2. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 128.
 3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 168.

Florence Kurema, Kakamega, Kenya

James 4:11

How-to Dealing With Feuds

Family feuds are part of the circumstances that marred Joab's life. We picture the military commander in situations that left Asahel, Abner, and Amasa dead. These feuds revolved around both the house of Saul and the house of David.

Family feuds are better solved amicably.

Family feuds began immediately after sin (Gen. 3:5–12) and have continued to the here and now. If left unchecked, these feuds easily serve as bait on our enemy's hook. As Christians, we belong to the family of God. In our churches, schools, homes, and social settings, we need to learn how to deal with family wrangles, and better yet, how to avoid them all together. Following are a few principles that will help us.

Let others help and participate in the healing process. The pain of family discord radiates outward, causing unhappiness to siblings, parents, extended relatives, and even close friends. Usually the discord is spiced with jealousy and revenge. In such cases, friends and relatives have active roles in healing the feud. They can be facilitators or serve as mediators between the two fighting groups. In so doing, they encourage the healing process.

Be an example to others. "Our words, our acts, our dress, our deportment, even the expression of the countenance, has an influence. Upon the impression thus made there hang results for good or evil which no man can measure. Every impulse thus imparted is seed sown which will produce its harvest. It is a link in the long chain of human events, extending we know not whither. If by our example we aid others in the development of good principles, we give them power to do good. In their turn they exert the same influence upon others, and they upon still others. Thus by our unconscious influence thousands may be blessed."*

Do not seek revenge. Family feuds are better solved amicably instead of employing the "an-eye-for-an-eye" principle. Whenever you find family members fighting each other, use dialogue, remembering that "a soft answer turns away wrath, / But a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1, NKJV).

REACT

Think of one person in your family with whom you have had a feud. What was the result of the feud, and how can you best forgive the person?

*Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 339, 340.

Opinion *Loyalty of a Mixed Nature*

2 Sam. 12:26–28

I am trying to imagine what would happen today if soldiers compromised their loyalty the way Joab did. The seventh edition of the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* defines being loyal as “remaining faithful to somebody or something and supporting them or it.”

The Holy Spirit will give us a transformed heart and a new way of thinking.

By virtue of his position, Joab was supposed to obey the orders of his master. However, his loyalty to David left a lot to be desired. We can see that after being commanded by David not to kill Absalom (2 Sam. 18:5), Joab later pursued Absalom and did just that (2 Sam. 18:14). With this example and others, we see Joab as a commander with questionable loyalty.

Being Christians puts us in a situation where we are supposed to deliver to the rest of the world the light we have received from Christ. When we fail to pass the torch of Christ to the next person, and when we willingly ignore the work of spreading the gospel, we behave as Joab, and we defy the instructions of our Master.

If we are to remain with Christ to the end, we must shun all that causes us to compromise our moral integrity and to fall short of God’s expectations. The Holy Spirit will give us a transformed heart and a new way of thinking.

“When Jesus speaks of a new heart, He means the mind, the life, the whole being. To have a change of heart is to withdraw the affections of the world, and fasten them upon Christ. To have a new heart is to have a new mind, new purposes, new motives. What is the sign of a new heart? A changed life. There is a daily, hourly dying to selfishness and pride.”¹

Pray to have God give you the power through His Holy Spirit to maintain a close relationship with Him. Undivided loyalty should be an integral part of your life, bearing in mind that “perfection of character cannot possibly be attained without self-sacrifice.”²

REACT

How do you rank on loyalty performance to the following?

a. God; b. parents; c. spouse; d. national leaders/friends

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 72.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 53.

Prov. 21:2

Exploration

It's What's Inside That Counts

CONCLUDE

An apt admonition, spoken by Jesus and recorded in Luke 12:48, applies to this week's lesson: " 'From everyone who has been given much, much will be required' " (NASB). Joab was given much. Yet, he misappropriated his leadership talent and misdirected his sense of loyalty, which led to intrigue and murder. To varying degrees, we may embody the traits of this "weak strongman" and dishonor our calling and opportunities to witness for Christ. Through wile or feud, we may inherit Joab's legacy. The heart of the matter is what matters in the heart.

CONSIDER

- Designing a poster that depicts people in history, politics, sports, and/or the Bible whose lack of moral integrity caused them to fall short of expectations.
- Thinking about a time when you fell short of expectations. Did you let others help you through that time? How was your ability to be an example to others compromised?
- Praying for our leaders, both in government and in the church, who by force of personality or position of power may face temptations that could lead to disastrous outcomes.
- Writing a poem or composing a song that addresses those who are quick to judge others, who rebuke with a harsh word, gossip, or a disapproving stare on a struggling soul.
- Listening to a song that illustrates a theme from this week's lesson. Visualize the scenes depicted in the song. An example of such a song is "Mr. Simon" by Ken Medema.
- Analyzing the Christian meaning or meanings of the word *heart* and contemplating why that meaning or those meanings are given to that human organ rather than another organ of the body.

CONNECT

Marvin Moore, *Conquering the Dragon Within* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2001); Sally Streib, *The Heart Mender* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 2006); Annette Stanwick, et. al., *Forgiveness: The Mystery and Miracle* (Calgary, AB: Heart Message® Publishing, 2007).

lesson nine

NOVEMBER 20-27

Rizpah: The Influence of **Faithfulness**

*“He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings
you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and
rampart” (Ps. 91:4, NIV).*



original art by Gustave Dore engraved by H. Pisan

2 Sam. 21:7-13

Introduction

To Be or Not to Be Famous

A few years ago, I imagined myself being a contestant on one of the popular TV quiz shows. During my turn, I happened to be lucky enough to select my favorite topic “Space Exploration.” I pictured myself facing the show’s host thinking that he had no idea what he was up against. I proceeded with a bring-it-on attitude to the first question: “Who was the first man in space?” “The Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin,” I quipped, before quickly asking for the next question. “Who was the first man on the moon, and what was the name of the mission?” Easy. The American astronaut, Neil Armstrong and the Apollo 11 mission. “What was the name of the U.S. space agency, and who headed it during the ‘space race’ years?” The agency was NASA, and it was headed by the famous rocket scientist, Werner von Braun.”

Not many knew much about him until many years after he had died.

“What was the first satellite in space?” OK, this definitely challenged my knowledge of the Russian (USSR) space program. I methodically explained that Russia was the first to launch a satellite named *Sputnik 1* on October 4, 1957. As I was about to pat myself on the back, the host quickly followed with “Who was Sergei Korolev?” One second elapsed, two seconds, three . . . but my mind went completely blank.

Buzzzzzzzzzz! went the timer, as I lost my chance at winning the quiz. Why? Just because of an obscure name? Someone I had never heard about or cared about in my study of space history? Obviously Korolev was not one of the famous people I knew about who were connected to space exploration. Later, I found out that Korolev wasn’t famous because of the secrecy that surrounded the Russian space program. Their great mastermind responsible for Russia’s early success was only referred to as the “Chief Designer.”

Not many knew much about him until years after he had died. How terrible it must have felt to be Korolev and see all the media attention surrounding his equivalent in the United States—Werner von Braun—while he languished in obscurity. Likewise, in the Bible, there are many individuals who were involved in shaping biblical history but to whom many of us have never paid any attention. This week, we shall study about Rizpah—an ordinary woman who endured extraordinary circumstances. Through her strong will, perseverance, and courage, she attained King David’s attention and, we hope, this week, ours.

Logos
*Faithfulness Inspires
Faithfulness*

Deut. 30:19;
2 Sam. 3:6–11;
21:1–14;
Mark 13:13

“Now Choose Life” (Deut. 30:19)

Many of the decisions we make have consequences that affect others. All faithful decisions not only bring blessings to the faithful and their descendants, but they inspire faithfulness in their descendants as well. This is what Deuteronomy 30:19 reveals by exhorting us to “choose life.”

History teaches us that future generations often reap the fruit nurtured by their ancestors. If a people have been corrupt and immoral, the consequences of their actions affect not only them but also those who will come after them. In contrast, if a people have been steadfast and faithful, their future generations will also be blessed by faithfulness. This is often the case even as it relates to parents’ influence on their children. Talking of divorce, Dr. Kenneth Bateman writes that “Children may also be very damaged by their parent’s bad marriage;

What a tragic day this must have been for Rizpah.

their school work may suffer, as well as self-esteem, increased anger, depression, and self-blame, conflicts with authority, and their own ability to have a good marriage (role modeling and family systems).”¹ Conversely, when we “choose life” and make faithful decisions, we are encouraging those in our sphere of influence to be faithful also.

It is no wonder that Jesus came to this world not only to die for our sins but to live among us to reveal in practical ways what it means to be faithful. Without diminishing the importance of the death of Jesus to our salvation, let us note that this part of God’s salvation plan took place over a period of three days. On the other hand, Jesus invested 33 years living among ordinary folks so that they would aspire to faithfulness. Therefore, our faithfulness to God is not just about us. It is about other people as well, some of whom we may never know.

Faithfulness Draws Attention (2 Sam. 3:6–11; 21:1–14)

Rizpah, whose name means “a coal or a hot stone,”² lived out the meaning of her name in an extraordinary way. As a response to the demands of the Gibeonites, and also probably for his own political reasons, David handed over to them seven sons from the house of Saul to be killed in retaliation for Saul having killed most of the Gibeonites. Among those men were two sons of Rizpah. These sons were possible heirs to Saul’s kingship because their three older

brothers had been killed in battle, and the young Eshbaal had been assassinated (1 Samuel 14; 2 Samuel 4).³

What a tragic day this must have been for Rizpah. She could have retaliated. Instead, she watched over the suspended bodies (2 Sam. 21:9) of her sons to prevent them from being devoured by beasts and birds of prey. “From the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured down from the heavens on the bodies, she did not let the birds of the air touch them by day or the wild animals by night” (2 Sam. 21:10, NIV). This indicates “that Rizpah’s devoted watch was of long duration.”⁴

When David heard about Rizpah’s devotion, he ordered that the bodies be given a proper burial.

Faithfulness Is Costly (Mark 13:13)

Faithfulness does not always bring about pleasant experiences. True faithfulness often comes at a cost. In Mark 13:13, Jesus gives a clear account of how those who are on the side of God will be hated by all. Even though the context of this verse is last-day events, many true Christians already have experienced this hatred. People are often quick to dislike those who follow Christ, because they know in their hearts what is right but prefer not to change. Our faithfulness, therefore, makes them uncomfortable.

Paul understood this when he said, “To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life” (2 Cor. 2:16, NIV). So let us not be discouraged in our attempts to be faithful amidst the indifference of other people. Instead, let us use their indifference as confirmation that “‘God is really among you!’” (1 Cor. 14:25, NIV).

REACT

1. How does your faithfulness compare or contrast with that of Rizpah?
2. How does a person come by such faithfulness?
3. If faithfulness did not come at a cost, do you think more people would accept Christ and live by His principles? Explain your answer.
4. What about faithfulness having a cost makes faithfulness meaningful?
5. Think of people in your life who have been faithful. How has their faithfulness affected your life?
6. Consider your faithfulness and how it affects your friends and family.

1. Dr. Kenneth Bateman, Amber University, <http://www.alicebaland.com/ABLSCResources/REMADivorceFacts.htm> (accessed June 4, 2009).

2. *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, <http://www.bible-history.com/eastons/R/Rizpah> (accessed June 8, 2009).

3. Diana Edelman, *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rizpah-bible> (accessed August 19, 2009).

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 697.

Testimony

Sackcloth and Passion

2 Sam. 21:10

Rizpah had a point to make, and it was this: “Here are my sons, taken from me, disgraced and given up to amend for the sins of their father. But though they are dead, I cherish the bond we once shared.” She was determined to express her passion under the shelter of sackcloth—not for an hour or two, a day or two, or a week or two—but from the spring to the fall. She did not send a message expressing the cry of her heart. She simply lived out her commitment from the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured. This is how her influence was felt. This is how she was able to influence King David. Do we have such passion? “It is our own character and experience that determine our influence upon others. In order to convince others of the power of Christ’s grace, we must know its power in our own hearts and lives. . . . Only through a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour is it possible to make our influence felt in a skeptical world.”¹

Rizpah was faithful to what she thought was the right thing to do.

Although it might have seemed of no use to safeguard the bodies of her sons, Rizpah was faithful to what she thought was the right thing to do, and so should we be. “None can know what may be God’s purpose in His discipline; but all may be certain that faithfulness in little things is the evidence of fitness for greater responsibilities.”²

The influence of her passion stirred the king to action. Whether she knew it or not, her actions led to a greater action. The same principle applies to our actions. Thus, “hundreds and thousands are helped by our unconscious influence. The true follower of Christ strengthens the good purposes of all with whom he comes in contact.”³

From beneath the shelter of sackcloth, she stirred the heart of a king to action. May our humble abodes also be centers from which our actions will influence others. “Our sphere of influence may seem narrow, our ability small, our opportunities few, our acquirements limited; yet wonderful possibilities are ours through a faithful use of the opportunities of our own homes.”⁴

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 469.

2. *Education*, p. 61.

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 348.

4. *The Adventist Home*, p. 33.

2 Sam. 21:1–14

Evidence *Meekness or Weakness*

Second Samuel is about a man trying desperately to be a great leader while remaining a man of God. Unfortunately, he is often sabotaged by his flawed humanity. Supporting characters such as Rizpah provide compelling, yet often ignored, parallels to the main character, David, who, in spite of his sins, remained a man after God's own heart—penitent, passionate, and purposeful. It is probable that 2 Samuel was written by Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer (1 Chron. 29:29). In addition to these, information from another source called “the book of Jasher” may have been included (2 Sam. 1:18). The events in the book took place between 1004 and 971 B.C. So can we learn anything from these long-ago events concerning a kingdom that God Himself said would last forever?

Through accounts such as Rizpah's . . . we are challenged to devote our lives to Jesus.

Listen to the words God spoke to the new king of Israel: “ ‘Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever’ ” (2 Sam. 7:16, NKJV). David eventually died, and no kings are reigning now in Israel. So what lasted forever? The Bible often refers to Jesus as the son of David. The promises are forever in Jesus Christ. Jesus, son of David, by His death and resurrection built a kingdom that will last forever. By faith we can be part of that kingdom. Through accounts such as Rizpah's that show ordinary people exercising unwavering commitment and faith, we are challenged to devote our lives to Jesus, the Founder of the kingdom. Through Rizpah's seemingly inconsequential life, we realize that we, too, should live our lives, however marginal they may seem in the grand scheme of things, with dedication and fortitude. We should draw encouragement from stories such as Rizpah's when we are challenged by unpleasant circumstances. We must remember that we must endure to the end in order to live forever in God's kingdom (Mark 13:13). Second Samuel reminds us that God always keeps His promises. No amount of sin can change that. Christ will reign for all eternity—now in our hearts and eventually over a new heaven and a new earth. By remaining faithful to Him, we are choosing life—now and forever (Deut. 30:19).

REACT

What comparison can we make between Rizpah's love for her sons and God's love for His children, as represented in Isaiah 49:15?

Enock Mochache (assisted by Barbra and Josene), Calhoun, Tennessee, U.S.A.

How-to *Remaining Faithful Through Thick and Thin*

Mark 9:14–29;
13:13

Many of us feel that because we are not as “holy” or as “important” as other members in our church, we are excused from being faithful at all times and in all things. After all, people already think the worst of us, so why should we struggle to remain faithful when no one would believe our sincerity anyway? I imagine that this must have been how Rizpah felt when her sons were handed over to the Gibeonites to be hanged. Why should she bother to watch over her sons’ corpses when nobody would care enough to help her bury them? Why should David care about a concubine of his defeated enemy? Why would he help the woman whose supposed promiscuity had caused Abner’s defection from Saul’s government? Yet despite her less-than-pristine reputation, Rizpah faithfully protected her son’s bodies for stench-filled months—until David gave them a proper burial. The concubine’s faithfulness had birthed the king’s mercy.

The concubine’s faithfulness had birthed the king’s mercy.

How can we achieve faithfulness that perseveres through thick and thin? How does one achieve a faith that overcomes a stained reputation? I believe such faith can be achieved if we do three things:

Stop assuming that because we are Christians our lives will be perfect and easy. In Mark 13:13, Jesus told His disciples, “You will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (NRSV). Here we learn that we must remain faithful to the end, and so we shall be saved. If this were easy, He would not have used the word *endures*. So let’s stop assuming that because we are children of God, our lives will be a walk in the park.

We must ask God to keep us faithful, because we cannot do it on our own. We must be like the faithful father in Mark 9:14–29 who cries out to Jesus, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (NKJV).

We must realize that the reputation we should care most about is that of being a child of God. Only when we remember that “while we were still sinners” (Rom. 5:8, NKJV) God loved us enough to send His Son to die for us can we realize that the most important thing is to remain faithful to Him.

REACT

1. Why do many Christians believe that their lives should be easy because they are Christians?
2. Why do so many of us focus on what others think of us rather than on what God thinks of us?

2 Sam 21:1–14;
Rom. 12:8**Opinion***True Peace Is Found in
Our Humility*

This week, we have been studying about Rizpah, Saul's concubine. Her story sounds strange, and her role in it doesn't seem to make sense. Was it God's will that her children should die to pay for their father's sin? It doesn't seem right that Rizpah should have suffered their loss when they were not at fault for what happened to the Gibeonites. What does this story say about God's character? Yet as I studied her story, I found some answers.

Revenge is never the answer.

David didn't mope around, wondering what the people were going to do without crops or pasture to feed their sheep and cattle. He went to God to ask what had caused the famine. When we don't understand what's happening in our lives, we should seek His counsel. But we shouldn't stop seeking His counsel the way David did. "In yielding to the Gibeonites, David did not consult Jehovah as to what he should do . . . though in . . . general character righteous and upright, had he consulted Jehovah, some happier way of being righteous might have been found."* Because David did not seek God's counsel in everything, he ended up repairing the breach with the Gibeonites in a way that did not honor God and His character.

After he turned over Saul's descendants to the Gibeonites, Rizpah could have avenged their deaths. Instead, she did her duty as a mother by protecting the deceased bodies from dishonor. When David heard of her bravery, he decided to follow her example by honoring Saul, Jonathan, and those hung with honorable burials. It was only when this was done that the famine ended.

We don't know what would have happened if David had consulted God a second time instead of the Gibeonites. Even so, I think we can see that reconciliation with God was achieved when mercy, not vengeance, was shown. This doesn't only apply with Rizpah and David, but to each of us. Revenge is never the answer. If you desire to be like Christ, follow Rizpah's example. Seek His peace and reconciliation. "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Rom. 12:18, NRSV). In doing so, we reflect God's character.

REACT

1. Is reconciliation different from sitting back and pretending nothing happened? If so, how?
2. Are there any situations in your life that need reconciliation?

* *John Darby's Synopsis*, <http://www.ewordtoday.com/comments/2samuel/darby/2samuel21.htm> (accessed August 20, 2009).

Exploration

Facets of Faithfulness

2 Sam. 21:1–14

CONCLUDE

Controlled by men, Rizpah's life was subject to questionable decisions such as David's own solution to the multiyear famine—turning over Rizpah's sons by Saul, along with Saul's grandsons, for the Gibeonites to execute. Rizpah certainly couldn't control this situation, but she did control her reaction to it. She stood sentinel 24/7 by her sons' bodies for five months. Her faithful vigil reproached David, and he belatedly collected the bones of Saul and Jonathan and buried them with the bodies of Rizpah's sons and grandsons. Faithfulness speaks louder than words in a world accustomed to self-centered actions.

CONSIDER

- Focusing on the meaning of Rizpah's name—"a coal or a hot stone"—by lighting a charcoal briquette in a metal can or other fireproof container. (Take suitable safety precautions). Once it lights, it provides steady heat. How often do you find a steady source of faithfulness?
- Singing "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" (no. 100 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*) and reflecting on your faithfulness compared to God's faithfulness.
- Searching the Internet using the words *Rizpah* and *Bible art*. Check the various artists' depictions of Rizpah's vigil.
- Reading a copy of Alfred Tennyson's poem "Rizpah" and comparing it to the biblical account. How are both accounts similar? How are they different?
- Considering the story in 2 Samuel 21:1–14 in light of the second commandment—the sins of the father are visited upon the second and third generation.
- Looking up the dictionary meanings of *faithfulness*, *dedication*, and *fortitude*. How are they defined and what examples have you observed?
- Researching the "Old Faithful" geyser in Yellowstone National Park to learn how many years it has erupted like clockwork.

CONNECT

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, pp. 696, 697.

Edith Deen, *All the Women of the Bible* (New York: HarperOne, 1988), pp. 109–112, 282, 291; *Voices of Faith: Women's Personal Study Bible*, (n.p.: World Bible Publishing, 1998).

The Man of God: Obedience Is **Not Optional**

“First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:20, 21, NRSV).



*original illustration
by Johann Christoph Weigel circa 1695*

Introduction

Freedom of Choice in Obedience

John 15:10

Behaviorists dispute that the “will” describes anything significant. They hold that we respond to stimuli and situations rather than to any freedom of choice. They call this the stimulus-response process. “When a certain stimulus is perceived, a person may have more than one way of responding but chooses the option that has been reinforced in the past. Reinforcement generally occurs through a system of rewards and punishments, or good and bad results.”* The biblical view directly opposes this concept.

Being obedient to God results in a transforming relationship with Him.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve knew no sin, much less the consequences thereof. They could choose freely, for God Himself gave them this freedom. Unfortunately, they chose to sin. After the Fall, we still have freedom of choice, but because our nature is now sinful, we tend to follow our impulses rather than our conscience. Allowing the Holy Spirit to enter into our lives makes the difference. He guides us in choosing the right direction our lives should take when we desire God’s purposes for our lives.

Sometimes, it’s easy to choose God, but sometimes it can be much harder. During those times, we often block out the Holy Spirit’s promptings. We need to take another look at the obedience exemplified by Jesus. On the night before the cross, He told His friends, “ ‘If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love’ ” (John 15:10, NIV).

Being obedient to God results in a transforming relationship with Him. Like Jesus, we can, by the power of His Spirit, walk in the path of the divine will. We will delight to do what pleases Him. Jesus was faithful even unto death—fulfilling His duty to the end. And because of His obedience, we have hope for eternal life. Jeroboam stands in stark contrast to Jesus. As you study this week about an unnamed man of God, ask yourself, *What will I choose?* Will you choose to follow God’s ordained duty or your own sinful inclinations?

* *The Popular Science*, vol. 5 (Republic of China: Grolier International, Inc., 1991), p. 299.

1 Kings 13

Evidence *Obedience Versus Disobedience*

Jeroboam failed to learn from the past. It was at the height of his disobedience that “a man of God” (1 Kings 13:1) was called to bring a pronouncement of divine judgment to the king, whose reign was in a state of moral decay.

Jeroboam’s disobedience was so great that he tried to “tempt” the man of God by showing him favor. But the man of God answered him, “ ‘Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here’ ” (1 Kings 13:8, NIV). Thus, a striking contrast emerged between the obedience of the man of God and the disobedience of the king. However, the story does not end here.

The decision to obey or to disobey should not be taken lightly.

An old prophet set out to meet the man of God as he returned to Judah. When the old prophet caught up with the man of God, the old prophet extended another tempting invitation similar to that of the king (1 Kings 13:15). Again, the man of God rejected the offer; but the prophet persisted, claiming that his invitation was what the Lord had revealed to him (verse 18). Thus it was that the man of God was convinced to go home with the prophet and eat. While eating together, the real word of the Lord came to the old prophet; and it was a pronouncement of judgment on the man of God (verses 21, 22). So it was that on his way home for the second time, a lion mauled him. The reason is uncertain as to what prompted the old prophet to provide a decent burial for the man of God. Afterward, he told his sons that the pronouncement of judgment from the man of God to Jeroboam would “certainly come true” (verse 32, NIV). Jeroboam refused to give up idolatry. He continued to corrupt the priestly office. Sure as the word of the Lord, his downfall came!

The decision to obey or to disobey should not be taken lightly. Armed with God’s Word, we must fight the temptation to disobey. Only then will we be able to find the strength to withstand temptation. “Look not to circumstances, to the weakness of self, or to the power of temptation, but to the power of God’s word. All its strength is ours.”*

The unnamed man of God teaches us that obedience is truly a matter of life and death!

**The Ministry of Healing*, p. 181.

Logos
*Absolutely No Sitting
on the Fence*

Exodus 32;
1 Kings 13:1–34;
Dan. 5:13–17

The Man of God from Judah (1 Kings 13:1–34)

First Kings 13 tells us about a man from Judah whom God commissioned to deliver a message from Him to King Jeroboam. Jeroboam was the first king of Israel in the northern region, after ten tribes seceded from the united kingdom of Israel (see 1 Kings 11:29–37). Rather than follow God's statutes and commands (verse 38), Jeroboam built golden calves in Bethel and Dan for Israel to worship there. He also built shrines in high places and appointed priests to these shrines who were not Levites.

**You're either in God's yard or outside it.
You cannot be a fence-sitter.**

The man of God found Jeroboam standing by the altar. The man of God then cried out against the altar and pronounced the message of the Lord: a son named Josiah would be born in the house of David. This son would sacrifice the priests of the high places on the altar by which Jeroboam was standing (1 Kings 13:2). The man said that the altar will be split apart and the ashes on it would be poured out (verse 3). Upon hearing this, Jeroboam ordered that the man of God be seized, but as the king's hand stretched toward the man, it became shriveled. At the same time, the altar split apart and the ashes on it poured out. Thus, part of the man of God's prophecy came to pass.

Jeroboam pleaded to the man of God to pray for him so that his hand would be restored. The former responded positively, and the king's hand was restored. Jeroboam invited the man to dine with him. He also wanted to give the man a present. However, the man of God refused the king's invitation, because the Lord had said he must "not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came" (verse 9, NIV). So the man proceeded by taking a different road home.

While sitting under an oak tree, the man of God met an old prophet from Bethel who followed him after he heard from his sons about what happened between the man of God and King Jeroboam. The old prophet invited the man of God to eat at his house, but the latter refused and repeated God's instructions to him. But the old prophet lied to him and said, "An angel said to me by the word of the Lord: 'Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water'" (verse 18, NIV). Thus, the man of God was

persuaded to return by the way he had come, and to eat and drink at the house of the prophet.

The Lord came to the old prophet and instructed him to tell the man of God the judgment that would befall him because he disobeyed God's instructions. As a consequence, his body would not be buried in the tomb of his fathers. On his way home, a lion attacked and killed the man of God. Upon hearing the news, the old prophet brought back the body of the man of God and buried him in his own tomb. Yet despite all this, Jeroboam refused to change his erring ways.

Our First Priority—Obedience to God (Exodus 32; Dan. 5:13–17)

Satan is very cunning. As we see in the story about the man of God, he will employ any and all means to deceive God's people, to lead them to destruction. Each of us must be vigilant in everything we do; and what better way to arm ourselves against the enemy than to read God's words faithfully and apply them to our daily lives.

Like the Israelites who disobeyed God by worshiping the golden calf in the wilderness and King Belshazzar who did what he pleased, our disobedience to God will bring unfavorable consequences to us. Sometimes we may not understand God's will, but we may be confident that it is for our own good and that He wants only the best for us.

God enjoins us to obey Him in a wholehearted manner. Obedience should be total, or it's no obedience at all. It's either black or white. There is no gray area. You're either in God's yard or outside it. You cannot be a fence-sitter. Jesus is our best example of perfect submission. A heart overflowing with love for God results in obedience. That is the only way we can overcome as Jesus did.

REACT

1. In the account we just studied, truth was combined with the false. Today, how is truth often mixed with the false? How will it be so in the future?

2. How can we be prepared to distinguish truth from falsehood? See Ephesians 6:10–18.

3. The man of God in this week's lesson met with a lion. Daniel met with several lions. The man of God did not survive. Daniel, however, did. What made the difference?

4. When Jeroboam begged the man of God to pray for his healing, God restored his arm. Why did God do this when He knew that in the end Jeroboam would still defy Him?

5. What does the old prophet teach us about Satan's attempts to get us to sin?

Testimony

The Man of God Rebuked the King

1 Kings 13:1–34

A man of God foretold the destruction of Jeroboam's altar and its idolatrous priests. He gave Jeroboam a sign that the prophecy would be fulfilled. Jeroboam became enraged and ordered the man of God to be seized. He stretched out his hand for this purpose, but his arm dried up. The altar was rent, and the ashes poured out, according to the sign given by the man of God. Following the man of God's intercession, Jeroboam's arm was restored. Jeroboam invited the man of God to eat and drink, but he refused and told him that he was ordered by God not to eat or drink in that place. Then he departed.

Beware of those who counsel us contrary to the word of the Lord.

"The Lord seeks to save, not to destroy. He delights in the rescue of sinners. 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked' (Ezek. 33:11). . . . He gives His chosen messengers a holy boldness, that those who hear may fear and be brought to repentance. How firmly the man of God rebuked the king! . . . The Lord gave His servant boldness, that an abiding impression might be made on those who heard."¹

After the man of God had disobeyed the express command of the Lord, the Lord spoke through the man who himself was used as a messenger of the evil one. The word of the Lord came to the old prophet, and he foretold the death of the man of God, who was indeed slain by a lion on his way. "Because the true prophet allowed himself to take a course contrary to the line of duty, God permitted him to suffer the penalty of transgression."²

Beware of those who counsel us contrary to the word of the Lord. Regardless of their titles or past accomplishments, we must hear and do the word of the Lord! Disobedience to God was the cause of the man of God's fast and humiliating death.

REACT

What lesson can we learn from the man of God?

1. *Conflict and Courage*, p. 202.
2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 106.

Ps. 119:33-40

How-to Tips on Obeying God

This week, we have been studying about what happened to an unnamed man of God because of his disobedience. So for today's lesson, let us study a few tips on how to be obedient.

By reading God's Word regularly, we come to know Him personally.

Don't be stubborn. The Israelites were a stiff-necked people (Exodus 32). Sometimes, we, too, are stiff-necked. When our parents tell us what to do, we disobey them. But given our fallen nature, our parents may also make mistakes. It isn't mandatory to obey them if what they're requiring is contrary to God's Word. John 14:15 is clear, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (NIV).

Be properly motivated. When we obey certain commands of our parents, they sometimes reward us. When I was young, my father told me that if I studied my lessons and got high grades, he would reward me on my birthday. As a young child, I couldn't resist. Rewards, however, must not be the only force impelling us to obey. When it comes to obeying God, our love for Him should be our motivation.

Read the Bible faithfully. In this fast-paced world, we are so busy with so many things that there are days when we skip Bible study. However, by reading God's Word regularly, we come to know Him personally and to understand His will for us. Press on even when you stumble. Because we are sinners, we will sometimes stray from the narrow path of obedience that leads to God. When we ask for forgiveness, make things right, and make good use of the opportunities He gives to us, we will find peace and joy that He alone can bring. Many of our youth want to be away from their parents and prefer to go along with their peers. But too often, these so-called friends lead them to un-Christian or even criminal behavior. The good news is that God still gives them the chance for a new life, if only they are willing to submit to Him.

Follow God despite opposition. Satan's agencies will test their limits on how far they can go with us. John 15:21 says, "They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me" (NIV). If we, however, know Jesus, He will be with us every step of the way.

REACT

1. What other tips can you think of on how we can be obedient?
2. What help does the Holy Spirit give us?

Opinion
*Freedom Versus
Obedience*

John 14:15

“Obey first before you complain” is a well-known principle in military circles. “A good leader is a good follower” is the saying of wise people. In any organization, there are rules to be followed. Some try to alter these rules, but in the end, there will be consequences for doing so. That is why Christians stress the need for obedience to retain trust and love. Many young adults choose to think that obedience suppresses their freedom of choice, rather than to understand the advantages of obedience.

Our sinful human nature makes it quite difficult for us to choose what is right.

One Sabbath in church, I observed a child being quite disobedient. Finally the mother had to leave the worship service in order to discipline her child. As they were leaving, I couldn't help but think about the pain the mother was feeling for her child and how her pain was like the pain God feels for us when we live contrary to His law.

Many times we find ourselves suffering the results of bad decisions we've made, decisions that went against the principles of our faith. What's worse is when we do not admit our error and try to cover up what we did. This causes more pain, restlessness, and guilt. Why do we live like this when we are promised the Holy Spirit to guide us, to live in our hearts? I asked my Sabbath School class one time, “If we truly love God, is it really hard to follow His words?” (See John 14:15.) Some said No, others said Yes. Then someone said, “It's not difficult to do His will, but it's hard to overcome our sinful human nature.”

Our sinful human nature makes it quite difficult for us to choose what is right. We'd rather have our heart's desire rather than God's. However, when the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, then we are able to choose God's desire for us. God gave us the law because He loves us and knows what is His best for us. His law is based on love. Read Matthew 22:34–40.

REACT

1. Does God really punish us for our sins, or is what we view as punishment the natural results of disobedience? Explain your answer.
2. How does obedience prove our love for God?
3. Read the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1–17. As you do, think about how love is the basis for each one.

Samuel D. Bagano Jr., Muntinlupa City, Philippines

Ps. 119:33-40

Exploration

Rules Aren't Made to Be Broken

CONCLUDE

Jereboam failed to learn from the past, and the “man of God” failed to learn from Jereboam. When confronting the king who had so clearly demonstrated his opposition to God, the prophet had no problem resisting temptation. However when confronted by a more subtle, unexpected temptation, he gave in. Anything less than total obedience to God is unacceptable. Although impossible from a human perspective, with God’s help, we will find the strength to obey no matter what situation we find ourselves in. A heart overflowing with love for Him expresses its love through obedience.

CONSIDER

- Adding one or two drops of food coloring to water, and mixing it well. Keep adding drops of coloring and mixing, noting how much you need to add before the water changes color. Imagine that the coloring is poison. How much would you need to add before you would not drink the water? How is disobedience like poison in our lives?
- Singing “Trust and Obey” (no. 590 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*). How does this song reflect your experience of obedience?
- Talking with a friend about an area of your life in which you are struggling to obey God’s will. Ask that friend to pray with you, for you, and to hold you accountable for your actions.
- Trying not to disobey any law. Often we “unconsciously” break the law by driving a little over the speed limit or going through the lights as they are changing from yellow to red. We sometimes break God’s law by telling a “white” or “social” lie: for example, telling someone on the phone that they are not disturbing you when they really are. At the end of the day, read John 3:16–21. What did this experiment teach you about obedience?
- Listing 10 promises in which God states that He will be with us. With a friend, memorize one or two of these promises.
- Cutting out a large paper heart and writing on it all the things you can thank God for and the reasons why you love Him. Ask Him to help you obey His Word.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ.

Doug Batchelor, *Broken Chains* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 2004); William E. Richardson, *Fugitives* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 2005).

Audrey Andersson, Lindesberg, Sweden

lesson eleven

DECEMBER 4-11

The Widow of Zarephath: The Leap of **Faith**

“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”

(Phil. 1:6, NKJV).



original illustration by Bernardo Strozzi circa 1630

Heb. 11:1

Introduction

A Mother's Ultimate Test

In my imagination, I can see her just as I think she might have looked. I can hear her sweet voice, too, and the plaintive tones of her child.

"Mother, my tummy hurts." Tears seem close to the surface, although he won't let them fall. Instead, he stands close to his mother. She looks down at him with sorrow in her eyes as she notes again the pitifully thin arms and legs, the protruding stomach, the hollow cheeks.

"Did you have a little drink of water?" she asks.

She feels the child's small hand slip into hers.

The boy shakes his head slightly, moving closer to the woman as if for comfort. *It's been a long time since we had something to eat.* The thought is there, but he does not voice it.

The mother pushes her son slightly in the direction of the pitcher. "Have a sip or two, my son. It will ease your tummy ache, and then we will go out to find a few sticks of wood. I'm going to bake us each a cake of oil and flour. Won't that be nice?"

The child looks up eagerly. "Oh, yes, Mother. Let's go right now!"

"First a little water, son." As he moves slowly toward the pitcher in obedience, the woman gazes after him. *And then we'll die, my darling boy. Oh, if only your father had lived. Surely he would not have let us starve.* She shakes her dark curls before concealing them with the customary covering. *No, even your wonderful father could not have made grain grow during this famine. I should be grateful that he did not live to see his family suffer so.*

She feels the child's small hand slip into hers. She smiles at him as they go to the door, feeling the hot sun on their faces. *Our Father, she prays, I do not ask to understand Your ways. I only know that You love us. I thank You for Your care. Amen.* Smiling again at her eager son, she steps out in faith across the threshold.

And so the widow of Zarephath went out to do what she could, while placing her faith in her heavenly Father. She didn't know she would meet Elijah. She didn't know she would be called upon to prepare food for him before she would prepare it for her son. But one thing she did know. God was her Abba, her personal parent, and she placed her faith in Him. As you study this week's lesson, may such faith become yours.

Logos

A Widow's Heart

2 Kings 17:32;
Isa. 58:10, 11;
Matt. 10:40–42;
Luke 4:16–30

Believing in the Midst of Disbelief (2 Kings 17:32)

She was from Zarephath, a town referred to by the prophet Obadiah as a Canaanite town (Obad. 1:20). In New Testament times, Zarephath was called Sarepta. Most of the people of Zarephath worshiped a number of gods and goddesses in temples or “high places” (2 Kings 17:32) where religious rites included acts of vulgar immorality “centered around a worship of the fertility of man.”¹ How surprising then, that somehow she had heard of the God of Israel and had become a believer.

There was nothing left for them to do but wait to die.

The “Mosaic law offered protection to widows who were frequently exploited (Ps. 94:6; Isa. 1:23; Ezek. 22:7; Mal. 3:5).”² But in Zarephath, this widow most likely was looked upon with a superstition that must have plagued her life with hardship, loneliness, poverty, toil, and grief. She had suffered the loss of her husband and was therefore raising her young son alone. Despite all this, she was known for being willing to share what she had. And as she did so, she herself was blessed.

“No Greater Test” (Isa. 58:10, 11)

The widow had been in the habit of unselfishly ministering to the needs of others, even when it meant a personal sacrifice to herself and her son. However, on the day she met Elijah, she had come to the very last of her provisions. Once she and her son had eaten that last meal, there was nothing left for them to do but wait to die.

Imagine what must have gone through her mind, when out by the city gate, gathering sticks with which to build a fire so she could prepare their last meal, Elijah approaches and asks her for a glass of water as well as something to eat. When she told him her situation, he asked her to make his meal first, then make some for her and her son. He then promised that if she would follow his instructions, she would have meal and oil until the day the Lord sent rain upon the earth. “No greater test of faith than this could have been required.”³ Just over 100 years later, the prophet Isaiah wrote, “If you extend your soul to the hungry / And satisfy the afflicted soul, / Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, / And your darkness shall be as the noonday. / The Lord will guide you continually, / And satisfy your soul in drought, / And strengthen your bones; / You shall be like a watered garden, / And like a spring of water, whose waters do

not fail” (Isa. 58:10, 11, NKJV). Might he have been thinking of the widow of Zarephath when he penned these words?

Christ and the Widow of Zarephath (Matt. 10:40–42; Luke 4:16–30)

Christ said, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward” (Matt. 10:40–42, NRSV). Might Jesus have been thinking of the widow when He spoke these words?

We do know, however, that He was thinking of her at the very beginning of His public ministry when He preached in a synagogue in His hometown. Read about this event in Luke 4:16–30.

Jesus wanted the congregation to recognize their great need of healing and their need to be free from the bondage of sin. But as they came to the realization that this was “only” Joseph’s son who was speaking to them, their hearts, full of pride and self-righteousness, resisted the working of the Holy Spirit. Because they were afraid that He would uncover their secret sins, they comforted themselves in the thought that they were, after all, God’s chosen, special people. Jesus, however, so desperately wanted them to understand that it is not the amount of light that they had been exposed to, but the use they made of that light that is of consequence to God.

Like the people in the synagogue that day, we may have all the opportunities and privileges afforded us as Seventh-day Adventist Christians. But if we do not live according to the light we have, we are actually in a more precarious spiritual condition than those who do not share our beliefs but who are nevertheless living according to the light they have. That is because their hearts are in a condition to receive further light when presented to them. And that was the heart of the widow of Zarephath.

REACT

1. Do you open your home/apartment/dorm room to people who are in need of help? Or do you make excuses for not doing so?

2. Think about some of the people you know and what their needs are. What things can you begin to do for them that will make their lives a bit better? Decide which of these you will do, and plan on when you will do them.

3. How well do you live up to the light you have? Do you compare yourself with others and comfort yourself that you’re as good as they are?

4. If God were to send to you today a messenger with words of reproof, would you embrace the message or would you reject it? Why?

1. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Canaan.”

2. *Ibid.*, s.v. “Widow.”

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 130.

Testimony Living the Light

Rev. 1:17

“The Lord passed by the homes of Israel, and found a refuge for His servant in a heathen land, with a woman who did not belong to the chosen people. But this woman was favored because she had followed the light she had received, and her heart was open to the greater light that God sent her through His prophet.”¹

“No greater test of faith than this could have been required.”

“In this poverty-stricken home the famine pressed sore; and the pitifully meager fare seemed about to fail. The coming of Elijah on the very day when the widow feared that she must give up the struggle to sustain life, tested to the utmost her faith in the power of the living God to provide for her necessities. But even in her dire extremity, she bore witness of her faith in the presence of the stranger, who was now asking her to share her last morsel with him.”²

“No greater test of faith than this could have been required. The widow had hitherto treated all strangers with kindness and liberality. Now, regardless of the suffering that might result to herself and child, and trusting in the God of Israel to supply her every need, she met this supreme test of hospitality by doing ‘according to the saying of Elijah.’ ”³

“By the apostasy of Israel in Elijah’s day, Jesus illustrated the true state of the people whom he was addressing. The unbelief and self-exaltation of the ancient Jewish nation caused God to pass over the many widows in Israel, and the poor and afflicted there, to find an asylum for his servant among a heathen people, and to place him in the care of a heathen woman; but she who was thus especially favored had lived in strict accordance with the light she possessed.”⁴

REACT

1. Why should ministers and teachers work for hardhearted and unbelieving people? Is there ever a time when they should not? Explain.
2. How do we know that a person is favored by God?
3. What parts of our lives could cause God to pass over us and to favor unbelievers?
4. How is it possible to live according to the light that has been given us? How can we know what that light is?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 238.

2. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 28, 1913.

3. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 130, 131.

4. *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 113.

Luke 4:24-28

Evidence

A Single Parent's Nightmare

“Widows in Elijah’s culture were the marginal people. Having no one to care for them, they had to rely on the kindness of their community for food. They were in essence beggars, and in lean times they were the first people to starve.”*

This widow, a single parent, was trying to survive a three and a half year famine; but it had become clear to her that she and her son were going to starve. She was gathering sticks to prepare their last supper when Elijah asked

She explained her situation, but Elijah was firm.

her for some water and bread. She explained her situation, but Elijah was firm. “Prepare my bread first.” Even though she saw starvation in her future, she was being asked to give someone else her last bit of food. She may have wondered what type of person this man was, who would ask a mother to make such a sacrifice. But still she was hospitable, even in the face of possible death. God rewarded her with food until the drought broke.

Do you know a single parent who is quietly struggling to survive? Can you help in some way? Is this single parent needing someone to check the oil in her car or babysit for an evening so she can get some needed shopping done? Perhaps some help with church school tuition would be greatly appreciated. What is God calling you to do for His needy ones?

REACT

1. The widow was a single parent struggling to make ends meet. Today, in what ways would she be considered a failure? A success?
2. How was the widow different from those around her?
3. Imagine that you don’t have enough food to last the week. On the day you take your last apple to work, you meet a stranger who asks for your apple. What would you say and do? How would you feel?

*The Way of the Dream, “Elijah and the Widow,” <http://everydaybackroom.blogspot.com/2009/03/elijah-and-widow.html> (accessed September 9, 2009).

How-to The Blessing Factor

Job 42:5, 6

Even though the widow was not an Israelite, she lived up to the light that had been shown to her. Hers was a hospitable household where all were welcome. Her faith in God brought blessings to her and her family. What is our responsibility toward offering hospitality?

“You shall be like a watered garden.”

We can use our position in life to bless others. “Our heavenly Father still continues to place in the pathway of His children opportunities that are blessings in disguise; and those who improve these opportunities find great joy.”¹ Each day God places us in positions where we can show His love to others. We are to look for opportunities to show hospitality, to bring love and joy to others, and to ease their burdens. This brings glory to God.

Our homes and lives should be filled with the giving and loving qualities that made the widow's home appealing. God has promised blessings to those of us who help others who are more needy than we are. “To all who, in time of trial and want, give sympathy and assistance to others more needy, God has promised great blessing.”² Then we will bring sunshine into the lives of others, and God will shower us with blessings. “If you extend your soul to the hungry / And satisfy the afflicted soul, / Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, / And your darkness shall be as the noonday. / The Lord will guide you continually, / And satisfy your soul in drought, / And strengthen your bones; / You shall be like a watered garden, / And like a spring of water, / whose waters do not fail” (Isa. 58:10, 11, NKJV).

“No act of kindness shown in His name will fail to be recognized and rewarded. And in the same tender recognition Christ includes even the feeblest and lowliest of the family of God.”³

REACT

1. How can children be taught hospitality?
2. Think of times when we should not be hospitable.
3. If we are not hospitable, what can we do to learn this trait?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 132.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 132.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Opinion*The Widow's Story*

Though little is known of her, her kindness to others and her faith in a God unknown to her people is exemplary to those of us living today. As is often the case in the Bible when women are talked about, her name is not mentioned. In fact, many women in the Bible are referenced only in relation to their husband's name. However, this woman's husband had died. For our purposes then, I shall

Which one of them would die first? Would no one come to help?

call her Sarephtha. And here is her story.

As she stepped outside that morning, Sarephtha again felt the heat of the day. And again she searched the sky for signs of rain. There wasn't a cloud in sight. The sky was a sapphire blue, just as it had been for so long. She looked all about her at the devastating effect of the drought as she walked toward the edge of the city. There, parched and dried leaves gave evidence to the fact that the trees, too, were dying. Sarephtha had seen much death. Animals. Birds. So many had died from thirst. Now it seemed as though it were her turn. Would her death and that of her son be painful? Which one of them would die first? Would no one come to help? Would it ever rain again?

While deep in thought, she searched for kindling amongst the downed timber. It wasn't hard to find some that was dry. She gathered a bit that she would use to make the last bread she and her dear son would eat.

As she did so, the voice of a stranger interrupted her thoughts: "Kind woman, could you please bring me some water and make me some food?"

Startled, Sarephtha finally answered, "Yes, I will give you what my son and I were going to eat and drink before we die." When she returned to her kitchen, she was shocked to see that her supplies were ample. Then she remembered what else the man had said: "For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land'" (1 Kings 17:14, NIV).

REACT

How much faith do you have? Is your faith being stretched now? If so, what does the widow's response teach you?

Exploration

The Last Little Bits

1 Kings 17;
Luke 4:16–30

CONCLUDE

We don't know her name, but she played a simple yet surprising role in the prophet Elijah's life as he was seeking refuge from Israel's wicked King Ahab. She was a destitute and hungry widow with a son to feed, and she was getting ready to prepare her last little bit of flour and oil for their final meal when Elijah showed up. The faith she demonstrated when Elijah asked for all they had to eat was something even Jesus talked about many years later. But then, Jesus was—and still is—a connoisseur of faith.

CONSIDER

- Researching the numbers of impoverished and malnourished families in your community and creating a poster highlighting the work of local relief organizations.
- Examining the online gift catalogue for ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) at www.adra.org in order to find a project you and your class can help support.
- Experimenting with making bread using just flour, oil, and water. Ponder the differences and similarities between your bread-making circumstances and those of the widow of Zarephath.
- Cataloguing the gospel stories in which Jesus commented on the faith of various individuals.
- Recasting these stories of faith (or lack of faith) in modern times, and writing and producing a play for another Sabbath School class in your church that illustrates the deep interest Jesus has in the quality of our faith.
- Examining your home for its hospitality potential. What might you need to do to make it easier to take in emergency visitors?

CONNECT

Prophets and Kings, pp. 128–132; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 238, 239.

Gehazi: Missing the
Mark

*“It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must
revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold
fast to him” (Deut. 13:4, NIV).*



original illustration by Caspar Luiken

Introduction

Danger! Money Ahead!

2 Kings 5:20–27;
Acts 5:1–11;
1 Tim. 6:10

It seems that money and greed often go hand in hand, and that people's perceived or real need for money can cause them to do desperate things. When this week's lesson was written, many people were still reeling from a serious downturn in the world's economy. Because some people lost their jobs and houses, they robbed banks, turned their pets loose to fend for themselves, or in some extreme cases, killed themselves and even their families. In addition, many scam artists fooled people into thinking they could help them get out of the crushing debt they were in, only to leave them worse off than before.

He wanted to have it both ways.

The Bible does not leave us uninformed about the dangers of money and the greed it causes in some people. For the next six days, we will learn about Gehazi and how his greed for money ruined his life. He wanted to have it both ways—to be in the service of the Lord while conspiring how he could get rich without regard for God's way of handling things.

Instead of serving his master, Elisha, in an honorable way, Gehazi decided to pursue his own selfish desire. Unfortunately, he carried the miserable results of his greed to his grave.

The New Testament contains a similar story. While the characters and situation are quite different from 2 Kings 5:20–27, the motivation and outcome are the same. Read Acts 5:1–11.

As you study this week's lesson, consider the answers to the following questions. At the end of the week, see whether you would answer any of them differently.

1. What prompted Gehazi to open his heart to Satan?
2. Why did Naaman think he could purchase healing?
3. Both Gehazi and Ananias and Sapphira lied about what they had done. What does this teach us about the nature of greed?
4. In addition to greed, what other two sins did Ananias and Sapphira commit? (See Acts 5:3, 9.) What does this teach us about lying and greed in general?
5. Think about your own relationship to money, especially if you are experiencing financial difficulty. How might you be tempted to be like Gehazi, or like Ananias and Sapphira?

2 Kings 4; 5

Evidence *The Uncertain and Covetous Gehazi*

The inclination toward giving someone a meaningful name is a common practice today just as it was in biblical times. The name *Gehazi* is derived from a Hebrew word meaning “uncertain.”¹ And that is what Gehazi turned out to be.

When we first meet Gehazi in 2 Kings 4:1–37, he appears to be a principled servant whose kindness is unquestionable. In 2 Kings 4, Elisha asks of a childless Shunammite woman what he can do for her in return for her hospitality. At first, she declines by simply saying that she lived among her people (verse 13). This answer “conveys the idea that she was perfectly contented. She was living at peace with her own people and had no quarrels with neighbors, nor any

His attitude of compassion wavers as his love for money overcomes him.

matters that could not be settled with her friends.”² Next, Elisha asked Gehazi what they could do for her. Gehazi responded by saying, “‘Actually, she has no son, and her husband is old’ ” (verse 14, NKJV). Gehazi’s response was a sign of compassion and sympathy, which are traits the Holy Spirit helps a person to develop. Gehazi was essentially saying, “Have mercy on her.”

However, when we move on to 2 Kings 5, we read how Gehazi runs after Naaman with selfish intentions that lead to his downfall. His attitude of compassion wavers as his love for money overcomes him. When Naaman sees him, he steps down from his chariot and asks if everything is all right (2 Kings 5:21). Read the lie that Gehazi tells in verse 22. The unsuspecting Naaman was so thankful to have been healed that he gave Gehazi double what he asked for, plus two of his own servants to help carry the goods home.

When Gehazi does return home, he tells yet another lie. Read verses 24–27. Elisha’s final words to Gehazi pronounce a fatal sentence upon him as an example to us all of the dangers of greed and of the love of money.

REACT

1. What are some of the principles we often compromise because of our covetousness?
2. Examine your own life. Where do you see evidence of being merciful? Where do you see evidence that you can be greedy? What can you do about the latter?

1. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Gehazi.”

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 868.

Undiscerning the Sacred From the Common

2 Kings 4:1–37; 5; 8:1–6;
Jer. 9:23, 24;
John 13:1–17;
1 Tim. 6:10

Eyewitness (2 Kings 4:1–37; 8:1–6)

Often in the news, we hear about events from eyewitnesses. When reporters are on the scene after earthquakes, fires, terrorist attacks, horrible car accidents, and other tragic events, they look for people to interview who saw what happened or who personally experienced the event. Gehazi was an eyewitness to the miracles Elisha performed for people who were in dire situations. Thus, he

Christ's behavior stands in stark contrast to Gehazi's.

had the chance “to develop the spirit of self-denial characterizing his master’s lifework. It had been his privilege to become a noble standard-bearer in the army of the Lord. The best gifts of Heaven had long been within his reach.”¹

Lover of Money (Jer. 9:23, 24; 1 Tim. 6:10)

Even though Gehazi had been an eyewitness to the miracles that his master Elisha performed on behalf of God, “his avaricious spirit led him to yield to an overmastering temptation. ‘Behold,’ he reasoned within himself, ‘my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but . . . I will run after him’ ”² to take what Naaman offered.

To Gehazi, Naaman was nothing more than one of Israel’s enemies who led bands of thieving soldiers along Israel’s borders to steal from God’s people. So, of course, he wondered how Elisha could lower himself to heal Naaman without asking for anything in exchange. Was the prophet so stupid as to refuse money from such a man? Why would he heal Naaman’s leprosy, a heathen and an enemy of Israel, when some of God’s own people died of leprosy? Gehazi had no consideration for the fact that through this miracle, Naaman had come to accept the true God and would return to Syria as an eyewitness to tell his people about God’s love and care for all humanity.

“People who love money are controlled by a ruthless, insatiable master, for the love of money can never be satisfied. **Loving money is at the root of all kinds of evil:** marriage problems, illegal acts, blowups in partnerships, envy, immorality, lying, ruthlessness, stealing, and a willingness to even hurt others if it makes money. The worst scenario, of course, is that money would actually

lead a person **from the faith**. It's tragic when money replaces God in a person's life. These greedy people found themselves **pierced with many sorrows**. The picture is that they were being impaled by sharp objects that they continued to push against. Instead of God's way, they chose a path that was taking them deeper and deeper into a briar patch of trouble. Instead of the happiness they expected, money brought grief.³

"A false witness will not go unpunished, / and a liar will not escape" (Prov. 19:5, NRSV). And so it was with Gehazi. His grief came in the form of the very disease of which Naaman had been cured.

Christ, Our Example (John 13:1–17)

Throughout His life on earth, Jesus stands as our example in regard to humility and caring about the right things. Perhaps the best example occurred during the last Passover He spent with His disciples, when He stooped to wash their feet. This was an act normally performed by a servant of the household for those who had traveled on dusty roads. However, this time there was no servant, and none of the disciples offered to do the task. Christ's behavior stands in stark contrast to Gehazi's. As we walk the Christian walk, we ought to follow the example of our Lord. We should master His ways so we will not miss the mark like Gehazi did.

REACT

1. First Timothy 6:10 teaches us that the love of money is responsible for all evil. How have you seen this to be true in today's world? How is it true in your own life or in the life of someone you know?

2. Does 1 Timothy 6:10 mean that we should not be at all concerned about money? (Remember that it does not say that money itself "is the root of all evil.") Explain your answer.

3. Where else in God's Word does money play a major role? In each case you recall, what was the outcome?

4. How can Christ's words in Matthew 6:25–34 help us if we are tempted to covet money, especially when we are in need?

5. Read 2 Kings 5:15–19. Why didn't Elisha accept money from Naaman in exchange for healing him?

6. How can paying tithe help us not to love money? What does paying tithe teach us about God? What does it tell the rest of the world about us and our loving God? (1 Cor. 9:8–16; Mal. 3:6–12).

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 250.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary*, 1 Timothy 6:10, WORDsearch7.

Testimony

The Tangled Web of Sinning

2 Kings 5:20-27

“It is seldom that one sin will stand alone or be restricted in the range of transgression to one precept or one prohibition of the moral law. There is ever a complication of disobedience, which leads the perverted conscience to a greater length of entanglement by entering to greater temptations and sinning more and more. . . .

“The Lord calls upon you to seek His counsel.”

“The heart not given entirely to the control of Jesus Christ has a door open for Satan to enter, and the archdeceiver weaves about the soul ingenious apologies in performing its hidden purposes of evil. All these excuses and pretensions are seen of God, and are as spiderwebs in the eyes of Him who never slumbers or sleeps. Oh, how readily will the human soul find poor and wretched excuses to deceive and cover up its own course of evil, which it pursues. There is an exact judge who weigheth actions. He cannot be deceived, neither can He be mocked. He will one day strike off the covering, unveil the conscience, and sweep away these excuses as smoke.

“The Lord God hath a witness to every transaction. Elisha’s reproof to Gehazi when he denied having left to follow Naaman was: ‘Whence comest thou, Gehazi?’ The answer is ‘Thy servant went no whither.’ Then the stern reproof came that showed he knew all. ‘Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever.’ The Lord had revealed the whole matter. The interview with Naaman, the minutest incidents of the scene, was accurately presented before him. Oh, the workings of the powers of darkness are so deceiving!

“Elisha revealed to Gehazi the very thoughts of his heart, and that he would enrich himself with the earthly treasure from Naaman. There was a man who should have been a standard-bearer in the army of the Lord, [but] through Satan’s temptations his course of action was a stumbling block to Naaman, upon whose mind a wonderful light had broken and he was favorably disposed toward truth, to serve the living God. Gehazi went from his presence a leper. The Lord calls upon you to seek His counsel, to be true to your own soul and to God, and to seek most earnestly to recover yourself and your children from Satan’s snares.”*

* *Christ Triumphant*, p. 171.

Matt. 22:1-13

How-to Missing the Mark

One of the definitions of sin is “to miss the mark.”¹ This week, we have been studying about how Gehazi missed the mark. Several other stories in the Bible show us how other people also have missed the mark.

“The whole heart must be yielded to God.”

In the parable of the marriage feast, Jesus presents a practical example of how not to miss the mark. The wedding garments people were supposed to wear when they attended a wedding symbolize the righteousness we need to enter God’s kingdom. However, we need to actually put on the garment of righteousness. We do this as the Holy Spirit transforms our characters into the image of God’s character. The man who came to the wedding feast without wearing the garment provided for him symbolizes those people who do not really accept Christ’s righteousness as their own. This man missed the mark, and so do we if we fail to accept Christ’s righteousness on our behalf.

How can we be sure we do not miss the mark? Following are some suggestions:

Recognize our need of Christ (John 3:3; Rom. 7:16). We cannot make ourselves good. We must, as John the Baptist said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, NKJV).

Repent (Acts 3:19). Repentance means that we are sorry for our sins and that we turn away from them. The prayer that David wrote in Psalm 51 after his fall illustrates the nature of true sorrow for sin. Take time to read it now.

Confess (Prov. 28:13). God can forgive us only if we confess our sins and turn away from them. We are to confess our sins both to God and to those whom we have sinned against.

Consecrate (Prov. 23:26). We must set apart for God all that we are and all that we have. “The whole heart must be yielded to God, or the change can never be wrought in us by which we are to be restored to His likeness.”²

Grow (John 15:1-8; 1 Pet. 2:2). “In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.”³

1. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, s.v., “Sin.”

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 43.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Opinion

The Harvest of Greediness

1 Tim. 6:10

Because of his greed, Gehazi found himself in a terrible situation. His story teaches us the truth of 1 Timothy 6:10, that the love of money is the root of all evil. We also can learn from Gehazi that the company we keep does not necessarily protect us from the evil that lies within us. Elisha was one of God's great prophets. Yet it seems that Gehazi did not allow Elisha's example to affect him when it came to his insatiable desire for money.

Evil thoughts lead to evil words and deeds.

This desire made Gehazi a liar. But as he discovered, God is not pleased with a deceptive tongue. The Bible teaches that we shall reap what we plant, so when Gehazi lied to both Naaman and Elisha, he discovered that he himself had received the disease from which Naaman had been cured. What comes out of our mouths is what comes from our hearts. Evil thoughts lead to evil words and deeds.

"Until the day of trial comes, how little men know of their own weakness. They think themselves wise, and make themselves fools. There is nothing that men may pride themselves in. Even those in most responsible positions do fall into sin, while apparently surrounded by the best religious privileges. Gehazi's case is one that we may consider with profit. This man dwelt in the household of the holy prophet Elisha, saw his godly life, heard his fervent prayers, and his inculcation of correct principles. Yet he was not made better. He deceived Naaman in order to receive a reward. His punishment came from the Lord. The leprosy of Naaman clave unto him.

"Judas was numbered among the twelve apostles. He heard the precious lessons that fall from the lips of Christ. He had a perfect example ever before him, and yet his heart was not right. He was ruined by the sin of covetousness. 'They that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.'"^{*}

REACT

1. What privileges do you have that could help you to be a better Christian?
2. How can you make the best use of those privileges?
3. Think of a trial you experienced that showed you an area of weakness you didn't know you had. How did you handle it? Is there anything you would have done differently?

^{*}*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1529.

2 Kings 4:8–37; 5;
 Matt. 26:14–16;
 27:3–10;
 Mark 14:10, 11;
 Luke 22:3–6;
 John 12:4–6; 17:12;
 Acts 5:1–10

Exploration

Don't Get the Gimmies!

CONCLUDE

Gehazi was given the opportunity to assist Elisha in his ministry. He spent time with Elisha. He witnessed the miracles that God performed through Elisha. He had a front-row seat to observing God's grace and benevolence to sinful human beings. In spite of all this, Gehazi's fall centered around material goods. In today's world, it is easy to become focused on having "stuff" rather than having a growing friendship with Jesus. Our joy should be found in Jesus and not in things.

CONSIDER

- Purging your personal belongings to find things you can sell on eBay or Craigslist. Use the proceeds to give a gift from ADRA's *The Original Really Useful Gift Catalogue*, available at www.adra.org.
- Reading Gehazi's story in *Prophets and Kings*, "Naaman," chapter 20. What insights did you learn? Why was Gehazi punished by developing leprosy? What do you think this signifies?
- Graphing comparisons of the stories of Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira, and Judas Iscariot. How many of their actions were similar? What was the outcome in each story? In what ways were the results of their actions the same? Different?
- Writing a modern parable about a person who makes financial choices that only benefit him/herself. Through word pictures, show the consequences of making these types of choices.
- Analyzing the behavior of Gehazi recorded in 2 Kings 4:8–37. Contrast his actions to Elisha's instructions in this story to what he did, recorded in 2 Kings 5. Think about what might have caused such different types of reactions to Elisha's commands.
- Interviewing a Christian financial planner. Discover how Christians can best budget their income in order to tithe, contribute to missions and spiritual outreach projects, and still have enough to pay personal bills.

CONNECT

Prophets and Kings, pp. 238, 239 and 250–252; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 336; *Counsels on Stewardship*, "The Principles of Stewardship," pp. 111–113.

lesson thirteen

DECEMBER 18-25

Baruch: Building a Legacy in a Crumbling World

"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"

(Isa. 8:20, NKJV).



*original illustration
by Johann Christoph Weigel
circa 1695*

Matt. 6:25–34

Introduction

And the Winner Is! . . .

It happens to most of us in some form or another at some point in our lives. As we're standing in the shower, waiting in traffic, or sitting at our desk, we daydream about being in front of a crowd, accepting an award, and thanking all those people who helped us achieve such greatness.

The same thing happens within the Christian community. We have our “celebrity” pastors, evangelists, and recording artists whom we admire without giving much thought to the people who provide them with the support necessary to do what they do. We even find such situations in the Bible. Whenever I read about Noah, for instance, I think about how he could not have built that ark and preached about the coming flood without a great deal of support.

Each of us has a God-given gift that can be used to further His mission on earth.

Each of us has a God-given gift that can be used to further His mission on earth, but that gift doesn't have to be a great singing voice or the ability to preach a compelling sermon. Maybe your gift is making somebody who's never been to church before feel welcome with a handshake and a smile, or maybe it's as simple as being faithful in paying your tithe so it can be used to continue His work where He directs it.

The challenge for each of us is this: Once we've identified our gift, can we put aside our pride if it's not what we “dreamed” it would be? Or can we put aside our fear if it's something we dread doing and then step into the role God has chosen for each one of us?

During this last week of the quarter, we will study about Baruch, a man who we might say stood in the shadows of the prophet Jeremiah. We will learn about his crushing disappointment, how that disappointment made him feel, and how God helped him to overcome it. As you study about this man, consider how God has called you, and whether or not you feel called to a supportive or leadership role in ministry. And remember that no matter what role God has in mind for you, if you accept it, you will be a winner.

Logos
*Faith in a Crumbling
World*

Isa. 53:1–5;
Jer. 7:1–11; 28; 45;
Matt. 6:25–34; 7:14

The Difficult Path (Isa. 53:1–5; Matt. 7:14)

“Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life” (Matt. 7:14, NKJV). Few know the truth of Jesus’ words better than Baruch, son of Neriah. As scribe, personal assistant, and close friend to Jeremiah the prophet, Baruch shared the hardships, persecution, rejection, and heartache that the prophet himself endured. When Jeremiah was thrown into prison, Baruch was with him every day, faithfully transcribing by hand the prophet’s visions and delivering them to a people who didn’t want to hear God’s warning and reproof. The king himself shredded the only copy of Baruch’s transcription. We can only imagine

We live in a time of conflicting messages and false prophets.

the heartbreak he must have felt upon seeing God’s word rejected and countless hours of work go up in smoke.

It’s never easy to tell people what they don’t want to hear, because ingrained in the sinful nature of humans is the tendency to despise those who point out wrongdoing. Following God automatically puts us at odds with the sinful nature of the world. The good news is that we don’t have to do it alone! Isaiah 53:1–5 describes Jesus as “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” who though rejected, took the punishment we deserved so that “by His stripes we are healed” (NKJV). We can rest assured that Jesus understands the hardships we are going through, and though He calls us to walk a path filled with difficulty, He is with us every step of the way.

Truth in the Face of Lies (Jer. 7:1–11; 28)

Jeremiah 7:1–11 gives us a glimpse of the crumbling morality of the society in which he lived. Though people still professed to follow God, their actions showed the true state of their hearts. In Jeremiah 7:9, 10, God Himself asks, “Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’—safe to do all these detestable things?” (NIV). The mentality that God would deliver them from their enemies without any change or sign of repentance was encouraged by a seemingly endless profusion of false prophets, spreading the lie that God would defend His people regardless of their sinful behavior and lack of faithfulness. “Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit” (verse 8). These false

prophets stood in direct opposition to the efforts of Jeremiah and Baruch to bring God's warning message to the people.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of the conflict between Jeremiah and a false prophet are found in Jeremiah 28. In front of the priests and a large crowd of people, Hananiah directly contradicts Jeremiah's prophecy. As Jeremiah's right-hand man, Baruch must have witnessed the event, and we can only imagine his reaction. It must have been difficult to stand by and watch Jeremiah publicly humiliated. Because we have the entire story, we know that Hananiah was a false prophet who paid for his lies with his life. But at that very moment, a flicker of doubt must have passed through Baruch's mind, and the temptation to join the popular side must have been fairly overwhelming. It's a testament to the strength of Baruch's character and the depth of his relationship with God that he stayed by Jeremiah's side.

Like Baruch, we live in a time of conflicting messages and false prophets. It's not enough to claim to follow Christ while living just as we always have. Unless we are completely connected to God, we won't be able to discern His will for our lives from all the false messages that constantly bombard us.

The Promise of Life (Jeremiah 45; Matt. 6:25–34)

Jeremiah 45 is a personal message from God to the scribe who remained faithful despite the seemingly endless hardships he endured with the prophet. Even the most faithful of people at times feel the crushing weight of the world on their shoulders, and in a moment of anguish, Baruch cries out to the Lord (verse 3). In the midst of world events that are unfolding at that time, the God of the universe hears and answers the heartbroken cry of one seemingly unimportant scribe! He lets Baruch know that He is in control and promises to preserve his life wherever he goes. God's message to Baruch beautifully illustrates how He cares about us as individuals. He is a God who knows the pain and suffering we are going through and who has been by our side the entire time.

In Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus tells us not to worry about what we'll eat, drink, or wear. If God cares about the tiniest bird and clothes the fields in flowers more beautiful than the most expensive garments, then why do we have such trouble trusting that He will provide us with the things we need? "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (verse 33, NKJV). We serve a God who knows our needs and cares about us as individuals. Like Baruch, we can rest assured that God will preserve and care for us wherever we go, if we will but trust Him.

REACT

1. What are the distractions in your life that keep you from fully hearing God's still small voice?
2. Compare and contrast the time when Baruch lived to the world we live in today. In what ways is it similar? Different?

Testimony *Remaining Faithful to God's Word*

Jer. 36:3

Baruch's faith was manifested by his deeds. Notice in Jeremiah 36 that each time Baruch's name is mentioned, he is doing something. We find him *writing* (verse 4), *doing all that Jeremiah commanded* (verse 8), *reading* (verse 10), and *rewriting* the words Jeremiah spoke (verse 32). The intent of the scrolls Baruch transcribed was to bring a rebellious nation to God. "It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (Jer. 36:3, NRSV). God's desire is the same today: that sinners may hear His

"The burning of the roll was not the end of the matter."

voice, turn from their sins, and be saved. But because he lived among rebellious people (Jer. 43:3), Baruch became discouraged (Jer. 45:3). However, God noticed his faithfulness (Jer. 45:5).

We also live among rebellious people. Each person to whom we hold forth the word of truth has a choice of whether to accept it and live or to turn from truth and perish. The Spirit of Prophecy declares, "Many now despise the faithful reproof given of God in testimony. . . . To defy the words of the Lord, spoken through His chosen instruments, will only provoke His anger and eventually bring certain ruin upon the offender. Indignation often kindles in the heart of the sinner against the agent whom God chooses to deliver His reproofs. It has ever been thus, and the same spirit exists today that persecuted and imprisoned Jeremiah for obeying the word of the Lord."¹

"The burning of the roll was not the end of the matter. [Jeremiah and Baruch obeyed God and rewrote the scroll. We are not to value our worth by how others respond to God's word that we proclaim. We must simply obey God's leading.] The written words were more easily disposed of than the reproof and warning they contained and the swift-coming punishment God had pronounced against rebellious Israel. . . . The record of the prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem had been reduced to ashes; but the words were still living in the heart of Jeremiah, 'as a burning fire,' and the prophet was permitted to reproduce that which the wrath of man would fain have destroyed."²

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 678.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 436, 437.

Jeremiah 7:1–11;
36; 43; 45

Evidence *Faith in the Midst of Apostasy*

The book of Jeremiah was written during a period of national apostasy. The children of Israel had hardened their hearts toward the Lord, and captivity was to be anticipated not as a form of punishment but as remedial discipline so that God would be able to carry out His plans for His people. It was during this time that Jeremiah was called as a young man to appeal to Israel on behalf of the Lord (Jer. 1:6–8; 7:1–11).

The task was difficult and dangerous.

During the 40 years that Jeremiah worked with the children of Israel, he experienced a short period of spiritual awakening among the people under the leadership of King Josiah. The four kings that followed Josiah ignored his warnings and led the people further away from God. Though Jeremiah's message was met with antagonism and apathy, his scribe Baruch remained faithful to the message, as did Jeremiah. Baruch's task as a scribe was to write down Jeremiah's words of prophecy as they were dictated to him by the prophet.

During the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah asked Baruch to write the words of prophecy given to him by God and to read them in the temple of Jerusalem on a day of fasting (Jer. 36:1–20). Though the task was difficult and dangerous, Baruch did what was asked of him. When the king got hold of the scrolls, he tore them up and burned them. Jeremiah and Baruch had to escape and hide (Jer. 36:21–26). While hiding, Jeremiah redictated the prophecies (Jer. 36:27–32). It was during this tough task of rewriting that Baruch became discouraged and the Lord sent a special messenger to encourage him (Jeremiah 45).

During Zedekiah's reign, Baruch and Jeremiah witnessed the fall of Jerusalem into the hands of the Babylonians in 586 B.C. After this, Baruch remained with Jeremiah, who was granted freedom. They lived with remnant Jews under the leadership of Gedaliah in Mizpah. Later, this remnant was forced into exile, and Jeremiah and Baruch were forced to go with them to Egypt (Jer. 43:1–7). During his lifetime, Baruch experienced rejection, hardship, war, and exile. Yet he remained faithful to God's word and God's prophet.*

REACT

1. How can we remain faithful to God when the world and society around us are not?
2. What trials have you faced because of your dedication to God's Word?

* *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 343–539.

How-to Putting God First in a Me-First World

Matt. 6:25-34

As humans, when we are faced with a problem, we often resort to solutions that we have devised rather than relying on God. This is what Israel did. Rather than relying on Him, they turned to their idols that they could see and touch. Today, we seem to give human circumstances more power than that we give God. The result is ultimately idolatry. We begin to trust in human accomplishments, money, or circumstances as the solution. Then, when God calls us to do something, we reason that we can't because we don't have the money or the circumstances aren't just right. We know that it's not easy to cast our burdens on the Lord and to trust Him to meet our needs. So what can we do when we're apprehensive, uneasy, and worried? Here are a few steps to follow:

What is the most important thing in your life?

Trust in God. We can trust Him when we walk with Him daily through prayer and Bible study. When we spend time with friends, we learn to trust them. So it is with God.

Seek advice from a Spirit-filled leader. Choose a trustworthy mentor with whom you can share your experience. Allow that leader to instill confidence and hope in you through God's grace.

Keep things in perspective by prioritizing your life. What is the most important thing in your life? Where would God come if you were to write a list? If He's at the bottom of the list, make Him first.

Get into the habit of seeking God. We often tend to forget all about Him once an issue is resolved. Develop a habit of coming to Him regularly to ask for guidance and wisdom and to praise Him.

One of the biggest problems we face today is the disconnection between knowledge and application. We know that we should do something, but we don't seem to do it. We know that we should not do something else, but we do it anyway. We simply need to step out in faith, knowing we are unable, trusting that God will supply the rest. Just as the priests crossing over into the Jordan River had to take the first step in faith before God supplied a dry path, so we must trust God to supply us with the strength to take one step at a time.

REACT

What do you sometimes look to in order to solve your problems, rather than looking to God?

Jill Manoukian, Avon, Indiana, U.S.A.

Isa. 41:10

Opinion
Stand Tall!

During the Aussie winter of 1988, I and a group of guys from Avondale College in Cooranbong decided to play with the Wyong Magpies, a struggling

God tells us to get up, that He will give us strength.

Australian Rules football team. I particularly remember the day we played the Terrigal Tigers. Just before that game, we had played a hard-fought win against their reserve grade team. As exhausted as we were, 15 of us (instead of a fresh 18) had to play the next game, which was the main event against the best team in the competition.

The result? We lost! No shocker there, but it was the way we lost that really stood out. It was like a professional team coming in and taking on a bunch of babies. We even made national news as the team with the greatest defeat in Australian Rules football history—472 to 0. The ball never even made it into our offensive half of the field. It wasn't for lack of trying—or wishing. It was an impossible task against an impressive opponent. We were embarrassed, but had nowhere to hide!

Nice story you say, but what relevance does this have for me today? Well, life beats us down, and we get embarrassed. If we get knocked down enough, we just lie there, thinking that this might be the place to stay. That's how Baruch must have felt when the scrolls he wrote for Jeremiah were destroyed. But then God tells us to get up, that He will give us strength. What helps us in these tough situations? Knowing that the battle has already been won, that because Jesus died for us, we don't have to pay the penalty, because He paid it for us.

Isaiah said it best when he reminded us where our strength comes from: "Fear not, for I am with you; / be not dismayed, for I am your God. / I will strengthen you, / Yes, I will help you, / I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10, NKJV).

Never forget that no matter how weak you feel, God has the strength you need when you need it; but it's up to you to call on Him!

REACT

1. What area of your life do you need to give up on and let God take over?
2. What steps will you take today to make that happen?

Exploration

Behind the Scenes and Faithful

Jeremiah 45

CONCLUDE

Baruch the scribe is a Bible character behind the scenes. He is a loyal companion and aid/scribe to Jeremiah the prophet. We know that he was a faithful friend to Jeremiah and a devoted servant of the Lord. What is it like for us? When we are out of view behind the scenes, are we faithful? How often are we willing to be the “behind the scenes” participants?

CONSIDER

- Interviewing someone who “works behind the scenes.” What type of temperament does this person have? Is there a temperament that suits itself better for such work? If so, describe that temperament.
- Creating a play list on an MP3 player about the theme of loyalty or faithfulness. (You don’t have an MP3 player? Search your CDs or online libraries instead.)
- Imagining what it was like to be a scribe. Try taking dictation from a friend or writing for two or three minutes from a political speech being given on TV.
- Sending a handcrafted thank-you card to two “behind the scenes” people—one in your church and the other in your circle of friends. Tell them specifically why you appreciate them.
- Interviewing three secretaries to find out what they like best about being assistants. Ask them to rank their list.
- Writing a song or poem that embodies the best qualities of Baruch.

CONNECT

Jeremiah 7:1–11; 28.

Prophets and Kings, chapter 35.

Read about Old Testament scribes at <http://digitalsurvivors.com/archives/scribeswritingoldtestament.php>. Read more about Baruch at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baruch_ben_Neriaah.

Understanding Our Emotions

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 2011, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 Emotions

Logos: 2 Samuel 13; Luke 19:41–44; John 16:20–24; Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:12–14.

Memory Verse: “I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy” (John 16:20, NIV).

Emotions are a vital part of the human personality. They can be powerful motivators, both for good or for evil. And, depending on the emotions, they make us happy, sad, fearful, or joyous.

Positive emotions can bring a feeling of satisfaction and well being; negative ones tend to cause pain and anguish. Though the first ones can promote mental health, a prolonged exposure to negative emotions may bring about behavioral and relational problems. Thus, emotions can play an important part in our overall well-being.

God wants us to enjoy the effects of positive emotions. However, because of sin, we often face the adverse effects of negative emotional experiences. Bible characters were not immune to emotional ups and downs, either. Some succeeded in gaining control over them; others, losing control, allowed negative emotions to lead them into wrong actions.

The relationship between emotions and behavior is not clear and direct. At times, painful emotions may drive us to our knees in order to seek God as the ultimate source of help and support. Other times, struggles may cause people to give up.

How crucial, then, that we learn more about our emotions and how they impact our lives.

Lesson 2 Divine Provision for Anxiety

Logos: Gen. 3:6–10; 15:1–3; Matt. 6:25–34; 18:3; John 14:1, 2; Phil. 4:11, 12.

Memory Verse: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7, NIV).

Scripture is filled with verses containing words such as *afraid*, *anxiety*, *anxious*, *fret*, *frightened*, and *terrified*. Many references have to do with what people are

anxious and fearful about; others with the promises of divine reassurance to those who are fearful or anxious. The message "Do not be afraid" runs across Scripture with strength and persistence.

And why not? After all, fear and anxiety have been part of human existence since sin entered this earth. Anxiety, or fear about what may happen, is one of the most dangerous emotions for mental and physical health. A medieval legend tells of the traveler who one night met Fear and Plague on his way to London, where he expected to kill 10,000 people. The traveler asked Plague if he would do all the killing. "Oh, no," Plague answered. "I shall kill only a few hundred. My friend, Fear, will kill the rest."

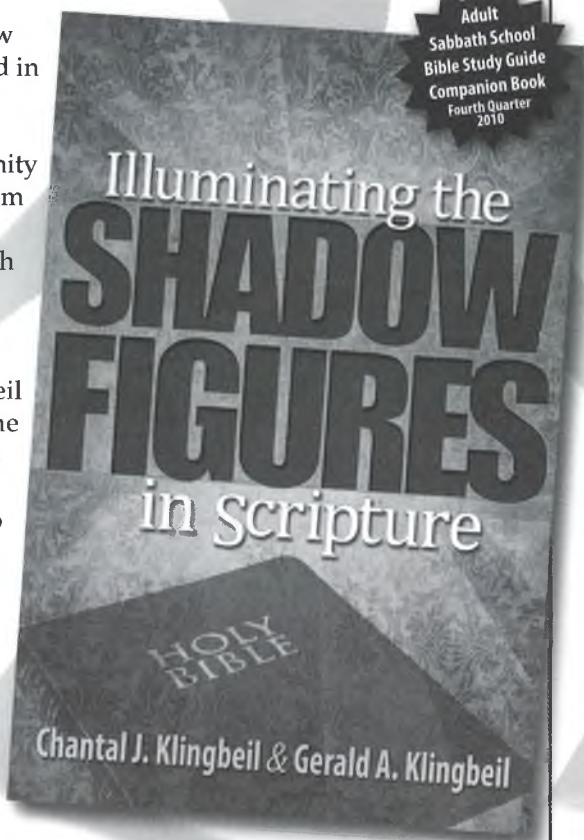
This week's lesson is about how, through divine power, we can have some relief from fear and anxiety. Trust in God and contentment are key factors in looking at the future with confidence.

Pacific Press® Publishing Association
P. O. Box 5353
Nampa, ID 83653-5353 U.S.A.

UNIMPORTANT?

Not according to God.

Except for a few words recorded in Scripture, they lived out their lives in anonymity—we know them only through association with someone “important.” Chantal and Gerald Klingbeil shed light on the lives and times of a few minor characters who each played a major role in God’s overarching plan. 978-0-8280-2509-6. US\$12.99



R REVIEW AND HERALD®
PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION
Since 1881 www.reviewandherald.com

3
WAYS
TO
SHOP

• Visit your local Adventist Book Center®
• Call toll-free 1-800-765-6955
• Order online at AdventistBookCenter.com

Prior and availability subject to change. Canadian prices higher.

On a good day life in Haiti is hard. In this, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, the majority of people live below the poverty level.

But when the 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit the island nation last January, it destroyed homes and churches, schools and hospitals. Thousands died, including hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists. Aid agencies, including ADRA International® rushed needed aid to the island nation, aid that meant the difference between life and death.

Now it's our turn to help our brothers and sisters in Haiti—all 300,000 of them—start rebuilding their lives and their faith. In an unprecedented move, the General Conference and the Inter-American Division have chosen to use this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Special Project Offering to help rebuild the Adventist Church in some of the hardest hit areas of Haiti.

I'm glad my church cares. I'm glad I can help. For me it's personal.



ADVENTIST
MISSION

www.AdventistMission.org



ECQ101001