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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

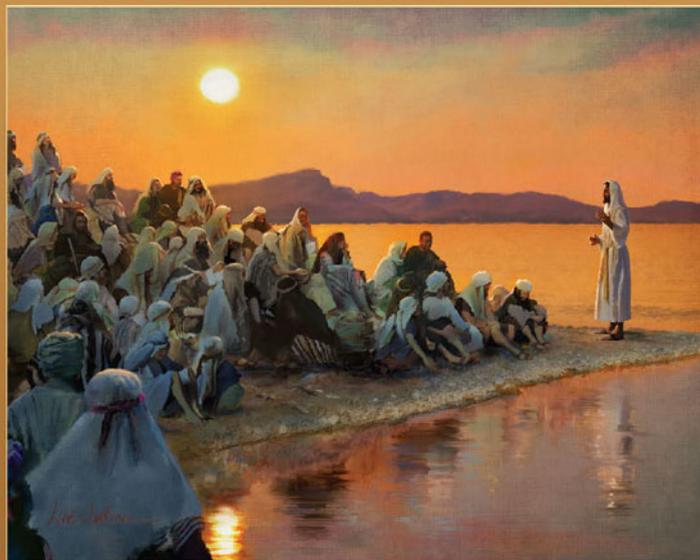
THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

July • Aug • Sept 2014

Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide

July | Aug | Sept 2014

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS



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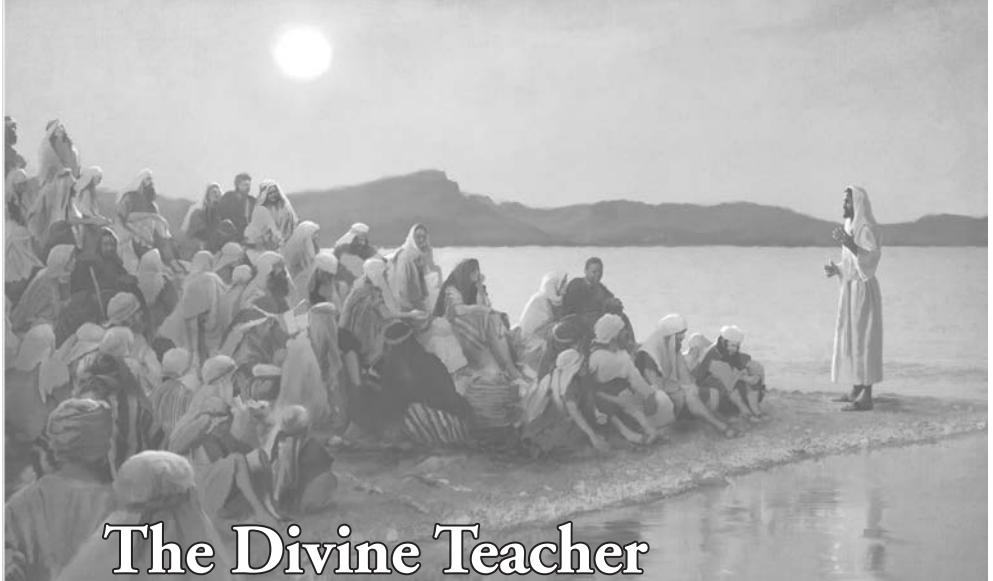
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The Divine Teacher

Most of us probably remember a great teacher who made an impact on our lives, whom we admired and appreciated. Some teachers transcend their own times and continue to influence subsequent generations. Outstanding teachers have decisively impacted life and thought and are often universally recognized. Jesus, of course, was the greatest Teacher of all.

His contemporaries acknowledged Him as a Teacher, for He exhibited the general characteristics of a first-century rabbi. As was the practice, He would sit down to teach. He often quoted the Scriptures and then commented on them. Finally, Jesus had a group of disciples who attentively listened to His words and followed and served Him. These were the basic attributes of teachers in His time and place.

Fundamental differences between Jesus and the other teachers, however, did exist. While the latter concentrated mostly on the intellectual aspects of a subject, Jesus addressed the whole being of His audience and invited them to make a decision in favor of God. Besides, those who heard Jesus “were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (*Mark 1:22, NKJV*). Christ’s authority gained credibility by the fact that He practiced what He taught. But above all, the source of His authority was His own Person. Jesus taught the truth, because He is “the Truth.” As God incarnated, He said, “Thus says the LORD,” yet would then later add, “but I say to you.”

This quarter we will study some of the main teachings of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels. Our Savior taught many things pertaining to our spiritual and practical lives. He presented His teachings to different audiences, being careful to adapt His method to each person. Sometimes He preached a sermon; other times He dialogued with individuals or with groups. Sometimes He spoke openly; other times He had to conceal the meaning of His words. In every case, however, He taught truth about God and salvation.

There could be many ways to organize and expound the teachings of Jesus. It would be possible, for example, to study His parables or to analyze His various sermons. Another approach would be to consider His dialogues with individuals or groups and His discussions with His opponents. Likewise, it would be interesting to focus on His deeds, His attitudes, and His miracles, which were ways He also used to teach important lessons. Each approach would be fruitful, but in order to grasp a comprehensive picture of Jesus' teachings, this quarter's lesson study will combine several approaches. It will come at His teachings more systematically, gathering how Jesus taught particular topics on different occasions and in different ways, which will give us a good understanding of most of His teachings.

When we open the Scriptures this quarter and read Jesus' words, let us picture ourselves among His attentive listeners at the mountainside, by the sea, or in the synagogue. Let us pray for spiritual discernment to understand His message and to grasp His unfathomable love manifested on the cross. And as we hear His tender voice calling us to follow Him, let us renew our commitment to walk daily with Him by faith and in obedience. The more we spend time at His feet, the more we will say, as did the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us . . . and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32, NKJV).

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Our Savior taught many things pertaining to our spiritual and practical lives. . . . In every case, however, He taught truth about God and salvation.

MISSION to the CITIES

Mission to the Cities is an emphasis of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on sharing Jesus' love and the hope of His soon return with people in urban settings. It envisions initiatives in more than 650 of the world's largest cities, starting with New York City in 2013 and running through 2015. Comprehensive outreach activities will be as varied as the character of each city, and will include Life Hope Centers, church planting, community events, health seminars, small groups, and reaping campaigns.

Please be praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Mission to the Cities:

- For the church members and church leaders working in these cities
- For the people yet to be reached with the Gospel
- For the world divisions and unions to develop strategies for reaching the large cities in their territories
- For the thousands of outreach activities and reaping events currently taking place
- For the strongholds of Satan to be broken, and relationships with Christ to be established

For a list of cities and to join in praying for them, go to:

www.MissiontotheCities.org and www.RevivalandReformation.org/777



READY AND WAITING



Reaching across the countries of the former Soviet Union, Adventists in the Euro-Asia Division face the challenges of postmodern secularism in some places and intolerance of religious minorities in others. But in the heart of Tatarstan, a golden opportunity awaits—to build a Seventh-day Adventist church in the city center of Kazan, where Christians and Muslims dwell peaceably side by side. In the city of Minsk, Belarus, Adventists are eager to meet the needs of their community through a Center of Influence. In

Ukraine, children long for a Christ-centered, Adventist education. We can help with this and more by supporting this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Please give liberally to help our brothers and sisters, and to provide ways to reach those who are ready and waiting to hear the wonderful message we have to share!

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Our Loving Heavenly Father



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 7:9–11, John 14:8–10, Luke 15:11–24, Matt. 6:25–34, Heb. 9:14.*

Memory Text: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1, NKJV).

Jesus delighted to speak of God as the Father. According to the Gospels, Jesus applied the name Father to God more than one hundred thirty times. On various occasions, He added adjectives: “‘heavenly Father’” (*Matt. 6:14, NKJV*), “‘living Father’” (*John 6:57, NKJV*), “‘Holy Father’” (*John 17:11, NKJV*), and “‘righteous Father’” (*vs. 25, NKJV*). The name describes the intimate bond that should unite us to our Lord.

Traditionally, a “father” provides love, protection, security, sustenance, and identity for a family. A father gives a name to the family and keeps its members together. We can enjoy these and many other benefits when we accept God as our heavenly Father.

Though it is so essential for us to know the Father, our aim should not be just intellectual and theoretical knowledge. In the Bible, to know someone means to have a personal, intimate relationship with him or her. How much more so with our heavenly Father?

This week we will explore what Jesus taught about our Father and about His infinite love for us. We will look, too, at the close relationship of the Father with the Son and with the Holy Spirit.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 5.

Our Father in Heaven

Father was not a new name for God. The Old Testament sometimes presented Him as our Father (*Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; Ps. 103:13*). However, it was not the most used name for Him. For Israel, the personal name of God was YHWH (probably pronounced Yahweh), which appears more than six thousand eight hundred times in the Old Testament. Jesus did not come to reveal a different God from YHWH. Rather, His mission was to complete the revelation that God had made of Himself in the Old Testament. In doing so, He presented God as our heavenly Father.

Jesus made clear that the Father is “in heaven.” It is important to remember this truth in order to have the right attitude toward God. We have a loving Father who is concerned with the needs of His children. At the same time, we recognize that this caring Father is “in heaven,” where millions of angels worship Him because He is the only Sovereign of the universe, holy and omnipotent. The fact that He is our Father invites us to approach Him with the confidence of a child. On the other hand, the truth that He is in heaven reminds us of His transcendence and the need to worship Him with reverence. To emphasize one of these aspects at the expense of the other would lead us to a distorted concept of God, with far-reaching consequences for our practical, daily lives.

Read Matthew 7:9–11. What does it tell us about how a human father can reflect the character of our heavenly One?

Not everyone has had a loving, caring father. For various reasons, some may not even have known their father. Therefore, for them to call God “my Father” may have little, if any, meaning. However, all of us have an idea of what a good earthly father would be. Besides, we may have known some people who did portray the characteristics of a good father.

We know that human fathers are far from perfect, but we also know that most fathers love their children and, in spite of their shortcomings, they try to give them the best they can. Imagine, then, what our Father in heaven can do for us.

What does it mean for you, personally, to address God as your heavenly Father? What should it mean to you?

Revealed by the Son

Talking about the Father, John says: “No one has ever seen God” (*John 1:18, NIV*). Since the fall of Adam and Eve, sin has hindered us from knowing God. Moses wanted to see God, but the Lord explained to him: “ ‘You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live’ ” (*Exod. 33:20, NKJV*). Nevertheless, our priority should be to know God, because eternal life is to know the Father (*John 17:3*).

What do we especially need to know about God? See *Jer. 9:23, 24*. Why are these things important for us to know?

In the great controversy, Satan’s main attack has been against the character of God. The devil made every effort to convince everyone that God is selfish, severe, and arbitrary. The best way to meet this accusation was for Him to live on this earth in order to demonstrate the falsehood of the charges. Jesus came to represent God’s nature and character and to correct the distorted concept that many had developed about the Godhead. “The only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (*John 1:18, RSV*).

Read *John 14:8–10*. Notice how little the disciples knew about the Father after being with Jesus for more than three years. What can we learn for ourselves from their lack of comprehension?

Jesus was sad and astonished to hear Philip’s question. His gentle rebuke actually reveals His patient love toward His dull disciples. Jesus’ response implied something like this: Is it possible that after walking with Me, hearing My words, seeing My miracles of feeding the crowds, of healing the sick and of raising the dead, you do not know Me? Is it possible that you do not recognize the Father in the works that He does through Me?

The disciples’ failure to know the Father through Jesus did not mean that Jesus had misrepresented the Father. On the contrary, Jesus was sure that He had fulfilled His mission of revealing the Father in a fuller way than had ever been seen before. Therefore, He could say to the disciples: “ ‘If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; . . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father’ ” (*John 14:7, 9, NKJV*).

The Love of Our Heavenly Father

Jesus came to emphasize what the Old Testament had already affirmed: the Father looks at us with incomparable love (*Jer. 31:3, Ps. 103:13*).

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (*1 John 3:1, NKJV*). It is amazing that the Almighty God, who rules the immense universe, would allow us insignificant and poor sinners living on a tiny planet in the midst of billions of galaxies to call Him Father. He does so because He loves us.

What supreme evidence did the Father give us to demonstrate His love? See *John 3:16, 17*.

Christ was not nailed to the cross in order to create in the Father’s heart a love for humanity. Jesus’ atoning death was not the means to convince the Father to love us; it happened because the Father had already loved us, even before the foundation of the world. And what greater evidence do we have, could we have, of His love than the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?

“The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 13.

Some tend to think that the Father is reluctant to love us. Nevertheless, the fact that Jesus is our Mediator does not mean that He has to persuade the Father to love us. Christ Himself dispelled this wrong idea when He said: “ ‘The Father Himself loves you’ ” (*John 16:27, NKJV*).

Read *Luke 15:11–24* and meditate on the Father’s love of the prodigal son. Make a list of the many evidences the son had of his father’s love.

How are we, each of us in our own way, like the prodigal son? In what ways have you experienced something similar to what he did?

The Compassionate Care of Our Heavenly Father

It is important to know that we are cared for. Even though some people may be indifferent and neglectful toward us, Jesus taught that our heavenly Father cares for us in every possible way. His mercy and tenderness are not subject to the ups and downs so common in human temperaments; His love is steadfast and unchanging, regardless of the circumstances.

Read Matthew 6:25–34. What encouraging words are found here? How can we learn to better trust in God, as He is revealed in these verses?

“There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. ‘He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.’ Psalm 147:3. The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 100.

Amid all the encouraging words here, we cannot ignore the fact that tragedy and suffering do strike us. Even in the texts for today, Jesus spoke of how “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (*Matt. 6:34*), implying that not everything is going to go well for us. We do have to live with evil and its doleful consequences. The point is, even amid all that, we are assured of the Father’s love for us, a love revealed to us in so many ways, most of all, by the Cross. How crucial, then, that we constantly keep the gifts and blessings of our heavenly Father before us; otherwise, we can easily become discouraged when evil strikes, which it inevitably does.

In what ways, during a time of crisis, were you able to see the reality of God’s love for you? What did you learn from that experience that you can share with someone else who might be struggling and, amid those struggles, questioning the reality of God’s love?

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

In different ways, Jesus taught and demonstrated that Three Divine Persons constitute the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although we cannot explain this truth rationally, we accept it by faith (like many of the truths revealed in Scripture), and together with Paul we strive to attain a full “knowledge of the mystery of God” (*Col. 2:2, NKJV*). That is, though there is much we don’t understand, we can seek by faith, obedience, prayer, and study to learn more and more.

The Three Persons of the Godhead were active in the key moments of the life of Jesus. Summarize the role of each One in the following events:

Birth: Luke 1:26–35 _____

Baptism: Luke 3:21, 22 _____

Crucifixion: Heb. 9:14 _____

When Jesus’ earthly ministry was about to finish, He promised His distressed disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit. Here again we see the three Persons working together. “ ‘I will pray the Father,’ ” Jesus assured them, “ ‘and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, . . . the Spirit of truth’ ” (*John 14:16, 17, NKJV; see also vs. 26*).

Jesus explained that there is complete harmony and cooperation between the Three Divine Persons in the plan of salvation. As the Son glorified the Father, demonstrating His love (*John 17:4*), so the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son, revealing His grace (and love) to the world as well (*John 16:14*).

Think through some of the other revealed truths that are difficult to comprehend through rational thought alone. At the same time, think about many things in the natural world that are similarly difficult to comprehend. What should these mysteries tell us about the limits of our rational thought and the need to live by faith? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “A Personal God,” pp. 263–278, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8.

“In order to strengthen our confidence in God, Christ teaches us to address Him by a new name, a name entwined with the dearest associations of the human heart. He gives us the privilege of calling the infinite God our Father. This name, spoken to Him and of Him, is a sign of our love and trust toward Him, and a pledge of His regard and relationship to us. Spoken when asking His favor or blessing, it is as music in His ears. That we might not think it presumption to call Him by this name, He has repeated it again and again. He desires us to become familiar with the appellation.

“God regards us as His children. He has redeemed us out of the careless world and has chosen us to become members of the royal family, sons and daughters of the heavenly King. He invites us to trust in Him with a trust deeper and stronger than that of a child in his earthly father. Parents love their children, but the love of God is larger, broader, deeper, than human love can possibly be. It is immeasurable.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 141, 142.

“Our heavenly Father has expressed his love for us individually in the cross of Calvary. The Father loves us, he is full of compassion and tender mercy.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*[®], September 30, 1889.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If someone tells you that he or she has difficulties in loving God and trusting in Him as a heavenly Father because of bad experiences with an earthly father, how could you help this person to love God and have confidence in Him?
- 2 We know God loves us. Why, then, is there suffering?
- 3 As a class, go over your answers to Thursday’s final question.
- 4 Think about the incredible size of the universe. Think, too, that the One who created it, Jesus, was the same One who died for us on the cross. How do we wrap our minds around this hopeful news? How can we learn to rejoice, moment by moment, in this amazing revelation of God’s love?

On Our Way Rejoicing

I met the Savior while studying in a simple little Seventh-day Adventist school in my home village in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. God gave me a burden to spread the message of the Adventist faith, and I began to share my faith in the neighborhood around my home church.

Then I learned about Global Mission and began working to plant a church in an impoverished suburb of Kinshasa. I found a few Adventists in the area and called them together to ask God for guidance to build up His church. These few Adventists brought their friends to study God's Word, and before long 17 more believers were baptized.

I was transferred to another area in Kinshasa, where I found three Adventist families who lived far from the nearest church. We began meeting in a member's yard every morning at five. The neighbors heard us singing and preaching, and some joined us. The members invited other friends as well. Soon 30 people worshiped together in that little yard.

We've continued to grow, and today we have more than sixty adults and children. We've outgrown the member's yard, and we rent an unfinished building that has no roof. We've hung a tarp to protect us from the sun and the rain. In spite of the lack of shelter, we are not dismayed. People continue to come. We have begun a Bible study program, and we're confident that we'll continue to grow even more.

When the owner of the building in which we worship completes its construction, we will have to find another place to worship. Our members are poor; most don't have money to feed and clothe their families and can't help build a house of worship. But we have abundant faith, and we pray that God will provide a house of worship for us.

Recently we learned that Global Mission will help us find land and build a church. We rejoice that the world church cares about us and will help us build a simple house of worship.

We don't have Bibles to share with new believers, so it's difficult to nurture them. Many members can't afford to pay for public transportation to attend church every week. But our situation is not unique in Africa, and we don't let our poor circumstances dismay us. We continue on our way rejoicing that the King of heaven is our Father, and He is preparing a heavenly mansion for us there. In the meantime, we thank God for His children everywhere who have not forgotten us and who faithfully give their mission offerings so that more of His children can be gathered in for the great harvest.

JEAN LONGOMO is a Global Mission pioneer in a suburb of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Son



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 24:30; Dan. 7:13, 14; Matt. 11:27; Luke 5:17–26; John 8:58; Matt. 20:28.*

Memory Text: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (*Mark 10:45, NKJV*).

After more than two years of public ministry, Jesus asked His disciples: “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (*Matt. 16:13, NKJV*). It was not difficult for them to report what they had heard people saying about Jesus. More challenging, however, was Jesus’ next question: “But who do you say that I am?” (*vs. 15, NKJV*). Now it became a personal issue. Jesus did not ask their opinions about His external appearance or about His character traits. His question, instead, went to the essence of Jesus’ very being. It required the disciples to express their individual conviction and faith.

Sooner or later, everyone has to answer this same question. Each has to decide, individually, who Jesus is. It doesn’t help to repeat what other people say or believe; the answer must be genuinely our own personal belief. And, of course, on that answer the destiny of every human being hangs.

This week we will seek the answer on the basis of what Jesus Himself said and did. Our aim will be to arrive, by faith, at the same response Peter gave: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (*vs. 16, NKJV*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 12.

The Son of Man

This title, “the Son of man,” was Jesus’ favorite designation for Himself. He referred to Himself as Son of man more than eighty times. Other people never addressed Him that way. He, of course, selected this special designation for Himself with a purpose in mind.

This idiomatic expression was common in the Old Testament. With just one exception, it always referred to a human; thus, Jesus used it in order to emphasize His humanity.

Scripture presents Jesus as a true human being. He was born as a baby, grew up as a child (increasing in wisdom and in stature [Luke 2:40, 52]), and had sisters and brothers (Matt. 13:55, 56). He ate (Matt. 9:11), slept (Luke 8:23), was tired (John 4:6), and suffered hunger and thirst (Matt. 4:2, John 19:28). He also experienced sorrow and distress (Matt. 26:37).

To the casual observer, Jesus seemed to be a common man who walked among the people as one of the multitude. Many of His contemporaries did not recognize in Him anything more than a man (John 7:46). People treated Him as one of them; they laughed at Him (Luke 8:53), criticized Him (Matt. 11:19), even mocked and beat Him (Luke 22:63). To them, He was just another human being.

Unfortunately, they failed to perceive that there is more to be found in this title. According to Daniel 7:13 and 14, “ ‘One like the Son of Man’ ” came with the clouds of heaven “ ‘to the Ancient of days,’ ” and received eternal dominion, glory, and a kingdom. The Jews identified this Son of man with the Messiah. So, when Jesus used this title, He was revealing, in a half-concealed way, that He was also the promised Messiah, the incarnate Christ.

Read Matthew 24:30, 25:31, 26:64. What elements in Jesus’ words recorded in these verses are reminiscent of Daniel 7:13, 14?

Why is it so important for us to know that Jesus was fully human? What implications does His full humanity have for our salvation? What implications does it have for our daily lives, especially in our battles with temptation and sin?

The Son of God

The title “Son of God” was used not only by Gabriel (*Luke 1:35*) but also by several people when addressing Jesus (*Matt. 14:33, Mark 15:39, John 1:49, 11:27*). He accepted that title but was very careful not to apply it directly to Himself, lest He be stoned to death. Nevertheless, the Bible does reveal in different ways His special relationship with the Father.

The Father acknowledged Jesus as His Son at His baptism (*Matt. 3:17*); the same as at the Transfiguration (*Matt. 17:5*).

Their Father-Son relationship is unique. Christ is the only Being in the universe who enjoys that kind of relationship, because only He is of the very same nature as the Father. As believers, we have been granted the privilege of becoming children of God. But Jesus always was, is, and will be the Son of God.

What do the following texts reveal about the perfect unity of the Father and the Son? *Matt. 11:27, John 3:35, 5:17, and 10:30.*

The complete unity of Jesus and the Father includes a mutual and perfect knowledge of Each Other: a unity of will, purpose, and objectives. Moreover, it includes a unity of nature. The Son and the Father are Two Persons (“I and the Father”) but of the same nature (“are one”), a fact emphasized by the neuter pronoun *one* (*compare with 1 Cor. 3:8*).

We have to be aware, however, that because He came to live as a man, Christ while here voluntarily subordinated Himself to the Father (*Phil. 2:6–8*). This limitation was functional but not part of His essence. Jesus subordinated Himself for a specific purpose, a specific goal.

With this concept in mind, we can understand why Jesus said: “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do” (*John 5:19, NKJV*); “because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (*vs. 30, NKJV*). From this functional point of view, He could say: “My Father is greater than I” (*John 14:28, NKJV*).

Jesus was fully God and fully human. What does this amazing truth tell us about the close link between heaven and earth? What comfort can we draw from this close connection?

Christ's Divine Nature: Part 1

The deity of Christ is the foundation of our faith. A human being could never be our savior, no matter how extraordinary his life may have been. Throughout the entire New Testament, we have evidence of His divinity. We will focus on what Jesus Himself taught about this subject.

It was, for starters, not a simple matter for Jesus to explain who He was. His mission required Him to make known that He was the Messiah, God in the flesh; however, there is no record of His saying publicly, *I am God* or *I am the Messiah*. Had He done so, His life could have immediately been taken. Therefore, He chose to hint at His divine nature and indirectly led His hearers to know His deity.

As Jesus gradually revealed His divine nature, most of His hearers understood Him but refused to accept His claim because it didn't fit with their preconceived idea of the Messiah. This is evident by their request: "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly" (*John 10:24, NKJV*). Unfortunately, the context shows that their question was not sincere.

As we saw yesterday, Jesus made many references to His special relationship with His Father. This was one of the methods He used to reveal His deity. Many understood clearly that when He said that God was His Father, He was making Himself equal with God (*John 5:18*).

Read Luke 5:17–26. In what very powerful ways did Jesus here reveal His divinity without openly saying it?

"It required nothing less than creative power to restore health to that decaying body. The same voice that spoke life to man created from the dust of the earth had spoken life to the dying paralytic."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 269, 270.

Jesus claimed the divine prerogative to forgive sins. He also said that He Himself "will sit on the throne of His glory" (*Matt. 25:31, NKJV*) and judge all the nations, deciding the eternal destiny of each one, something that rests on God's authority alone. How much more could He have done here to reveal who He really was?

Think about how hard-hearted some of these leaders were toward Jesus. And these men were supposed to be the spiritual guardians of the people. How can we make sure we don't become hard-hearted in our own ways, as well?

Christ's Divine Nature: Part 2

Jesus declared and demonstrated that He had the same power as the Father to overcome death. “ ‘As the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will’ ” (*John 5:21, NKJV*). Only God can state: “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ ” (*John 11:25, NKJV*).

Another clear indication of Jesus' divinity is found in His assertion to preexistence. He “ ‘came down from heaven’ ” (*John 3:13, NKJV*) because the Father sent Him (*John 5:23*). Then, again, He reaffirmed His preexistence: “ ‘And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was’ ” (*John 17:5, NKJV*).

Why is John 8:58 one of Jesus' more direct and profound statements about His deity? See also *Exod. 3:13, 14*.

In contrast with Abraham, who came into being (which is the literal meaning of the Greek root *ginomai*, translated here as “was”), Jesus announced Himself to be the self-existent One. He was not only there before Abraham's birth but existed eternally. *I am* implies continuous existence. Furthermore, I AM is the title of Yahweh Himself (*Exod. 3:14*). The leaders understood, unmistakably, that Jesus claimed to be the I AM revealed in the burning bush. For them, He was guilty of blasphemy and therefore “they took up stones to throw at Him” (*John 8:59, NKJV*).

The Gospels show that Jesus, without showing disapproval, accepted worship from others. He knew very well that, according to the Scriptures, only God deserves the adoration of humanity, for He said to Satan: “ ‘It is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’ ” (*Matt. 4:10, NKJV*). Therefore, by accepting worship from others, He was revealing His divinity. The disciples on the sea (*Matt. 14:33*), the blind man healed (*John 9:38*), the women at Jesus' tomb (*Matt. 28:9*), and the disciples in Galilee (*Matt. 28:17*) all worshiped Him openly, recognizing His deity. Thomas's words to Jesus, “ ‘My Lord and my God!’ ” (*John 20:28, NKJV*) would not have been spoken by a Jew back then unless he clearly understood that he was talking to God.

Read John 20:29. What are things that you have not seen, yet believe in? What are the implications of your answer for the whole question of faith?

Christ's Mission

After considering who Jesus was, we are in a better position to understand what He came to do for us.

Satan made accusations against God. In order to meet those accusations, Jesus came to represent the Father's character, and to correct the false concept that many had developed about the Godhead. He wanted us to know God, because to know Him is indispensable in order to have eternal life (*John 17:3*).

However, we need more than knowledge to be saved. We need God to provide us a Savior, which is precisely the meaning of the name *Jesus*: Yahweh is salvation (*Matt. 1:21*). Jesus described His mission in very clear terms: " 'The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost' " (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). In Eden, humans lost their relationship with God, lost their holiness, lost their home, and lost eternal life. Jesus came to restore everything: He reestablishes our relationship with the Father (*John 1:51*); He forgives us our sins (*Matt. 26:28*); He gives us an example of how to live (*1 Pet. 2:21*); and, of course, He gives us eternal life (*John 3:16*).

How did Jesus define the essence of His mission? *John 10:11, Matt. 20:28.*

Why did Jesus have to die? It was because He voluntarily took our place and bore the punishment of our sin. We are all sinners (*Rom. 3:10–12*) and, as such, deserve eternal death (*Rom. 6:23*). The price for our salvation was so high that only the life of the Son of God was enough to pay for it.

"The broken law of God demanded the life of the sinner. In all the universe there was but one who could, in behalf of man, satisfy its claims. Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63.

Look around at our world and the fate of us all in this world. If everything ended in the grave, what hope would we have? We would have none at all, were it not for the plan of salvation. How, then, can we show our gratitude to God for what He has done for us in Christ?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Divine-Human Saviour,” pp. 1126–1128 in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5.

“While God’s Word speaks of the humanity of Christ when upon this earth, it also speaks decidedly regarding His pre-existence. The Word existed as a divine being, even as the eternal Son of God, in union and oneness with His Father. . . . The world was made by Him, ‘and without him was not any thing made that was made’ (John 1:3). If Christ made all things, He existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so decisive that no one need be left in doubt. Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore. The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 247.

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Demons knew and confessed that Jesus was “‘the Holy One of God’” (*Mark 1:24, NKJV*), “the Son of God” (*Mark 3:11*), “‘Son of the Most High God’” (*Mark 5:7, NKJV*). See also **James 2:19**. Why is this kind of acknowledgment not enough for our salvation? How can we avoid the trap of being satisfied with a mere intellectual acceptance of Jesus?
- 2 When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Jesus, saw how He died, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (*Mark 15:39*). The best place to understand Jesus is at the foot of His cross. How often do you go there? When was the last time you were there? Why don’t you take a moment, right now, to meditate on the infinite sacrifice He made for your salvation?
- 3 A good number of Jesus’ contemporaries rejected Him because they had wrong ideas about the Messiah. Unfortunately, many people today refuse to yield their lives to Jesus, because they have prejudices or a distorted concept about Him. How can we help them to see Jesus as He really is? What do we have as Seventh-day Adventists in particular that could help give them a clearer view of who Jesus really is?

The Power of Many

Believers in western Russia work together to win their neighbors—and sometimes thieves—to Jesus. They write the names of people for whom they are praying in a book at church. Then they deliver tracts or newsletters to those people during the week.

One woman who owns a goat farm asked God whom to pray for, and God showed her in an unusual way. The woman noticed that her goats were disappearing. Then she found a man lifting one of her goats from its pen. She stopped him. “My family is hungry,” the man said. “If I sell the goat, they can eat.”

The woman asked the man to put the goat back into its pen while she prepared food for his family. She gave him the food and some missionary tracts as well. The man’s family read the tracts. The man now works as a goat herder for this Seventh-day Adventist woman, and his family worships with the Adventist congregation in town.

Three sisters were praying for an apartment to rent. An old woman offered to rent them an apartment, and the sisters moved in.

Then they discovered that their landlady spoke to the spirits. The sisters prayed for the woman, but they were afraid to speak to her about her alliance with the devil. Instead, they left some Bible tracts on the table where she would find them. The woman picked up the tracts and read them. One of the tracts dealt with the devil’s skillful lies. While reading it, the landlady realized that her alliance was with the devil. The landlady has asked the sisters for more tracts and a book about God.

Through their faithfulness in sharing their faith, a congregation has grown. But the members had no church in which to meet. The nearest church was several miles away in another town. They struggled

to raise money for a church until the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped make their dream a reality. Today a simple church stands in this town in western Russia, a lighthouse and a testimony to the power of many working together as one to finish God’s work.



Members celebrate their new church (left) in Temryuk, Russia.

The Holy Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 14:16–18; 14:26; 15:26; Matt. 12:31, 32; John 16:8; John 3:5–8; Luke 11:9–13.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever’ ” (*John 14:16, NKJV*).

Of the Three Persons of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the least understood. It is ironic that the Person who is closest to us, the Being who produces the new birth in us, who dwells in us and transforms us, is the One we know so little about.

Why? To begin with, the Bible is less explicit regarding the Holy Spirit than it is about the Father and the Son. There are many references to the Spirit in Scripture, but most are metaphoric or symbolic. The Bible gives us ample information about the work of the Spirit, but it says little about His nature.

Another reason arises from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is constantly trying to focus our attention on Christ, not on His own Person. In the plan of salvation, the Spirit plays a subordinated role, serving the Father and the Son, although this function does not imply inferiority in essence.

This week, as we listen to what Jesus taught about the Spirit, let us eagerly pray for His transforming presence in our lives.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 19.*

The Representative of Christ

With fear and sadness, the disciples listened as Jesus announced His imminent death. When they were deprived of His presence, who would be their Teacher, Friend, and Counselor? Knowing their desperate need, Christ promised to send His representative to be with them.

What particular name did Christ use for His representative? See John 14:16–18. In what sense was that name so appropriate? See also John 14:26.

Helper, Counselor, and Comforter are various translations of the Greek *paraklētos*, which is made up of the preposition *para*, “beside,” and the adjective *klētos*, “called.” It literally means “one called to the side of,” giving the idea of “a person summoned to one’s aid.” It may refer to a mediator, an intercessor, a helper, an advisor, or even a legal advocate.

Only John uses the term *paraklētos* in the New Testament. Interestingly, he also applied this word to Jesus Himself (*1 John 2:1*).

During His earthly ministry, Christ was the disciples’ Counselor, Helper, and Comforter. Therefore, it is quite appropriate for His successor to receive the same name. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father at the request of the Son, and in the name of the Son (*John 14:16, 26*). The Spirit continues Christ’s work on this earth.

Through the Holy Spirit the disciples had the presence of Jesus. “‘I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you’” (*vs. 18, NKJV*), said the Lord. He was not talking about paying them an occasional visit, which wouldn’t be of much comfort to helpless “orphans.” Rather, He was announcing a permanent and intimate relationship: “‘I in you’” (*vs. 20, NKJV*). This was going to be possible only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, Christ’s human nature hindered Him from being personally in every place at the same time. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is omnipresent (*Ps. 139:7*). By the Spirit, our Savior is accessible to all, independent of where people are or the physical distance that separates them from Christ.

In what ways have you experienced the reality of the Holy Spirit, even though His nature and how He works in our lives is not easy to understand?

The Holy Spirit Is a Person

Ellen G. White wrote that “the nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. . . . Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 52.

Nevertheless, she also affirmed that “the Holy Spirit is a person, for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. . . . He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 616, 617. This statement was based on the Bible (*Rom. 8:16 and 1 Cor. 2:10, 11*). So, although we are limited by our human nature, through the Scriptures we can at least know that the Holy Spirit is a Person and that He is Divine. What Jesus said about the Holy Spirit confirms this conclusion.

What are some of the actions of the Holy Spirit that show us He is a Person? See *John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7–14*.

Jesus mentioned several activities the Spirit carries out, all of which imply a personality. Who better than a person can teach us and bring to our remembrance all the things that Christ said (*John 14:26*)? Or who better than a personal being can testify of Jesus (*John 15:26*), convict the world (*John 16:8*), guide us into all truth, and also hear and speak (*vs. 13*)?

Following the teachings of Jesus, the New Testament writers made it clear that the Holy Spirit has the essential characteristics of a person: will (*1 Cor. 12:11*), intelligence (*Acts 15:28, Rom. 8:27*), and emotions (*Rom. 15:30, Eph. 4:30*).

Because the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person, we must humbly surrender ourselves to His will and guidance. We will invite Him to dwell in our hearts (*Rom. 8:9*), to transform our lives (*Titus 3:5*), and to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our characters (*Gal. 5:22, 23*). On our own, we are helpless; only through His power working in us can we become what we have been promised in Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is a gift; like most gifts, it can be rejected. How can you make sure, day by day, that you are not turning away from what the Holy Spirit seeks to do in your life?

The Holy Spirit Is Divine

When Jesus introduced the Holy Spirit to the disciples, He called Him “another” Helper (*John 14:16*). The Greek word Jesus used for “another” is *allos*, which means “another of the same kind,” in contrast with *heteros*, “another of different kind or quality.” The same likeness of nature that bonds the Father and the Son is revealed in the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit “ ‘will tell you things to come’ ” (*John 16:13, NKJV*). Only a divine Being can announce the future (*Isa. 46:9, 10*).

The divinity of the Holy Spirit is also attested by His role in the inspiration of the Scriptures, a function that Jesus explicitly acknowledged. He argued that “ ‘David himself said by the Holy Spirit’ ” (*Mark 12:36, NKJV*) what is recorded in Psalm 110:1.

While on this earth, Jesus was constantly under the direction of the Holy Spirit. After being anointed by the Spirit in His baptism (*Matt. 3:16, 17*), He was “led by the Spirit into the wilderness” (*Luke 4:1, NKJV*). Victorious over the tempter, He “returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee” to carry on His ministry (*vs. 14, NKJV*). The miracles He performed were done through the Holy Spirit (*Matt. 12:28*). The fact that the Son of God depended on the Spirit is another demonstration of the divine character of the Spirit, for it’s hard to imagine the Son of God dependent upon anything less than the Divine.

Further evidence for the deity of the Spirit lies in His association with the Father and the Son in texts that mention the Three Persons as equal. Thus, Jesus commissioned the apostles to baptize the new disciples “ ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ ” (*Matt. 28:19, NKJV*).

How do the following verses help us to understand the divinity of the Holy Spirit? See *Matt. 12:31, 32*.

The comparison between speaking against the Son of man, a sin that may be forgiven, and speaking against the Holy Spirit, a sin that cannot be forgiven, shows that the Spirit is not a common being. Blasphemy is a sin committed directly against God. Thus, we conclude that the Holy Spirit is One of the Three Persons of the Godhead. Though much has been written about the “unforgivable sin,” the immediate context shows people so hardened against the Spirit and His role in salvation that they attribute His work to the devil!

The Work of the Holy Spirit

We have already mentioned the important role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the incarnated Christ and in the inspiration of Scripture. Let us focus now on what Jesus taught about the Spirit's work for our salvation.

What indispensable work does the Holy Spirit do in order to prepare us to accept the Savior? See *John 16:8*.

Who takes their medicine unless they acknowledge that they are sick? By the same token, we cannot be saved unless we recognize that we are sinners. Softly but steadily the Holy Spirit convinces us that we have sinned, are guilty, and are under the righteous judgment of God.

Then the Spirit guides us to Christ, testifying about Him (*John 15:26*), the only One who can save us. Since Jesus is the Truth (*John 14:6*), by taking us to Jesus, the Spirit is also taking us "into all truth" (*John 16:13*). It could not be any other way; after all, the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth" (*John 14:17*).

Once we are convicted of sin (which implies repentance from our sins) and are directed to Jesus and His truth, we are ready for the Holy Spirit to do His greatest work.

Why is it so crucial to be "born of the Spirit"? See *John 3:5–8*.

Those who have tried to reform their lives by themselves know how futile their efforts are. It is impossible for us, without divine intervention, to transform our deteriorated sinful lives into new beings. The regeneration of a sinner requires the kind of creative power that only the divine Holy Spirit can provide. We are saved "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (*Titus 3:5, NKJV*). What the Spirit does is not a modification or improvement of the old life but a transformation of nature, the creation of a new life. The results of such a miracle are clearly visible and constitute an irrefutable argument in favor of the gospel.

The operation of the Holy Spirit is not necessary only at the beginning of our Christian life; we need Him constantly. To foster our spiritual growth, He teaches us and reminds us of all the things that Jesus taught (*John 14:26*). If we allow Him, He abides with us forever as our Helper, Comforter, and Counselor (*vs. 16*).

Bad character habits are hard to change, are they not? And even when we stop, unless constantly vigilant, we can be overcome by them again, as well. What should our inherent weaknesses and propensities to sin tell us about our constant need to be surrendered to the Holy Spirit?

Filled With the Holy Spirit

No doubt, it is important to know who the Holy Spirit is. But this knowledge would be pointless unless it leads us to completely open our lives to be filled with Him. Jesus made it clear that if we fail to invite the presence of the heavenly Guest to abide in us daily, there is another kind of spirit that is eager to enter into the empty life and produce a spiritual disaster (*Matt. 12:43–45*). Jesus Himself was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (*Luke 4:1, NKJV*). “Daily He received a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 139.

What does Luke 11:9–13 tell us about the way we may receive the Holy Spirit? What do these verses show us regarding the Father’s willingness to give us the Holy Spirit?

At the Last Supper, Jesus promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit. He emphasized the Spirit’s comforting and teaching ministry, which was to meet their need at that time. After Christ’s resurrection, however, the context was different, and the disciples faced new challenges.

What was the focus of Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit after His resurrection? See *Acts 1:4–8*.

Acts 1:5 contains the only record of Jesus talking about being “‘baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (*NKJV*). John the Baptist had announced this special baptism (*Matt. 3:11, John 1:33*), but it had to wait until Christ’s ascension. What does baptism with the Spirit mean?

In Acts 1:8, Jesus Himself explained this with a parallel expression. You are “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (*Acts 1:5, NKJV*) “when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (*vs. 8, NKJV*). To be baptized is to be totally immersed in something, usually water. It includes the whole person. Baptism with the Holy Spirit means to be totally under the influence of the Spirit, completely “filled with the Spirit” (*Eph. 5:18, NKJV*). This is not a “once and forever” experience, but is something that needs to be constantly renewed.

If someone asked you, Have you ever been “filled with the Spirit,” what would you answer, and why?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Power Promised,” pp. 19–23, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8; “The Gift of the Spirit,” pp. 47–56, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“At all times and in all places, in all sorrows and in all afflictions, when the outlook seems dark and the future perplexing, and we feel helpless and alone, the Comforter will be sent in answer to the prayer of faith. Circumstances may separate us from every earthly friend; but no circumstance, no distance, can separate us from the heavenly Comforter. Wherever we are, wherever we may go, He is always at our right hand to support, sustain, uphold, and cheer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 669, 670.

“The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He [Jesus] could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer.”—Page 671.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Given the human tendency to self-exaltation, what lessons does the humble and subordinate operation of the Holy Spirit teach us?
- 2 In dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus compared the Spirit to the wind. What spiritual lessons may we learn from that comparison?
- 3 Some people claim that the evidence of being “filled with the Spirit” is to be able to speak in what is commonly referred to as “tongues.” How should we respond to this claim?
- 4 We tend to think of the work of the Holy Spirit on an individual, one-on-one basis, which is, of course, correct. At the same time, how can we, as a corporate body, experience the reality of His presence in our church as a whole?

A River of Life

I'm a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist in the Czech Republic, the second-most atheistic country in Europe. Going to church was part of my life, like grocery shopping and eating. I enjoyed church because I had friends there, but I didn't have a relationship with God.

I had developed a rather twisted picture of God. Many other young people did, too, and lots of them stopped attending church when they enrolled in a university.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders prayed for a way to reach university-age people across the Czecho-Slovakian Union. God answered their prayers with INRI Road, which means "Jesus' way." It's a program primarily for university students.

When I began my university studies, a youth pastor invited me to attend INRI Road. It's like no church I've ever been to. Casual week-night meetings provide lots of opportunities to bond with other students. The program includes Bible studies, of course, but we can also join language conversation groups, sports teams, and other activities. I continued going because I enjoyed the fellowship.

Mark, the founder of INRI Road and leader of the group in the city where I am studying, asked me if I'd like to join the planning team for INRI Road. I agreed. We were encouraged to try our outreach ideas to see if they would work. And we have lots of smaller groups that make up INRI Road.

For instance, an Adventist girl studying medicine invited another Christian girl to pray amid the stacks of books in the library. Others joined them, and the group grew. They wanted a place to meet, and INRI Road invited them to join. This is typical of the way INRI Road is growing. Many members are not Adventists, but are friends.

I attend two Bible study groups, and the in-depth study we do has opened God's Word in new and amazing ways for me. I see how far God has taken me in my walk with Him. I'm learning to rely on God for everything. He is giving me opportunities to act on the lessons He's taught me and to share what I've learned with others.

I want to pass on what I'm learning about God and life and ministry to others. I want to help others see that their lives are a gift from God, a gift they're responsible to give to others. This realization has changed my life.

Last year INRI Road received part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to help expand the program to other university cities, to train leaders, and to provide resources that will bring other young people to a knowledge of the Savior. Thank you for caring about the youth of Europe.

JAN JUSTRA is studying pharmacology and theology in Brno, Czech Republic.

Salvation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 18:9–14; John 6:44; Luke 15:3–10; Matt. 20:28; John 8:34–36; John 6:35, 47–51.*

Memory Text: “‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life’ ” (*John 3:16, NKJV*).

Death,” we often say, “is just part of life.” No, death is the negation of life, not part of it. Yet, so used to death, we mislabel it, calling it the opposite of what it really is. However we understand it, one point is certain: without divine help, eternal death would be the fate of us all.

Fortunately, that help has come. God, in His infinite love, offers us salvation through Christ. When the angel announced the birth of the Messiah, he named Him “Jesus” (from a Hebrew word that means “salvation”), “‘for He will save His people from their sins’ ” (*Matt. 1:21, NKJV*).

This week we will consider Jesus’ saving work. First, our attention will focus on the basis of our salvation and later on the results of it.

The Bible is clear. We have only two choices regarding our sins: either we pay for our sins in the lake of fire, or we accept Christ’s payment for them on the cross. As we review the generous gift of God’s grace through Christ, let us once again humbly renew our faith in Jesus as our personal Savior.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 26.*

Salvation Is a Gift From God

In John 3:16 two verbs are used to describe what God did for our salvation. How do these verbs relate to each other? What do they reveal regarding the origin of our salvation?

The English verb *to love*, especially the casual way it is often used today, is totally inadequate to express the depth of solicitous interest expressed by the Greek verb *agapaō*, “to love.” In the New Testament, this term and its related noun *agapē*, “love,” reveal God’s deep and constant love toward His creatures, who are completely unworthy of this love. Love is the preeminent attribute of God’s character. He not only loves us, but also He is love (*1 John 4:8*).

God’s love is not an impulse based on His feelings or preferences. His love is not selective, nor does it depend on what we do. God loves the world, that is, all human beings, including those who do not love Him.

True love is known by the actions it generates. Sometimes as human beings we may say we love someone, while our actions demonstrate the opposite (*1 John 3:17, 18*). The same does not occur with God. His love is reflected in His actions. Out of love, He gave His only begotten Son for our salvation. In so doing, God gave us all He had, which is Himself.

Read Luke 18:9–14. What does this story teach us about what our attitude toward God and His grace should be?

We have probably read this parable so many times that we are not surprised by Jesus’ verdict: “ ‘I tell you, this man [the tax collector] went down to his house justified rather than the other’ ” (*Luke 18:14, NKJV*). However, those who heard Jesus when He pronounced the verdict must have been astonished. Wasn’t this an unjust outcome?

Yes, it was completely undeserved. That is the way salvation is. It is a gift from God. Gifts are not earned; they are simply accepted. We cannot buy salvation; we can only receive it. Although Jesus never used the term *grace*, He clearly taught that salvation is by grace, and grace is being given that you don’t deserve.

If God gave you what you deserved, what would it be, and why?

Salvation: God's Initiative

A simple reading of the Gospels shows that we owe our salvation entirely to God. Jesus did not come to this world because we invited Him, but because the Father, out of love for us, sent Him. The Father's initiative is confirmed by Christ's frequent use of the phrase "He who sent Me" and "the Father who sent Me" (*NKJV*). (Read *John 7:28, 8:29, 12:49*.)

What else does the Father do for our salvation, according to *John 6:44*?

In spite of the fact that we were sinners and did not love God, He loved us and provided the means for our sins to be forgiven through His Son (*1 John 4:10*). This wondrous love is what draws us toward Him.

Not only is the Father involved, but the Son also has a very active role in our salvation. He came with a definite mission. "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). Whenever we contemplate Him lifted up from the earth, He draws us to Himself (*John 12:32*).

How far is the Lord willing to go in His efforts to save us? See *Luke 15:3–10*.

These twin parables show that God is not waiting passively for us to come to Him but actively seeks us out. We have a seeking God. It does not matter if we are astray, far away in a dangerous place or even lost at home; the Lord will seek us untiringly until He finds us.

"No sooner does the sheep go astray than the shepherd is filled with grief and anxiety. He counts and recounts the flock. When he is sure that one sheep is lost, he slumbers not. He leaves the ninety and nine within the fold, and goes in search of the straying sheep. The darker and more tempestuous the night and the more perilous the way, the greater is the shepherd's anxiety and the more earnest his search. He makes every effort to find that one lost sheep.

"With what relief he hears in the distance its first faint cry. Following the sound, he climbs the steepest heights, he goes to the very edge of the precipice, at the risk of his own life. Thus he searches, while the cry, growing fainter, tells him that his sheep is ready to die. At last his effort is rewarded; the lost is found."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 188.

The Required Death

John the Baptist described Jesus as “ ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*). This image was easy for any Israelite familiar with the sacrifices offered in the temple and the sacred history recorded in the Old Testament to understand. Abraham had revealed his faith that “ ‘God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering’ ” (*NKJV*); and the Lord did provide the animal to be sacrificed in place of Isaac (*Gen. 22:8, 13*). In Egypt, a lamb was slain by the Israelites as a symbol of their divine deliverance from the bondage of sin (*Exod. 12:1–13*). Later, when the sanctuary service was established, two lambs were to be sacrificed on the altar each day, continuously: one in the morning and the other at twilight (*Exod. 29:38, 39*). All these sacrifices were symbols of the coming Messiah, who “was led as a lamb to the slaughter” because “the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (*Isa. 53:6, 7, NKJV*). Therefore, by introducing Jesus as “ ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*), John the Baptist was revealing the vicarious nature of Christ’s atoning death.

During His ministry, Jesus repeatedly announced His death, even though it was hard for the disciples to understand why He had to die (*Matt. 16:22*). Gradually, Jesus explained the great purpose of His death.

What illustrations did Jesus use to indicate that He was going to die as a Substitute for us? See *Matt. 20:28, John 10:11*.

“ ‘Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends’ ” (*John 15:13, NKJV*); this holds true even if they do not understand or accept that sacrifice. On the cross, Jesus shed His blood “ ‘for many for the remission of sins’ ” (*Matt. 26:28, NKJV*).

It is important to notice that Jesus died voluntarily. As the Father gave His one and only Son, so the Son gave His own life to redeem the human race. Nobody forced Him to do so. “ ‘No one takes it [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself,’ ” declared Jesus (*John 10:18, NKJV*).

Even Caiaphas, who openly rejected Jesus and led the plot to kill Him, involuntarily recognized Jesus’ substitutionary death (*John 11:49–51*).

Think of how much ingratitude humans have toward God and what He has given us in Christ. How can we make sure we don’t fall into that trap? Why is this so easy to do, especially when we are going through difficult times?

Free From Sin

Without Christ, we were slaves of sin, slaves to the evil impulses of our fallen human nature. We lived in a self-centered way, pleasing ourselves instead of living to the glory of God. The unavoidable result of this spiritual slavery was death, because the wages of sin is death.

But Jesus came “ ‘to proclaim liberty to the captives . . . , to set at liberty those who are oppressed’ ” (*Luke 4:18, NKJV*). These aren’t literal captives but spiritual prisoners of Satan (*see Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:1, 2*). Jesus did not release John the Baptist from Herod’s prison, but He did release those who were bound by the chains of sinful lives and delivered them from the heavy burden of guilt and eternal condemnation.

What great promise is found in the following verses? *See John 8:34–36.*

The use of the word *indeed* in verse 36 shows that there is also a false kind of freedom, a pseudo-freedom that actually shackles human beings to further disobedience to God. Jesus’ hearers trusted in their ancestry of Abraham as their hope for freedom. We run the same risk. The enemy wants us to rely upon anything—for instance, our doctrinal knowledge, our personal godliness, or our record of service for God—anything except Christ for our salvation. But none of these, however important they may be, has the power to free us from sin and its condemnation. The only true Liberator is the Son, who was never enslaved by sin.

Jesus delighted in forgiving sins. When four men brought a paralyzed man to Him, He knew that this man was sick as a result of his dissolute living, but He also knew that the man had repented. In the pleading eyes of this man, the Lord saw the longing of his heart for forgiveness and his faith in Jesus as his only Helper. Tenderly, Jesus said to him: “ ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’ ” (*Mark 2:5, NKJV*). Those were the sweetest words this man ever heard. The load of despair disappeared from his mind, and the peace of forgiveness filled his spirit. In Christ he found spiritual and physical healing.

At a Pharisee’s house, a sinful woman washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and anointed them with perfume (*Luke 7:37, 38*). Perceiving the Pharisee’s disapproval, Jesus explained to him that “ ‘her sins, which are many, are forgiven’ ” (*vs. 47, NKJV*). Then He said to her: “ ‘Your sins are forgiven’ ” (*vs. 48, NKJV*).

“ ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ ” Why are these the best words any of us will ever hear?

Christ Gives Us Eternal Life

Because of our sins, we deserve to die. But Christ took our place on the cross and paid the death penalty that, otherwise, rested on us. He, being innocent, took on our guilt and received our punishment so that we, being sinful, could be declared innocent. Through Him, instead of perishing we receive eternal life. John 3:15 makes this amazing promise to us. It says that “ ‘whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life’ ” (*NKJV*), a promise repeated at the end of John 3:16.

Some think that, even after accepting Christ as Savior, the promise of everlasting life will be real only after His second coming. However, the promise of salvation is expressed in the present tense: “ ‘He who believes in the Son has everlasting life’ ” (*John 3:36, NKJV*). Whoever believes in Christ “ ‘has everlasting life’ ” now, “ ‘and shall not come into judgment’ ” in the final day, “ ‘but has passed from death into life’ ” (*John 5:24, NKJV*). Thus, even if we die and sleep in the grave, this temporary rest doesn’t take away from the reality of eternal life.

When Jesus becomes our Savior, our life acquires a whole new meaning, and we can enjoy a richer and a fuller existence. “ ‘I have come,’ ” stated Jesus, “ ‘that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ ” (*John 10:10, NKJV*). Instead of transitory worldly pleasures, which fill us up without really satisfying us, He offers us a life lived in a completely different way, full of inexhaustible satisfaction in Him. This new abundant life includes our whole being. Jesus performed numerous miracles to restore the physical life of many people. But above all, He wanted to give them a renewed spiritual life, clean from sin, filled with faith in Him and the certainty of salvation.

What metaphor did Jesus use to express the results of accepting Him? What does that mean in our practical daily living? See *John 6:35, 47–51*.

Meditate on the concept of eternal life. It is not only an imperishable existence but above all a blessed, satisfying, and happy life in loving communion with God in the new earth. Although we are still living in this world, how can we start to enjoy, even partially, what it means to have eternal life?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Sinner’s Need of Christ,” pp. 17–22, in *Steps to Christ*; “The Subject Presented in 1883,” pp. 350–354, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

“Looking upon the crucified Redeemer, we more fully comprehend the magnitude and meaning of the sacrifice made by the Majesty of heaven. The plan of salvation is glorified before us, and the thought of Calvary awakens living and sacred emotions in our hearts. Praise to God and the Lamb will be in our hearts and on our lips; for pride and self-worship cannot flourish in the soul that keeps fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary.

“He who beholds the Saviour’s matchless love will be elevated in thought, purified in heart, transformed in character. He will go forth to be a light to the world, to reflect in some degree this mysterious love. The more we contemplate the cross of Christ, the more fully shall we adopt the language of the apostle when he said, ‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.’ Gal. 6:14.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 661.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Salvation is a gift, which means that it’s free. At the same time, does it not cost something? What does it cost to accept this gift, and why—whatever that cost—is it more than worth it?
- 2 On Monday we read texts showing that salvation is the result of God’s initiative. He makes every effort to save us. Yet, Jesus also said that we need to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness (*Matt. 6:33*). His words “ ‘Strive to enter through the narrow gate’ ” (*Luke 13:24, NKJV*) imply that we need to seek our salvation. How do we explain this?
- 3 How does Christ’s death on the cross reveal God’s justice? How does it also reveal God’s mercy?
- 4 If we could work our way to eternal life, through our own efforts and good deeds, and even our own law-keeping, what would that say about the seriousness of sin? Instead, think about just how bad sin must be that only the death of Jesus could atone for it.
- 5 Religious Jews see in the Sabbath a foretaste of what eternal life will be like. In what ways does that idea—eternal life prefigured in the Sabbath—make good sense?

Sharing God's Dream

God sent Allen and Kelley Fowler a dream to minister among the Navajo people of northern Arizona, in the United States. They went as volunteers, praying that God would use them to reach the people they loved. They ministered to the Navajos living on the reservation and in the nearby town of Page in any way they could. "When we saw a need, we prayed for a way to fill it," Kelley said.

The couple invited mission teams to help rebuild run-down hogans (houses) and supplied struggling families with coats, warm blankets, and baskets of food. They invited medical personnel to spend their vacations offering free medical care to those who couldn't afford it, and they held health classes to teach people how to prevent diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

There was much to do on the reservation, but God called them to serve in the city as well. Page is the hub of a thriving tourist area. But half the population is Native American, many of them living in poverty.

The couple visited trailer parks and run-down homes, seeking to meet the needs of the people. And once the Navajo people realized that this couple really cared for them, they were willing to learn about God.

Soon the couple had 70 people who wanted Bible studies. They organized evangelistic meetings in Page. Twelve Navajos were baptized following the meetings.

But they had no church. The group met in the community center that volunteers had built outside town. And they prayed for a church, a dream that seemed impossible to fulfill short of a miracle. Land was expensive and hard to find, and a church would take years to build.

The North American Division offered to help the struggling work among the Navajo with part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Hope soared. Then a Seventh-day Adventist visitor to town discovered an unused church building. No sign had been posted, but the church was for sale. Members prayed, negotiations continued, and the church, a parsonage, and a vacant lot were purchased within the amount allocated to that project by the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

"We saw the hand of God moving," the Fowlers said. "And people around the world helped make God's dream a reality." Thanks to your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, the little miracle church was dedicated to God on a clear, cold day in December 2012. Thank you!

Please keep praying for volunteers to continue answering God's call to work among the Navajo, so they can learn that God loves them and wants to spend forever with them.



ALLEN and KELLEY FOWLER continue to minister to their beloved Navajo people in Page, Arizona.

How to Be Saved



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 5:27–32; 13:1–5; Matt. 22:2–14; Zech. 3:1–5; John 8:30, 31; Luke 14:25–27.*

Memory Text: “‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life’” (*John 3:14, 15, NKJV*).

As the Israelites were being bitten by snakes in the desert, God instructed Moses to make a bronze one and place it on a pole so that whoever was bitten could look at it and be saved.

What healing properties can a bronze snake have? None. Healing came only from God. By looking at the bronze statue, however, the Israelites demonstrated their faith in God as their only hope of life and salvation.

The Lord wanted to teach them a spiritual lesson. He transformed a symbol of death into a symbol of life. That bronze serpent was a symbol of Christ, who became the Bearer of our sins in order to save us. By faith, we can all look to Christ lifted up on the cross and find a cure from the deadly sting of the old serpent, Satan. Otherwise, we are fated to die in our sins. The Word of God expresses what should be painfully obvious: as human beings, we are sinners in need of grace. That grace has been offered to us in Christ Jesus.

This week we will look at Jesus' teachings regarding the simple practical steps needed for salvation.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 2.

Recognize Your Need

Read Luke 5:27–32. How can you know which group you are in?

Many people are physically healthy and “have no need of a physician.” Who, though, is truly spiritually healthy? Of all human beings “there is none who does good, no, not one” (*Ps. 14:3, NKJV*); nobody is righteous by themselves (*Rom. 3:10*). We may do some morally good actions, but we cannot make ourselves righteous before God. Hence, by saying that He had “ ‘not come to call the righteous’ ” (*Luke 5:32, NKJV*), Jesus was referring to the Pharisees, who thought they were righteous although they were not. Unfortunately, though they believed that they were in good standing before God, they were blind spiritually (*John 9:40, 41*).

The first step, then, to receive the cure from sin is to recognize our state of sinfulness and our utter inability to heal ourselves. But how can we see our real need if we are blind? How can we acknowledge that we are sinners if it is precisely our sins that are preventing us from recognizing our true condition?

How can our spiritual eyes be opened so that we may recognize our desperate need of a Savior? See *John 16:8*.

The only eye salve that can make us see our real spiritual status is the Holy Spirit. Before any other work He may do for us, He has to convict us of sin. Persistently He calls to our conscience in order to produce in us an inescapable awareness of our sins and a deep sense of guilt, which leads us to long for a Savior. When we hear that call, we must listen and obey it; otherwise, sooner or later, we will be so hardened against the Holy Spirit that nothing can be done for us. What a scary thought!

Though guilt is often a bad thing, in what ways has the Holy Spirit been able to use guilt to your own spiritual advantage?

Repent

Recognizing our sins is not enough; it must be accompanied by repentance. The biblical meaning of repentance includes three aspects: acknowledgment of one's sin, sorrow for having sinned, and the desire not to sin any more. If one is lacking, there is no true repentance. For example, Judas admitted his sin, but he lacked grief for having betrayed the Master (*Matt. 27:3, 4*). He was overwhelmed with remorse, not with repentance. His confession was generated by fear of the consequences, not by his love of Christ.

We can see the importance of repentance by the fact that John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministry by preaching, “ ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ ” (*Matt. 3:2, 4:17, NKJV*). Later, when Jesus sent the Twelve on their first missionary trip, they went out, preaching “that people should repent” (*Mark 6:12, NKJV*). And after Pentecost, Peter exhorted the crowd to do the same (*Acts 2:38, 3:19*).

Look at the strong words Jesus used to emphasize the universal need for repentance in order to be saved. What message is He giving us here? See *Luke 13:1–5*.

Jesus affirmed the sinfulness of all people. Therefore, He urged His hearers: “ ‘Unless you repent you will all likewise perish’ ” (*vs. 5, NKJV*). Without repentance, redemption is impossible, because the absence of repentance demonstrates that people refuse to surrender to the Lord.

Now, we have been told “the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (*Rom. 2:4, NKJV*). What does that mean? A block of ice can be broken into small pieces, but the resulting pieces will still be ice. That same block of ice can be placed next to a heater, and it will melt away into water. The ice of our pride can be thawed only if we are exposed to the warmth of God's goodness and love. Thus, how crucial for us to dwell, as much as we can, on all the evidences we have been given of God's love for us.

“We do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we may repent.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 189.

What are the evidences of God's love? What have you seen and experienced and learned that gives you powerful reasons to trust in His goodness? Why is it so important always to dwell on those reasons, especially in bad times?

Believe in Jesus

True repentance goes hand in hand with faith in Jesus as our only Savior. Jesus frequently talked about the need to believe in Him in order to receive His blessings. “‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes’” (*Mark 9:23, NKJV*). Faith is essential if we are to be saved. Satan knows that, which is why he makes every effort to keep us from believing (*Luke 8:12*).

According to Jesus, what does it mean “to believe”? It is more than a vague feeling that something will just happen. It is more than a mental exercise. Saving faith is not devoid of content. On the contrary, faith has a definite object: Jesus Christ. Faith is believing not only in something but, especially, in Someone. Faith is trusting in Jesus and His death for us. Believing in Jesus means knowing Him, understanding who He is (*John 6:69*), and receiving Him personally (*John 1:12*).

God so loved the world that He gave us Jesus, so that all who truly believe in Him will have eternal life. His death does not mean that everyone will be saved, however. We have to be covered by His righteousness. By believing in Him, we have righteousness, we have assurance, and we have the great promise that He will raise us up at the last day (*John 6:40*).

To a woman who had lived a sinful life, Jesus assured her: “‘Your sins are forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you’” (*Luke 7:48, 50, NKJV*). What does that mean? Does our faith save us?

According to the Gospels, when Jesus healed some people, He said to them: “‘Your faith has made you well’” (*Matt. 9:22, Mark 10:52, Luke 17:19, NKJV*). By saying these words, He was not assigning any healing power to their faith. Their faith was just a complete trust in Jesus’ power to heal them. The power of faith does not come from the person who believes but from the God in whom that person believes.

Why must we be very careful in how we understand the role of faith in regard to prayer, especially about healing? Why is it wrong to conclude from the above verses that if healing doesn’t come as we pray, it’s because we don’t have enough faith?

The Wedding Garment

Jesus sat before the people and uttered what must have been to them shocking words: “Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 5:20, NKJV*). Few were more scrupulous in the observance of the letter of the law than were the Pharisees. Nevertheless, they failed because their behavior was intended to impress men more than to please God. Jesus warns us not to do likewise (*Matt. 6:1*).

How, then, can we be righteous before God? The parable of the marriage feast gives us the clue in finding the source of true righteousness.

Read Matthew 22:2–14. Why did the king want to be sure that every guest had the wedding garment for the feast? What did that garment represent? See *Isa. 61:10, Zech. 3:1–5*.

The king provided the wedding robes free of charge. Those present were invited randomly while traveling on the highways, and probably did not have the appropriate attire for the wedding, nor money to buy it. Both the invitation and the garment were gifts from the king. The only requirement needed to attend the feast was to accept both presents.

Since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, every human being is spiritually naked. Adam and Eve felt naked after disobeying, and they attempted to cover themselves by sewing fig leaves together, something utterly uncomfortable and ineffective (*Gen. 3:7*). The best righteousness that human effort can achieve is “like filthy rags” (*Isa. 64:6, NKJV*).

As in the parable, God provides the garment we need. He made garments for Adam and Eve and clothed them (*Gen. 3:21*), a symbol of His righteousness covering the sinner. The Lord also provides the garment of Christ’s righteousness for His church, so that she may “be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright” (*Rev. 19:8, NKJV*), “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (*Eph. 5:27, NKJV*). This robe “is the righteousness of Christ, His own unblemished character, that through faith is imparted to all who receive Him as their personal Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 310.

Above and beyond anything else we believe, why must we understand that our salvation comes only from the covering that Christ gives us as a gift? Why must we always remember this?

Follow Jesus

When in faith we recognize our need, repent, confess our sins, and claim Christ's righteousness for ourselves, we become His disciples. During His ministry, Jesus called different people, such as Peter and James and John, to be His disciples, a call that implied leaving everything in order to follow Him (*Matt. 4:20, 22; Mark 10:28; Luke 5:28*). In fact, in the Gospels the verb *to follow* practically became a synonym for *disciple*.

What two elements are essential in order to be a disciple of Jesus? See *John 8:30, 31*.

Some people try to separate faith in Jesus from adherence to Jesus' teachings, as if the first would be more important than the latter. But Jesus did not make such a distinction. For Him, both aspects are closely interrelated and fundamental for true discipleship. A disciple of Jesus is committed to His person, as well as to His words. Though there is always the danger of getting so caught up in doctrines and forms of faith that we lose sight of Jesus Himself, we must also be aware of the danger of thinking that all that matters in our walk with the Lord is to believe in Jesus.

What is the high cost of being a disciple of Jesus? See *Luke 14:25–27*.

Jesus used the verb *to hate* as a hyperbole meaning "to love less." The parallel passage in Matthew clarifies the meaning of Jesus' words: " 'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me' " (*Matt. 10:37, NKJV*). Jesus must have the first place in our lives if we want to be His disciples.

What has following Christ, being His disciple, cost you? What does your answer say about your walk with the Lord?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Repentance,” pp. 23–32, in *Steps to Christ*.

“We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 26.

“As we behold the Lamb of God upon the cross of Calvary, the mystery of redemption begins to unfold to our minds and the goodness of God leads us to repentance. In dying for sinners, Christ manifested a love that is incomprehensible; and as the sinner beholds this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition in the soul.”—Pages 26, 27.

“The humble and broken heart, subdued by genuine repentance, will appreciate something of the love of God and the cost of Calvary; and as a son confesses to a loving father, so will the truly penitent bring all his sins before God. And it is written, ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ 1 John 1:9.”—Page 41.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Many try to drown their sense of guilt with alcohol, drugs, worldly pleasures, or by cramming their lives with frenzied activities. Why do none of these methods really work? How would you help someone who is in this condition to find the true solution for guilt?
- 2 It is possible to recognize our sins without bearing “fruits worthy of repentance.” Why isn’t that true repentance? What is the value of these fruits? Are they good works done in order to gain God’s favor? Explain your answer.
- 3 Discuss the fact that Christ’s righteousness is free, but not cheap. Although we do not have to pay for it, the Lord had to pay an infinite price at the Cross. Think about how fallen we are, and how serious sin must be, that it took something as “extreme” as the death of the Son of God Himself in order to save us from the consequences of sin.

Serving to Save

Zho and his wife, Lai, are a young couple who serve as Global Mission pioneers in China. God sent them to serve in a city that had no Seventh-day Adventist believers. The couple rented a house that would work as a house church and began meeting their new neighbors.

One day Lai met an old man on the street. He was pushing a heavy tricycle loaded with goods to sell. Lai helped the man push the tricycle to his house as she told him about God. Later Zho visited the old man and invited him to attend their Bible discussions. The old man came.

Zho and Lai met some elderly people who live in a nearby group home. They noticed that the residents couldn't afford haircuts, and they offered to cut their hair without charge. The couple shared God's love with their new friends, and 15 senior citizens agreed to study the Bible with them. None of these seniors had come from a Christian background, but they were hungry to know about God.

When Zho presented the Sabbath message to the seniors, they all decided to worship on the Sabbath. But then the manager of the home in which they lived decided that Zho and Lai couldn't hold a worship service there. So Zho found a place nearby where they could worship. A number of these elderly people walk 15 minutes to their new house church several times a week. Zho continues to visit those who can't walk that far to church.

The couple went to a nearby village to help farmers harvest their crops. They made friends in the village and invited the farmers to join them for worship. The farmers decided among themselves that Zho and Lai were good people and that their God must be good as well. They listened to Zho's messages about Jesus, and today, long after the crops have been harvested, 30 villagers are studying the Bible with Zho. One day soon there will be a church in this village.

"We seek to meet the needs of people who are old or sick or discouraged," Zho said. The group that worships with them is growing, and several people are preparing for baptism.

The couple is training the local people to lead the congregations in the city and in the country so that when they leave, there will be people who can carry on the work.

Our mission offerings help support Global Mission pioneers in dozens of countries throughout the world. Thank you for giving so that others can learn that God loves them and is preparing a place for them in His kingdom. Pray that God will bless their efforts to reach many in China.

Growing *in* Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 3:1–15; 2 Cor. 5:17; John 15:4–10; Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 9:23, 24.*

Memory Text: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” (*John 3:3, NKJV*).

Nicodemus felt drawn to Christ but dared not visit Him openly. He greeted Jesus politely, acknowledging Him as a teacher from God. The Master knew that behind this courteous greeting was a seeker of truth; therefore, wasting no time, He told Nicodemus that he did not need theoretical knowledge as much as he needed spiritual regeneration, a new birth.

This concept was hard for Nicodemus to grasp. Because of his descent from Abraham, he was sure he had a place in God's kingdom; in addition, as a strict Pharisee, he surely deserved the favor of God, right? So, why did he need such a radical change?

Patiently, Jesus explained that spiritual transformation is a supernatural work produced by the Holy Spirit. Though we cannot see or understand how it happens, we can perceive the results. We call it conversion, a new life in Christ.

Though we should always remember how the Lord called us and converted us, our challenge is to steadfastly abide in Him daily so that He can transform us more and more into His image.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 9.*

To Be Born Again

A zealous Christian confronted a politician and asked her, “Have you been born again?” Angry at what she deemed a personal question, the politician replied, “It worked the first time, thank you.”

Maybe it did, but considering our fallen nature, our first birth isn’t enough, at least not for eternal life. For that, we must be “born again.”

Read Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:1–15. How did Jesus explain what it meant to be born again?

No doubt Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, knew the Old Testament Scriptures, which speak about the need for a “new heart” and God’s willingness to create it in us (*Ps. 51:10, Ezek. 36:26*). Jesus explained to Nicodemus this truth and how it can happen.

The dialogue recorded by John ends with Jesus’ words. No answer from Nicodemus. He probably went home immersed in profound reflections. Quietly, the Holy Spirit worked in him, and three years later he was ready to openly become Jesus’ disciple.

The fact that it is necessary to be born again shows without a doubt that our previous birth is insufficient from a spiritual standpoint. The new birth must be a double one: of water and of the Spirit. In light of John the Baptist’s ministry, Nicodemus easily understood that to be born of water referred to baptism with water. What he also needed to know was that to be born of the Spirit is the renewing of the heart by the Holy Spirit.

There are similarities between physical and spiritual births. Both mark the beginning of a new life. Also, we produce neither birth ourselves; it’s done for us. But there is also an important difference between them: we were unable to choose if we wanted to be born physically; we can, however, choose to be born spiritually. Only those who freely decide to allow the Holy Spirit to generate a new spiritual self within them are born again. God respects our freedom and, although eager to transform us, He does not change us by force.

Think about the way in which the Lord produced your conversion. It does not matter if it was through dramatic circumstances or through a long and imperceptible process of transformation. How have you experienced the new birth?

The New Life in Christ

Being born again is possible only through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus made use of the fact that the Greek word *pneuma* means both “Spirit” and “wind” in order to illustrate the process of conversion (*John 3:8*). The wind blows; none of us can start it, direct it, nor stop it. Its great power is beyond human control. We can only react to it, either resisting it or using its potential for our benefit.

Likewise, the Holy Spirit is constantly working upon the heart of every human being, drawing him or her to Christ. No one has control over its great saving and transforming power. We can resist it or yield to it. When we surrender ourselves to His convicting influence, the Holy Spirit produces a new life in us.

Is there any way to know if we have experienced the new birth? Yes. The Spirit works invisibly, but the results of His activity are visible. Those around us will know that Jesus created a new heart in us. The Spirit always produces an outward demonstration of the inward transformation He makes in us. As Jesus said, “ ‘by their fruits you will know them’ ” (*Matt. 7:20, NKJV*).

The new life in Christ is not a patched-up life with a few external reformations. It is not a modification or improvement of the old life but a complete transformation.

What do the following texts tell us about what the new birth will accomplish in us? *Titus 3:5–7, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15.*

Through the Holy Spirit, Christ implants in us new thoughts, feelings, and motives. He awakens our conscience, changes our mind, subdues every unholy desire, and fills us with the sweet peace of heaven. Though the change doesn’t happen instantly, over time we do become a new creature in Christ. We have to, because the original version, the one that came out of the womb, isn’t right with God.

Meditate on your life during the last 24 hours. To what degree did those who relate with you perceive Christ in your words, attitudes, and actions? Pray about those traits of character that still need to be modeled by the Holy Spirit.

Abiding in Christ

A flourishing spiritual life is possible only by constantly depending on Christ. Jesus used the illustration of the vine to teach us how to accomplish this. “‘I am the vine, you are the branches,’” said Jesus (*John 15:5, NKJV*). In the Old Testament, Israel was depicted as a vine that the Lord had planted (*Isa. 5:1–7; Ps. 80:8, 9; Jer. 2:21*), but Jesus presents Himself as “the true vine” (*John 15:1*) and urges His followers to be united with Him just as the branches abide in the vine.

What do these texts teach us about abiding continually in Christ? See *John 15:4–10*.

A branch recently separated from the vine may appear alive for a while, but it will surely wither and die because it has been cut off from the source of life. By the same token, we can receive life only through our connection with Christ. But in order to be effective, this union must be maintained. Devotional time in the morning is essential, but our communion with the Lord has to continue throughout the day. Abiding in Christ means seeking Him constantly, asking for His guidance, praying for His strength to obey His will, and begging for His love to fill us.

One of the most deceitful traps is to try to live the Christian life independently from the Lord. “‘Without Me you can do nothing’” (*John 15:5, NKJV*). Without Him we cannot resist even one temptation, overcome one sin, or develop a character in His likeness. The new spiritual life can grow only by means of an uninterrupted communion with Christ.

By reading the Word and meditating on it, we are nourished and strengthened. “‘The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life,’” said Jesus (*John 6:63, NKJV*). Treasured in our hearts and minds, these words will inspire our prayers in order to keep us in contact with the Lord. Though it’s easy to be distracted by “‘the cares of this world’” (*Mark 4:19, NKJV*), we must make a concentrated effort to abide in Jesus.

What are the greatest obstacles that prevent you from abiding constantly in Christ? What steps can you take in order to remove or overcome them?

Prayer

Along with studying the Bible, prayer is indispensable in order for us to abide in Christ and grow spiritually. Even Jesus Himself needed prayer to be united with the Father. He left us an example of a life of prayer. Prayer marked the crucial moments of His life. He prayed when He was baptized. He often prayed in solitary places before daylight or on the mountain after sunset. Sometimes He spent the entire night praying, such as when He chose the Twelve Apostles. He prayed to resurrect Lazarus. Not even the cross deterred Him from praying.

If the “ ‘Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him’ ” (*Matt. 6:8, NKJV*), why do we need to present Him our needs in prayer? Because through prayer, we learn to empty ourselves of ourselves and become more dependent upon Him.

“ ‘Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you’ ” is Jesus’ promise (*Matt. 7:7, NKJV*). Although we do not need to impress Him by endless prayers of vain repetitions (*Matt. 6:5–9*), we need to persevere in prayer, clinging to His promises (*John 15:7, 16:24*) no matter what.

How can the different parts of the Lord’s Prayer help us to grow in Christ? See *Matt. 6:9–13*.

Jesus is our Mediator in heaven. Therefore, He instructed us to address our prayers to the Father in His name. “ ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you’ ” (*John 16:23, NKJV*). Christ taught that there are certain conditions in order for this wonderful promise to be fulfilled. We need to believe that God can answer us (*Matt. 21:22*). An attitude of forgiveness toward our neighbor is required (*Mark 11:25*). Most important, our will should always be subordinated to the Father’s will (*Matt. 6:10, Luke 22:42*). And any “delay” in the answer should not discourage us; on the contrary, we need to always pray and not give up (*Luke 18:1*).

“Lord, teach us to pray” (*Luke 11:1*) is always a relevant request, no matter how long ago we accepted Christ as our Savior. In what aspect of your prayer life do you still need to grow by the grace of God?

Die to Self Every Day

Paradoxically, it is only by dying that we may truly live. When baptized, we (ideally) died to our old nature and rose again to a new life. It would have been wonderful if the old man of sin had permanently died when we were buried under baptismal waters. Sooner or later, however, all of us have discovered that our past habits and tendencies are still alive and do strive to regain control of our lives. After our baptism, our old nature has to be put to death again and again. That is why Jesus associated the Christian life with a cross.

What does Luke 9:23, 24 mean?

Many think the cross they have to bear is a serious sickness, unfavorable circumstances in life, or a permanent disability. While any of these surely is heavy, the meaning of Jesus' words goes further. To take up our cross means to deny ourselves daily. Not just once in a while but every day; not just a part of us but our entire being.

The Christian life is a cruciform life. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (*Gal. 2:20, NKJV*). In the ancient world, the victims of crucifixion did not die immediately. Usually, they agonized for many hours, sometimes several days, while hanging on the cross. Similarly, our old nature, although crucified, fights to survive and get down from the cross.

It is not easy to deny ourselves. Our old nature lingers on; our old man doesn't want to die. Moreover, we cannot nail ourselves to the cross. "No man can empty himself of self. We can only consent for Christ to accomplish the work. Then the language of the soul will be, Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul.

"It is not only at the beginning of the Christian life that this renunciation of self is to be made. At every advance step heavenward it is to be renewed. . . . Only by constant renunciation of self and dependence on Christ can we walk safely."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 159, 160. There must be a daily surrendering to the Lord.

When was the last time you died to self? What does your answer say to you, especially in light of today's texts?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Consecration,” pp. 43–48, in *Steps to Christ*; “Nicodemus,” pp. 167–177, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 43.

“We cannot retain our own self and be filled with the fullness of God. We must be emptied of self. If heaven is gained by us at last, it will be only through the renunciation of self and in receiving the mind, the spirit, and the will of Christ Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 155.

“When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. . . . The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 173.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is your own experience with what it means to abide in Christ? What happens when you connect with Jesus? What happens when you don't?
- 2 Who hasn't struggled with the issue of prayers that are not answered, at least as we have prayed them? How do you maintain faith in God and in His promises in the face of requests that have not been answered as you wanted? What crucial things must we always keep in mind in such situations?
- 3 What is it about self, about the very nature of self, that we are called to deny it daily? Look at it this way: if you didn't deny self, if you allowed self to dominate all that you thought or did, what kind of life would you live? Would it, in any way, resemble that of our Master? What does your answer tell you about yourself apart from Christ?

Faithful Renalto

Renalto and his parents live in a town on the beach in northern Peru. When he was eight years old, his mother lost her job. The family faced difficult financial times. Renalto's younger brother was sick, and his mother had to stay home with him. So Renalto walked the few blocks to church alone. He prayed that God would help his family be able to attend church together again.

Then a Seventh-day Adventist couple moved into a home on the beach near Renalto's home. They learned that Renalto's mother was a cook and invited her to open a restaurant on the porch of their home. "You can even rent part of our house," the couple said. "That way you'll be close to your work and your children."

The family moved into the couple's home, and his mother's restaurant has become well-known among tourists visiting the beach. Father completed his studies and found a better job. At last Renalto and his family could attend worship together in the little Adventist church in town.

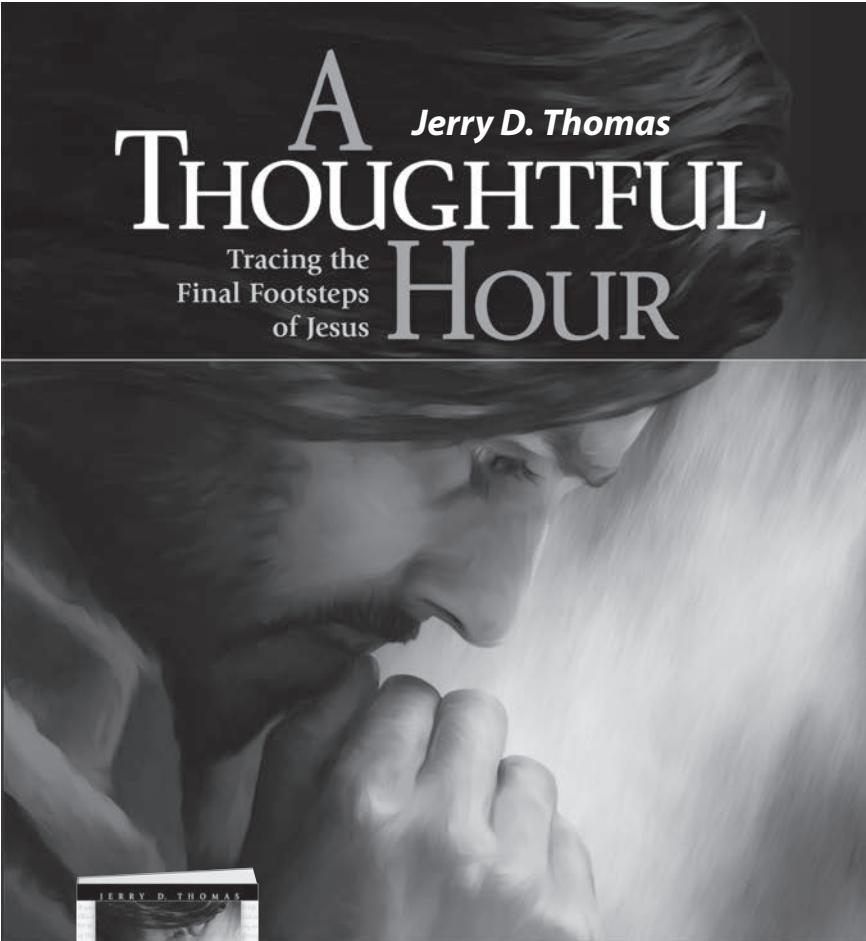
The Adventist couple invited Renalto to study the Bible with them, and he accepted. Renalto invited some of his classmates to study the Bible with him. But when Renalto asked his Adventist friends to study with his classmates, they urged him to have his own small group. "We'll help you," they encouraged.

Renalto began studying with his friends. More children came, and the group grew. When the studies ended, Renalto and Sandra, one of his classmates, were baptized together. Sandra invited Renalto to start a small group in her house. Soon another small group had formed.

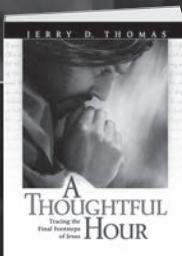
Sandra's father was not a Christian, but he had seen the changes in Sandra's life. He listened to the children's small-group discussions, and in time he accepted Jesus as his Savior. Sandra's parents began worshipping in the little Adventist church too. Her parents invited some of their friends to the children's small group, and soon it had more adults than children. A woman in the church offered to lead the adults in their own group. Today, 15 to 18 people attend the adult small group every week.

Renalto and Sandra's small group has moved to the church, where 25 or more children, many from the neighborhood, attend every week. Renalto helps lead the group, though he is one of the youngest there. He tells them, "Remember when I invited you to the small group? Now it's your turn to invite your friends to come." And because of this the group has grown.

In 2012, part of a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped provide teaching materials for children who lead small groups in Peru. Thank you for making it possible to share God's love with others through this successful program in Peru and throughout South America.



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Living Like Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 9:36, Mark 10:21, Luke 10:30–37, Matt. 25:31–46, Luke 6:32–35, John 15:4–12.*

Memory Text: “‘A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another’ ” (*John 13:34, NKJV*).

Contrary to what many think, the command to love our neighbor is not something newly taught by the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God already had commanded His people to “love your neighbor as yourself” (*Lev. 19:18, NKJV*) and to “love [the stranger] as yourself” (*vs. 34, NKJV*).

Why, then, did Jesus say, “‘A new commandment I give to you’ ” (*NKJV*)? The newness of Jesus’ instruction was in that it had a new measure: “‘as I have loved you’ ” (*NKJV*). Before the incarnation of Christ, men did not have a full manifestation of God’s love. Now, through His selfless life and death, Jesus demonstrated the real and deepest meaning of love.

“Love was the element in which Christ moved and walked and worked. He came to embrace the world in the arms of His love. . . . We are to follow the example set by Christ, and make Him our pattern, until we shall have the same love for others as He has manifested for us.”—Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 27.

This week, as we consider Jesus’ tender, sympathetic, considerate, and compassionate life, let our hearts be touched and molded by His divine active principle of love, which is the watermark of true Christianity.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 16.

How Jesus Lived

In spite of being constantly under Satan’s fiercest attacks, Jesus lived an unselfish life of loving service. His priority was always centered on other people, not on Himself. From childhood to the cross, He showed a constant tender disposition to minister to others. His willing hands were ever ready to relieve every case of suffering He perceived. He lovingly cared for those who were considered by society to be of little value, such as children, women, foreigners, lepers, and tax collectors. He “ ‘did not come to be served, but to serve’ ” (*Matt. 20:28, NKJV*). Therefore, He “ ‘went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil’ ” (*Acts 10:38, NKJV*). His sympathy and merciful interest for the well-being of others were more important to Him than satisfying His own physical need for food or shelter. Indeed, even at the cross He cared more for His mother than He did about His own sufferings (*John 19:25–27*).

What do Matthew 9:36, 14:14, and 15:32 teach us about how Jesus looked at people?

Jesus was sensitive to the needs of people, and He truly cared about them. His heart reached out with compassion to great multitudes that were weary and scattered. He was moved with compassion toward helpless individuals, such as the two blind men near Jericho (*Matt. 20:34*), a pleading leper (*Mark 1:40, 41*), and a widow who had just lost her only son (*Luke 7:12, 13*).

What principle of action guided Jesus as He related to different people? See Mark 10:21 and John 11:5.

Every act of mercy, every miracle, every word of Jesus was motivated by His infinite love, an unwavering and permanent love. At the end of His life, He vividly showed His disciples that, having loved them from the beginning, “He loved them to the end” (*John 13:1, NKJV*). With His death on the cross, He demonstrated to the entire universe that selfless love triumphs over egoism. In the light of Calvary, it is clear that the principle of self-renouncing love is the only valid foundation of life for earth and heaven.

“ ‘Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends’ ” (*John 15:13, NKJV*). **How do you understand what this means in daily, practical terms? How does one apply this principle day by day?**

Love Your Neighbor

To live like Jesus means to show the same love He demonstrated. He illustrated this kind of love through the parable of the good Samaritan (*Luke 10:30–37*), which He told in dialogue with a lawyer. The lawyer summarized our duty to God and fellow human beings: “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself’ ” (*vs. 27, NKJV*). The lawyer knew His Bible well (he quoted by heart Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18), but he must have felt guilty for not demonstrating love to his neighbor. In an attempt to justify himself, he asked Jesus: “ ‘Who is my neighbor?’ ” (*Luke 10:29, NKJV*).

How did Jesus explain who is our neighbor? What implications does the parable of the good Samaritan have for us? See *Luke 10:30–37*. How is the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” related to the golden rule? *Matt. 7:12*.

To the question: “who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered, basically, that our neighbor is every person who needs our help. Thus, instead of asking: “what can my neighbor do for me?” we should ask: “what can I do for my neighbor?”

Jesus went far beyond the usual negative rendering of this rule at that time: “do not do to others what you yourself dislike.” By presenting it in a positive way, He addressed not only what we need to avoid but especially what we have to do. We need especially to remember that this principle does not tell us to treat others as they treat us. After all, it’s easy to be kind to those who are kind to us or nasty to those who are nasty to us; most people can do that. Instead, our love toward our neighbor should always be independent of the way our neighbor treats us.

Think of someone who has treated you in a bad way. How have you treated him or her in return? What does Christ’s example, and how He treated those who mistreated Him, teach you about how you could better relate to those who don’t treat you kindly?

Loving Service

What is the basic message of Matthew 25:31–46?

At the final day there will be many surprises. Those at the right hand of the Son of man never imagined that their manifestation of unselfish love would be so decisive. Christ will not commend them for the eloquent sermons they have delivered, the valuable work they have done, or the generous donations they have given. Instead, Christ shall welcome them into heaven for the little caring things done to the least of His brethren.

Those at the left-hand will also be surprised at the reason given by the King for His verdict. Some of them will even say: “ ‘ “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” ’ ” (*Matt. 7:22, NKJV*). Although these are desirable deeds, without a loving attitude they are worthless. These people professed to serve Christ, but the Lord never knew them (*vs. 23*) because they never really loved Him or His brethren. They didn’t practice the principles of true religion (*see James 1:27*).

Commentators have suggested various interpretations regarding who are “the least of these My brethren” (*Matt. 25:40*). It is important to determine who they are in order to know the extent of our Christian responsibility. Some interpreters argue that Jesus’ “least brethren” are the apostles and other Christian missionaries. They find support for this view in Matthew 10:40–42 and conclude that the fate of all human beings depends on how they treat Christian missionaries. Other scholars claim, based on Matthew 12:48–50, that Jesus’ “least brethren” are His followers in general. There is no doubt that all the disciples of Jesus are His brethren; but the scope of Jesus’ words seems to be even wider. Christ “identifies Himself with every child of humanity. . . . He is the Son of man, and thus a brother to every son and daughter of Adam.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 638.

Think of a time when you were in desperate need of help, and someone came to your aid. What did that aid mean to you in your suffering and pain? How did that experience show why it’s so important that we be willing to help others who are in need in any way we can?

Love Your Enemies

The supreme proof of genuine Christianity is loving our enemies. Jesus established this high standard in contrast with the prevalent idea of His time. From the commandment, “ ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (*Lev. 19:18, NKJV*), many had inferred something the Lord never said or planned: you shall hate your enemy. Of course, that wasn’t implied in the text itself.

In what practical ways is love toward our enemies manifested, according to Christ? See *Luke 6:27, 28*.

An adversary can show us enmity in three different ways: hostile attitudes (“hate you”), bad words (“curse you”), and abusive actions (“spitefully use you and persecute you” [*Matt. 5:44, NKJV*]). To this threefold expression of enmity, Christ instructs us to respond with three manifestations of love: doing good actions to them (“do good” to them), speaking well of them (“bless” them), and interceding before God for them (“pray” for them). The Christian’s answer to hostility and antagonism is to “overcome evil with good” (*Rom. 12:21*).

Notice: Jesus requests us first to love our foes and then, as a result, to demonstrate this love through good actions, kind words, and intercessory prayer. Without heaven-inspired love, those actions, words, and prayers would be an offensive and hypocritical forgery of true Christianity.

What reasons did Jesus mention to explain why we have to love our enemies? See *Luke 6:32–35*.

In order to help us to understand this high command, the Lord used three arguments. First, we need to live above the low standards of the world. Even sinners love each other, and even criminals help each other. If following Christ doesn’t raise us to live and love in a way superior to the virtue of the children of this world, what would its value be? Second, God will reward us for loving our enemies; even though we do not love for the reward, He will grant it graciously to us. And third, this type of love is an evidence of our close communion with our heavenly Father, who “ ‘is kind to the unthankful and evil’ ” (*Luke 6:35, NKJV*).

How to Live Like Jesus

Jesus' teachings set such a high ideal of a selfless, loving life that most of us probably feel overwhelmed and discouraged. How can we, who are selfish by nature, love our neighbor unselfishly? Moreover, is it even possible for us to love our enemies? From a human point of view it is utterly impossible.

But the Lord would never ask us to love and serve those who are hateful and unlovable without providing us also with the means to accomplish it. "This standard is not one to which we cannot attain. In every command or injunction that God gives there is a promise, the most positive, underlying the command. God has made provision that we may become like unto Him, and He will accomplish this for all who do not interpose a perverse will and thus frustrate His grace."—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 76.

What is the promise underlying the command to love our enemies? It is the assurance that God is kind and merciful to the unthankful and evil (*Luke 6:35, 36*), which includes us. We can love our enemies because God loved us first, even though we were His enemies (*Rom. 5:10*). When we daily reaffirm our acceptance of His loving sacrifice for us on the cross, His self-denying love pervades our lives. The more we realize and experience the Lord's love for us, the more His love will flow from us to others, even to our enemies.

What is the relationship between abiding in Christ and His love, and loving our neighbor? See *John 15:4–12*.

Our daily need is not only to accept Christ's death for us again but also to surrender our will to Him and abide in Him. In the way Jesus Himself did not seek His own will but the will of the Father (*John 5:30*), so we need to depend on Jesus and His will. For without Him, we can do nothing.

As we choose every day to submit ourselves to Jesus, He lives in us and through us. Then "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (*Gal. 2:20, NKJV*) and changes my egocentric attitudes into a selfless, loving life.

Read again John 15:4–12. What is the joy that Jesus is talking about there? How can we experience for ourselves the joy that comes from serving Him, even when we don't necessarily feel happy about our immediate circumstances?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Good Samaritan,” pp. 497–505; and “The Least of These My Brethren,” pp. 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“All around us are poor, tried souls that need sympathizing words and helpful deeds. There are widows who need sympathy and assistance. There are orphans whom Christ has bidden His followers receive as a trust from God. . . . They are members of God’s great household, and Christians as His stewards are responsible for them. ‘Their souls,’ He says, ‘will I require at thine hand.’”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 386, 387.

“It is not the greatness of the work which we do, but the love and fidelity with which we do it, that wins the approval of the Saviour.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 325.

Discussion Questions:

- ① At first sight, the parable of the sheep and the goats seems to teach that salvation is by works, that is, the more good works we do, the better our chances of getting into the kingdom of God. But the surprise of the saved ones shows that they did not demonstrate love in order to gain merits. Jesus clearly taught that eternal life is the result of believing in Him (*John 3:15; 6:40, 47; 11:25, 26*). True loving deeds come from faith and love to God (*Gal. 5:6*). These deeds are the evidence, not the cause, of salvation. How can we endeavor to act in a loving manner while, at the same time, avoiding the trap of thinking that we are doing these things in order to earn our right to heaven? Why must we always distinguish between the fruit of salvation and the means?
- ② It’s one thing to love your “enemies” when they are nothing but annoying, unfriendly creatures, such as difficult coworkers, rude acquaintances, or ungrateful neighbors. That’s hard enough. But what about true enemies, people who have done you harm or who intended to do you or your family harm? How are we to love them?
- ③ People can argue with us over our theology, doctrine, lifestyle, pretty much everything. But who can argue against unselfish, disinterested love? Unselfish love reveals a power that transcends rational or logical argument. How can we learn to express this love, no matter the cost to ourselves?

God Is My Rock

I'm Angelo. I live in Madagascar, the large island off the eastern coast of Africa. My parents are Christians, but they attended different churches and often fought over what to believe. To me, church worship became a source of arguments, not an act of love.

When I was ten years old, my mother wanted to enroll me in a Christian school where I would be in a better environment. She found a Seventh-day Adventist school near our home and asked Dad to let me study there. At last Dad agreed.

Until this time, all I knew about God was what my father had taught me. But in my new school, we studied the Bible as a class. I was used to arguing about God, so if a student said something I didn't agree with, I'd argue with them.

However, I soon learned that the Adventist students knew lots of Bible texts to back up what they were saying. Their knowledge pushed me to read the Bible so I could support my points better. My new Adventist friends encouraged me to study the Bible to see what God said, not to argue points.

My interest in religion grew, and by the time I was 15 I had accepted Jesus as my Savior and asked to become an Adventist. My mother accepted my decision and was actually quite glad. But my father wasn't so happy. We often got into arguments about Bible topics, each of us quoting texts to prove our points.

My parents joined another church together to be united in faith. They hoped I would join them, but I told them that God is my rock, and I want to follow Him only.

I've been an Adventist for three years now. My parents still haven't accepted my faith, but they've accepted my decision. I hope that one day they will worship with me in church. I can see changes in my parents because of my strong stand for God, and that makes me glad.



I thank my parents for sending me to the Adventist school. I thank my teachers and fellow students for leading me to the true path in Jesus. And I thank you, dear Sabbath School members, for sharing your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering with my school in 2012. That offering has helped improve my school and provide more classrooms and dormitory space for others who want to study here and learn that God wants to be their rock as well.

ANGELO is a student at Mahajanea Adventist School in northwestern Madagascar.

The Church



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 32:4; Ps. 28:1; John 17; John 15:1–5; Matt. 7:1–5; Matt. 5:23, 24; 18:15–18.*

Memory Text: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (*John 17:20, 21, NKJV*).

The roots of the Christian church can be traced back to Adam, Abraham, and the sons of Israel. The Lord had called Abraham, and later the Israelites, to enter into a covenant relationship with Him in order to bless the world through them. In the course of sacred history, that covenant relationship was continued by the church.

The church was not an invention of the apostles or of any human being. During His ministry, Christ Himself announced His intention of establishing His church: “I will build My church” (*Matt. 16:18, NKJV*). The church owes its existence to Jesus Christ. He is its Originator.

According to the Gospels, the term *church* appears on the lips of Jesus only three times (*Matt. 16:18, 18:17*). This doesn't mean, however, that He didn't deal with the subject. In fact, He taught very important concepts relating to the church. Our study this week will center on two main ideas: the foundation of the church and the unity of the church.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 23.

The Foundation of the Church

Jesus said, “ ‘On this rock I will build My church’ ” (*Matt. 16:18, NKJV*). Who is the *rock* (*petra* in Greek) upon which the church is built? Some interpreters believe that Peter is the rock. They argue that the Lord used a play on words between Peter and rock (*Petros* and *petra*, respectively, in Greek)—a play that presumably would be clearer in the Aramaic language, which Jesus probably used. The fact is, however, that nobody knows with certitude the exact wording of Jesus’ statement in Aramaic. We have only the Greek text recorded by Matthew, which distinguishes between *Petros* (stone) and *petra* (rock), a distinction that should not be overlooked.

There are good reasons to affirm that *petra* refers to Christ. The immediate context of Jesus’ statement (*vss. 13–20*) centers on Christ’s identity and mission, not Peter’s. Besides, Jesus had previously used the image of building upon a rock, clearly identifying the rock as Himself and His teachings (*Matt. 7:24, 25*).

What is the symbolic meaning of “rock” in the Old Testament? *Deut. 32:4; Ps. 28:1; 31:2, 3; 42:9; 62:2; Isa. 17:10.*

When Peter and the other apostles heard Jesus speaking of building His church on a rock, they would have interpreted the image in terms of what it meant in the Old Testament—namely, a symbol of God.

Peter himself affirmed that Christ is “ ‘the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone’ ” (*Acts 4:11, NKJV*), and he applied the term *rock* to Christ as the foundation of the church (*1 Pet. 2:4–8*). While he compared Christians in general to “living stones,” he applied the term *rock* (*petra*) to Christ alone. In the Bible no human being is called *petra*, except Jesus.

The apostle Paul used the term *petra* in reference to Christ (*Rom. 9:33, 1 Cor. 10:4*) and decidedly declared that “no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (*1 Cor. 3:11, NKJV*). We conclude, therefore, that the apostolic church unanimously understood that Jesus Christ Himself is the underlying *petra* upon which the church is built, and all the prophets and apostles, including Peter, are the first layer of living stones in the church’s spiritual edifice (*Eph. 2:20*).

Why is it important to know that the church, feeble as it sometimes may seem, is founded upon Christ Himself?

Christ's Prayer for Unity

It was Thursday night. After the Last Supper, Jesus and the disciples went toward the Mount of Olives. On their way to Gethsemane, Jesus stopped and prayed for Himself, for His disciples, and for all who later would believe in Him through the apostles' preaching. Although the agony of the Cross was before Him, His greatest concern was not for Himself but for His followers. John 17 presents Jesus' longest intercessory prayer recorded in the Bible. It is encouraging to think that He prayed for everyone who believes in Him, including each of us.

Read John 17. What was Jesus' main prayer request to the Father regarding the believers? See especially verses 21–23.

Unity is crucial for the life of the church. We can measure its importance by the fact that four times Christ repeated His eager desire that His followers may be one (*John 17:11, 21–23*). In that special final hour, the Lord could have prayed for many other very significant and necessary things. Instead, He focused His prayer on the unity of the believers. He knew that the greatest danger for the church would be a spirit of rivalry and division.

Jesus' plea is not for uniformity but rather for a personal unity similar to His relationship with the Father. He and the Father are Two Persons, distinct from each other, with different functions. Yet, They are One in nature and purpose. By the same token, we all have different temperaments, backgrounds, abilities, and roles, but we all should be united in Jesus Christ.

This kind of unity does not happen spontaneously. In order to have it, we must fully accept Christ's lordship in our lives. He must mold our character, and we must surrender our will to His will.

This unity is not an end in itself. It is a testimony to inspire the world to believe in Christ as the Savior sent by the Father. Harmony and union among men of diverse dispositions is the strongest witness possible that God has sent His Son to save sinners. It is an unquestionable evidence of Christ's saving and transforming power. And we have the privilege of bearing this witness.

Many times unity is threatened by nothing other than selfishness. How can we make sure that we are not guilty of jeopardizing unity for no good reason?

Christ's Provision for Unity

What is the basis for the unity that Jesus prayed about for His church?

See *John 17:23* and *John 15:1–5*.

“‘You in Me, and I in you’” (*John 14:20, NKJV*) expresses the intimate relationship we need to have with Jesus. The presence of Jesus in our hearts produces unity. He brings to our lives two things that are indispensable for unity: the divine Word and divine love.

If we have Jesus, we will also have His words, which are actually the words of the Father (*John 14:24; 17:8, 14*). Jesus is “the truth” (*John 14:6*), and the Word of the Father “is truth,” as well (*John 17:17*). Unity in Jesus means unity in the Word of God. In order to have unity, we need to agree on the content of the truth as presented in the Word of God. Any attempt to attain unity without adherence to a body of biblical beliefs is destined to failure.

The Lord also wants His followers to be united by true love. If we have Jesus, we will have the perfect love the Father has for the Son (*vs. 26*). This love is not a temporary emotion or feeling but a living and permanent principle of action. In order to have true love, we must have less of self and more of Jesus. Our selfish pride must die, and Jesus must live in us. Then we will truly and sincerely love one another, making possible the perfect unity that Jesus prayed for.

“When those who claim to believe the truth are sanctified through the truth, when they learn of Christ, His meekness, and lowliness, there will be complete and perfect unity in the church.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*[®], September 19, 1900.

It has not always been easy to maintain a high view of truth and to have deep love for one another at the same time. There is always the risk of emphasizing one at the expense of the other. There was a time when doctrine alone was considered the most important element for unity. Fortunately, this lack of balance has been gradually corrected. Today, however, we run the risk of going to the other extreme: to think that love is more important than truth for unity. We need to remember that love without truth is blind, and truth without love is fruitless. Mind and heart must work together.

The apostolic church exhibited the unity for which Christ prayed. “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine [truth] and fellowship [love]” (*Acts 2:42, NKJV*).

A Great Obstacle for Unity

How can Jesus' words in Matthew 7:1–5 help us to avoid divisions and conflicts in the church?

It is much easier to see the faults in others than to see our own. To criticize gives a false sense of superiority, because the critic compares himself with other human beings who seem to be worse than he is. Our aim, however, is not to compare ourselves with others but with Jesus.

How many problems could we avoid if we would all obey the divine command: “ ‘ You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people’ ” (*Lev. 19:16, NKJV*). It is painfully true that “a whisperer separates the best of friends” (*Prov. 16:28, NKJV*).

On the other hand, there are circumstances when it is necessary to speak about another person. Before we do that, however, we should ask ourselves three questions:

1. *Is what I am about to say true?* “ ‘ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor’ ” (*Exod. 20:16, NKJV*). Sometimes we may report something as a fact while it is actually an assumption or a guess. Besides, we may unconsciously add our own subjective assessment, running the risk of judging erroneously the intentions of other people.

2. *Is what I am about to say edifying?* Will it be helpful for those who hear it? Paul admonishes us to speak only “what is good for necessary edification” (*Eph. 4:29, NKJV*). If something were true but not edifying, wouldn't it be better not to say it?

3. *Is it possible to say it in a loving way?* The way we say something is as important as what we say (*see Prov. 25:11*). If it is true and edifying, we have to be sure that we can say it in a way that it will not offend other people.

James compares the tongue with a little fire that kindles a great forest (*James 3:5, 6*). If we hear gossip, we shouldn't add more wood to the fire, because “where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases” (*Prov. 26:20, NKJV*). Gossip requires a chain of transmitters to be alive. We can stop it by simply refusing to hear it; or, if we have already heard it, avoid repeating it. “Instead of gossiping, thus creating mischief, let us tell of the matchless power of Christ, and speak of His glory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 306.

There's no doubt about it: criticism of others can make us feel better about ourselves. What happens, however, when we compare ourselves with Jesus?

The Restoration of Unity

Why is reconciliation with an offended brother a prerequisite for acceptable worship? See *Matt. 5:23, 24*.

There were different kinds of offerings brought to the altar, but Jesus was probably referring to an animal sacrificed so the sinner could receive divine forgiveness. Before we can obtain God's pardon, however, we must make things right with others. Reconciliation requires a humble recognition of our faults. Without this attitude, how could we ask for God's forgiveness?

What three steps should we follow if someone has hurt us? See *Matt. 18:15–18*.

Jesus tells us that, instead of talking about the offense with others, we should speak to the erring person, not to criticize but to show the person his (or her) fault and invite him (or her) to repent (*Lev. 19:17*). With a spirit of meekness and tender love, we should make every possible attempt to help the person see his (or her) mistake, allowing him (or her) to repent and apologize. It is very important not to put the person to shame by making his (or her) error public. That would make the offender's recovery much more difficult.

Ideally, the private conversation will lead to repentance and reconciliation. However, if the offender does not admit wrongdoing, or is unwilling to make things right, the next recourse is to take one or two witnesses (*Deut. 19:15*) in an effort to persuade the erring person. They should not be personally involved in the situation in order to be in a better position to call the offender to repentance. If the offender refuses to hear their counsel, they can bear witness to the efforts that have been made on his (or her) behalf.

Finally, and only if the first two attempts have failed, we should "tell it to the church"—not yet for a disciplinary action but for an ultimate appeal to lead to repentance. From the beginning, the whole process has a redemptive goal (*Gal. 6:1*).

We should remember that redemption is the best way to bring healing for everyone involved in a dispute. When someone has hurt us, why do we so often not follow the procedure that Jesus gave? How can we learn to not let a desire for revenge cloud our thinking?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Christian Unity,” pp. 236–248, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “One With Christ in God,” pp. 239–243, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8.

“Union is strength; division is weakness. When those who believe present truth are united, they exert a telling influence. Satan well understands this. Never was he more determined than now to make of none effect the truth of God by causing bitterness and dissension among the Lord’s people.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 236.

“We should endeavor to think well of all men, especially our brethren, until compelled to think otherwise. We should not hastily credit evil reports. These are often the result of envy or misunderstanding, or they may proceed from exaggeration or a partial disclosure of facts.”—Page 58.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do you deal with people who—though their doctrine (you are sure) is wrong—are kind, accepting, and loving, despite your differences? How should you relate to them? On the other hand, how do you deal with people who, though you agree with them theologically, are harsh, judgmental, and unloving toward anyone who doesn’t see things exactly as they do?
- 2 However important unity is to the Christian church, how well has that unity been maintained? How do you think a non-Christian, looking at Christianity, would view the idea of “Christian unity”?
- 3 Jesus instructs us to forgive those who hurt us. But what if they have not repented and do not ask us to forgive them? How are we to relate to them?
- 4 What is the relationship between love and discipline?
- 5 The ecumenical movement claims to be an attempt to create the unity that Christ prayed for. However well-intentioned the motives that some might have, what problems can we see with the ecumenical movement, apart from the obvious issues regarding last day events?
- 6 “We should endeavor to think well of all men, especially our brethren, until compelled to think otherwise.” How should we understand that sentence, especially in light of the fallen nature of humanity?

The Tithe Receipt

Charlie Tui, like many young men in the island nation of Vanuatu, had come from an outer island to the capital city looking for work. Charlie found a job and moved into a barracks with other young men from his home island. The friends spent their weekends drinking and smoking.

But one man was different. Jeffrey didn't smoke or drink, and he wasn't interested in using marijuana. The other men learned that Jeffrey had become a Seventh-day Adventist after attending an Adventist secondary school. Charlie and his friends teased Jeffrey mercilessly.

One day Frank, one of the guys in the barracks, found a slip of paper near Jeffrey's bed. It was a tithe receipt from an Adventist church. "Hey, Jeffrey! Do you really give this much money to a church?" he asked, teasing.

Jeffrey answered simply that God demands one-tenth of our income. The guys were surprised, because on their island their families had paid their pastor with a basket of food or a chicken. They sat down to listen as Jeffrey explained important doctrines of the Bible. Surprised by their interest, Jeffrey asked if they wanted to know more about the Adventist church, and several of the men agreed. Jeffrey invited a pastor to come to the barracks to study with his friends. About ten of the men met with the pastor each week.

Charlie lost interest in the Bible studies, but three others joined the Adventist Church. Charlie's life changed too—for the worse. While out partying with friends, he was injured in an automobile accident that killed the driver's girlfriend. When Charlie sobered up, he was haunted knowing that he could have died as well.

Then Frank, one of his friends who had become an Adventist, invited Charlie to attend meetings at his church. Charlie agreed. This time he listened carefully and realized that the speaker told the truth. He wanted to know more.

Charlie invited his girlfriend, Agnes, to join him. She didn't want to, but she reluctantly agreed. Charlie asked for prayer to stop drinking and smoking, and God delivered him. He prepared for baptism, but Agnes took longer to be convinced. Two years later she, too, joined God's remnant church. They were married.

Charlie's and Agnes's families resist their invitations to consider the Adventist faith, but at least now the families speak to the couple. Charlie and Agnes pray for opportunities to share their faith with them.

Charlie credits Jeffrey's dropped tithe receipt for first opening his heart's door to God's message. Faithfulness to God in tithes and offerings brings unexpected blessings.

CHARLIE TUI is captain of a fishing boat in Port Vila, Vanuatu.

Our Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 5:14–16; Luke 24:48, 49; John 20:21; Matt. 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6–12.*

Memory Text: “‘And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come’” (*Matthew 24:14, NKJV*).

Early in Jesus' ministry, He called Peter and Andrew to be His disciples, which meant that they were to lead others to Him: “‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’” (*Matt. 4:19, NKJV*). Later, the Lord appointed 12 disciples “that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach” (*Mark 3:14, NKJV*). Christ sent out the Twelve Apostles and later 70 disciples to evangelize as well (*Matt. 10:5–15, Luke 10:1–12*). During the 40 days after His resurrection, Christ appeared several times to His disciples (*1 Cor. 15:3–8*), and He placed the responsibility of preaching the gospel in their hands (*Acts 1:2, 3*). Again and again He entrusted them with the gospel commission. Though none of the gospel writers recorded every word Jesus said, each one set down a few sentences of the Lord's instructions, each account emphasizing a different aspect of the gospel commission and thus providing us with valuable insight into its purpose, methodology, and scope.

This week we'll look at the gospel commission as Jesus Himself presented it.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 30.*

To Be the Light of the World

Read Matthew 5:14–16. What is Jesus saying here to each of us individually and as a church community?

Throughout the Bible, light is intimately associated with God. “The LORD is my light,” sang David (*Ps. 27:1*), and John stated that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (*1 John 1:5, NKJV*). God is the source of light. In fact, the first thing He created was light, because light is indispensable for life.

Given the close connection between light and God, Scripture frequently uses light to symbolize truth, knowledge, and godliness. To walk in light means to have a character like God’s (*Eph. 5:8, 1 John 1:7*). Light stands for God; darkness, for Satan. That’s why it is a grievous sin to “put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (*Isa. 5:20*).

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is “‘the light of men, . . . the true Light which gives light to every man’” (*John 1:4, 9, NKJV*). He alone is the light that can illuminate the darkness of a world enshrouded in sin. Through Him we may have the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (*2 Cor. 4:6*), that is, His character.

When we accept Christ as our Savior, we become “‘sons of light’” (*John 12:36, 1 Thess. 5:5, NKJV*). But we have no light in ourselves. Like the moon, all we can do is reflect the light that shines upon us. When we let Jesus shine through us, we will not do good works to parade our own virtue but to lead people to glorify God.

“If Christ is dwelling in the heart, it is impossible to conceal the light of His presence. If those who profess to be followers of Christ . . . have no light to give, it is because they have no connection with the Source of light.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 41.

Wouldn’t it be absurd to light a lamp only to put it “‘under a basket or under a bed’” (*Mark 4:21, NKJV*)? Then why is it that sometimes we do so with Christ’s light? A concealed disciple is no more useful than a lamp under a bowl on a dark night. Therefore, “arise, shine; for your light has come! and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you” (*Isa. 60:1, NKJV*).

Light itself is actually invisible. It has to be reflected off of something; otherwise we cannot see it. What spiritual lesson can we draw from this about how, as believers, our light is to be revealed?

To Be Witnesses

Jesus' first encounter with the disciples after His resurrection was very important. They were fearful, distressed, discouraged, and perplexed. They had locked the doors of the room out of fear, but Jesus came and stood in their midst. With a clear and warm voice He said to them: "Peace to you." Startled and terrified as they were, it was difficult for them to believe their eyes and ears. Lovingly, the Lord showed them His hands and His feet and explained to them everything the Scriptures said about Him. That night, His presence and His words transformed them dramatically, dispelling their anxiety and unbelief and filling them with the peace and joy that come from the certainty of His resurrection.

Then Christ began to expound their mission, gradually helping them to grasp the significance of their responsibility as witnesses of His death, His resurrection, and His power to forgive sins and to transform lives (*Luke 24:46–48*). They had surely seen Him die, but they had also seen Him alive again. So they could testify for Him, that He was the Savior of the world.

A witness is someone who has seen an event happen. Anyone can be a witness, provided that he or she has personally watched something. There is no such thing as a secondhand witness. We can testify based only on our own experiences, not on someone else's. As rescued sinners, we have the privilege of telling others what Jesus has done for us.

What is the relationship between receiving the Holy Spirit and witnessing for Christ? See *Luke 24:48, 49; Acts 1:8*. See also *Isa. 43:10, 12; 44:8*.

The book of Acts shows that the believers' testimony could have convincing power only through the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts. After receiving the Spirit, "with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (*Acts 4:33, NKJV*). That is, they were able to speak, openly and with great power, about what they themselves had witnessed and experienced. In a very real sense, our witness about Christ must always include our own experience with Him.

What has been your own personal experience with the Lord? What has God done in your life that you can witness about firsthand to others? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

So Send I You

John's Gospel also reports Jesus' first encounter with the disciples in the upper room but mentions other elements not included in Luke's Gospel.

According to John, in what way did Jesus define the mission of the believers? *See John 20:21.*

Jesus had already mentioned this concept a few days before, when He prayed: “ ‘As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world’ ” (*John 17:18, NKJV*). Sending someone implies that the one who sends has authority over the one who is sent. It also involves a purpose, since one is sent with a mission to fulfill. Jesus was sent by the Father to save the world (*John 3:17*), and we are sent by Jesus to proclaim salvation through Him. Evidently, our commission is a continuation of Christ's work, which consisted of a complete ministry to all people (*Matt. 9:35*). He expects us not only to continue what He had initiated but also to go further. “ ‘He who believes in Me,’ ” said the Lord, “ ‘the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do’ ” (*John 14:12, NKJV*).

Jesus provided the Holy Spirit to enable the disciples to carry out their mission. At Creation, God “breathed into” Adam “the breath of life” (*Gen. 2:7*). Now Jesus “breathed on” the disciples “ ‘the Holy Spirit’ ” (*John 20:22, NKJV*). As the breath of life transformed lifeless dust into a living being, so the Holy Spirit transformed fearful and discouraged disciples into powerful living witnesses to continue Jesus' work. The same anointing is indispensable today to fulfill the commission entrusted to us.

Jesus has called you to be a witness. What can you witness about? That is, what have you seen or experienced that you should share with others about Jesus?

To Make Disciples

After His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples in Galilee, at “the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them” (*Matt. 28:16, NKJV*). Not only the eleven, but also more than five hundred followers gathered there to meet the risen Lord (*1 Cor. 15:6*). The One who had conquered death said to them: “ ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ ” (*Matt. 28:18, NKJV*). His power and authority are no longer voluntarily limited as they were during His earthly ministry. Rather, as before the Incarnation, His authority includes the whole universe. Based on His unquestionable authority, He entrusts a mission to His followers.

According to Matthew’s account, in giving the Great Commission, Jesus used four verbs: *go*, *make* disciples, *baptize*, and *teach*. Unfortunately, many Bible versions do not reflect on the fact that, in Greek, the only verb that is imperative is *make* disciples, while the other three verbs are participles. This means that the emphasis of the sentence is on *make* disciples, the other three activities being dependent on it.

What is the role of going, baptizing, and teaching in fulfilling the command to make disciples? See *Matt. 28:19, 20*.

Jesus’ mandate indicates three activities involved in making disciples. The three activities do not need to occur in a particularly sequential order; rather, they complement each other. While going to different places, eventually to the entire world, we should be teaching everything Jesus taught, baptizing those who accept Him as Savior and are willing to observe all the things Jesus commanded.

We rejoice when somebody is baptized, but baptism is not the end of the story. It is just part of the process of making someone a disciple. Our task is to invite people to follow Jesus, which means to believe in Him, to obey His teachings, to adopt His way of life, and to invite others to become His disciples, too.

The word *all* characterizes this text. Because Jesus has “all authority,” we have to go to “all the nations” teaching them to observe “all things” pertaining to the gospel, with the assurance that Christ is with us “always” (literally, “all the days”) to the end of the age.

Think about your local church. What is done there to help nurture and disciple new believers? What more can be done? Ask yourself, too: What talents do I have that I could use in this important part of fulfilling the gospel commission?

The Early Explosion

With its characteristic conciseness and clarity, the Gospel of Mark presents the commission in one short sentence: “‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’” (*Mark 16:15, NKJV*). As in Matthew, the verb *go* in Greek is a participle that indicates not the task but the movement needed to fulfill the task. The mission itself is expressed by the Greek verb *Kērusso*, given here in the imperative mood. *Kērusso* means “to proclaim aloud, to announce, to preach.” Mark uses this term 14 times, more than any other Gospel. The church must proclaim the gospel.

During Jesus’ ministry, the Twelve had been sent not to the Gentiles but only “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (*Matt. 10:6*). Now they are sent “into all the world” and “to every creature.” The eleven alone could never announce the gospel to the entire world, much less to every creature living in it. A task of such worldwide dimension requires the participation of the entire church. It is entrusted to all the believers in Jesus in all ages. This includes you and me.

Read Revelation 14:6–12. How do these verses encompass the worldwide mission of the church?

Preaching the gospel to every creature, however, doesn’t automatically mean that everyone will accept it. Only “‘he who believes and is baptized will be saved’” (*Mark 16:16, NKJV*). We should preach eagerly, hoping that every hearer will yield to the gospel invitation. Nevertheless, we have to be aware that many will not accept the Word, as the image of the narrow gate clearly shows (*Matt. 7:13, 14*).

What assurance do we have that this worldwide mission can and will be fulfilled? See *Matt. 24:14*.

There is an encouraging parallelism between Mark 16:15 and Matthew 24:14. Both texts refer to the proclamation of the gospel to all the world. While the first passage presents Jesus’ commission to preach, the second gives Jesus’ promise that the mission will actually be carried out.

Christ “made full provision for the prosecution of the work, and took upon Himself the responsibility for its success. So long as they [His disciples] obeyed His word, and worked in connection with Him, they could not fail.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 822. The question, then, that we each need to ask ourselves is, *How willing are we to be used by Him in this crucial work?*

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Go Teach All Nations,” pp. 818–828, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

“The Saviour’s commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. . . . All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ.”—Page 822.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Not everyone is able to travel the world preaching the gospel. What, though, are ways that each one of us can be involved in the task of spreading the gospel to the world in the context of the three angels’ messages?
- 2** In what ways is your local church continuing Jesus’ ministry in your community? How could you help to improve the church’s missionary service?
- 3** Jesus said that the gospel would go to all the world. For the vast majority of human history since He spoke those words, methods of communication had not changed. Two hundred years ago communication wasn’t much faster than it was 2,000 years ago, when Jesus gave us the gospel commission. Of course, all of that has changed, especially in the last 50 years, in which we have developed methods of communication that are amazing. How can we better learn to use the incredible technology we have been given in order to do the work that we have been promised will be done?
- 4** In class, based on the question at the end of Monday’s lesson, let those who are willing share their own personal experience with Jesus. How can we use our own testimony as a witness to others? Why should we use our own experience?

May's New School

May was overwhelmed in her new school. She had classes on topics that she had never studied before, and she didn't know enough English to understand what she was being taught. She hung her head and felt like crying. Her teacher touched her shoulder and asked if she needed help. May nodded, embarrassed. "Don't worry," her teacher said softly. "I'm here to help you. Tell me what you need."

May had never experienced such kindness from a teacher before. Softly she said, "I don't understand." The teacher knelt beside her and explained the lesson to her again. May smiled; she understood.

May lives in Myanmar. Her father, a Christian, wanted May to learn about God. When he learned about Yangon Adventist School (YAS), not far from where the family lived, he visited the school. It was an older building with crowded classrooms, but the children seemed happy and the teachers cared about their students. He enrolled May at YAS for the coming year.

May struggled with the new school curriculum, which was different from her previous school. She didn't know English well enough to understand what her teacher said. And Bible class was entirely new to her. But her teachers helped her, and May worked hard to catch up.

May liked that in her new school students worked together to learn new lessons rather than compete for the top ranking in the class. She discovered that learning was fun!

May made friends and enjoyed learning new subjects. Two years later she asked to be baptized, and her parents willingly gave their permission. May continued to study and mature; she learned what it means to follow Jesus completely.

May completed high school at YAS and enrolled in elementary education at the Seventh-day Adventist college in Myanmar.

She's glad to be an Adventist and a member of God's family. But as the only Adventist in her family, May sometimes feels separated from her relatives. "I wish we all could worship God together with the same faith," she says. "I'm so thankful to have had a chance to study in Adventist schools and learn the way to God."

Today May is a tutor, helping other children master their lessons and grow both spiritually and mentally. "I'm thankful for the opportunity I had to study at Yangon Adventist School," she adds. "I thank everyone around the world who gave to the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to help enlarge the school so it can accommodate more students?"

Your offerings to mission do make a difference, a real difference in the lives of children and adults around the world. Thank you.

MAY teaches school in Yangon, Myanmar.

The Law of God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 5:17–19, 5:21–44, Mark 7:9–13, Matt. 19:16–22.*

Memory Text: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (*John 14:15, NKJV*).

Though many leaders in Israel highly exalted the law, some misunderstood its purpose, believing that they could obtain righteousness by obeying the law. As Paul was to write: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (*Rom. 10:3*).

This is why Jesus often questioned, and even disapproved of, the traditions of the religious elders (*Mark 7:1–13*). And their misunderstanding was why they criticized and confronted Him about His views of the law.

It is important to understand that, although Jesus criticized the openly legalistic practices of the Pharisees, He exalted the Ten Commandments, clearly affirming the perpetuity of the Decalogue and explaining its meaning and purpose. Christ Himself said that He had come to fulfill the law (*Matt. 5:17*). In many ways, His death was the ultimate revelation of the continued validity of God’s law.

This week we will analyze Jesus’ teachings in regard to the law and the impact His teachings should have in our lives.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 6.

Jesus Did Not Change the Law

What does Matthew 5:17–19 teach about Jesus’ attitude toward the law?

Although the word *law* is often used to refer to the first five books of the Bible (also known as Pentateuch or *Torah*), in this case the context seems to indicate that He was referring primarily to the Ten Commandments. When saying He had not come to “destroy” the law, Jesus is literally saying, *I have not come to make invalid or abolish the Ten Commandments*. His statement is very clear and probably meant to show that it was the religious elders, not He, who had been destroying the law, reducing its effect through their tradition (see *Matt. 15:3, 6*). In contrast, by filling it with a deeper meaning, Christ had come to “fulfill” the law, thus giving us an example of what perfect obedience to the will of God looks like. (See *Rom. 8:3, 4*.)

Read Acts 7:38. Who was the Angel who spoke to Moses and gave him the law on Mount Sinai? (See *Isa. 63:9, 1 Cor. 10:4*.) Why is this important?

“Christ was not only the leader of the Hebrews in the wilderness . . . but it was He who gave the law to Israel. Amid the awful glory of Sinai, Christ declared in the hearing of all the people the ten precepts of His Father’s law. It was He who gave to Moses the law engraved upon the tables of stone.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 366.

The fact that Christ Himself gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai makes it even more important for us to take it seriously. Also, if the Lawgiver Himself further explained it through His teachings, as we find in the Gospels, we would do well to obey that law. One would be hard pressed to find in the life and teachings of Jesus anything implying that the Ten Commandments are not binding on Christians. On the contrary, His words and example teach us the opposite.

Though we know that the law is still binding, we also know that it does not, indeed cannot, save us. (See Gal. 3:21.) How then do we understand the relationship between law and grace?

Jesus Deepened the Meaning of the Law

After establishing the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments, Jesus continued His Sermon on the Mount, now setting forth a few specific examples of Old Testament laws. People had so greatly misunderstood these specific commandments that Jesus felt the vital need of explaining their true meaning.

What contrast did Jesus make with each aspect of the law mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount? To what authority did He appeal in each case? *Matt. 5:21–44.*

Note that in each instance Jesus first cites an Old Testament text (*Exod. 20:13, 14; Deut. 5:17, 18; Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21*) and then appears to argue against it. Was Jesus discrediting the law? Of course not. By further explaining and expanding what the religious leaders had narrowed down to nothing but formality, He was simply contrasting the teachings of the Pharisees with the true meaning of the law.

The rabbis cited tradition as their authority for their interpretation of the law. In contrast, Christ spoke on His own authority, as the Lawgiver Himself. The expression “but I say unto you” appears six times in this chapter. Who alone but the Lord Himself could rightly make a claim like that?

What’s fascinating, too, is that Christ’s requirements went radically beyond the simple form of the law. His teachings included the spirit behind the letter of the law. The spirit imparts meaning and life to what otherwise can only be pure formalism. Law-keeping, in and of itself, as an end in itself, leads to nothing but death if the law is not understood as an expression of what it means to be saved by grace.

Consider the scribes’ and Pharisees’ attitudes as described in Matthew 23:3–5, 23–28. How can we obey God’s commandments wholeheartedly without falling into similar hypocrisy and legalism? What crucial role does understanding grace play in sparing us from legalism?

Jesus and the Seventh Commandment

How did Jesus expand the meaning of the law, as seen in Matthew 5:27, 28? What did He say in verses 29 and 30? How are we to take these words?

In this passage Christ referred to two commandments: the seventh and the tenth. Until then, the Israelites considered adultery to be only the overt physical sexual act with another person's spouse. Jesus points out that in reality, because of the tenth commandment, adultery would include lustful thoughts and desires, as well.

In verses 29 and 30, Christ was using a figure of speech. Of course, one could argue that it would be better to go through life mutilated than to forfeit eternity with Christ. However, rather than pointing to mutilation, which would be contrary to other biblical teachings (*see Lev. 19:27, 28; 21:17–20*), Jesus was referring to the control of one's thoughts and impulses. In His references to plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand, Christ was figuratively speaking of the importance of taking resolute decisions and actions toward guarding oneself against temptation and sin.

What did the Pharisees ask Jesus in Matthew 19:3, and why was it a trick question? (*See vs. 7.*) What was Jesus' answer? *See Matt. 19:4–9; compare with Matt. 5:31, 32.*

Both texts (*Matt. 5:31, 19:7*) are citing Deuteronomy 24:1. In Jesus' days there were two rabbinic schools that interpreted this text in two different ways: Hillel understood it to allow divorce for almost any reason, while Shammai interpreted it to mean only explicit adultery. The Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus into taking sides with one school or the other. However, they had overlooked the fact that it was not God's original plan for anyone to divorce, ever, which is why Jesus said: "What God has joined together, let not man separate" (*Matt. 19:6, NKJV*). Later, because of the "hardness" of their hearts, they asked why God had allowed a man to give his wife a "certificate of divorce" if he found some "uncleanness in her" (*Deut. 24:1, NKJV*). Christ corrected the misuse of this passage by uplifting the sanctity and permanence of marriage: the only cause for divorce, before God, is "sexual immorality" or "fornication" (in Greek *porneia*, literally "unchastity").

How seriously do we take Jesus' warning about plucking out our eyes or cutting off a hand? How much stronger a warning could He have given us about what sin can do to our eternal destiny? If this warning scares you, good. It should!

Jesus and the Fifth Commandment

During another encounter Jesus had with the scribes and Pharisees (*Matt. 15:1–20*; see also *Mark 7:1–13*), they questioned Him about a tradition of the elders, one not found in the Law of Moses. This tradition stipulated that one should ritualistically wash his hands before eating, something Jesus’ disciples had neglected to do. Christ immediately responded by citing another tradition of the Pharisees, one that invalidated the fifth commandment.

Before analyzing Christ’s argument, we need to understand that the tradition the Pharisees had established, called Corban, comes from a word that means “a gift.” When a man applied the words, “It is Corban” to anything, it was considered an oath: it was something dedicated to God and the temple.

Read Mark 7:9–13. In what ways was the Pharisees’ tradition such a subtle way of violating the fifth commandment? Consider the importance of presenting offerings before God (*Exod. 23:15, 34:20*) and the sacredness of an oath made before the Lord (*Deut. 23:21–23*).

It seems as if the Pharisees had found the perfect excuse to deny one’s parents their rightful support. They had expanded the solid principles found in the Pentateuch and transformed them into man-made commandments, which, in their leaders’ own thinking, could supersede one of God’s commandments.

This isn’t the only time Jesus dealt with the same spiritual perversion: “ ‘But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. *These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone*’ ” (*Luke 11:42, NKJV; emphasis added*). They should have kept both commands, first by honoring their father and mother, without leaving aside their giving to the Lord.

No wonder Jesus summed up His argument by applying to the Pharisees a description Isaiah made of the Israelites 700 years earlier: “ ‘ “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” ’ ” (*Matt. 15:8, 9, NKJV*). Once again, Christ upheld the Ten Commandments and contrasted His position with that of the Pharisees.

In what ways might you be seeking little technical loopholes in order to avoid doing what’s clearly your duty?

Jesus and the Essence of the Law

Read Matthew 19:16–22. From the immediate details of this specific story, what broad and important truths can we derive from this account about the law and what the keeping of the law entails?

The rich young man couldn't comprehend that salvation from sin does not come from following the law, even strictly. It comes, rather, from the Lawgiver, the Savior. The Israelites had known this truth since the beginning, but they had forgotten it. Now Jesus set forth what they should have heeded from the start: that obedience and full surrender to God are so united that one without the other becomes only a pretense of Christian life. "Nothing short of obedience can be accepted. Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ. Often it is presented and enjoined in language that seems authoritative, because there is no other way to save man than to cut away those things which, if entertained, will demoralize the whole being."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 523.

In another encounter, the Sadducees had been questioning Christ about the resurrection, and Jesus had astonished and silenced them with His answer. So, now the Pharisees gathered together, ready to make a final attempt to lead the Savior into saying something that they could interpret as being against the law. They chose a certain lawyer to question Jesus about which was the most important commandment (*Matt. 22:35–40*).

The lawyer's question probably arose from the attempt of the rabbis to arrange all the commandments by order of importance. If two commands appeared to be in conflict, the one assumed to be more important took priority and left a person free to violate the less important one. The Pharisees particularly exalted the first four precepts of the Decalogue as being more important than the last six and, as a result, they failed when it came to matters of practical religion.

Jesus answered in a masterful way: first, and most important, there must be love in the heart before anyone can begin to observe God's law. Obedience without love is impossible and worthless. However, where there is true love toward God, a person will unconditionally put his life in harmony with God's will as expressed in all ten of His commandments. That is why Jesus later said: " 'If you love Me, keep My commandments' " (*John 14:15, NKJV*).

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Spirituality of the Law,” pp. 45–78, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*: “The Sermon on the Mount,” pp. 307–314, and “Controversy,” pp. 606–609, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Speaking of the law, Jesus said, ‘I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill’ . . . ; that is, to fill up the measure of the law’s requirement, to give an example of perfect conformity to the will of God. . . .

“His mission was to ‘magnify the law, and make it honorable.’ Isaiah 42:21. He was to show the spiritual nature of the law, to present its far-reaching principles, and to make plain its eternal obligation. . . .

“Jesus, the express image of the Father’s person, the effulgence of His glory; the self-denying Redeemer, throughout His pilgrimage of love on earth was a living representation of the character of the law of God. In His life it is made manifest that heaven-born love, Christlike principles, underlie the laws of eternal rectitude.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 48, 49.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In what ways can we fall into the temptation of being legalistic in our observance of the law, as the Pharisees were? On the other hand, what danger exists when we assume that loving God exempts us from obeying His law? Make a list of practical ways in which we could avoid falling into one or the other pitfall in our days. Bring your ideas to share with your class.
- 2 As we know, the argument against the continued validity of the Ten Commandments often is nothing but an attempt to get around the seventh-day Sabbath. Review all the Sabbath healing stories in the Gospels. How do they affirm not only the continued validity of God’s law but also of the seventh-day Sabbath? Why are the words and example of Jesus the last place anyone who wants to deny the Sabbath should go?
- 3 Theologians sometimes talk about “a moral universe.” What does that mean? How is our universe a moral place? If it is, what do you think makes it so? What role would God’s law have in a moral universe? Could the universe be a moral place without God having a moral law to govern it? Discuss. How does the idea of God’s law in a moral universe help explain Satan’s attempt to undermine that law?

Labor of Love

Muthu is a Bible teacher in a Seventh-day Adventist high school in southeastern India. But his ministry extends beyond the classroom. He takes students and adults to villages to hold branch Sabbath Schools. Most of the villagers know little about Jesus.

The children come first, gathering under a tree to hear stories and sing songs. Then team members visit villagers' homes to pray for the sick or discouraged. Eventually adults join in the meetings.

One day Muthu visited a village and discovered that heavy rain had damaged an old mud house, causing it to collapse and leaving the woman who lived there homeless. She had leprosy, and no one would go near her.

Instead of holding branch Sabbath School, Muthu and his team cleared the debris from the home site. Soon villagers pitched in to help as well. They cut some poles and stretched a tarp over them for a temporary shelter.

During the week, Muthu and his team began building a small, sturdy house for the woman. The villagers saw that no harm came to Muthu or his teammates, and they began treating the woman as one of them again. Some gave her clothes and household goods to replace what she had lost.

The next Sabbath the woman met Muthu and begged him to come to her house. There she pointed to two large gunnysacks filled with coconuts. "Those are my offering," she said. Muthu was touched as he realized that this woman had gathered about 100 coconuts and carried them, one by one, to her little home. Her labor of love had taken her all week.

Today a large group meets in the village for worship. The village has no church of any denomination, but they welcome the Adventists because they know these people care. The nearest church is three or four miles (five or six kilometers) away, and there is no reliable transportation. The new believers are learning to pray and are asking God for a church in their village.

Thousands of villages such as this one have only a stone god to worship. The people still wait to hear that Jesus loves them and wants to live with them forever. Our mission offerings help to make it possible for these people to have a simple church in which to worship God and invite others to worship as well.



MUTHU KUTTI is a lay worker living in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India.

The Sabbath



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:1–3; Matt. 12:1–5; Luke 4:16–21; John 5:16, 17; Matt. 24:20.*

Memory Text: “And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV*).

Throughout His ministry, religious leaders challenged Christ's Sabbath observance. When criticized, Christ emphasized His authority as Lord of the Sabbath (*Matt. 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5*). He also showed what correct observance of the Sabbath should be.

Today we are confronted not only with the challenge of “correct observance” of the Sabbath but also with the popular belief that Sunday, not Sabbath, is the day of rest. Those pushing for Sunday, however, have nothing in their favor in the Gospels. The Sabbath controversies in the Gospels dealt only with how the Sabbath was to be kept, never with when. Jesus' life and teachings leave no doubt that the seventh-day Sabbath would continue as God's day of rest, even after His death and resurrection.

This week we will discuss Christ's relationship to the origin and lordship of the Sabbath. Next, we will study the example and teachings of Jesus regarding the observance of the Sabbath. Finally, we'll look at the Sabbath as seen in His teachings and in the example of His disciples after the Resurrection.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 13.*

Christ, the Creator of the Sabbath

What do the following texts indicate about Jesus' role in Creation? Why is this so important, especially when considering the origin of the Sabbath? See *John 1:1–3*; *Col. 1:16*; *Heb. 1:1, 2*.

John begins his Gospel with the famous statement: “In the beginning was the Word. . . . All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made” (*John 1:1–3, NKJV*). Both John and Paul leave no doubt as to the role of Christ in creation. God the Son, Jesus Christ, created all things: “By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible. . . . All things were created through Him and for Him” (*Col. 1:16, NKJV*). Through Christ, God made the universe, including our solar system, the earth, and everything in it, animate and inanimate.

Christ, who was to be man's Redeemer, was also his Creator. And right there, at the end of Creation week, the Lord gave us a day of rest. “The Sabbath was made for man, it is the Lord's day. It belongs to Christ. . . . Since He made all things, He made the Sabbath. By Him it was set apart as a memorial of the work of creation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 288.

The same God who created humanity with the need to rest also provided the means to rest: a weekly day in which human beings are to set aside weekly toils and troubles and to rest in Him, the Creator. After finishing Creation, He Himself rested on the seventh day, not because of tiredness but in order to bless and sanctify the Sabbath and give us an example to follow. And He also rested on Sabbath when He finished our Redemption on the cross, not because He needed it but in order to (among other things) confirm the perpetual value of the Sabbath. Christ, who invites restless human beings to rest in Him (*Matt. 11:28, 29*), invites us to rest in a special way, once a week, every Sabbath day.

Sabbath keeping ties us to the beginning of earth's creation, to the very foundation of our existence. What better time to dwell upon the important question: What am I doing with the existence that God has given me?

Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath

Read Matthew 12:1, 2. What is going on here? Why would the Pharisees consider this action as “not lawful”?

Deuteronomy 23:25 states: “When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain” (*NKJV*). The problem, therefore, was not the action itself, but the day on which it was done. Rabbinical regulations expressly prohibited many types of work on Sabbath, such as reaping, threshing, and winnowing. In the Pharisees’ opinion, by plucking the ears of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and separating the grain from the husks, the disciples were guilty of doing all of them.

What is the significance of the examples that Jesus used to answer the Pharisees? See *Matt. 12:3–5*.

With the first example (*1 Sam. 21:1–6*), Christ argued that, although in normal circumstances David and his men should not have eaten the bread meant for the priests (*Lev. 24:9*), yet because their lives were in danger, their actions should be considered a permissible violation of a ceremonial rule. The second example Jesus mentioned (*Matt. 12:5*) has to do with the sacrifices and offerings ordained for the Sabbath day in the temple service, which were twice as many as those offered on any other day (*Num. 28:9, 10*). The Jews themselves recognized that the temple service had priority over the Sabbath.

After citing these examples, Jesus made two statements that vindicate His authority to redefine the Pharisees’ burdensome observance of the Sabbath: (1) “ ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath’ ” (*Mark 2:27, NKJV*). Here Jesus reaffirms the Edenic origin of the Sabbath, and redefines the incorrect priorities of the Pharisees regarding man and the Sabbath: the Sabbath was created to benefit human beings and continues as a God-given gift at the service of humanity, instead of humanity at the service of the Sabbath. And (2), by saying, “ ‘The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*vs. 28, NKJV*), Christ ratified His status as Creator and Legislator of the Sabbath. Therefore, He alone had the authority to free the Sabbath from these man-made laws.

The spiritual leaders of God’s people charged the Lord of the Sabbath with violating the day that He Himself had created and sanctified. What message should we all take from this about the dangers of spiritual blindness among those who should know better?

The Example of Jesus

What does Luke 4:16 tell us about Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath? Why is this so important for us today? See John 14:15, 1 Pet. 2:21.

The word Luke used in verse 16, *custom*, comes from a Greek word related to habits constant in time and practice. In other words, Jesus regularly attended the synagogue every Sabbath that He could. Moreover, this is so important to Luke that four times in his Gospel he mentions Jesus' attendance at the synagogue on different Sabbaths (Luke 4:16, 4:31, 6:6, 13:10). Also, Luke specifically identifies the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week (Luke 23:54–24:1). The fact that Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry, observed the seventh-day Sabbath, along with the Jews, testifies that the weekly cycle had not been lost since the giving of the law at Sinai, or even since Creation. His example as an observer of the Sabbath is a model for Christians to follow, in both time and manner of observance.

What did Jesus read on that special occasion in the synagogue? Why is this significant? See Luke 4:16–21.

This wasn't the first time Jesus read and spoke at a synagogue. More than a year had already gone by since He was baptized in the Jordan River. However, this was Jesus' first visit to Nazareth after leaving the carpenter shop, where He spent the first 30 years of His life and where He attended the local synagogue. During His youth, "often in the synagogue on the Sabbath day He was called upon to read the lesson from the prophets, and the hearts of the hearers thrilled as a new light shone out from the familiar words of the sacred text."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 74.

But this time it was different. Jesus selected a particular passage, Isaiah 61:1, 2, a text that explains the Messiah's work on earth and how He will come "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:19, NKJV). That was the Sabbatical, or jubilee, year, a time of rest. Appropriately, Jesus chose the day of rest, the Sabbath, to announce His ministry of redemption, liberation, and healing. Truly, we find rest in Jesus, a rest expressed in a tangible way every Sabbath day.

Miracles on the Sabbath

The Gospels mention numerous miraculous healings that Jesus carried out on the Sabbath day. It is interesting to note that, in most cases, the healing came by Jesus' initiative, as if He purposely wanted to heal on the Sabbath, though He could have done it any other day. Jesus was trying to make a point: healing on the Sabbath was not unlawful. On the contrary, it was more lawful than what many of the Pharisees and religious leaders were accustomed to doing on the Sabbath.

What arguments are given in each of these texts to justify Jesus' healings on the Sabbath? *Matt. 12:10–12; Luke 13:15, 16; John 5:16, 17.*

Although it is true that we must set aside our own interests during the Sabbath (*Exod. 20:9, Isa. 58:13*), it should never be considered as a period of useless idleness. In His controversies with the Pharisees, Christ clearly pointed out that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (*Matt. 12:12, NKJV*). According to rabbinic traditions, a sick person could be treated on the Sabbath if the situation was life-threatening. Likewise, if a sheep or an ox fell into a pit, it was permissible to pull the animal out on the Sabbath day to save its life. Wasn't a person's life more valuable than an animal's? Unfortunately, Christ's critics showed more compassion toward their own animals than to suffering human beings. They approved watering an animal, but not restoring a person.

Jesus also stated: “ ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working’ ” (*John 5:17, NKJV*), referring to God's work in favor of His creatures. Even on the Sabbath day He continues giving life and sustaining the universe (*Heb. 1:2, 3*).

Jesus taught that we should not be legalistic when observing the Sabbath. To keep it means to “rest” from our own works (*Heb. 4:10*) and, even more important, to stop trying to work our way to salvation—which is impossible anyway. Satan wants to convince us to keep the Sabbath selfishly. If he cannot move us against the Sabbath, he will try to push us to the other extreme: legalism.

Though it's easy to be legalistic about the Sabbath, others can be very lax in keeping it. How do we strike the right balance? Also, why must we be careful in our response to how others keep the Sabbath (don't forget how the Pharisees viewed Christ's Sabbath keeping)?

The Sabbath After the Resurrection

Many Christians keep Sunday instead of the Sabbath, offering a host of reasons, the main one being the resurrection of Christ. Besides the fact that nothing in the New Testament, including the passages on the Resurrection, teaches that Sunday is to replace Sabbath, the New Testament shows that Christ intended for His Sabbath to be kept even after His resurrection.

What does Matthew 24:20 have to say about the Sabbath in the years following the resurrection of Jesus?

Christ's words in Matthew 24:20 show us that in A.D. 70, about forty years after His death, the Sabbath was to be considered as sacred as it had always been. The commotion, excitement, fear, and travel necessary to flee from Jerusalem would be inappropriate on the Sabbath day.

What other New Testament evidence do we find that shows the seventh-day Sabbath remained sacred after the resurrection of Christ? See Acts 13:14, 42; 14:1; 17:1, 2; 18:4.

For the disciples, going to the synagogue was what church attendance should be for us today: one of the best ways to observe the Sabbath. This is especially noticeable with the apostle Paul, who was present at the synagogue services on Sabbath when no church was there. It was his custom, following Jesus' example (*Acts 17:2*). Although he was the apostle to the Gentiles and the champion of justification by faith, he usually went to the synagogue on Sabbath, not only to preach to the Jews but also to keep holy the Sabbath day.

One Sabbath, after the synagogue service was finished, the Gentiles begged Paul to preach the gospel to them. The apostle could have invited them to hear him the next day, Sunday, but he waited one week. " 'The next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God' " (*Acts 13:44, NKJV*). These texts provide powerful evidence that the early church knew nothing of the first day of the week as a replacement for the seventh.

OK, so we know we're right about the right Sabbath day. That's important, of course. How, though, can our Sabbath keeping make us Christians who are more compassionate, loving, and caring?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Sabbath,” pp. 281–289, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“ ‘Wherefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.’ These words are full of instruction and comfort. . . . It [the Sabbath] points to Him as both the Creator and the Sanctifier. It declares that He who created all things in heaven and in earth, and by whom all things hold together, is the head of the church, and that by His power we are reconciled to God. For, speaking of Israel, He said, ‘I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them,’—make them holy. Ezek. 20:12. Then the Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 288, 289.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 We are Christ’s, both by Creation and Redemption. How does the Sabbath especially remind us of these crucial truths?
- 2 What is the problem with a legalistic obedience of the fourth commandment? On the other hand, why is a watered-down observance of the Sabbath not the solution to legalism? What is the key element that makes keeping the Sabbath a real blessing?
- 3 Why should the Sabbath, and the opportunity to rest on the Sabbath day, be a special reminder to us of the crucial truth that we are not saved by our works, but by the merits of Christ in our behalf?
- 4 What are ways that we can learn to have a deeper and richer experience with the Lord on the Sabbath?
- 5 What lessons about how to keep the Sabbath can we learn from Christ’s example of Sabbath healings? How do these healings help us understand better what the Sabbath should be about?
- 6 We are told to keep the Sabbath “holy.” Think through some of your Sabbath activities. How holy are they?

The Greatest Power

Teresa was well-known in her community in western Bulgaria as a witch. She worked magic, casting spells, and removing spells. She told people's fortunes and predicted their future. People respected her for the power she had.

Teresa's little granddaughter, Sara, came to visit. How Teresa loved her! On Sabbath Sara asked her grandmother to take her to church. Teresa was surprised, but she found the church, which met in an old café in town, and took Sara.

A church member saw Teresa and Sara in church and offered Sara a child's Bible storybook. Every evening Sara asked her grandmother to read from the Bible storybook.

Sara loved to sing songs about Jesus as she played or helped her grandmother around the house. Teresa often stopped to listen. Teresa realized that this Jesus, whom her granddaughter loved, was Someone special. She decided to return to the church to learn more.

Teresa started attending church regularly, even after Sara returned home to Italy. Teresa smoked heavily and felt powerless to quit. One day, she stood during testimony time and said, "If you people want me in this church, you need to pray that God will help me get rid of my tobacco habit. I can't make it through church without a smoke."

The church members stopped to pray for her and promised to continue praying. Later that day, Teresa felt nauseated. She began vomiting. *OK, God, she thought, I guess that this is Your way to get the poison out.* She continued vomiting for several hours. When the nausea passed, she never felt the urge to smoke again.

As Teresa became better acquainted with God, she destroyed her witchcraft materials, her charms, and her herbs. When her former clients called to ask her to remove a curse or to curse someone, Teresa told them she no longer dealt in witchcraft. Then she offered to pray to God for them instead. Several of her clients agreed, and some called back to tell her that her prayers had been answered. A few even visited the church.

Teresa knows that she has found a greater power than witchcraft. God saved her, took away her witchcraft, and gave her the ability to read and write so she can share what she is learning with those who haven't yet heard.

Teresa is thankful that believers around the world gave a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to help the believers in her town build a church. When it's finished, many more people will come and learn about God's great power and love.

TERESA shares her faith in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.

Death *and* Resurrection



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 11:11; John 1:1–4; Luke 8:54, 55; John 5:28, 29; Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; John 11:38–44.*

Memory Text: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live’ ” (*John 11:25, NKJV*).

Humans have an innate repulsion toward death because we were created only to live and never to die. Death is an intruder; it was not meant to be.

That’s why, during His earthly ministry, Jesus showed immense sympathy toward the bereaved. When He saw the widow of Nain taking her only son to the grave, “He had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep’ ” (*Luke 7:13, NKJV*). To a heartbroken father of a 12-year-old girl who had just died, Christ consoled him, saying: “ ‘Do not be afraid; only believe’ ” (*Mark 5:36, NKJV*). Every time death strikes our loved ones, Jesus is tenderly moved by our grief. His compassionate heart weeps with us.

But Christ does far more than weep. Having conquered death with His own death and resurrection, He owns the keys of death, and He promises to raise everyone who believes in Him to eternal life. This is, by far, the greatest promise that we have been given in God’s Word; otherwise, if death has the final say, our whole lives and everything we have ever accomplished will be in vain.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 20.

The State of the Dead

Old Testament writers consistently held that a human is an indivisible living being. The various Hebrew terms usually translated as *flesh*, *soul*, and *spirit* are just alternative ways to describe, from different points of view, the human person as a whole. In harmony with this perspective, the Scriptures use different metaphors to describe death. Among them, sleep stands out as a fitting symbol to reflect the biblical understanding of the condition of the dead (see *Job 3:11–13, 14:12, Ps. 13:3, Jer. 51:39, Dan. 12:2*). Death is the total end of life. Death is a state of unconsciousness in which there are no thoughts, emotions, works, or relationships of any kind (*Eccles. 9:5, 6, 10; Ps. 115:17; 146:4*).

By the time of Jesus, however, this view of humanity, and particularly of death, was challenged by the pagan dualistic concept of the immortality of the soul, which was rapidly propagating throughout the known world.

How did Jesus describe the death of his friend Lazarus? See *John 11:11*.

Despite this and other passages, a number of Christians argue that Jesus believed in the immortality of the soul, for He said to the thief on the cross: “ ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise’ ” (*Luke 23:43, NKJV*). The meaning of this text changes entirely, depending on where the commas are placed. (The oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament don’t have punctuation marks.) If the comma is placed after *you*, as most Bible versions render the text, it means that Jesus and the thief went to Paradise that same day; if the comma is after *today*, the text means that Jesus assured the thief his future redemption. Actually, Jesus’ words emphasize assurance of salvation, not the timing of the thief’s entrance into heaven. The context confirms this. To begin with, the thief had not asked for an immediate transfer to heaven at death but rather to be remembered when the Lord would come into His kingdom. Moreover, three days later Jesus Himself affirmed that He had not yet ascended to Paradise (*John 20:17*). This text, therefore, does not teach that the souls of the dead go to heaven after death.

Because we understand that death is an unconscious sleep, why is the teaching of the resurrection so crucial to us?

The Hope of Resurrection

At Creation, “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” As a result, “man became a living being” (*Gen. 2:7, NKJV*). As long as God maintains the breath of life in the living creatures, they are alive. But when He takes away their breath, they die and return to dust (*Ps. 104:29, Eccles. 12:7*). This is not an arbitrary decision of God; it is the inevitable consequence of sin. But the good news is that, through Christ, there is hope, even in death.

Read John 1:1–4. What is implied in these verses that shows us the power of Jesus to raise the dead?

Christ has life in Himself, for He is the life (*John 14:6*). He created everything and has the power to give life to whom He wills (*John 5:21*). Thus, He can raise the dead.

How does resurrection happen? See *Luke 8:54, 55*.

According to the Bible, resurrection is the reversal of death. Life is restored when the breath of life comes back from God. That is how Luke explained the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter. After learning that the twelve-year-old girl had passed away, Jesus went to the house and told the mourners that she was sleeping. Then He “took her by the hand and called, saying, ‘Little girl, arise.’ Then her spirit [*pneuma*] returned, and she arose immediately” (*Luke 8:54, 55, NKJV*). At Jesus’ divine command, the life principle imparted by God returned to the girl. The Greek term that Luke used, *pneuma*, means “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit.” When the Bible uses it in relation to human beings, it never denotes a conscious entity capable of existence apart from the body. In this text it clearly refers to the breath of life.

Death is so common that we take it for granted. How, though, can we learn to trust in God’s promises about eternal life, even though for now, death seems to be the victor?

The Resurrection and the Judgment

What we have studied so far could lead us to think that the resurrection will be for only a few people. But Jesus affirmed that a time will come when “ ‘all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth’ ” (*John 5:28, 29, NKJV, emphasis added*). Believers and unbelievers, righteous and sinners, saved and lost, all will be raised. As Paul declared, “ ‘There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust’ ” (*Acts 24:15, NKJV*).

Though all are, eventually, raised from the dead, all will face only one of two eternal fates. What are they? *John 5:28, 29.*

The universality of the resurrection doesn't mean that at the final day everybody will be ushered into a blissful and joyful eternal life. “ ‘Those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt’ ” (*Dan. 12:2, NKJV*).

The Bible teaches that God will judge the lives of every human being, deciding the eternal destiny of each person who ever lived (*Eccles. 12:14, Rom. 2:1–11*). The execution of the divine sentence, however, does not occur immediately after the death of each individual but only after his or her resurrection. Until then, both the saved and the lost sleep unconsciously in the dust. The resurrection, by itself, is neither a reward nor a punishment. It is the precondition to receiving eternal life or condemnation.

Speaking of the two resurrections, Jesus indicated that our destiny will be decided on the basis of the moral quality of our deeds (good or bad). This fact, however, doesn't mean that works save us. On the contrary, Jesus clearly taught that our salvation depends exclusively on our faith in Him as our Savior (*John 3:16*). Why, then, are works taken into consideration? Because they show whether our faith in Christ and our surrender to Him are genuine or not (*James 2:18*). Our works demonstrate whether we are still “dead in trespasses and sins” (*Eph. 2:1, NKJV*) or “dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 6:11, NKJV*).

Dwell on the ultimate destiny that awaits each of us. If anything is standing between you and eternal life, why not, right now, choose to get rid of it? After all, what possibly could be worth losing eternity for?

What Jesus Said About Hell

Jesus used two Greek terms, *hadēs* and *gehenna*, to speak about death and the punishment of the unrighteous. Given the popular belief in the meaning of the term *hell*, we need to consider it carefully.

Hadēs is equivalent to the Hebrew *she'ōl*, the most common Old Testament term for the realm of the dead. These names simply represent the grave or the place to which all descend at death, with no connotation of punishment or reward. There is one text, however, where *hadēs* appears to be connected with punishment. It is in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Read Luke 16:19–31. What is the basic lesson that this parable sets forth (see especially vss. 27–31)? What's wrong with using this parable to teach that human beings go to paradise or hell immediately after death?

This parable is not focused on the state of man in death. A popular but unbiblical belief that many of Jesus' contemporaries held provided the background for this parable. Nevertheless, the parable teaches an important lesson: our future destiny is determined by the decisions we make daily in this life. If we reject the light God grants us here, there is no opportunity after death. Any attempt to interpret this parable literally leads to many insoluble problems. Actually, the details of the picture seem purposely awkward in order to show us that Jesus did not intend His words to be taken literally, but figuratively.

What warnings did Jesus pronounce regarding hell? See Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 23:33.

In many Bible translations, the word *hell* appears 11 times on Jesus' lips. He actually used the Greek term *gehenna*, from the Hebrew name *Gē Hinnom*, "Valley of Hinnom." According to the Old Testament, in this gorge south of Jerusalem, kings Ahaz and Manasseh conducted the horrendous pagan rite of burning children to Molech (2 Chron. 28:3, 33:6). Later, godly king Josiah brought the practice to a halt (2 Kings 23:10). Because of the sins perpetrated in it, Jeremiah prophesied that God would make the place a "valley of slaughter" (Jer. 7:32, 33; 19:6). Hence, for the Jews, the valley became a symbol of the last judgment and the punishment of the impenitent. Jesus used the name figuratively, without explaining any details regarding the time and place of the punishment, which we find in other biblical passages. Hell, though, is not a place of eternal punishment.

Jesus Conquered Death

Why was Lazarus's resurrection the crowning miracle of Christ's earthly ministry? See *John 11:38–44*.

Though Jesus had raised two others from the dead, none was as dramatic as this. Lazarus had been dead for four days, a fact that Martha corroborated at the graveside. Jesus performed the miracle in the full light of day before a crowd of respected witnesses from Jerusalem. The evidence couldn't be dismissed.

Still, far more important than Lazarus's resurrection was Jesus' own resurrection. Since He has life in Himself, He not only has the power to raise the dead and give life to whom He wills (*John 5:21*), but He also has the power to lay down His own life and take it again (*John 10:17, 18*). His resurrection proved this convincingly.

What is the relationship between Christ's resurrection and ours? Why is His resurrection so important for our salvation? See *1 Cor. 15:17–20*.

Christ's power to break the bonds of death is undisputed. He arose from the sepulcher as the first fruits of those who slept in Him. His resurrection is the guarantee of every believer's resurrection, for He has the keys of death (*Rev. 1:17, 18*).

"To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. In our Saviour the life that was lost through sin is restored; for He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will: He is invested with the right to give immortality. The life that He laid down in humanity, He takes up again, and gives to humanity."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 786, 787.

Death is so powerful that only the One who first created life can restore it. What does this truth tell us about why we must trust that Jesus can, and will, resurrect us as He promised?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “‘Lazarus, Come Forth,’” pp. 524–536, and “‘The Lord Is Risen,’” pp. 779–787, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: ‘Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!’ Throughout the length and breadth of the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. . . . From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 644.

Discussion Questions:

- ① We’ve all struggled with the reality of death, the seeming finality of it, and the seeming senselessness of it. If, as many believe, there is no God, no hope of eternal life, and no resurrection, then what does human life itself mean? What can it mean if, sooner or later, everyone who ever lived dies and every memory of them is forever gone? How does our understanding of the Resurrection answer this otherwise unsolvable dilemma?
- ② What are some of the dangers inherent in the idea of the immortality of the soul? Why is Satan eager to propagate this nonbiblical belief? What role will this concept play in the religious scenario at the time of the end? Think about all the potential deceptions out there from which those who understand death as a sleep until the resurrection are spared.

The Story Box

Muka [*moo-KAH*] is the third wife of a Himba headman living in northern Namibia.

While some Himba children have gone to school, few who remain in the settlements can read or write. They pass their history and culture to their children during story times around a fire in the evening.

For more than fifteen years, Seventh-day Adventist missionaries have been working with the Himba, befriending them, teaching them about God, showing they care. They prayed for Muka when she was seriously ill, and God healed her. Muka's husband respects the missionaries for what they are doing to help his family and his people.

Muka enjoys the missionaries' visits and eagerly takes part in their prayer times. She wishes she could attend worship services, but the nearest worship service is too far away to walk, and the family is too large to ride in a donkey cart. So Muka contents herself with praying when she has free moments.

Recently the missionaries held a special camp meeting for the Himba people. Everyone was invited, and nearly everyone went. At the meetings the missionaries gave the headmen a special gift, a solar-powered MP3 player. They showed the men how to lay the MP3 player in the sun to charge the batteries and how to turn the player on so they can listen to God's stories in their own language.

Returning home, Muka's husband gave the MP3 player to his first wife to listen to. When she finished listening to the stories, she passed it on to Muka so she and her children could hear God's stories. She passed it on to the next wife, and so around the circle of families the stories of Jesus are being woven into the fabric of Himba life.

"I understand God better now after hearing the stories the missionaries have given us on the little story box," Muka says. "I want to learn more about God and know how to follow Him better."



The MP3 players have proven a breakthrough among the Himba, and a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is providing hundreds more MP3 players and the funds to record more stories in the Himba's language. Thank you for your offerings, which help people such as Muka and her family meet the Savior and learn to follow Him.

MUKA (left) lives in a rural settlement in northern Namibia with her extended family.

The Second Coming of Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 14:1–3; Matt. 16:27; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Matt. 24:3–14; 24:42, 44.*

Memory Text: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (*John 14:1–3, NKJV*).

The second coming of Jesus, mentioned more than three hundred times in the New Testament, is the capstone of our teachings. It is essential to our identity as Seventh-day Adventist Christians. The doctrine is engraved in our name, and it is a crucial part of the gospel that we are called to proclaim. Without the promise of His coming, our faith would be in vain. This glorious truth gives us a sense of destiny and motivates our missionary outreach.

It could be argued that the stretching of time beyond our expectations would undermine our belief in Jesus’ promise to return. However, this has not happened. For many, our passion for Christ’s return is stronger than ever.

This week we will review what Jesus said about “the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (*Titus 2:13, NKJV*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.

The Promise

After the Last Supper, Jesus told the disciples that He would go to a place where, at least for now, they could not go (*John 13:33*). The thought of being separated from the Master filled their hearts with sorrow and fear. Peter asked, “‘Lord, where are You going? . . . Why can I not follow You now?’ ” (*vss. 36, 37, NKJV*). Christ knew their desire and assured them that the separation would be only temporary.

Read Christ’s promises to us in *John 14:1–3*. Apply those words to yourself. Why should they mean so much to you?

Our Lord’s pledge could not have been more emphatic. In Greek, the promise “I will come again” is in the present tense, emphasizing certainty. It could literally be translated, “I am coming again.”

Jesus has given us the certitude of His second coming. He did not say “I may come again,” but “I will come again.” Every time He mentioned His return, He referred to it in certain terms.

Sometimes we make promises we later cannot keep, even in spite of our best efforts and determination. That’s not the case with Christ. Many times He proved unmistakably that His word is trustworthy.

Referring to His incarnation, the Lord prophetically announced through David: “‘Behold, I come’ ” (*Ps. 40:7, NKJV*). And He did (*Heb. 10:5–7*). The reality of His first coming sustains the certainty of His second.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus promised a despairing father: “‘Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well’ ” (*Luke 8:50, NKJV*). And sure enough, Jairus’s daughter was made well, although she had been dead. Christ announced that three days after His own death He would rise from the grave; and He did. He promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples; and He sent Him right on time. If our Lord honored all His promises in the past, even those that, from a human perspective, seemed impossible, we can be certain that He will keep His promise to come again.

How can you keep the fire burning in your own heart for the second coming of Jesus?

The Purpose of Jesus' Second Coming

The great plan of Redemption will find its culmination in the Second Coming. Without Christ's return to this earth, His incarnation, death, and resurrection would have no effect for our salvation.

What is one of the basic reasons for the second coming of Jesus? See *Matt. 16:27*.

Life is not always fair; in fact, often it is not fair. We do not always see justice in our society. Innocent people suffer while evil ones seem to prosper. Many people do not receive what they deserve. But evil and sin will not reign forever. Jesus will come “to give to every one according to his work” (*Rev. 22:12, NKJV*).

This assertion implies that a judgment must take place prior to Christ's return. When Jesus comes, the destiny of each human being will already have been decided. Jesus clearly hinted at this investigative judgment in the parable of the wedding feast (*Matt. 22:11–13*). The fact that we are judged by works does not mean that we are saved by our works or by our own merits. Salvation is by God's grace and received by faith in Jesus (*Mark 16:16, John 1:12*), which we demonstrate by our actions.

What's important about the promise in Matthew 16:27 is that justice will be done. We just have to wait for it.

Also, at the Second Coming, those who sleep in Christ will be raised to eternal life. As we saw earlier—because we know that the dead are asleep in the grave—the promise of the Second Coming and the resurrection to eternal life that follows is especially important to us.

“Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: ‘Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!’ Throughout the length and breadth of the earth, the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 644.

How Will Jesus Come?

In His prophetic sermon, Christ expressed concern about wrong teachings in regard to His second advent, and He warned His disciples against people who would come in His name, “ ‘saying, “I am the Christ” ’ ” (*Matt. 24:5, NKJV; see also vs. 23–26*). He doesn’t want His followers to be deceived. Therefore, He clearly indicated the way in which He will come.

What does Matthew 24:27 tell us about how Jesus is going to return?

Lightning cannot be hidden or faked. It flashes and shines throughout the sky in such a way that everyone can see it. So will Jesus’ second coming be. No advertisement will be needed to call people’s attention toward it. Every human being, good and evil, saved and lost, even “they who pierced Him” (*Rev. 1:7, NKJV*), will see Him coming (*Matt. 26:64, NKJV*).

How does 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 help us understand what the Second Coming will be like?

In His second advent, Christ will be seen with all His divine glory as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (*Rev. 19:16*). In the Incarnation, the Son came alone and without any external splendor, with “no beauty that we should desire Him” (*Isa. 53:2, NKJV*). But this time He will descend with all His majesty and magnificence surrounded by “all the holy angels” (*Matt. 25:31*) and “with a great sound of a trumpet” (*Matt. 24:31*). If all that weren’t enough, the dead in Christ will rise to immortality.

If we trust the Lord regarding an event as incredible as the Second Coming, why should we not trust Him about every aspect of our lives?

When Will Jesus Come?

When Jesus said regarding the temple that “ ‘not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ ” (*Matt. 24:2, NKJV*), the disciples were astonished. “ ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ ” (*vs. 3, NKJV*), they inquired. In their thinking, the destruction of the temple would coincide with the end of history at Jesus’ return.

Jesus’ answer skillfully combined the signs for both events: the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and His second advent, because the disciples were not prepared to grasp the difference between them.

It is important for us to understand the nature and purpose of these signs. They were not given for us to determine the date of Jesus’ return, for “ ‘of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only’ ” (*vs. 36, NKJV*). Rather, the signs show the historical tendency of events in order to alert us that His coming is near, even at the doors. While we should never be date setters, we must never ignore the time we live in either.

Read Matthew 24:3–14, 21–26, 29, 37–39 (see also Mark 13 and Luke 21). What picture of the world does Jesus present here? In what ways does it fit the world in which we now live?

The most important idea Jesus wanted to impress on the disciples’ minds was that His coming is near. Actually, His entire prophetic sermon addressed the apostles as if they were to be alive when He would come (*see Matt. 24:32, 33, 42*).

In a real sense, from the personal perspective of each of us, the Second Coming is never farther away than a moment after our death. Death is a deep unconscious sleep. We close our eyes in death and, whether one year has passed or one thousand years have passed, the next thing we know is the second coming of Jesus. Thus, the idea of the nearness of Christ’s coming, which Paul, Peter, and James also shared, makes perfect sense. For each of us, individually, His coming is never more than a moment after we die.

How does this concept help us understand the “imminence” of Christ’s second coming?

Watch and Be Ready

Why is it crucial for us always to watch and be ready for Jesus' coming?

See Matt. 24:42, 44.

The keynote of Jesus' prophetic sermon is the imperative to watch, to be on alert. It doesn't mean to wait idly but to be actively vigilant, as is the owner of a house who remains diligent against any potential thief (*Matt. 24:43*). While watchfully waiting, we have a work to do, as did the faithful servant who carried out the tasks his master entrusted to him during the master's absence (*Matt. 24:45, Mark 13:34–37*).

What attitude would be fatal for us who claim to believe in the second advent of Jesus? *See Matt. 24:48–51; Luke 21:34, 35.* **How can we avoid falling into that attitude? Why is the error so easy to do if we are not careful?**

The parable of the evil servant is very sobering, especially for us as Seventh-day Adventists. This servant represents those who profess to believe that Christ will come again, but not immediately. Believing that the Lord is delayed, they think they still have time to live selfishly and indulge in sinful pleasures because, surely, there will be plenty of time to prepare for the Second Coming. Unfortunately, this idea is a deadly trap, because no one knows when Jesus will come. Moreover, even if Christ doesn't come yet, any one of us could be called to rest unexpectedly, suddenly ending our opportunity to make things right with God. But above all, repeated indulgence in sin gradually hardens and desensitizes the conscience so that it becomes more difficult to repent. The devil doesn't care that we believe theoretically in the second coming of Jesus, as long as he can make us postpone our preparation for it.

How can we be ready today? By repenting and by confessing our unconfessed sins to Jesus, by renewing our faith in His expiatory death on the cross for us, and by surrendering our wills totally to Him. Walking in communion with Him, we can enjoy the deep peace of being covered by His robe of righteousness.

How much do you think about the Second Coming? How much of its reality impacts your life? How do we strike the right balance in going about our daily work and yet living in anticipation of Christ's return?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “On the Mount of Olives,” pp. 627–636, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Heralds of the Morning,” pp. 299–316, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man’s hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious, until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it the rainbow of the covenant. Jesus rides forth as a mighty conqueror. . . . With anthems of celestial melody the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng, attend Him on His way. The firmament seems filled with radiant forms—‘ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.’ No human pen can portray the scene; no mortal mind is adequate to conceive its splendor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 640, 641.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though we need to believe in the nearness of Christ’s return, how can we avoid the dangers of fanaticism? That’s not always so easy. After all, how many fanatics really think that they are fanatics?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that the Second Coming is never far off from each one of us on a personal, individual level because our death is never really that far off, no matter how long we live. What does this idea tell us about just how close the Second Coming really is as far as we each are concerned?
- 3 How do you respond to those who mock the idea of the Second Coming? Before you respond to them, try to put yourself in their shoes, looking at things from their perspective. After you do that and see their arguments, think through ways that you can respond.
- 4 What about this idea that we, as a people, can either help hasten or delay the Second Coming? What are the arguments either way in that discussion?
- 5 If you knew that Jesus was coming next week, what in your life would change now?

“Show Us Your Church”

Ivan and Raveta grew up in the traditional church in Macedonia. After their marriage, Raveta continued attending church occasionally, though Ivan didn't.

When the Bible became available in the Macedonian language, Raveta bought a copy. But she didn't read it; she put it on a shelf and forgot it.

Years later Ivan, a lawyer, had a heart attack. While recovering, he asked Raveta for the Bible. “I know the laws of our country,” he said. “Now I want to read God's laws.” Ivan found the Ten Commandments and told Raveta that they had been disobeying God's laws all their lives. “God says we must have no other gods before Him, but we have icons in the house and at the church,” he said. “It says that God is jealous. He wants us to worship Him, not saints. And here, God says that we must keep holy the seventh day, not the first day.”

Raveta took the Bible from Ivan and began reading for herself. She read for hours a day. She threw away the icons and searched for a church that kept the Sabbath. But she couldn't find one, so the couple worshiped in their home on Sabbath. Frustrated, Raveta cried, “God, please show us Your church!”

She turned on the TV and heard a pastor speak on the Second Coming—just what they had been studying. At the end of the program the name “Seventh-day Adventist Church” flashed across the screen. Raveta called the TV station and asked for the number of the Adventist church. She called the church and told the pastor that they wanted to talk with him. He offered to come to their home.

Ivan and Raveta peppered the pastor with questions on the Ten Commandments and other Bible texts that troubled them. The pastor chuckled and explained each subject in depth.

Ivan and Raveta were satisfied that they had found the true church and began worshiping there. They shared what they were learning with Ivan's parents. They believed and joined the Adventist Church before Ivan, who struggled with tobacco. Finally he turned his habit over to God, and God gave him the victory. Ivan and Raveta were baptized together. “We



thank God for the television programs that led us to the church where God delights to dwell,” Raveta says.

Your mission offerings help support the ministry of television and radio in the small country of Macedonia, where fewer than five hundred members live today. Thank you.

RAVETA and IVAN STRATROV live in Skopje, Macedonia.

The epistle of James has been one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible. Who was James, anyway? Was he a legalist, teaching that justification is really by works instead of faith? Or was he simply providing a slightly different perspective on the subject, similar to the several perspectives on the teachings of Jesus that we find in the Gospels? The answer is, clearly, the latter, as we will discover in the fourth quarter 2014 study guide entitled, *The Book of James* by Clinton Whalen.

James had a firsthand knowledge of Jesus, and his epistle may very well be the earliest Christian writing in existence.

The epistle of James exudes confidence in the return of Jesus; it also provides crucial perspectives on the law, the judgment, and the Second Coming. Our journey this quarter spans the entire Christian era, as it includes some of the earliest preaching, as well as special insights for these last days.

Lesson 1—James, the Lord’s Brother

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **James, the Brother of Jesus** (*Mark 6:3*)

MONDAY: **James, the Believer** (*Gal. 2:9*)

TUESDAY: **James and the Gospel** (*James 2:22, 23*)

WEDNESDAY: **To the Twelve Tribes Scattered Abroad** (*Acts 11:19–21*)

THURSDAY: **James and Jesus** (*James 4:12, Matt. 7:1*)

Memory Text—*John 15:14*

Sabbath Gem: Who was James? What was his background? What had been his relationship to Jesus? And what position did he hold in the church? We will discover that this week.

Lesson 2—The Perfecting of Our Faith

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Faith Lasts** (*James 1:2, 3*)

MONDAY: **Perfection** (*James 1:4*)

TUESDAY: **Asking in Faith** (*James 1:5, 6*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Flip Side of Faith** (*James 1:7, 8*)

THURSDAY: **The Rich and the Poor** (*James 5:1–4*)

Memory Text—*Hebrews 12:2*

Sabbath Gem: We should not worry over whether or not our characters will be good enough in the end. That is God’s work. Our role is to “fight the good fight of faith” (*1 Tim. 6:12*) by keeping our eyes on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of our faith.”

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.